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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 32: T. Vasudeva Reddy

BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Haiku Poetry

- One of the oldest forms of poetry but discovered and proliferated in the 20th century.
- Paul Louis' collection *Haiku* in the early 20th century gave a new way to haiku poetry.
- Previously called ho'kku, it was termed haiku by Masaoka Shiki in the 19th century.
- It has its roots in the poetic form *tanka*, a form of prayer to Gods by the Japanese.

Contd…

- Poets like Basho and Issa made it popular in Japan in the 17th and 18th century.
- Any 17-syllable poem written in the 5-7-5 syllable pattern is called Haiku.
- “Hai”- denoting amusement, “ku”- the versified form of a sentence
- Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and T.E. Hulme adopted this poetic form in the Western world.

Contd….

- This poetic form has been adopted across languages.
- “Next, the rules of grammar- eliminating all the possible uses of gerunds and adverbs, little use of pronouns, ending the haiku with a noun, avoiding too many/all verbs and prepositions.” (Rajni Singh)
- In modern times, poets have experimented a lot with this poetic form. They do not follow any specific pattern.

Contd….

- In India, Rabindranath Tagore is considered to be the first poet who wrote haiku poems.
- When Tagore first visited Japan in 1916 then he translated some haiku poems of the Japanese poet Basho into Bengali.
- “We don’t find three-line poem anywhere else in the world. These three lines are enough for their poet and the readers. The heart of the Japanese people does not sound like a waterfall; it is quiet like a lake.” (Tagore)

“Oh! Japan thy oceans are restless

Thy land is calm

Mountains are deep and steep

Thy landscape is soft and green.”

Some Haikus

"The Old Pond" by Matsuo Bashō

"An old silent pond
A frog jumps into the pond—
Splash! Silence again."

"A World of Dew" by Kobayashi Issa

"A world of dew,
And within every dewdrop
A world of struggle."

Sonia Sanchez "Haiku [for you]"

"Love between us is
speech and breath.
loving you is
a long river running."

"In a Station of the Metro" by Ezra Pound

"The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough."

"Fireflies"* by Tagore (A Haiku Poem)

My fancies are fireflies, —
Specks of living light
twinkling in the dark.

The voice of wayside pansies,
that do not attract the careless glance,
murmurs in these desultory lines.

In the drowsy dark caves of the mind
dreams build their nest with fragments
dropped from day's caravan.

Spring scatters the petals of flowers
that are not for the fruits of the future,
but for the moment's whim.

*It's a long poem. Only opening part has been discussed

My words that are slight
my lightly dance upon time's waves
when my works heavy with import have gone down.

Mind's underground moths
grow filmy wings
and take a farewell flight
in the sunset sky.

The butterfly counts not months but moments,
and has time enough.

My thoughts, like sparks, ride on winged surprises,
carrying a single laughter.
The tree gazes in love at its own beautiful shadow
which yet it never can grasp.

T. Vasudeva Reddy(1943- 2020)

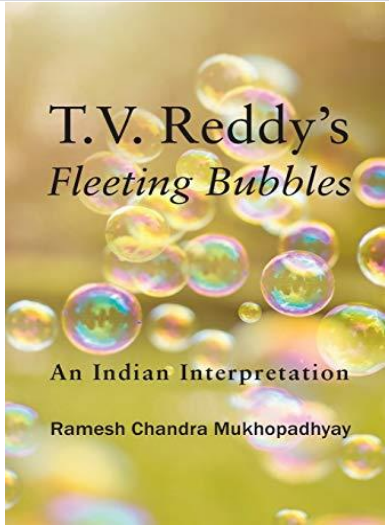
- Born on 21st December, 1943 in a small village of Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.
- A Ph.D on Jane Austen, Reddy is a poet, novelist, and a critic.
- He was the Secretary of the GIEWEC (Guild of Indian English Writers, Editors and critics), which was established in 2011.
- Credited with 12 poetry collections, 2 novels, and 3 critical books.
- A prominent poet from India who is popular for his haiku poems.
- A poet who celebrates rural life and searches for a life outside this world in the world of spirituality.

