

Indian Poetry in English
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Lecture - 25
Lakshmi Kannan

Good morning and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course, on Indian poetry in English. All of you are listening to lectures by Binod Mishra and I think you all remember that in the previous lecture we talked about Eunice De Souza-- a celebrated Indian English poet, who actually brought in her poetic world the element of modernity through the element of rebelliousness which many people would call. But then she actually vouched for a sort of change, so yearned for a sort of change and those changes especially in the lives of women. Now today we are going to take up another important voice though not much attention has been paid to this voice, but once you go through her poetic numbers you will realise that this voice also should have been given due space and due importance.

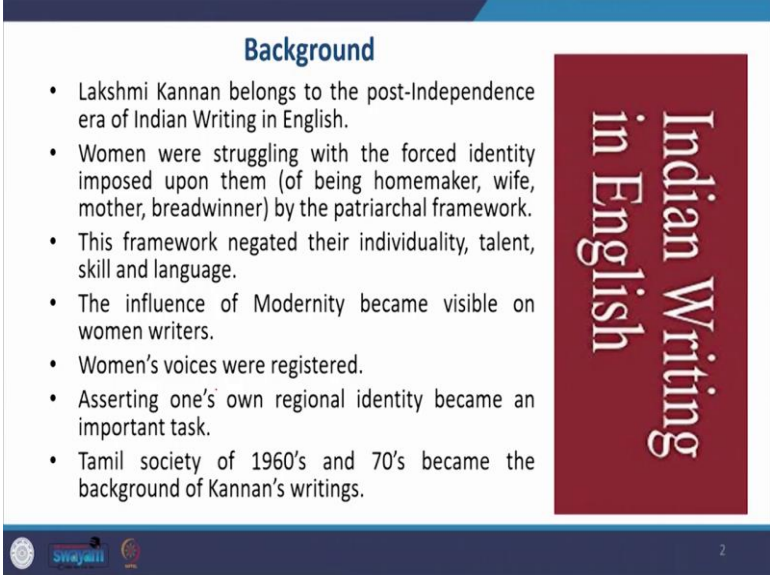
My dear friends, the world of Indian poetry in English is actually full of poets and there are many poets who because of some reasons or the others could not attract the attention of anthology editors. And many of them may call it is only because of the sort of indifference to women, but then as time flows more and more voices of women are appearing on the scene of Indian poetry in English.

And one such voice is none other than Lakshmi Kannan. Now in the previous lecture we talked about how Eunice De Souza since it was not comfortable with the different rigours, restrictions, impediments and many more bindings; she actually created a sort of or caused a sort of stir in the minds of women through her poetry.

But here is another Indian English woman poet who also has the same amount of rebellion, but her rebellion is of a different sort. Not aggressive but subtle, not interrogating but at the same time addressing the women. And in her approach to address those women who are suffering what Kannan does is---- she goes back and remembers many such women poets, many such women voices who actually came forward to represent. But then their sacrifices and their efforts have till now not brought or bred any fruits.

So, before we go into the poetic oeuvre of Lakshmi Kannan let us have a look at her background.

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Background

- Lakshmi Kannan belongs to the post-Independence era of Indian Writing in English.
- Women were struggling with the forced identity imposed upon them (of being homemaker, wife, mother, breadwinner) by the patriarchal framework.
- This framework negated their individuality, talent, skill and language.
- The influence of Modernity became visible on women writers.
- Women's voices were registered.
- Asserting one's own regional identity became an important task.
- Tamil society of 1960's and 70's became the background of Kannan's writings.

Indian Writing in English

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Lakshmi Kannan also belongs to the post independence era of Indian writing in English and she was not only a poet, but she also wrote some essays, stories, novels. And to say in one-word fiction as well. Women as we already have discussed were struggling with a forced identity, imposed identity by the patriarchal framework; we have had this experience in many of the previous lectures.

This framework most often ignored their potential I mean the potential of the women--- their individuality, their talent, their sparks and even their language. The influence of modernity had become visible on these women writers too and they registered their voices, how not only by expressing them through poetic numbers, but also by registering them through different genres fine----- be it poetry, be it novel, be it short stories, and their identity and the search for their identity became very important.

Actually, Lakshmi Kannan is a bi-lingual she writes both in English as well as in Tamil. We will come to see how she tries to bifurcate when she writes poetry and whenever she writes prose or whenever she writes stories Tamil society of 1960s and 70s have become the background of majority of the writings of Lakshmi Kannan.


As is the practice that before we come to examine or before we come to understand the poetic, you know, a world of a poet we try to understand the biography.

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Biographical Details

- Bilingual writer, poet, translator, novelist, short story writer
- Pen name – Kaaveri (on the name of river)
- Born on 13th August 1947 (Mysore)
- Taught at IIT Delhi for several years
- Member of the Poetry Society of India
- Member of the Jury for Commonwealth Writers prize, Eurasia
- Received Manjula Srinivas Award for best women writer in 2012
- Her stories have been translated into French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Hindi and many other Indian languages.



