U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open
University, Prayagraj

MAEN-117
Indian English Literature

Block

1

NON-FICTIONAL PROSE

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MAEN-117/2

COURSE INTRODUCTION: INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Welcome to the course on Indian English Literature!

You must before anything else spend some time reflecting on the importance of Indian English Literature. Why should we study it? It may seem strange that Indian writing in English continues to be the bone of contention in the Indian literary world even today. Even after some of its writers have won national and international acclaim, critics in the other Indian languages and many others believe that it is impossible to do creative writing in English since it is an alien language. Its cultural register and verbal associations are simply inaccessible to us. They maintain that it smacks of *colonial elitism* and does not address to any specific community in India. For that matter names like Budha Dev Bose and S.H. Vatsyayan charge it for its 'primarily urban, middle-class and Western-oriented' drift and hence a far out cry from the reality of 'rural-ethos and native traditions'

Let me also not take shelter under untenable claims like it is the only pan-Indian literature after the hegemony of Sanskrit and the Persian literatures. Even though there are quite a few valid reasons to consider Indian English Literature relevant and legitimate -reasons that have come forth from scholars and writers of this literature, I would want you to tackle this larger question in the context of the significance 'English' enjoys in India. Think for a while how we take it for granted. English has become part of our lives- personal as also official, it is the preferred language of higher education advertising, marketing, Indian Parliament, courts, armed forces and the list is unending. Besides English is an international language whose power and use is increasing day by day. It is the *'lingua franca'* of the world wide web and *Internet* and countries like Japan and Germany have taken up cudgels to teach and use English in their countries in order to keep pace with the IT revolution world wide.

Of course in India the presence and dominance of English is the outcome of several factors-historical, social and political. It relates to the history of colonialism under the British Crown. Don't you think English continues to thrive because the countries which use it, are altogether the most powerful in the world today? But before you are swept off your feet in its eulogy, let me sober you down a bit by saying in Makarand Paranjape's words "it foregrounds and problematises this issue better than any other discipline. Study of Indian English Literature, its inception, growth and its status of paramountcy is the study of historical cultural and social forces which have shaped our destiny. It holds key to our identities as Indians".

Out endeavor is not just to harp upon the extra-literary factors that the issue entails, the quality of the texts itself is a significant factor. The texts embody great humanistic and cultural values. K. Satchidanandan has, with some risk of simplification, summed up the various legitimate reasons both literary and extra literary put forward by scholars and writers from Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand to Kamla Das, Shashi Deshpande and B. Kachru thus

> One: India is the third largest English-using nation after the USA and UK which has about 35 million users of the language. This is about 5 per cent of India's population which is larger than the percentage of the users of certain scheduled languages of the constitution. Two: English has the status of an 'associate' official language in the constitution. Three: It is the state language of four states and of most of the Union territories. Four: India has a large network of English print media with a pan-Indian circulation and is one of the world's three major book publishers in English. Five: English happens to be, even if we desire otherwise, the primary language of inter-regional

interaction in India and of course of India's interaction with the outside world. Six: English is fast getting assimilated into Indian languages while also assimilating them. India has given English its own cultural identity that has little do to with its Judiac-Christian tradition. Along with the Sanskrit and Persian traditions, English also has entered India's linguistic and literary creativity. A common world of concepts, beliefs, rituals, attitudes and even words and phrases is shared, say, by a Kannada novel like Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* and an Indian novel in English Like Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. This is not mere thematic parallelism; experimentation in English has to be viewed from the point of view of bilingual creativity. Indian English writers bring into the very fabric of their writing a lot of what they have learnt from the Indian languages they know-rhythms, syntax, concepts, even words. This bilingual creativity is not new to Indian literature; it is very much there in the whole tradition, as for example in the poets of the Bhakti movement. English in this context, is decolonised through a nativisation of the theme, space and time, a change of canon from the Western to the Indian, a cohesive use of the discoursal devices of the other languages of the writer-like native metaphors, similies, proverbs, quotations, speech-acts, culturally appropriate styles-even transliterations of conversations done in the Indian tongue-and narrative models like *Sthalapurana* (e.g. *Kanthapura)* or *Nama* (e.g. The Trotter-Nama) or *Mahabharata* (e.g. The Great Indian Novel). Seven: English literature and translations into English of European works have had a profound impact on Indian creativity in all languages, contributing genres, modes, attitudes, sensibilities and points-of-view. Eight: the charge of elitism can also be levelled against literatures in other Indian languages, since our people are mostly illiterate and since elitism also consists in the style and technique used and not only in the language chosen. Nine: To dismiss the 20 per cent of Indians who live in the cities as 'unreal' is dishonest: urban reality is also part of the Indian reality and urban readership is part of the Indian readership. Ten: The best Indian English literary works have as many readers in the country as the best books in Indian languages, and at times even more.

We recommend perusal of this course also because it gives the MA English programme of IGNOU its national character for English happens to be, the 'primary language of inter-regional interaction in India'.

Indeed to be writing in English and to be Indian is a great challenge. We want you to study this course against the paradigm of *Making* as C.D. Narasimhaiah would have us do in *Makers of Indian English literature*. In the wake of Booker mania and the western publishers ruling the roost, it ought to be necessary for the English teachers in the universities to dictate taste, to discover lost reputations and fall back upon time tested resources in an effort to revive the *life of the spirit* otherwise there could be total impoverishment in the contemporary cultural scene in the so called civilized world. We have listed in the syllabus a few who can be called *makers* of Indian English literature. Prominent on our readings are thinking men who have their eyes on eternity: Aurobindo, Toru Dutt, Derezio, Sarojni Naidu, Vivekananda, Coomaraswamy, Gandhi and Nehru demonstrate profound involvement in India's mythology and literature and a rare dexterity in a language not their own. In the words of CD Narasimhaiah, " the foreign language when internalized by a genius seems more a help than a hinderance because of the mastery it calls for".

