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Introduction to A.K. Ramanujan

A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1993) was a distinguished Indian poet, scholar, and linguist. He made significant contributions to Indian literature by writing poems and stories in English as well as Indian languages like Kannada and Tamil. Ramanujan is celebrated for blending traditional Indian themes with modern ideas, exploring family, culture, and identity in his works.

Besides his literary achievements, Ramanujan was a renowned linguist who studied the structure and history of Indian languages. His scholarship helped bring Indian culture and literature to a global audience, making ancient traditions accessible to English-speaking readers. At the time of his death, he was a professor of linguistics at the University of Chicago and was recognized as a profound scholar of South Indian languages and culture.

His interests also included anthropology and folklore, which influenced his poetic craftsmanship. Ramanujan's legacy continues to inspire students and scholars worldwide.

Key Elements

- **Poet and Scholar:** Known for poetry and linguistic research.

- **Languages:** Wrote in English, Kannada, and Tamil.
- **Themes:** Family, culture, identity, folklore.
- **Legacy:** Influential in Indian literature and linguistics.

Textual Evidence

“A.K. Ramanujan is one of India’s finest English-language poets. He is best known for his pioneering translations of ancient Tamil poetry into modern English.”

Practice Set

- **Level 1:** Who was A.K. Ramanujan and what languages did he write in?
- **Level 2:** Explain how Ramanujan’s work helped global audiences appreciate Indian culture.
- **Level 3:** Discuss the influence of anthropology and folklore on Ramanujan’s poetry.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** A.K. Ramanujan was an Indian poet and linguist who wrote in English, Kannada, and Tamil.
- **Level 2:** His translations and writings made Indian literary traditions accessible to English readers, promoting cultural understanding worldwide.
- **Level 3:** His interest in anthropology and folklore enriched his poetry with cultural depth and traditional themes.

Quick Reference

A.K. Ramanujan: Indian poet, linguist, cultural scholar, known for blending tradition with modernity.

Glossary

- **Linguist:** A person who studies languages scientifically.
- **Anthropology:** The study of human societies and cultures.
- **Folklore:** Traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community.

Summary of the Poem "Time And Time Again"

"Time And Time Again" is a poem by A.K. Ramanujan that reflects on the nature of time through the metaphor of clock towers in a city. The poem describes how different clock towers chime at slightly different times, influenced by factors such as the materials used, the maker's hand, and the distances between them. It also touches on the communal diversity of Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities symbolized by the clocks.

The poem captures the irregularities and imperfections in timekeeping, symbolizing the complexities of life and society. It also references moments of violence and peace, such as riots and peace marches, showing how time continues despite human conflicts and natural events.

Key Elements

- **Theme:** The passage of time, cultural diversity, human conflict, and nature.
- **Imagery:** Clock towers, gongs, bronze, and the cityscape.
- **Symbolism:** Clocks represent time and social harmony or discord.
- **Tone:** Reflective, contemplative, and sometimes somber.

Textual Evidence

"Or listen to the clocktowers of any old well-managed city beating their gongs round the clock, each slightly off the others' time..."

"One day you look up and see one of them eyeless, silent, a zigzag sky showing through the knocked-out clockwork, after a riot..."

Practice Set

- **Level 1:** What do the clock towers symbolize in the poem?
- **Level 2:** Explain the significance of the differences in the clock towers' timekeeping.
- **Level 3:** Analyze how the poem reflects on communal disharmony and human violence.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** The clock towers symbolize the passage of time and the diversity of society.
- **Level 2:** The differences show the imperfections and unique characteristics of each community and the complexity of time itself.
- **Level 3:** The poem uses the clocks and their irregularities to comment on communal tensions and the persistence of time despite violence.

Quick Reference

Time is shown as irregular and influenced by human and natural factors, symbolizing life's complexity.

Glossary

- **Symbolism:** Use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.
- **Imagery:** Descriptive language that creates pictures in the mind.
- **Tone:** The poet's attitude or mood in the poem.

Analysis of Literary Devices in "Time And Time Again"

The poem employs several literary devices to convey its themes and mood effectively.