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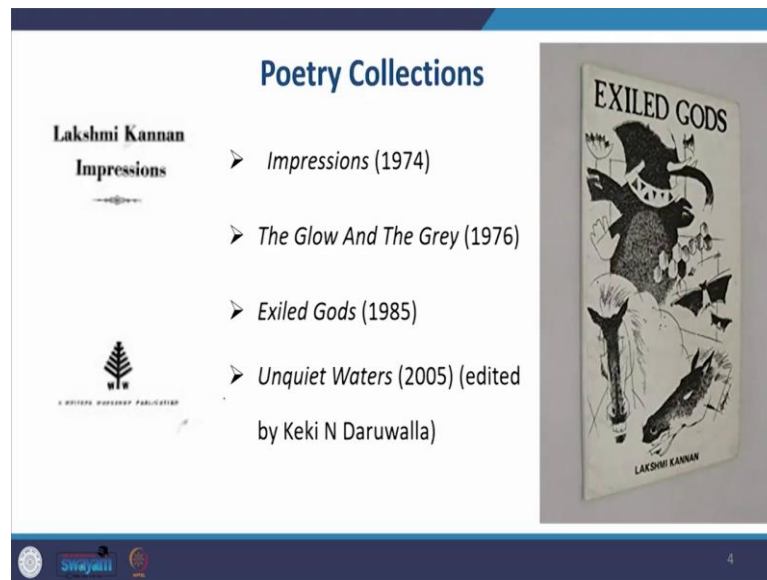
And in this regard Lakshmi Kannan--- a bilingual writer, poet, translator, novelist and a short story writer, was actually born in Mysore in the year 1947 when India you know the date is very important, because and the year is also very important.

So, she was born on 13th of August 1947 and we all remember that only 2 days before she actually took birth in independent India and then she started feeling the experiences and having the joys of being a poet in the post independent world. Actually traditionally she was named Kaaveri which is on the basis of a river most of the Indian women, in ancient days were named on the basis of rivers, on the basis of the deities and all.

Lakshmi Kannan is not only a poet, but she was actually a professor at IIT Delhi. By her nature she is quite reticent and perhaps she did not like much of the visibility, but she continued her sojourn of writing. She was actually a member of the Jury for Commonwealth Writers prize, Eurasia.

She also received Manjula Srinivas award for best women writer in the year 2012 .One thing is very important to notice about Lakshmi Kannan is that her works have been translated into French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Hindi and many other Indian languages.

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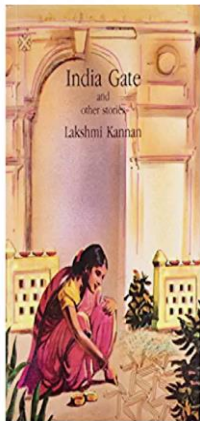
Now, what are her poetry collections, the very first collection of Lakshmi Kannan is entitled *Impressions*, look at the name *Impressions*. So, maybe these are the impressions of the poet herself and the impressions of the world in which she lived. Then came *The Glow and The Grey* it came out in 1976.

In 1985 came *Exiled Gods*, Lakshmi Kannan did not write you know very frequently, but unless and until things stirred. Because in many of the interviews she has herself said that unless things came to a person naturally the writing cannot be justified. And then came in 1985 *Exiled Gods*, then came *Unquiet Waters*. Look at the title of the poem *Unquiet Waters*.

So, *Unquiet Waters* can water and you know when she says water when she titles it water, the water here is a metaphor, water here is a symbol. And like all other women poets Lakshmi Kannan also writes about women's issues. But she writes in a very silent subtle manner and then she tries to convey her message and anyway she wages a war, but it is a sort of silent war.

So, this *Unquiet Waters* was edited by Keki N. Daruwalla we have already discussed and have also had a lesson on Keki N. Daruwalla. And Keki N. Daruwalla was quite helpful to many poets, both Keki N. Daruwalla and Arvind K Mehrotra these two people actually helped many of these poets who were in the making.

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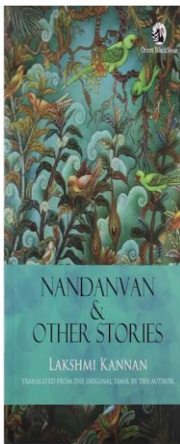
Works

Short Story Collections

- *Rhythm* (1986)
- *Parijata and Other Stories* (1992)
- *India Gate and Other Stories* (1993)
- *Nandavan and Other Stories* (2011)
- *Genesis: Select Stories* (2014)

Novel

- *Going Home* (1998)



Now, Kannan was not confined only to poetry, rather she also became very famous because of her short stories which were translated in several languages. So, in 1986 came *Rhythm* then came *Parijata and Other Stories*, one can find in the world of Kannan a blend of several religions as well we shall see when we come to the lines.

India Gate and Other Stories that came in 1993, *Nandavana and Other Stories* in 2011, then *Genesis* which is select stories 2014 and then Lakshmi Kannan also tried her hand at novel writing that is in 1998 *Going Home*.

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General Themes of Her Poetry

- Devotional Poems (*Ekdanta, Visarjana*)
- Feminine Sensibility
- Relationship and Mosaic of romance
- Celebration of ordinary women
- Suffering: External Vs. Internal voice
- Sensuousness and Spiritualism
- Marginalized section of Indian Society (Dalit, Women)
- River and River myths, Indian ritual and culture
- Water and woman fused into one
- Multi-layered existence of woman
- Blend of spirituality underlying Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism.

Now, what could be the themes of Lakshmi Kannan's poetry as we have been seeing that majority of these women poets, they were actually struggling or they were trying to carve a niche by creating a world of their own in search of their own identity. And in search of their own identity feminine self always became the hallmark.

But then she is more of a traditional poet where we can also find poems which are devotional in nature namely Ekdanta Visarjana fine, it is a poem which is actually addressed to lord Ganesha. Then we can also find a relationship and mosaic of romance in a Kannan's world.