We have under the creative label covered the trio-Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao as also Arun Joshi, Manoj Das, Amitav Ghosh, Nirad C. Chaudhary and Vikram Seth. The first generation novelists affirmed their faith in the traditions of this country. The *Untouchable* refuses to be a convert to Christianity, Raju the guide, even though a vagabond, gladly lays down his life for the community and Raja Rao could 'teach Brahman to the Brahmins' themselves. Such is the strength of an undying tradition with its continuity and vitality.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This Block aims to introduce you to non-fiction prose written by Indians in English. In terms of form, prose is the simplest, so many people assume that it does not have the same literary merit as a poem, a drama or a novel. In this block, you will read prose written by thinkers like Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi, autobiographies by Jawaharlal Nehru and Nirad C. Chaudhuri, and travelogues by Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh. This block will have the following units:

Unit 1: Introduction.

Unit 2: Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.

Unit 3: Mahatma Gandhi

Unit 4: Jawaharlal Nehru

Unit 5: Nirad C. Chaudhuri

Unit 6: Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh

There have been outstanding Indian orators like Vivekananda, Tilak and Srinivasa Sastri. Indians have published biographies, autobiographies, travelogues, and houmorous sketches in addition to scholarly monographs in various fields of knowledge. Many of the contemporary novelists and poets have written good prose. But the achievements in poetry and fiction have drawn attention away from non-fiction prose writings. We have given a detailed account of non-fictional prose and included Vivekanand, Aurobindo, Coomaraswamy, Gandhi, Nehru, Nirad C. Cahudhari and Vikram Seth for you to study samples of great prose.

This tradition continues in the women writers we have chosen. They avowedly refuse to be considered pure feminists with a preoccupation with female psyche only. Anita Desai Shashi Deshpande, Subhdra Sen Gupta, Raji Narsimhan, Geeta Hariharan on your reading list write in an affirmative vein rather than breaking the fabric of social life.

Coming to our poets, the contemporary English poets are vulnerable by their 'precosity and preoccupation with word play' as C.D. Narasimhaiah states. But we have given ample examples where English poetry has gone beyond prescriptive reading.

It is easy to talk about Indian Drama in English because there is so little of it. We have included Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*. Dattani, the Bangalore-based Actor / Director / Playwright is the founder of the performing arts group called 'Playpen'. When asked why does he not write in his own language his reply was, I do.' Dattani uses the language in which he can best express what he wants to say. Translated into Hindi, *Where There's a will* was just as successful and effective as it was in English. If the play is strong enough it will work in any language.

The story of Indian resistance to standard English structures and usage is set forth in Rao's preface to *Kanthapura*:

> One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language.

The enormous success that attended Roy, Rushdie and Seth because they display an inventiveness which while breaking all ground rules of English, creates a register close to vernacular Indian tongue. Makarand Paranjape's article "Inside and Outside the Whale" sums up the options before the Indian English Novel in the post Rushdie era thus:

> ...So long the Indian - English novel lived inside the whale before this book (Midnight's Children)... Realism, consistent characters, linearity, order are out; non-linearity, fantasy, and disorder are in.. I can name heaps of novels which bear an influence of Rushdie's liberating touch.

We shall separately study the implications as well as the consequences of post Rushdie era in another elective course on Post 80's Indian English Novel. Issues like *post-colonial* and *post-modernist, innovative* and *decolonizing* will be taken up then

For the purpose of our present overview of the course on Indian English literature it is sufficient to say that both diaspora and native writers do not forsake India and remain preoccupied with Indian ethos and multilingual complexity..

In this course we have selected non-fictional prose, novels, short stories, poetry and a play. Let us look at the blockwise arrangement of this 8 credit course.

Block 1: Non-fictional Prose
Block 2: Mulk Raj Anand: *Untouchable*

Block 3:	Raja Rao: *Kanthapura*
Block 4:	Anita Desai: *Clear Light of Day*
Block 5:	Salman Rushdie: *Midnight's Children*
Block 6:	Short Story
Block 7:	Poetry
Block 8:	Mahesh Dattani: *Tara*

The four novels take you through the major landmarks from the 30's , 60's to the 80's of the 20th century. In Unit 2 of Block 2, we have discussed the rise of Indian Novel in English. For that matter we have surveyed the field of poetry, drama and non-fiction as well in their respective Blocks. We expect you to read the novels and the play on your own. We shall not give you the texts of the prescribed novels or the play. You can either buy copies locally or you can read the texts at your study centre library. You may find discussion in the Blocks much more meaningful if you read the texts first.

We have prepared an anthology of the texts prescribed for Non-fictional Prose (Block1), Short story (Block 6) and Poetry (Block 7) which will accompany the studying material.

We also recommend that you listen to the audios and view the videos that accompany the course. You may find the writers talking about their own texts prescribed for you. Isn't it interesting? You will also require to complete your set of three assignments before you can appear for the term-end exams. In order to help you with the task, we have given questions in the Blocks. For clarifications and counselling, do go to the study centre assigned to you. We shall also organise teleconferencing schedules and extended contact Programmes, if possible, for you to interact with your teachers.

Even though your study materials have been prepared by very learned and experienced teachers, we expect you to read beyond the Blocks and try and form your own critical perspectives.

We hope you'll enjoy working through this course. Good Luck with your work!

UNIT 1 NON-FICTIONAL PROSE: A SURVEY

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Indian Prose Writers
1.2 Post-Independence Prose
1.3 Forms and Varieties of Prose
1.4 Let Us Sum Up
1.5 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall trace the beginnings of Indian English Non-Fictional Prose. While surveying the field we will document important prose writers of the pre-independence era as also those who are currently writing. You will also be acquainted with the Forms and Varieties of Prose. After reading this unit you will appreciate the fact that whether fictional or non-fictional, prose should be read as closely as verse.

