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.

Responding to the Poem

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?

Suggested Reading

*The Interior Landscape* by A.K. Ramanujan
*Poems of Love and War* by A.K. Ramanujan.