Key Literary Devices

- **Imagery:** Vivid descriptions of clock towers, gongs, and the city create a sensory experience.
- **Symbolism:** Clocks symbolize time, cultural diversity, and social harmony or discord.
- **Personification:** The clocks are given human-like qualities, such as "beating their gongs" and "a maker's shaking hand." This adds life to the inanimate objects.
- **Alliteration:** Repetition of consonant sounds, e.g., "beating their gongs round the clock," enhances the musical quality.
- **Contrast:** The poem contrasts the mechanical precision of clocks with natural events like riots and lightnings.

Examples from the Poem

"Beating their gongs round the clock, each slightly off the others' time..." (Personification and imagery)

"A maker's shaking hand in Switzerland..." (Symbolism and personification)

"After a riot, a peace-march time bomb..." (Contrast between violence and peace)

Practice Set

- **Level 1:** Identify two literary devices used in the poem.
- **Level 2:** Explain how personification is used to describe the clocks.
- **Level 3:** Discuss the effect of contrasting mechanical time with natural and social events.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** Imagery and symbolism.
- **Level 2:** The clocks are described as "beating their gongs," giving them human qualities that make the passage of time feel alive.
- **Level 3:** The contrast highlights the tension between human attempts to control time and the unpredictable forces of nature and society.

Quick Reference

Literary devices enrich the poem's meaning and emotional impact.

Glossary

- **Personification:** Giving human traits to non-human things.
- **Alliteration:** Repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words.
- **Contrast:** Showing differences to highlight particular qualities.

Important Quotes from "Time And Time Again"

The poem contains several significant lines that capture its themes and tone.

- "Or listen to the clocktowers of any old well-managed city beating their gongs round the clock, each slightly off the others' time..."
- "A maker's shaking hand in Switzerland, or the mutual distances commemorating a donor's whim..."
- "One day you look up and see one of them eyeless, silent, a zigzag sky showing through the knocked-out clockwork, after a riot..."
- "A peace-march time bomb, or a precise act of nature in a night of lightnings."

Explanation of Key Lines

These lines illustrate the poem's focus on the imperfection and variability of time, the influence of human and natural forces, and the coexistence of violence and peace in

society.

Practice Set

- **Level 1:** Quote a line that shows the clocks are not perfectly synchronized.
- **Level 2:** Explain the meaning of “a maker’s shaking hand in Switzerland.”
- **Level 3:** Analyze the significance of the “knocked-out clockwork” after a riot.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** “Each slightly off the others’ time.”
- **Level 2:** It suggests human imperfection in making clocks, symbolizing the flaws in timekeeping and life.
- **Level 3:** It symbolizes the disruption caused by violence, showing how social unrest affects the regular flow of time.

Quick Reference

Quotes highlight the poem’s themes of time’s imperfection and social commentary.

Glossary

- **Synchronize:** To occur at the same time or rate.
- **Whim:** A sudden desire or change of mind.
- **Riot:** A violent disturbance of the peace.

Practice Exercise for "Time And Time Again"

1. What did you think the poem was about when you read the first few lines?
2. From which line does the import of the title strike the reader?

3. What makes for the differences between the timekeeping of the various clocks?
What is the implicit comparison?
4. Why is the act of nature described as 'precise'?
5. Which of the following reflects the poet's attitude towards communal disharmony: (i) Critical condemnation, (ii) Helpless acceptance, (iii) Wistful lament?
6. Is the poet's attitude a representation of how the average Indian feels both towards human violence and nature's fury?

Answer Key

1. The poem initially seems to describe the sounds and rhythms of clock towers in a city.
2. The title's significance becomes clear when the poem discusses the clocks beating their gongs at different times, symbolizing repeated cycles.
3. The differences arise from the materials, the maker's hand, and distances between clocks, implicitly comparing human imperfection and diversity.
4. The act of nature is 'precise' because natural events like lightning follow their own exact patterns, contrasting with human-made irregularities.
5. The poet's attitude is best described as a wistful lament, reflecting sadness over communal disharmony.
6. Yes, the poet's attitude reflects a common Indian perspective of sorrow and resignation towards violence and natural calamities.

Quick Reference

Reflect on the poem's themes of time, human imperfection, and social harmony.

Glossary

- **Disharmony:** Lack of harmony or agreement.
- **Implicit:** Implied though not directly expressed.
- **Wistful:** Having a feeling of vague or regretful longing.