1.1 INDIAN PROSE WRITERS

Indian English literature began as a by-product of the Indo-British encounter. Indians first started learning English for the purpose of trade and commerce. Expository prose writing, letters, and speeches were the first to be published. The first Indian author in English, Dean Mahomet, published his memoirs, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, in 1794. There have been outstanding Indian orators like Vivekananda, Tilak and Srinivasa Sastri. Indians have published biographies, autobiographies, travelogues, and humorous sketches in addition to scholarly monographs in various fields of knowledge. Many of the contemporary novelists and poets have written good prose. But the achievements in poetry and fiction have drawn attention away from non-fiction prose writings.

Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) was born in 1759 into a family claiming traditions of service to the Mughal Empire. After the death of his father, at the age of eleven, he joined the East India Company's Bengal Army as a camp follower, and attached himself to an Ensign Godfrey Evan Baker. Over the next fifteen years, they travelled all over the Gangetic plain, from Delhi to Dhaka. Dean Mahomed became a market master and then a subaltern officer, as his Anglo-Irish patron rose to become the captain of his unit. When Baker sailed home to Cork in 1784, Dean Mohamed went to Ireland with him. He settled down there, and married an Anglo-Irish girl. He read widely, and it is possible that Addison's and Smollett's accounts of their travels in Europe encouraged him to write. In 1794, with the help of public subscription, he published his book, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal, Through Several Parts of India, While in the Service of the Honorable The East India Company*. (In the East India Company's administration, most of Bihar, including Patna, were part of the province of Bengal). At that time, the most common way of publishing a book was by subscription -- the author would collect money from the book-reading public to pay for the cost of publication. Dean Mahomet (to use the spelling he favoured) adopted the epistolary form; the book is in the form of thirty-eight letters. *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* is probably the only account by an Indian of life with the East India Company. The book ends with his arrival in Britain.

The Travels of Dean Mahomet, the first book ever written and published by an Indian in English, is a memoir, a popular genre in non-fictional prose. It is in the form of thirty-eight letters. The epistolary form is just a convention; different portions of the first person narrative, the various "letters", begin with "Dear Sir". The first letter (the first chapter of his *Travels*) begins with his birth and childhood, he claims that he was descended from the Nawabs of Murshidabad. Subsequent chapters clearly describe the towns and villages they passed through, the dress and occupations of the people, and the activities of the various classes of men in the Bengal Army. His language is graphic and without stale diction when he is describing events in his life, or scenes from the army camp. But when it comes to descriptions of nature, Dean Mahomet turns to clichés he has picked up from his reading of English nature descriptions. This is not surprising, as early writers in the settler colonies like Canada, Australia and New Zealand experienced the same problem of the dichotomy between the language (though it was their mother tongue) and the place they were writing about.

The book was written more than two centuries ago, just when the Mughal Empire was fading away and the British was taking over. Dean Mahomet describes various aspects of life in India, always laying stress on the beauty of the country and the nobility of its people. He describes "the Mohammedan ceremony of marriage", the caste system, the custom of offering betel leaves, and the goods manufactured in different parts of the country, such as the fine cloth of Dhaka. But the tone is always that of a neutral observer. One often finds the author taking over the European's values along with his vocabulary: the Indians (probably Adivasis) who attack the Bengal Army's convoy, are described as "a savage clan" and "unfeeling barbarians". The tribals armed with bows and arrows are no match for the British guns, and they are punished brutally: "some being whipped in a public manner, others suspended on a kind of gibbets, ignominiously exposed along the mountain's conspicuous brow, in order to strike terror into the hearts of their accomplices". Dean Mahomet says that they "justly received exemplary punishment".

The beginnings of Indian English writing are not fully documented. For long, Cavelley Venkata Boriah's "Account of the Jains" published in 1809 in a journal has been considered the first published work by an Indian in English. M.K.Naik (in his *A History of Indian English Literature*, 1982) and K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar in his *Indian Writing in English* (1962) supported this view because *The Travels of Dean Mahome* had been forgotten. It is only in 1996 that a historian, Michael H. Fisher, brought this work to light. His scholarly work, *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1795-1851) in India, Ireland and England* has chronicled the life of this unknown Indian, tracing his later life as the first Indian entrepreneur in England, and the role his wife Jane played in furthering his business of running a coffee house and later a medicinal bath. But it is difficult to correctly place Dean Mahomet's work in the tradition of Indian English writing. He is chronologically the first, but we do not know whether later writers like Raja Rammohun Roy were aware of his work.

Raja Rammohun Roy's essay, "A Defence of Hindu Theism" (1817) is the first original publication in expository prose in the history of Indian writing in English. Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) was the greatest social, religious and cultural reformer of the period. The son of a rich landlord, he studied Arabic and Persian at Patna, and Hindu theology and philosophy at Benares. He knew many European languages, and had read the Bible in Greek, Hebrew and Latin. He was a polymath, who wrote in Bengali (his mother tongue), Persian, and Sanskrit in addition to English. In 1828, he founded the Brahmo Samaj, a reformist Hindu movement. He fought for women's rights, and lead a movement against *sati*. His articles about the "practice of burning widows alive", and his "Address to Lord William Bentinck" (1830) played a big role in framing legislation to ban this cruel custom. He wanted to modernize India, and realized the importance of knowing English. He was one of the founders of the Hindu College (which came into being in Calcutta in 1817).

His "Letter on English Education" addressed to the Governor-General Lord Amherst in 1823 is a fine example of his prose style. His writing reveals clear thinking and logical argument. He was a master of English prose, the first in a long line of distinguished Indians who used English prose to promote social and political reform.

Bengalis have made an outstanding contribution to early prose writing. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), the father of the Bengali novel and author of *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), the first Indian novel in English, wrote several essays in English. With the growth of English education, a larger number of Indians started writing distinguished scholarly books. Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) a member of the Indian Civil Service is remembered for his verse translations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He wrote novels in Bengali, two of which he translated into English: *The Lake of Palms* (19023) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909). His non-fiction prose works are equally distinguished, his most famous book being the two volumes *Economic History of India* (1902 and 1904). He was also the first Indian (the second, now that Dean Mahomet's work has come to light) to write a travelogue, *Three Years in Europe 1869-1871*, published in 1872. He was also the first to write literary history: *The Literature of Bengal* (1879). His friend and contemporary, Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925), one of the founding members of the Indian National Congress was a powerful orator; his speeches have been published as early as 1890.