Ordinary women actually become a part of Kannan's world, it is quite unlike you know de Souza, where she talks about and she takes a dig at the religiosity, but we do not find like this in terms of religion she is actually very submissive I mean Lakshmi Kannan. And then she also depicts both sorts of suffering both the internal and the external suffering, there is always a struggle between the external and the internal voice.

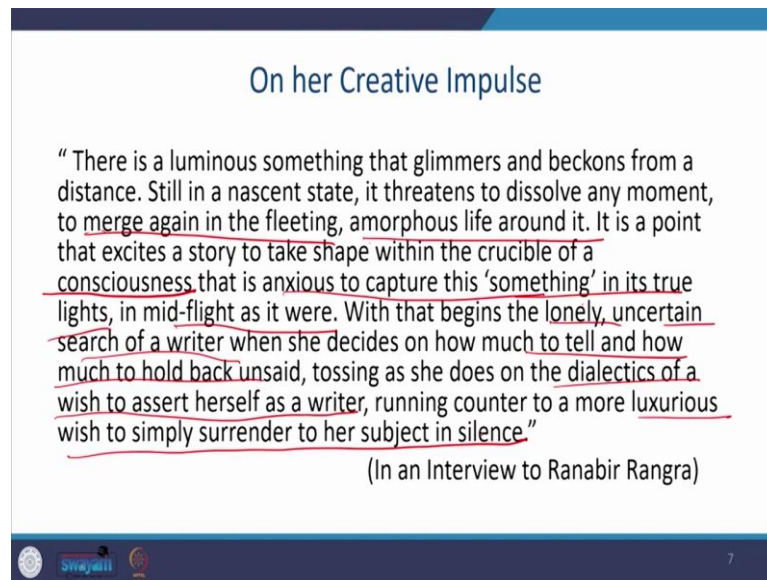
And one thing which actually deserves to be mentioned is that we can find not only a sort of sensuousness in the world of Lakshmi Kannan, but we can also find a sort of a spiritual yearning. She also has her eye for a Dalit, Women and like women she also talks about certain things, certain myths namely of waters, of rivers, then Indian ritual and culture. We can find her world abundant with all these things.

It is said that water and woman have been fused into one in the world of Lakshmi Kannan fine. Lakshmi Kannan also talks about the multi-layered existence of women and as I said earlier that there is no denying the fact that Kannan's world is a blend of a spirituality underlying Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism.

It is actually very sad to know that Lakshmi Kannan has not been included in many of the anthologies, but I am quite hopeful that with the advance of time and all Lakshmi Kannan's poetry because of its sensuousness and spiritual yearning will become a part of the major anthologies which are in the making.

Now, it is quite natural for a poet to express her own idea of her creative impulse. And since Kannan was a blend of so many genres in her poetry short stories novel and then essays here and there. In one of the interviews which she gave to Ranabir Rangra in one of the books, where 50 years of celebration of women writers and poets.

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In one of the interviews when Ranabir Rangra asked Lakshmi Kannan about her creative act or creative struggle or impulse what she says is actually very eye opener.

She says, "there is a luminous something that glimmers and beckons from a distance. See there is a luminous something that glimmers and beckers beckons from a distance, still in a nascent state it threatens to dissolve any moment to merge in the fleeting I mean any creative work. Say for that matter poetry or a novel or whatsoever, any creative art is not only a creative art only because it is full of emotions; rather emotions are have actually to merge in the fleeting amorphous life around it.

Whatever we see around ourselves, whatever happens around ourselves if that actually affects and it actually merges with the feelings. It is a point that excites a story to take shape within a crucible of consciousness, that is actually the main thing fine. Consciousness that is anxious to capture this something in its true lights in mid flight as it were, when that begins. With that begins the lonely uncertain search of a writer when she decides on how much to tell and how much to hold back or how much to hide.

My dear friends, poetry is actually the voice of the unsaid feelings attack us affect us. And we actually try to recreate those feelings in the form of poetry it actually keeps on simmering, glimmering, burning and finally, it takes shapes. Tossing as she does on the dialectics of a wish to assert herself as a writer, running counter to a more luxurious wish to simply surrender to her subject in silence.

So, what Kannan says is very important and it actually weighs a lot of meaning that, whenever an artist surrenders I think the real art cannot come out. So, what the writer or the poet does is, in order to assert himself or herself as a writer running counter to more luxurious ways to simply surrender to her subject in silence. So, the writer has several responsibilities, the poet has several responsibilities before him or her.

Now as I have been saying that Lakshmi Kannan is a poet who believes in several traditions, but at the same time she actually tries to oppose those traditions. And here when she opposes what is at the back of her mind is the marginality of women. And in this regard there is one poem which actually deserves mention and the poem is titled *Don't Wash*.

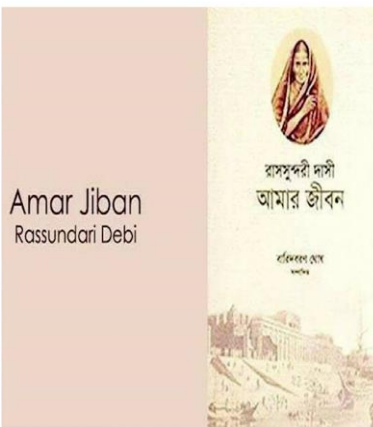
Actually you might be reminded of Kamala Das, where she says- 'fit in', she uses the word fit in, be Kamala Madhavi or say Madhavi Kutti. And here what Lakshmi Kannan says she actually reminds us of because in the poem, she has dedicated this poem to and she says for Rasha Sundari Debi.