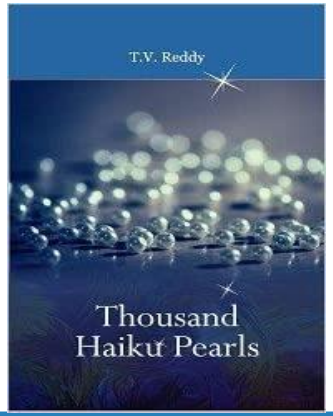


Awards And Achievements

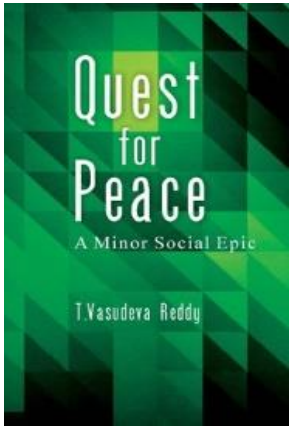
- ✓ The International Eminent Poet in 1987
- ✓ Honored D.Litt. from the World Academy of Arts and Culture, San Francisco, United States in 1988
- ✓ Best Teacher Award (Univ.& College Level) from the Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, India, in 1990
- ✓ Best poetry Award for his third book *The Fleeting Bubbles* from Michael Madhusudan Academy, Kolkata in 1994
- ✓ UGC (University Grants Commission) Award of National Fellowship (as Visiting Prof.) in 1998
- ✓ Award of ‘Excellence in World Poetry’ for the year 2009

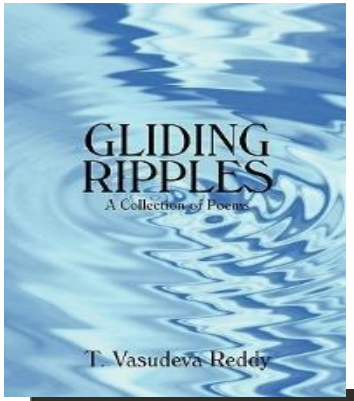
Poetry Collections

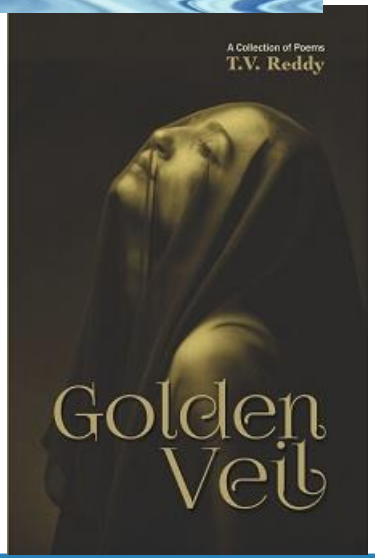




- *When Grief Rains* (1982)
- *The Broken Rhythms* (1987)
- *The Fleeting Bubbles* (1989)
- *Melting Melodies* (1994)
- *Gliding Ripples* (2008)
- *Echoes* (2012)
- *Quest for Peace* (2103)
- *The Rural Muse* (2014)
- *Thousand Haiku Pearls* (2016)
- *Golden Veil* (2016)
- *Sound and Silence* (2017)
- *The Pulse of Life: Essential Readings* (2017)
- Light Eternal : A Spiritual Poem (2020)



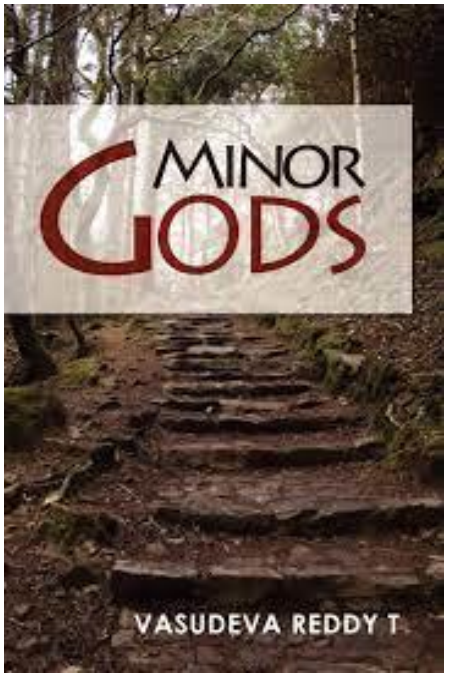




Novels and Critical Books



- *The Vultures*
- *Minor Gods*
  - *The Vultures* has the rural settings of Andhra Pradesh.
  - *Jane Austen: The Dialectics of Self-Actualization in her Novels* (1987)
  - *Jane Austen: The Matrix of Matrimony* (1987)
  - *A Critical Survey of Indo-English Poetry* (2016)