Three Bengalis, who distinguished themselves in the fields of religion, poetry and national awakening, were masters of prose. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was named Narendranath Datta by his parents. At the age of eighteen, he became a disciple of the great mystic Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and took the name Vivekananda. After Sri Ramakrishna's death in 1885, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an order of monks devoted to social reform. His speech at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 brought him international fame. His *Complete Works*, the first volume of which appeared in 1907, consist primarily of speeches and lectures. He spoke of the spiritual uniqueness of India, and the greatness of Hinduism, but he spoke even more forcefully about the current degradation of India, its causes and cure. His language has an astonishing modernity about it; the idiom is so fresh it is difficult to believe that he spoke a hundred years ago. He used simple diction and short sentences. His imagery was taken from day-to-day life, not art or literature. Here is a passage from a speech condemning Hindu insularity:

> Our religion is in the kitchen, our God is in the cooking pot and our religion is, "Don't touch me, I am holy."

He used a kind of incantatory repetition very effectively, as in this piece on "The Secret of Work":

> If a man's wants can be removed for an hour, it is helping him indeed; if his wants can be removed for a year, it will be more help to him; but if his wants can be removed for ever, it is surely the greatest help that can be given him.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the brightest star in the firmament of Bengali literature and culture. He was a poet, playwright and novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. He composed hundreds of songs and was also a painter of merit. His autobiographical works in Bengali, *My Boyhood Days* and *Reminiscences* are among his early works. Tagore's prose writings in English were primarily in the form of lectures, though his letter to Mahatma Gandhi, 'The Great Sentinel", is an outstanding composition, upholding the values of humanism in the midst of political turmoil. *Sadhana* (1913), his first prose work in English, is based on lectures he gave on Indian philosophy at Harvard University. Of his many collections of lectures, *Nationalism* (1917) is the most relevant today. Tagore makes a distinction between society (the "spontaneous self expression of man as a social being") and nation (the

"political and economic union of people"). He warns Japan and India against imitating the west. In fluent prose which has an almost poetic power, Tagore denounces the economic imperialism of western nations, which has destroyed the social fabric of India. Tagore absorbed the best of ancient Indian thought and spirituality. He was passionately concerned with modern India, but he did not believe in narrow patriotism. His prose is characterised by deep thought expressed in lucid language.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is better known as a seer and poet, but he has to his credit many volumes of prose writings on philosophical, religious, social, and cultural subjects. He has been called "The inaugurator of modern Indian criticism" (the words are C.D.Narasimhaiah's) because of the range and originality of his writing. Aurobindo Ghose was sent to England for his school education at the age of seven by his Anglophile father. He studied classical languages at Cambridge, and got a First class First rank in his degree. He qualified for the Indian Civil Service, obtaining record marks in Greek and Latin. He also learnt French, German, Italian and Spanish. He came back to India in 1893 and started teaching English at Maharaja's College in Baroda. He resigned his position when the British partitioned Bengal in 1905, and took an active part in the nationalist agitation. He was arrested in 1908 as a terrorist; his mystic experience at Alipore Jail in 1909 (he called it "Narayana Darshan") made him give up politics. He settled down at the French enclave of Pondicherry, and continued his yogic quest. He was joined by a French woman, Mirra Richard (later known as the "Mother" in the Aurobindo Ashram), who recognised him as the guru she was searching for. In 1926 he had a great spiritual experience, the descent of a new consciousness. He retired into seclusion, but continued his literary work; in addition to poetry (including the epic *Savitri*) he produced many poetic dramas, and more than fifty volumes of prose, comprising essays, speeches, correspondence and translations from Sanskrit.

Sri Aurobindo's essays can be divided into three broad categories: religion, social issues and literary criticism. His most famous works in the field of religion and spirituality are *The Life Divine* (1939-40), *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1948) and *Heraclitus* (a comparative study of Greek philosophy and Vedantic thought). Many of his essays on social issues first appeared in *Arya*, a monthly he founded in 1914. Books on social and cultural issues include *The Renaissance in India* (1920) and *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953). His literary criticism appears in *The Future Poetry* and in letters. His critical approach is a synthesis of the best in western and Sanskrit traditions of aesthetics. He is quite original in his assessment of individual poets; he recognised the achievement of Walt Whitman, calling him "the most Homeric voice since Homer" long before the English academic establishment accepted him. Two other writers who have made important contributions to Indian literary criticism are Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (you will read him in Unit 2) and M.Hiriyanna, author of *Art Experience* (1954) and other books on Indian philosophy

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed Indians using English very effectively in public speeches. Nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mahadev Govind Ranade were great orators. Perhaps the greatest orator of the period was V.S.Srinivasa Sastri (1869-1946), a leader of the Moderates. He was known as "the silver-tongued orator of the Empire". He also wrote a number of biographies, including *Life and Times of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta* (1945) and *My Master Gokhale* (1946). Sarojini Naidu, better known for her poetry, showed her mastery of prose in her speeches. Another leader of the Gandhian era, C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) was an eloquent speaker. His simple prose versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* also reveal his mastery of English. But the most important leader and thinker of the era was Mahatma Gandhi, after whom this period has been named. In terms of literary merit, Jawaharlal Nehru was the greatest writer of this period, and most critics agree that his autobiography is the best work in the genre.