Majority of us are familiar with this name Rasha Sundari Debi who was actually the first Indian woman especially first Indian woman--- a Bengali writer, who actually wrote her autobiography and titled *Amar Jiban* in 1876. Now see how the poet goes back and now she says, but she has actually a point to prove and while proving that point what she says is really worth mentioning.

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"Don't Wash"

(For Rasha Sundari Debi)
No, don't.
Don't ever clean with water
the dark, sooty walls
of your kitchen, Rasha Sundari.
For the akshara you scratched
on the walls so furtively,
the akshara you tried to match
with the sounds you heard
They've quickened now, with life.
Even as you wash rice, fish, vegetables
even as you peel, cut, bake, stir and cook
the thieving letters on the wall will take wings.
They fly down to the palm leaf
you once stole from your son.





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“Do not ever clean with water the dark sooty walls”,.Look at the lines. Do not ever clean with water the dark sooty walls of your kitchen Rasha Sundari.

Now, here she is addressing Rasha Sundari and he says she actually talks of domesticity and then see in a way reflects the life of a woman who is confined to the kitchen, but then that does not mean she has also confined her own choice, her own yearning, her own imagination, her own choices, her own yearning to move forward and that is why she said do not ever clean with water the dark sooty walls.

So, the darkness also refers to the darkness in which the women are---- ‘sooty walls of your kitchen Rasha Sundari/ for the *akshara* you scratched.’ Women have got--- in those days women were not given the freedom to go to the school and learn.

And that was a sort of traditional you know etiquette or a traditional mode, but then what she says.What the poet here says the *akshara* that a woman writes on the sooty dark wall. So, this reflects a sort of imagination this reflects a sort of wish, this reflects a sort of desire, desire for what desire for knowledge because it is this knowledge only that can pull you out of the darkness out of that dark world the dark world of kitchen.

So, ‘for the *akshara* you scratched on the walls. So, furtively’ very secretly did you write on the wall some of the words some of the letters ‘the *akshara* you tried to match with the sounds you heard.’ Now a woman, you know, my dear friends the world is beautiful only because of a woman because all of us are born of women and the sort of education that we get from our mothers and from our grandmothers and we get those educational lessons through stories through narrations and whatsoever.

And here the poet says the *akshara* the word that you tried to match because you were only meant to listen. Other people might be reading other people might be studying and you simply heard those sounds and you tried to etch those sounds on the dark sooty walls they have quickened now with life.

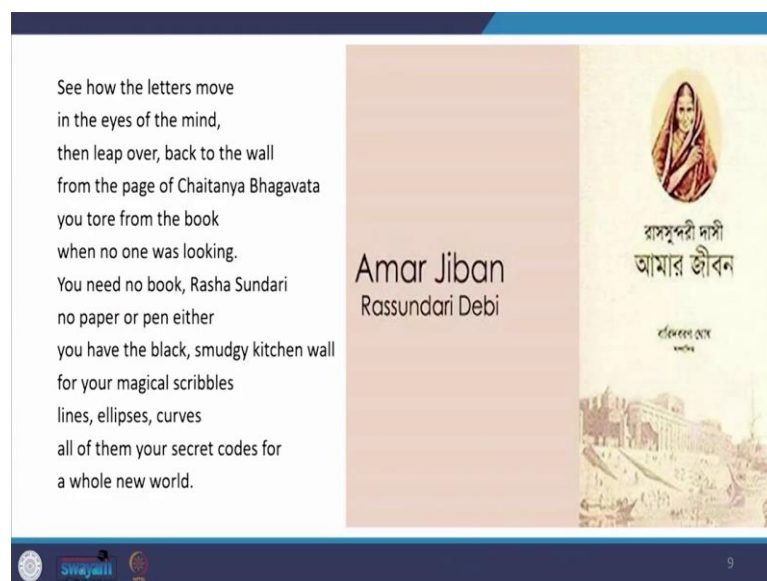
So, the sounds that you have heard the sounds that you have heard, those sounds which you are trying to scratch on these walls, what they have done now ‘they have quickened now with life with the passage of time they have quickened now.’ “Even as you wash rice, fish, vegetables/ even as you peel, cut, bake, stir and cook”, these were the fort .

These were actually the everyday duties/ activities of a woman and then she says the thieving letters on the wall, whatever you wrote secretly, silently on the walls will take wings. One day all these sounds which are getting the form of letters through your petite fingers one day they will take wings. They will actually help you because this is how you know you have a desire to learn, but you have not been provided with the facilities.

But she says-- oh Rasha Sundari Debi, do not ever clean with water. So, Rasha Sundari Debi symbolises women of all sorts, women of all kinds. They fly down to the palm leaf you once stole from your son.

The desire for learning, no? Because men were only meant to study and even if the son be, so the poet says they fly down to the palm leaf you once stole from your son. “See, how the letters move”. You can have a look how these letters move ‘in the eyes of the mind’ the sound that you heard these sounds were not meaningless. The sounds were not sound and fury, but these sounds signified everything and they are now taking shapes.