General Themes of Reddy's Poetry

- Rural Life, Shift from local to global
- Deteriorating Moral Values, Spiritual Quest
- Memory and Loss
- Autobiographical elements

"His poetry is a pleasant blend of the traditional and the modern, the realistic and the romantic, the symbolic and the imagist, the urban and the rural, satirical and lyrical streams of poetry." (Introduction, *The Pulse of Life*)

Features of his Poetry

- ✓ Rural surroundings and Nature
- ✓ Suggestiveness
- ✓ Humour
- ✓ Fuses personal with the universal
- ✓ Substantial impersonality
- ✓ Satiric but not devoid of universal truth
- ✓ Transition of mood

"in that double roasted hamlet
women stand like expiring candles,
water moves in concentric circles
like their daydreams
wearing desires in the plaits
of their cobra-hair."

("Women of the Village")

“When Grief Rains”

When gales of sorrow
Wreck my surging spirit,
Misery storms my being,
And grief rains incessantly
I wish to drench myself,
Depart from these ills
And enter the pores of the earth
With drops of rain that seep.
Still somewhere in me
A dim desire creeps unawares
To possess the instinctive mackintosh.



Gliding Ripples(2008)

- The first section has 57 poems, the second has 100 haikus.
- Contemplative
- Social consciousness

"Oh America"

Roads and lanes look spick and span
unclean and uncivil ways people ban;
No piece of paper or butt or pup's litter
Unending lines of racing cars glitter
Sky high towers and huge shopping malls
Fill our eyes with thrills of Niagra falls.

"My Village"

"…most of the huts and thatched cottages
symbols of nature's simple life for ages
now stand erect in concrete avatar
of terraced buildings of brick and mortar
cemented by greed and jealousy, and hate."

"The sun sets in the West only to rise in the east."

Varying Moods

When Grief Rains

Jilted by crafty clouds
The sun-burnt crop looked
Like a dissected corpse
On the post-mortem table.(WGR,28)

The nothingness around me gapes and gasps;
It hardly breathes ---baneful breeze. (WGR 24)

Still somewhere in me
A dim desire creeps
To possess the instinctive mackintosh.(WGR,25)

Barren lands
Vanishing sounds
Elusive clouds
Depressed crowds
Dried streams dying dreams. (GR,19)

Gliding Ripples

They are castaway, the untouchables
Innocent offspring
Poor victims of
Their aged thoughtless creators.(GR,13)

Monarch of eerie clammy nights
an unkind despot blood-thirsty
Fond of pond and puddle dark and filthy
A nagging source of uneasy fright to all on the earth that happily breathe
Old or young with or without teeth.(43)

“The Gipsy Woman”

With a basket
Woven of palm leaves
Balanced meticulously
On the disheveled head
She walks along the street
Treading the scorching ground
With her bare tripping feet;
Her silver anklets and bracelets
Vie in arresting heaviness.
Her broad bangles jingle,
Garlands of patches on her sari
Host the molesting sun,
Pieces of mirror sewn on her dress
Reflect the piercing rays
While her arms move
In tune with her slender waist;
She cries with an assured voice—
“I can tell your fortunes—
Hear my ‘sode’*, know thy future
Sode amma sode, hear my sode”,
Pauses at each door –step
Feels the palm of rustic maid
With her wondrous wand
And discloses the pages of fate
In words of musical cadence
And earns palmfuls of rice;
By telling sweet and sensible lies,
Interspersed with generalizations,
She fills the hearts of maids
With honeyed thoughts;
They gain a parcel of sweet dreams
While she her remorseless morsel.

*Telugu word used by gipsy women for telling the past, present and future

From *Thousand Haiku Pearls*

World is vast and wide
for the dynamic youth to ride
on the crest of tide.

Your sweet memories
dispel dark clouds of worries_
Light conquers night.

With smiling pearls
you make my dreary life bloom_
the spring chases gloom.

Sun or moon may rise or set
Super powers may rise and soon fall,
but crimes know no sunset.

The once famed pink city_
Royal pink exploded with terrible ink,
city bleeds and stands in dignity.

The rose, razed to the root,
her petals fondly raped and looted,
falls and faints at the door.

Leader stands on the snowy peak,
All the snow flies with a terrible shriek
seeing his heart, a gory granite.

Contd….

Cricket match_
Idle brains boundaries watch;
Reason, clean-bowled.

Management schools,
Beehives with stinging rules---
gardens of weeds.

Our universities,
large stinking academic slums--
petty political drums.