1.2 POST-INDEPENDENCE PROSE

After Independence, the political struggle no longer engaged the attention of writers; this facilitated the growth of lighter writing. Both before and after Independence, Indians wrote scholarly books in the field of history, economics, religion and philosophy. The most famous writer in the field of Indian philosophy and religion was S.Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), he taught philosophy at leading universities in India and abroad, and rose to be President of India. He was a prolific writer, whose works include *Indian Philosophy* (in two volumes, 1923, 1927), *The Hindu View of Life* (1926) and *The Principal Upanishads* (1953). Khushwant Singh, better known as a novelist and journalist, has the credit of writing the standard scholarly work on his community: *A History of the Sikhs*, published in two volumes (1963, 1966). Much significant literary criticism has appeared in the last four decades, covering studies of individual authors and works as well as theoretical studies like Krishna Rayan's *Sahitya: A Theory* (1991). The leading critics in the field of Indian English literature are K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, C.D.Narasimhaiah and M.K.Naik (see Suggested Reading). Meenakshi Mukherjee is another important critic, whose *The Twice Born Fiction* (1971) is devoted to Indian English fiction; in *Realism and Reality* (1985), she studies the growth of the novel in Indian languages.

More than thirty books of non-fiction prose appear every year in the field of Indian English literature. They include biographies, autobiographies, travelogues, historical and culture studies and social criticism. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has written books of all these types. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) is his most famous work; the autobiographical mode continues in its sequel, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* (1987). His second book, *A Passage to England* (1959) is a travelogue. His books on history, culture, religion and Indian society include *The Continent of Circe* (1966),*The Intellectual in India* (1967), *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (1979) and *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997). Biographies include *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Max Müller* (1974) which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and *Clive of India* (1975). He revelled in provoking controversy. His first book was dedicated to the memory of the British Empire, "because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by . . . British rule." He denounced India as the "Continent of Circe", a land where the original, energetic Aryans had been turned into slothful pigs by the climate. Most readers are irritated by this human gadfly, full of his own importance. His long, complex sentences, full of learned allusions and difficult words, are not very readable. But much of his criticism of Indian society is based on fact, and his books cannot be ignored by any serious student of Indian literature or culture.

A writer of the post-independence era who resembles Chaudhuri in dedicating himself to non-fictional writing is Ved Mehta, author of eighteen books, of which just one, *Delinquent Chacha* (1967), is a novel. Born in Lahore in 1934, he became blind at the age of four, and was educated at a special school for the blind at Bombay. When he was fifteen years old he went to America to study at the Arkansas School for the Blind. He went to college in the United States and Britain, obtaining a B.A. degree from Oxford University and an M.A. from Harvard. He has been MacArthur Fellow and a Visiting fellow at Balliol College, Oxford. Undeterred by blindness, he joined the staff of *The New Yorker* in 1961, and much of his work first appeared in it. His first book, *Face to Face* (1957) is autobiographical. His non-fiction includes a travelogue, *Walking the Indian Streets* (1961), *The Fly and the Fly-Bottle* (1963) based on interviews with British intellectuals, and *The New Theologian* (1966) an attempt to evaluate the ideas of Christian theologians coping with the secular world. *John is Easy to Please* (1971) contains some of his best essays of literary criticism. He is now at work on an autobiographical series to which he has given the name *Continents of Exile*. The first five volumes, *Daddyji* (1972), *Mamaji* (1979), *Vedi*

(1982), *The Ledge between the Streams* (1984), *and Sound-Shadows of the New world* (1986) describe his family and childhood, and his coming to terms with life in Arkansas. *The Stolen Light* (1989) describes his experiences at Pomona College in California, and his attempts to move on equal terms with his sighted college fellows

Thirty-two years separate *The Stolen Light* from his first autobiographical book. *Face to Face*. But Ved Mehta has grown and matured in terms of style and character in these decades, quite unlike Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who reveals no change in the thirty-six years which separate the two volumes of his autobiography. His first book avoided mentioning his disability; now he states it plainly, "I have been blind from the age of four, as a result of meningitis". An early book, *Walking the Indian Streets* frequently indulged in visual details, such as the colour of a person's clothes. *The Stolen Light* is based on felt experience, and his prose conveys it beautifully, as in his descriptions of the new students' initiation at Pomona College:

> The air was fresh with the scent of eucalyptus, which made me think of childhood colds back home in India and the eucalyptus leaves crushed in a handkerchief which my mother would press against my nose. No matter how stuffed up my head was, it seemed, I could always smell the pungent, overpowering fragrance of eucalyptus.

In spite of being an autobiography, Ved Mehta's later work is not one-sided; we get a complete picture of the narrator, his good as well as bad qualities. The streak of selfishness present in Ved Mehta's love affairs and friendships at college is revealed.

Many persons better known in other walks of life have written their memoirs. Such books present fresh glimpses of less known facets of life in India. Sheila Dhar's *Here is Someone I'd Like You to Meet* (1995) contains entertaining anecdotes of musicians. while Moosa Raza's *Of Nawabs and Nightingales* (1995) gives us insights into the life of the I.A.S. officer posted in a small town. R.K.Laxman, India's best cartoonist, has published his autobiography, *The Tunnel of Time* (1998). Many established novelists have published their autobiographies: Nayantara Sahgal's *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954) which appeared before her novels, was followed by *From Fear Set Free* (1962). R.K.Narayan has written *My Days* (1975), while Ruskin Bond's autobiographical works have the titles *Scenes from a Writer's Life: A Memoir* (1997) and The *Lamp is Lit: Leaves from a Journal* (1998). P.Lal, the poet and translator, has written about his near-death experience in *Lessons* (1991). C.D.Narasimhaiah, the literary critic who has done a lot to promote the study of Indian English literature, calls his autobiography *N for Nobody: Autobiography of an English Teacher* (1991). Manohar Malgonkar, the novelist, has written biographies of figures in Indian history, such as *Kanhoji Angrey: Maratha Admiral* (1959) and *Chatrapatis of Kolhapur* (1971).