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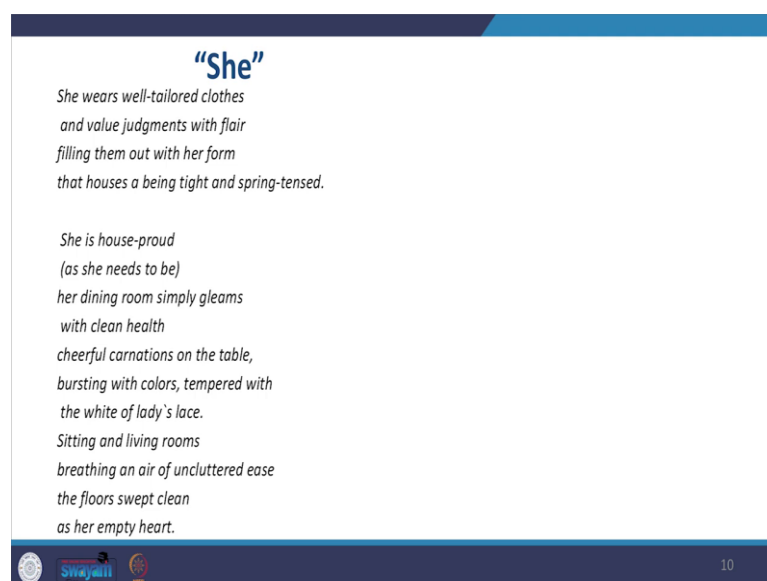
“In the eyes of the mind/ then leap over back to the wall/ from the pages of Chaitanya Bhagavata/ you tore from the book.” Your desire was not only to learn the everyday things, but you also tried to learn, you know the religious scriptures, the messages of the scriptures and the lines that you heard. You know the lines from the Chaitanya Bhagavata which you tore from the book, because you were not allowed to when no one was looking.

So, you had so many restrictions, but now those restrictions through which you have got a sort of, you know, courage to write some of the words on the walls, those words have now taken shape, they are now becoming language. You need no book, Rasha Sundari, no paper or pen neither you have the black smudgy kitchen wall, there is a reference to slates in olden days people used to write on slates. And what the poet here is suggesting is that you do not need any paper-- you have the kitchen wall which can act. It is very metaphoric, my dear friend, which can act as a sort of slate where you can black smudgy kitchen wall for your magical scribbles, lines, ellipses, curves all of them; your secret codes for a whole new world. And these only can be a secret code for the new world that you are actually trying to enter into, meaning thereby there is actually a sort of advocacy for education.

So, through this poem "Don't wash" we come to see not only the pitiable condition of women in those days, but even after that even in post independent India a woman is talking about and simply saying- Oh! Rasha Sundari Debi, please do not wash, do not clean those walls which are smudgy, which are dark, but then they act because you have written some of the words there.

We can take some other poems also and in other poems also. One can find a sort of craving desire, a sort of craving, for the choice, a sort of craving for individuality.

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"She"

*She wears well-tailored clothes
and value judgments with flair
filling them out with her form
that houses a being tight and spring-tensed.*

*She is house-proud
(as she needs to be)
her dining room simply gleams
with clean health
cheerful carnations on the table,
bursting with colors, tempered with
the white of lady's lace.
Sitting and living rooms
breathing an air of uncluttered ease
the floors swept clean
as her empty heart.*

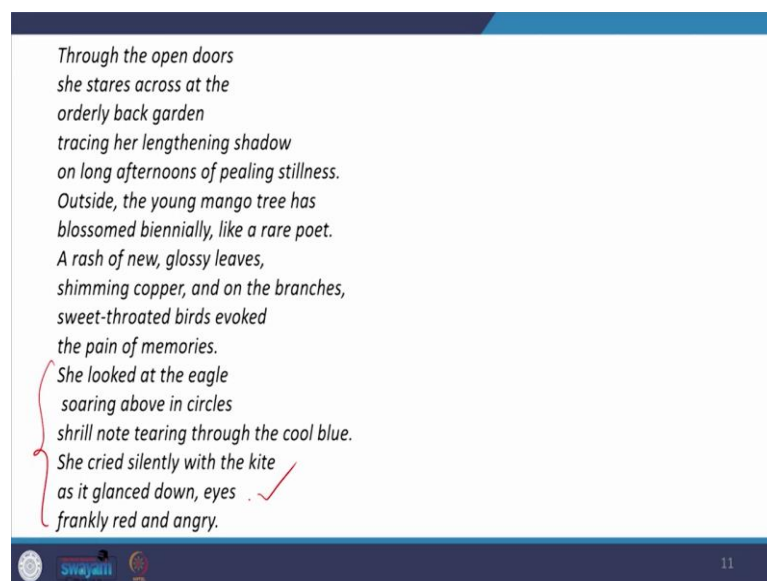
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The poem is titled “She”, She wears well-tailored clothes/ and value judgments with flair/ filling them out with her form/ that houses are being tight and spring tensed”. Look at the lines- “She wears well tailored clothes/ and value judgments with flair/ filling them out with her form/ that houses are being tight and spring tensed./ She is house proud. She is a housemaker and in under brackets she says, as she needs to be, she should be proud of the house.

“Her dining room simply gleams/ with clean health/ cheerful carnations on the table./ Bursting with colors/ tempered with/ the white of lady’s lace,/ sitting and leaving rooms/ breathing an air of uncluttered ease,/ the floor swept clean/ as her empty heart.” So, there is a sort of parallelism there is a sort of analogy, what the woman does every day.

But then despite cleaning everything, despite sweeping the floor, despite maintaining the entire house her real house is empty, her real heart is empty ,the floors swept clean as her empty heart.