A bride's blush
A parrot's biting kiss fresh
On the guava fruit.

Nude, lush green garden
Feels fresh, slim, shy and sensuous---
Fairest Eve in Eden.

Birthdays march
Like lamp post on market road
With back-breaking load.

Soon to old age we grow
With emotional waste of youthful past;
Life of a cawing crow

Contd…

Election promises---
Countless pebbles in a near-empty pot
To pump few drops.

Voice is a gift, a lift
To soar or sigh, use it with thrift
A multiple choice.

Words of well wishers though harsh
Are the right remedy our wrongs to thrash;
Chronic ills need bitter pills.

Beware of beauty's power
And its wily weapon of seduction--
Root of character's reduction.

Corporate hospitals
Money-minting unethical machines---
Trading portals.

Most medical doctors
are commission agents and cunning actors;
Amassing money, their only creed.

Religion is a footboard
To reach the divine feet of the Lord
In any form on any road.

Caste and creeds
Are man-made walls; demolish them
And uproot the weeds.

We are impure;
With this heavy baggage, the sinful load
We can't cross the road.

The one Supreme
Is beyond the limits of form and norm;
Let us be calm.

Reddy's Haikus

Depression

Who is to whom in this world?

There is none whom you can call yours".

Reality sleeps

justice yawns and snores";

The widow weeps. (THP,13)

Realism

World is wide
for the youth to ride
on the crest of tide. (On Youth)

Birthdays march
Like lamp posts on market road
With back-breaking load.
Soon to old age we grow
With emotional waste of youthful past;
Life of a cawing crow.(THP, 47)

Characteristic Hallmark of Reddy's Haiku

- Rural atmosphere
- Spiritualism at the core of his poetry
- Native ethos
- Celebration of nature
- Economy of expression
- Rhythm is an essential part.
- "…… he is a meeting point of the past and the new-conventional, structured, rhymed poetry and the present, unrhymed free verse."-----V.K. Dominic

"Search of soul
though it is late, let us start;
a conscious chart."

Views of Critics

- " My attention is sometimes arrested by the striking imagery and phrasing. The poet has keen eye to mark the exceptional whether in life or nature." (K.R. Sriniwas Iyengar)

- "Like a gifted sculptor, he chisels his poems with the deftness of a master craftsman." (Nissim Ezekiel)

- "Subtle, elegant, profound, Reddy's haiku broadens his unwavering focus on the natural and the modern world and turn them inwards to explore the complex realm of the human and the divine." (Patricia Prime)

- "He remains a native, an Indian in what he thinks about the world in its enigmatic appeal, a pantheist at the core of his heart. His is stuff with a distinctly Indian flavor, the ripe jackfruit and appetizing yellow of mango in a basket." (A. Russell)

- ' satires traverse from the general to the particular and rise to the universal' (Prof. K. Venkatachari)

- 'sociological consciousness and earnest concern for the weal of society' (David Kerr)

Estimate of Reddy as an Indian Poet

- Reddy is a poet who synthesizes Indian myth, culture, ritual, tradition, legend, and religion.
- Indian ethos, imagery, and idiomatic expression
- Although from South, he brilliantly captures the scenic beauty of North India.
- An eco-critical reading of his poetry is possible.
- He addresses many philosophical questions of our lives. His philosophical depth about our belonging and non-belonging is noteworthy.
- Conscious of the degeneration in all walks of life. Loss of value and ethics became focal point of many of his poems.
- Contemporary political issues and political corruptions dominate his writings.

Conclusion

- Haiku poem is comparatively a new form of poetry in India which has greater scope.
- Writers from various cultures and regions are practicing this.
- T. Vasudeva Reddy is a celebrated voice of Haiku poetry in Indian English in Writing.
- His poetry deals with the issue of life, society, nature, and spiritualism.
- “He does not withdraw memories and moral instances, but at the same time a didactic essence permeates many lyrics, but most of the time one detects incantation, a little ornamentation and undertones of emotions when he resurrects rural atmosphere.”- P. C. K. Prem
- “It is high time now to bring him from margin to the mainstream of great Indian English poets….”_ Pashupati Jha

" Let Rama, Buddha and Christ be our models
to tread their path with a will without hurdles;
they light the mind with broader outlook
and kindle the flame with spirit of sacrifice;
if children read them in their school book
it inspires their tender minds to banish vice.
Today's children are our wealth and bulwark,
let us guide them with ethics and truth stark."

(From *Quest for Peace*)

Thank You

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