The last fifty years has seen the publication of a large number of autobiographies and biographies. One biography which won the Sahitya Akademi Award (in 1976) is S. Gopal's *Jawaharlal Nehru*. Sarvepalli Gopal (b.1923) is a distinguished historian: after working as Director of the Historical Division of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India (1954-1966), he went back to teaching at universities like Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi) and Oxford. His biography of his father, S.Radhakrishnan (who was president of India) is remarkable for its candid portrayal. Professor Gopal makes no attempt to cover up anything, not even regarding the marital life of his distinguished father. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (2 volumes, 1976, 1979) is considered the definitive work in the field. Gopal's work, as befits a scholar, is loaded with facts and references, duly footnoted. But he is involved in his subject, and does not hesitate to use strong language. He admires Nehru, but points out the flaws in his style of functioning. Nehru had implicit faith in his personal assistant, M.O.Mathai; unfortunately, he was "not the faithful retainer as Nehru thought but disloyal, avaricious and opportunistic." Gopal does not have the dry, dispassionate style one associates with a historian; he condemns Mathai in a

complex prose which is full of adjectives . He points out that Nehru alone was not to blame, the pusillanimity of others had a big role in pufting up Mathai:

> Unknown to Nehru, Mathai's irregular activities were generally accepted and his influence either sought or feared. Indira Gandhi encouraged him beyond normal limits, Vijalayalakshmi Pandit addressed him as Deputy Prime Minister, Rajagopalachari told Mathai that he looked on him as a son, Padmaja Naidu regularly sent him affectionate birthday greetings and even the Mountbattens, who should have known better, fussed over him. Thus an illiterate upstart had succeeded in making Nehru the victim of his own isolation and had revived in Delhi the atmosphere of a decadent court.

The metaphor of "a decadent court" puts these national leaders on par with the flattering courtiers who used to surround kings in the old days. For centuries, Delhi had been the capital where the Mughals (and before them the Khiljis and Lodhis) had held court in an atmosphere of intrigue, where some upstart favourite would unduly influence the king. The metaphor constitutes very strong condemnation of Mathai.

Rajmohan Gandhi (b.1935) is another important prose writer. His biography of C.Rajagopalachari, his maternal grandfather, first published in two volumes in 1978 and 1982, is considered the definitive work on this statesman. He has now written a condensed version, *Rajaji: A Life* (Penguin, New Delhi, 1997). His biography of Gandhiji, his paternal grandfather, *The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Mahatma Gandhi* (1995) is thought provoking. Rajmohan Gandhi was involved in the Moral Re-armament Movement. He was chief editor of *Himmat*, a Bombay weekly, from 1964 to 1981, and later moved to Madras as resident editor of *The Indian Express*. In the last decade, he has started taking an interest in national politics. His study of Hindu-Muslim relations is perhaps his greatest contribution to modern thought. His latest book *Revenge and Reconciliation: Understanding South Asian History* (Viking Penguin India, New Delhi, 1999) studies this topic in the context of this whole region. Realizing the general Indian ignorance about Muslims, he wrote biographies of eight Muslim leaders: *Understanding the Muslim Mind* (first published in 1986 under the title *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter*). Rajmohan Gandhi presents historical facts in a clear and readable manner. He attempts to present both sides of a question.

Many leading novelists have written travelogues. R.K.Narayan's *The Emerald Route* (1977) takes us all over Karnataka, while his *Dateless Diary* (1960) is about his visit to U.S.A. Many novelists of the new generation have written travelogues: Salman Rushdie's *The Jaguar Smile* (1987) describes his visit to Nicaragua, while I. Allan Sealy's *From Yukon to Yucatan* (1994) describes his journey along the west coast of North America. You will read travelogues by Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh in unit 6 of this block.

The personal essay is a very popular prose form, and Indians have not lagged behind in practising it. These light essays are generally published in newspapers or journals. But there are many collections of lasting literary merit. R.K.Narayan's essays reveal his keen observation of life in India. His gentle irony make them very entertaining reading. Many collections of his essays have appeared, such as *Next Sunday* (1956) and *A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988*. The chief virtues of Narayan's prose, whether he is writing autobiography, essays or translations, are simplicity, precision, clarity and readability. He uses the minimum of words to achieve his purpose, and his vocabulary has a modest range. He is a master of the light essay, and can create memorable characters with just a few words. V.V.John has written in a witty manner of modern India, especially the educational scene, in his collections of essays like *Light Luggage* (1969), and *The Great Classroom Hoax* (1978). Jug Suraiya, the newspaper columnist, has published collections of light essays, like *A Taste for the Jugular* (1994) and *The Great Indian Bores* (1996).

From the beginning, Indians have used English for functional purposes -- trade and commerce or politics and social reform. For almost two centuries, we have used it as a medium for scholarly works in various fields like science and technology, history, economics, religion, philosophy and literary history and criticism. As students of literature, we are more interested in the creative use of non-fiction prose in forms like autobiography, biography, travelogue and the personal essay.

1.3 FORMS AND VARIETIES OF PROSE

The French poet Paul Valéry compared prose to walking and verse to dancing. Verse is the more stylized form, while prose is functional, and used for non-literary purposes also. But this does not mean that prose is a lower form; prose can employ all the rhetoric techniques (like simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, understatement, irony etc) that verse uses. Prose, too, can be rhythmic, though rhythm in prose is different from the music of poetry. Literary genres can use either prose or verse. Traditionally, the epic has always been in verse, but the qualities of an epic can be found in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, written in prose. The novel is usually written in prose, but the great Russian poet Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* is a novel written in verse. Inspired by Pushkin, Vikram Seth has written a novel in the form of sonnets: *The Golden Gate*. Drama can be either in verse or prose. Greek drama, and Elizabethan drama which followed that tradition, was in verse. Shakespeare's tragedies are great poetic dramas, but he has many prose passages in his comedies, which are interspersed with songs. Modern English drama is in prose: T.S.Eliot is the only playwright to successfully attempt poetic drama. Poetry confers a certain heightening, prose is derived from the Latin word meaning "direct, straightforward".

There are different literary forms of prose. The short story and the novel, the fictional forms of prose, do not concern us in this block. We shall devote our attention to the main non-fictional forms; the essay, biography and autobiography, and the travelogue.