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“Through the open doors/ she stares across.” So, in a world of confinement she only can find a passage she only can find the doors, the doors to freedom, fine. And she only looks at the sky, so looking at the sky symbolises a lot of thing. An urge for freedom an urge for spread, an urge actually for broadening her horizon ‘orderly back garden/ tracing her lengthening shadow/. She can only look back lengthening shadow with the flux of time.

Her shadows are simply lengthening ‘on long afternoons of peeling stillness/ outside the mango tree has/ blossomed biennially like a rare poet.’

So, even the tree you know even outside the tree which stands the tree has also grown, the young mango tree has blossomed biennially. There has been a fruition, there has been a flowering and you know, but what about the life of a woman like a rare poet.

“A rash of new glossy leaves,/ shimmering copper and on the branches/ sweet throated birds evoked the pain of memories like the sweet throated birds.” So, there is a sort of jealousy like the jealousy that Keats in one of his poems says to the nightingale. You remember, with a full- throated ease you can sing, but I cannot because I am a human being. And here the condition is that of a woman and the woman naturally has an envy (Refer Time: 28:52) with a bird and what she finds, sweet throated birds evoked.

So, there is also a metaphorical expression here that even though women speak very sweetly they have a very sweet voice which the society has time and again asked of them to be, but then what is there? The pain of memories. The pain of memories she looked at the eagle, soaring above in circles, shrill not tearing through the cool blue she cried silently with a kite as it glanced down eyes frankly red and angry.

So, look at these lines which are. So, pregnant with meaning ---“She looked at the eagle,” So freedom. “Soaring above in circles/ shrill note tearing through the cool blue/ she cried silently...” At least these are eagles--- they are in groups, but here she cried silently with the kite she looks at the kite which is flying.

So, the kite symbolises so many things--- ambition, freedom, flying high, soaring as it glances down, but as the kite glances down; eyes frankly red and angry. The coming down of the kite symbolises the coming of a sort of despair, a sort of distress, a sort of disappointment, a sort of dejection, a sort of debasement, a sort of derailment which the woman does not deserve. So, through one poem and the other we can find that Lakshmi Kannan has very beautifully characterized her poetic world.

Even though on majority of occasions we find that her tone is very narrative because every now and then it has been written in the first person narrative. Of course, the expression is very economical, but the language is very figurative in this regard when we

compare De Souza and Lakshmi Kannan, Kannan was more subtle and the language became very figurative.

The setting as we find majority of the poems have Indian setting, the Indian kitchen, you know the Indian sky, fine. There is a regional flavour also if we come across some other poems.

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Characteristic Features of Her Poetry

- ❖ First person narrative
- ❖ Economy of expression
- ❖ Figurative language
- ❖ Indian setting
- ❖ Conversational tone
- ❖ Regional flavor
- ❖ Natural imagery and symbol
- ❖ Melody
- ❖ Lucid and free style

You insisted it was me
In the verse of your love I gaze in
consternation;
At you too, That you should feel the
Lines of your own love-potential,
and Trace a woman there I (Doubt)

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And in many of the poems like if we take some of the poems from *Unquiet Waters* there is actually a nature imagery and symbol, fine? So, when she says *Unquiet Waters* what she means water and woman have been fused into one they are actually flowing quietly, but are they really quiet they are unquiet.

There is a chaos within, the style is free. So, the free style and the lucid style is also another weapon to carry forward because the poetess is actually yearning for a freedom. Freedom not for herself freedom not for the individual self, but freedom for the women of her own community the women of her own elk, the women in general. There is another poem named “Doubt”, where we can find that even though when she depicts love she is quite doubtful and what she says is, you insisted it was me in the verse of your love I gaze in consternation.

So, also so flatter is that you men are making I will be singing of the glories of love, but then ‘in the verse of your love/ I gaze in consternation/ at you too./ That you too I am

quite doubtful. “That you should feel the /lines of your own love potential.” Have you ever examined, have you ever thought of have you ever introspected whether this love is a sort of pure love?

While she says all this may also be a question to oneself when we think of our own individuality. Are we really true to ourselves as well. But then the poet says—“At you too that you should feel the/ lines of your own love potential/ and trace a woman there!” I doubt, is not it. So, there is actually a question that even in the course of love, you know, when you make all sorts of swearing, swooning and what not, but is the verse of love really been coloured with the true sensations of love; that is what as a woman I often doubt I trace a woman there.

So, love is not love and we remember when Shakespeare says: Love is not love when it alteration finds,/ though rosy lips and cheeks within/ his bending sickles compass come. I mean time you know if people only hanker after the beautiful things and they actually make several swearing in the name of love, is that love really the love?

Because that is actually love for the body not for the beauty of the heart. We have already been saying that Kannan’s world is also full of imagery and symbol. Kannan uses a natural imagery like birds, winds, rain, storms, shadow, curves and mango trees. So, if you read *Unquiet Waters* even though it is about water, but it is about life because water symbolises birth.


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Imagery and symbol

- She uses natural imagery like- birds, winds, rain, storm, shadow, curds and mango tree.
“The birds have flown home,
the people retired for the day
sounds have stilled
but the uncertain lights wait,
they wait.”

