

Time and Time again

-A.K. Ramanujan

Time and Time Again :
Or listen to the clocktowers
of any old well-managed city
beating their gongs round the clock, each slightly
off the others' time, deeper or lighter
in its bronze, beating out a different
sequence each half-hour, out of the accidents
of alloy, a maker's shaking hand
in Switzerland, or the mutual distances
commemorating a donor's whim,
the perennial feuds and seasonal alliance
of Hindu, Christian, and Muslim -
cut off sometimes by a change of wind,
a change of mind, or a siren
between the pieces of a backstreet quarrel.
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.

About the Poet:

Poet, translator, folklorist, and philologist A.K. Ramanujan was born on 16th March 1929 in Mysore, India. He earned degrees at the University of Mysore and Deccan College in Pune and a Ph.D. from Indiana University. Ramanujan wrote in both English and Kannada, and his poetry is known for its thematic and formal engagement with modernist trans-nationalism.

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. At the time of his death he was professor of linguistics at the University of Chicago and was recognized as the world's most profound scholar of South Indian languages and culture. His interests included anthropology and folklore. These influenced his work as a craftsman of English.

In 1976, the Indian government honoured him with the title of Padma Shri, the fourth-highest civilian award in the country. The Sahitya Akademi Award was conferred upon A.K. Ramanujan posthumously for his "The Collected Poems(1995)".

Ramanujan's other honours include MacArthur Fellowship.

About the poem:

This poem presents the complex distillation of a lifetime of unusual thought and feeling. The poem describes the theory of difference among religions through the symbol of clock towers. This poem also represents the average Indian's feeling both towards human violence and nature's fury.

Glossary:

Gongs: a large, flat, circular piece of a metal hit by hammer to make a sound.

Round the clock: always

alloy: a mixed metal

Commemorating: to honour the memory of someone or something with a ceremony

Perennial: everlasting

feuds: mutual hostility between two families

Alliance: association

Siren: a warning

riots: clashes

1. Choose the correct alternatives :

- (a) 'Precise' means-
 - (i) different ways (ii) inaccurate
 - (ii) clumsy (iv) exact
- (b) Which of the following reflects the poet's attitude towards communal disharmony?
 - (i) critical condemnation
 - (ii) helpless acceptance
 - (iii) wistful lament
 - (iv) none of the above

2. Answer the following questions in 15-20 words each:

- (a) Why is the city termed as 'old'?
- (b) "Between the pieces of a back street quarrel"
What do you understand by "back street quarrel"?
- (c) Explain - "The perennial feuds and seasonal alliance".
- (d) How do you interpret "knocked out clock work"?
- (e) What is zigzag sky?

3. Answer the following questions in 30-40 words each:-

- (a) Why is the act of native described as "precise"?
- (b) Discuss the title of the poem.
- (c) How would you interpret the term 'donor's whim'?
- (d) What does the line 'perennial feuds and seasonal alliance' allude to?

4. Answer the following questions in 150 words each:-

- (a) What is the central idea of the poem? How is it developed?
- (b) Is the poet's attitude a representation of how the average Indian feels both towards human violence and nature's fury? Explain.