"Essay" is derived from the French word meaning "attempt". An essay is a prose composition of moderate length devoted to some particular topic. Essays are of two types: formal essays and personal essays. Formal essays, written by scholars in any field with the sole purpose of conveying ideas, are also referred to as articles. (Journals like *Critical Quarterly* or *the Journal of Commonwealth Literature* publish articles of literary criticism.) A formal essay discusses the topic concerned in an objective and impersonal manner. Its primary purpose is to impart knowledge. The personal essay, written in a light style, seeks to entertain the reader. The style of the essay is often conversational; it can be anecdotal, and generally reveals the personality of the author. In English literature, *The Essays of Elia*, written by Charles Lamb, are famous specimens of the personal essay.

A biography is the story of the life of an individual. Unlike history, which concentrates on facts and figures, a biography tries to project the personality of the subject, helping the reader to share that person's hopes and fears. In an autobiography, the author is his own biographer, so it tends to be more subjective. Events are seen through the consciousness of the protagonist; of course, the passage of time may give much objectivity to the recollection. Another big difference between a biography and an autobiography is that an autobiography is more selective in the incidents it describes. A biography can cover the whole life of the subject from birth to death, and even discuss his reputation after his death. An autobiography is necessarily incomplete, but it has the great advantage of presenting events at first hand. The writer can describe what he has experienced personally.

A travelogue is an account of the writer's travels. In this autobiographical account, the focus is on the places and people he has met in his travels, not on events in the author's own life, or his personality. English literature has a strong tradition of travelogues. Addison (1672-1719), the father of the periodical essay, wrote a travelogue, so did the early English novelist Tobias Smollett (1721-1771). Indian English literature too has many travelogues, starting with Dean Mohamet's *The Travels of Dean Mohamet through Several Parts of India* (1794).

We have been talking about the forms of non-fiction prose. Let us now examine the different varieties of prose employed by writers, whether in fiction or non-fiction. There are three main varieties: descriptive, narrative and expository prose. These are not exclusive categories -- a writer may use two or all three types in the same passage. Descriptive prose can be used to describe a person, a thing, or a place. A good description vividly recreates the object or event in such a way that we feel that we ourselves have seen, heard and experienced it. Some descriptions can be impressionistic, that is, they present things from a particular, very personal point of view; an impressionist description reveals not just the object, but the sensibility of the person who is observing it. On the other hand, we can have descriptions, especially of places, which have a kind of photographic realism. When we read the passage, we feel that we are looking at photographs or videotapes of the place.

Narrative prose describes events; a narrative deals with what happens over the course of time. It is the action which absorbs our attention. Narration can be slow or fast. It can be exciting, colourful and heightened, or matter-of-fact and factual. It can be highly imaginative, or purely objective. A narrative can deal with external happenings -- public events or interpersonal relationships. The writer can also narrate internal events, the changing feelings and emotions. Non-fiction prose forms like biographies, autobiographies and travelogues deal with factual narratives, while novels and short stories deal with events born of the writer's imagination. Of course, there can be no rigid rule; good historical novels incorporate a lot of historical facts into the narrative, while autobiographies can be so imaginative that the facts are not important. We also have a kind of fiction based on actual events; such a novel is called a "faction" (fact+fiction) or "non-fiction novel". Truman Capote's novel, *In Cold Blood* (1966), deals with crime and punishment in Kansas, based on interviews with the accused. Norman Mailer used the term "true life novel" for his work *The Executioner's Song* (1979), because it chronicles the life and death of Gary Gilmore, a murderer who demanded his own execution in Utah. Novels and short stories give more scope for the writer to employ different narrative voices, but narrative prose has an important place in non-fiction too.

Expository prose defines or explains a subject. Scholarly writing on science, technology, philosophy, religion, political science, economics etc falls under the category of expository prose. It presents details concretely and clearly in a logical sequence. The aim of the writer is not to describe something or narrate a story, but to present facts and ideas. Good writers use many devices to present their subject effectively: these include the use of examples to illustrate their point, varying their tone from one of public rhetoric to one of personal conversation, narrating interesting anecdotes, presenting analogies in support of their argument, and use of figures of speech like simile, metaphor and personification. Much of non-fiction prose is explicatory in nature, but this does not mean that expository prose has no place in fiction. Many great novels, such as Tolstoy's, present the writer's views on life and society.

Whether it is fictional or non-fictional, prose should be read as closely as verse. In analysing prose, we should examine the diction of the writer -- the words he uses, the range of his vocabulary. The syntax and structure of the sentences deserve attention. Are they short or long? Does he use simple sentences, or does he prefer complex sentences with many clauses and qualifying parenthetical comments? The Victorians had perfected the periodic sentence: long, elaborate sentences with many balanced

clauses. We should also examine rhythm, how the sentences flow. The structure of paragraphs, and the writer's use of punctuation, also reveal his style. But it is not possible to analyse the style in isolation from the meaning. The literary meaning of anything depends on how it is said, a simple paraphrase of what is said does not constitute the full meaning of the text under analysis.

The units which follow are devoted to leading prose writers. Units 2 and 3 contain expository prose. But the writers make good use of description and narration to explicate their subject. The next two units are devoted to the most famous Indian English autobiographies: Nehru's and Chaudhuri's. In the last unit, we shall read two recent travelogues.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

Even though the beginnings of Indian English writing is not fully documented, in this unit we have traced the earliest accounts of non-fictional prose and surveyed the field by referring to various authorities on the subject and the currently writing authors. We have also acquainted you with the form and varieties of prose. Finally, though in terms of form, prose is considered the simplest, we have tried to tell you that it does have the same literary merit as a poem, a drama or a novel.

1.5 SUGGESTED READING

This reading list is in two parts. Part I lists some important books of non-fiction. It is by no means a comprehensive list, and does not include the books which have been prescribed in the syllabus. Part II contains some books of criticism. More will be found in the reading list in each unit of this block.