Symbol

- **Rain**- Symbol of fertility, renewal and rebirth
- **River**- Symbol of free, strong spirit and also symbolic of quiet and nourishing. It has both life-affirming and life-negating qualities.
- **Journey of diya in river**- Symbolic of the journey from innocence to experience
- **Water**- It can both create and erase. (*Don't Wash*)





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Water symbolises creativity, water symbolises continuity, water symbolises creation and recreation, water symbolises a sort of fluidity, water symbolises a sort of flexibility, water symbolises a new generation that is in store. So, what the poet says in a while depicting a sort of natural imagery--- “The birds have flown home,/ the people retired for the day/ sounds have stilled;/ but the uncertain lights wait, they wait.” So, there is loneliness also and this loneliness gets a sort of analogy with the loneliness of someone/those who has been left, who have been abandoned in love who have been cheated.

There are symbols of rain, as I said, and all these symbolise, fertility, renewal and birth because Kannan is a poet and Kannan is a poet with commitment. And there is a commitment not only for natural objects, but this commitment towards life. One can also find references to the journey of *diya* in a river which is actually symbolical of the continuity of life and then water which can both create and which can both erase, water has that potential water has that ability.

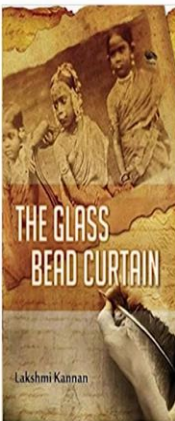
So, women are like water they can give birth they can provide sustenance, but at the same time, when there is enough of water there can be destruction as well. While depicting her own women fine especially in *Unquiet Waters* as I have been saying.

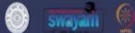
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Her Women

- In her *Unquiet waters* she has presented a distinct picture of women.
- Women are not flowers but spring which nurture the flowers.
- She equates women to the flow of river. River is the symbol of whole life of women.
- They come everyday to river to take bath, to celebrate, to worship and ultimately everything returns to water which is the source of creation of everything. (cycle of birth, death and rebirth).
- Women have the qualities of river, like quiet, nourishing but when time comes, they can also have the quality of liberty, storm and even destruction.
- Through the myth of Draupadi and Guinevere she attacks male pride:-

“she has done it.
Has offended the supreme male
into a sullen silence
by her terrible nakedness.”




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She actually presents a different and a distinct picture of women, where she says that ‘they are not only flowers, but they are actually the springs of life which actually nurture

the flowers. So, women have got immense potentiality. They not only nurture life, they actually bring spring down to earth.

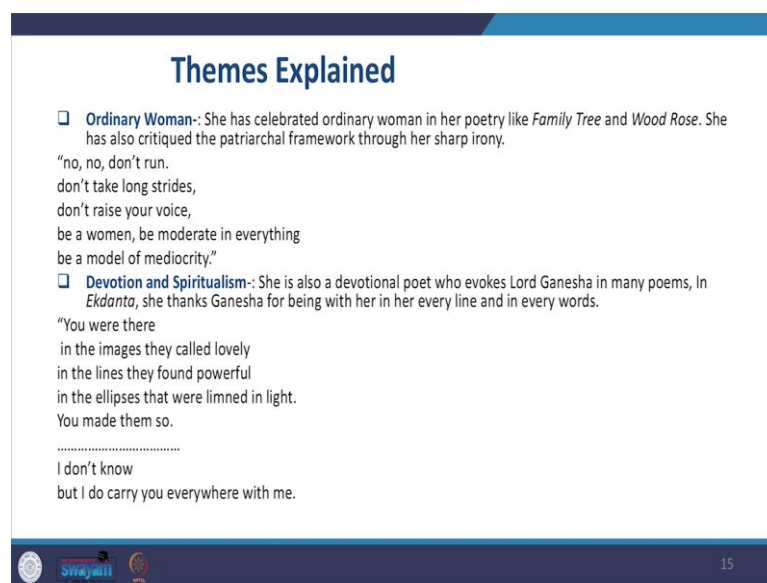
Actually, Kannan equates the flow of river to the flow of a woman's sentiments and feelings. They come every day to river to take bath, to celebrate to worship and ultimately everything returns to water. Water has a sort of not only a sort of religious because every now and then right from our birth to our death. water has its prominent role to play. So, water is the source of creation of everything-- cycle of birth death and rebirth and women have all these qualities.

And that is why they have created this beautiful world-- they nourish, they cherish and ultimately they in turn create a beautiful world. In several of her poems she has made references not from Indian scriptures, but also from biblical stories and all. So, while she talks about Draupadi in one of her poems and she mentions the myth of Draupadi and then also of Guinevere. Guinevere comes from the Arthurian legend where Guinevere is was the wife of king Arthur. And Guinevere was very powerful, but Guinevere was also infamous for her love of Lancelot. She provided the sort of opening and it is only because of that the kingdom was ruined and it is it is said that later on Guinevere actually survived her husband's death and then she repented her sins and actually became a nun. So, while she refers to the Draupadi myth and Guinevere myth. So, some of the lines which are very important and which are worth mentioning are:

“She has done it.
Has offended the supreme male
into a sullen silence
by her terrible nakedness.”

So when she says, the supreme male there is a dig on it. ‘Has offended the supreme male/ into a sullen silence/ by her terrible nakedness.’ So, while we explain themes one after another we must realise that Lakshmi Kannan not only makes a mention of ordinary women.

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Themes Explained

- **Ordinary Woman**:- She has celebrated ordinary woman in her poetry like *Family Tree* and *Wood Rose*. She has also critiqued the patriarchal framework through her sharp irony.
“no, no, don’t run.
don’t take long strides,
don’t raise your voice,
be a woman, be moderate in everything
be a model of mediocrity.”
- **Devotion and Spiritualism**:- She is also a devotional poet who evokes Lord Ganesha in many poems, In *Ekdanta*, she thanks Ganesha for being with her in her every line and in every words.
“You were there
in the images they called lovely
in the lines they found powerful
in the ellipses that were limned in light.
You made them so.
.....
I don’t know
but I do carry you everywhere with me.

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While she says, in one of the poems—“no, no, don’t run,/ don’t take long strides.” Now where she talks of all these negatives she actually is taking a dig on this patriarchal order on this androcentric world.

No, no don’t run, fine. So, the poems like “Family Tree” and “Wood Rose”, she actually criticizes the patriarchal framework and says no, no, do not run, do not take long strides, do not raise your voice/ be a woman/ be moderate/ in everything be a model of mediocrity.” So, this is actually a slap on the face of this patriarchal order because these are some of the restrictions, these are some of the commandments which are being made by this male chauvinistic society.

But then she does not confine only herself to the domesticity of ordinary women rather she also talks about devotion as we have said Ekdanta Visarjana fine. And there she thanks Lord Ganesha for Ganesha Lord Ganesha has always been with her and she says,

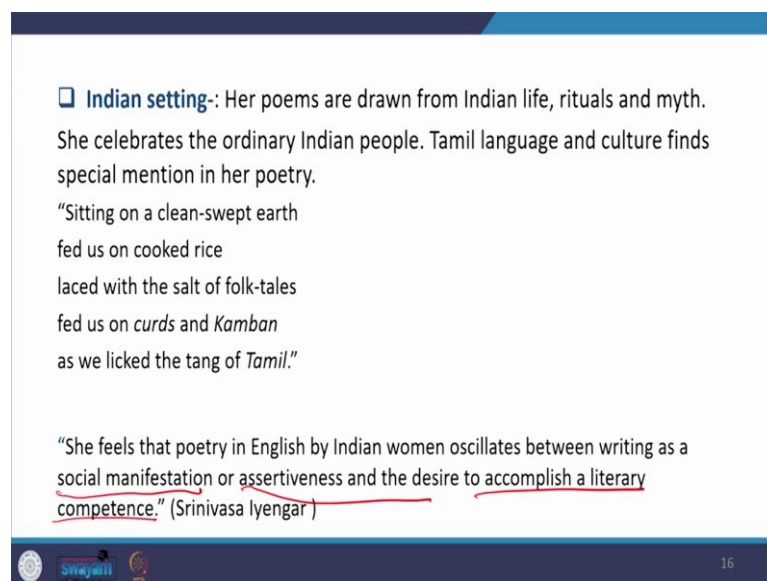
“You were there
in the images they called lovely
in the lines they found powerful
in the ellipses that were limned in light.
You made them so....
I don’t know
but I do carry you everywhere with me.

In the lines they found powerful in the ellipses that were limbed in light you made them so. Oh Ganesha you have always been with me in all sorts of conditions and circumstances.

But when you made them so, I do not know; but I do carry you everywhere with me. So, this actually gives a sort of indication and attestation of the fact that despite struggling for the rights of woman and despite sympathizing with the plight of women. Lakshmi Kannan also was quite devotional and she devoted herself submissively to the Lord Ganesha. So, in a way she was traditional, but there was a sort of spiritual yearning in some of her poems.

Actually majority of Lakshmi Kannan's poems have got Indian settings where one can get, a beautiful panorama of Indian life a picturesque quality of the description of rituals, myth and life. She also talks about ordinary Indian people and her language which her mother tongue that is Tamil.

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❑ **Indian setting**:- Her poems are drawn from Indian life, rituals and myth. She celebrates the ordinary Indian people. Tamil language and culture finds special mention in her poetry.

"Sitting on a clean-swept earth
fed us on cooked rice
laced with the salt of folk-tales
fed us on curds and Kamban
as we licked the tang of Tamil."

"She feels that poetry in English by Indian women oscillates between writing as a social manifestation or assertiveness and the desire to accomplish a literary competence." (Srinivasa Iyengar)

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So, Tamil language and culture finds a special mention in some of her works, where she says; "Sitting on a clean swept earth/ fed us on cooked rice/ laced with the salt of folk tales/ fed us on curds and Kamban/ as we licked the tang of Tamil."

So, this also reminds us of some other women poets though diasporic, Sujata Bhatt where she brings her own language in the midst of English, but here she was bilingual

and that is how she practised her own art. Actually, Lakshmi Kannan should deserve or Lakshmi Kannan deserves the attention that she has not been paid to and it is time that you as curious readers and listeners and poetry lovers gave more and more attention to Lakshmi Kannan.

It is in this regard Srinivas Iyengar's comments are to be taken very seriously, where he says--- "She feels, that poetry in English by Indian women oscillates between writing as a social manifestation writing as a social manifestation or assertiveness and the desire to accomplish a literary competence."

So, this is actually what Srinivas Iyengar-- the doyen of Indian writing in English comments about Lakshmi Kannan. And it is a sort of realization that Kannan feels that poetry by Indian English women poets is actually oscillating between the two.

Oscillating between writing as a social manifestation and then assertiveness and a desire to accomplish a literary competence. My dear friends, we could have gone on and on and could have discussed as much as could have been possible, but then at my back as I have always been saying, at my back 'I always hear time's winged chariot hurrying near.'

And the time is now sharp and it is now wise to wind up my lecture. Wishing you all a good day. And promising you to meet in the next talk once again. Thank you very much! Have a nice day.