Part 1: Non-fiction

Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Understanding the Muslim Mind*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1987.

Gopal, S. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Mahomet, Dean. *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, (1794) in Michael H. Fisher's *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed ((1759-1851) in India, Ireland, and England*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Mehta, Ved. *The Stolen Light* London: Collins, 1989.

Narayan, R.K. *A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1988.

Sahgal, Nayantara. *Prison and Chocolate Cake*. (1954) Delhi: HarperCollins India. 1996

Suraiya, Jug. *The Great Indian Bores*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors. 1996.

Part 2: Criticism

Iyengar, K.R.Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. (1962). Revised edition, New Delhi: Sterling, 1995.

M.K, Naik. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.

--------- *Studies in Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1987.

M.K, Naik. Ed. *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English*. New Delhi: Abhinav, 198.

C.D, Narasimhaiah. *The Swan and the Eagle*. (1968). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1987.

UNIT 2 SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, SRI AUROBINDO, AND ANANDA COOMARASWAMY

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Swami Vivekananda: An Introduction
  2.2.1 Introduction to Addresses at the Parliament of Religions 1893
  2.2.2 Response to Welcome
  2.2.3 Why We Disagree
  2.2.4 Paper on Hinduism
  2.2.5 Religion not the Crying Need of India
  2.2.6 Buddhism, the Fulfillment of Hinduism
  2.2.7 Address at the Final Session
2.3 Sri Aurobindo: An Introduction
  2.3.1 Is India Civilized?
2.4 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy: An Introduction
  2.4.1 The Dance of Shiva
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Glossary
2.7 Questions
2.8 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is devoted to three great Indian thinkers and masters of English prose. In this Unit we shall attempt to understand the life and work of each of them by looking in detail at the selected short excerpts from their prose writings.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

We need to be aware, at the very outset, that this is perforce a somewhat limited and hazardous task. It is limited in the sense that we will only be able to touch the surface of the vast ocean of their prolific writings, only have a peep or glimpse into their fascinating worlds. Each of these men wrote a huge quantity of prose; each of them, moreover, led exemplary and distinguished lives, which impacted considerably on the entire flow and direction of our cultural formation during a crucial time of our national awakening. That is, all three of these figures were active at approximately the same time, from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. Of the three, Swami Vivekananda was not only the eldest, but also the first to die. His brief life of less than forty years, however, left a blazing trail which the two other men, in their own ways, both followed and furthered.

What is more, we'll also need to be aware that all three of these writers, though each is different and unique, shared a common outlook not just on India, but also on life. This outlook may be termed "national idealism," for the sake of convenience. What does "national idealism" mean? It means, simply speaking, two things. First, an attitude of reverence and respect for the nation that is India. This attitude was, by no means, uncommon to that period. As you know, India was emerging from centuries of subjugation in a new self-assertion. On the one hand, the struggle was to free

India from British imperial rule. But, on the other hand, in order to accomplish this, Indians, with their huge diversities and differences, had to be welded into a modern nation. Cultural cohesion, therefore, was very important to the larger enterprise of nation building. But cultural cohesion couldn't simply be "invented" out of nowhere. What the so-called renaissance of India in the 19th century accomplished was a rediscovery of India's ancient past, of its traditions and philosophies. It was this awareness of a shared culture and civilization that stretched back to over five thousand years that became the basis for making of the new Indian nation. This nation was, at once, an attempt to evoke India's past, but at the same time construct a state that was modern, democratic, and equitable. This was a great task to which many people contributed in their own way.

All three of the writers that we shall study in this unit contributed to this great task.

So, national idealism means, first of all, the attempt to reawaken the nation, to idealize it, to treat it as sacred and special. But idealism also means a certain attitude to the world. It means that the ideal, the spiritual is considered more important than the material, the mundane. Idealists, like Plato, are people who believe that all that we see around us is made up of mind-stuff, of ideas, or thought, or spirit. All three of these writers were idealists in that they believed that the whole cosmos is pervaded by one Spirit. They saw the harmony and interconnectedness of all life. The whole universe was a unity, though it expressed itself in diverse ways. They derived this basic philosophical outlook largely out of the ancient wisdom traditions of India.

2.2 SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: AN INTRODUCTION



Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Swami Vivekananda is one of the great heroes of modern India. There is scarcely an Indian who has not heard of him or doesn't not admire him. What is the source of this fame and admiration? After all, the Swami only had a brief life, from 1863 to 1902. What did he accomplish that make him a household figure in India even a hundred years after his death?

To understand this, we shall have to look briefly at his life. Born and raised in an upper class Kayastha family in Calcutta, Narendranath Dutta, as he was then known, was a brilliant student. He had a modern, "English" education first at Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution and then at the famous Presidency

College and the Scottish Church College. In these institutions, he trained to be a modern, Westernized, privileged Bengali gentleman. He read Kant, Schopenhaur, Spenser, Comte, and Mill, then the intellectual giants of Europe. We might say that he was a positivist, that is someone who only believed in positive knowledge—that which could be verified by the senses and tested for its accuracy. He was not prepared to accept things on authority, faith, or superstition.

Young men like Narendranath were then known to be rather critical of Indian traditions, which they considered to be irrational and inferior to modern, Western learning. There was a ferment brewing in Indian society in those days. The missionaries were attacking Hinduism and Islam in order to get converts while the colonial administration wished to undermine India's ancient civilization so as to rule more easily and effectively. The introduction of English education in India was, as we have seen elsewhere, a part of this strategy. The products of this drive for mastery were the young men of Bengal who scored things Indian and wished to become like their rulers. No wonder, Narendranath had all the makings of such a modern, Westernized Indian.

However, his life changed quite suddenly and dramatically after he met Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886). The latter was an astonishing spiritual phenomenon, one of the most important of India's modern saints. To all appearances, an illiterate village priest, now officiating at the Kali temple at Dakshineshwar, Sri Ramakrishna was actually a storehouse of learning, piety, and dynamism. He learned the best of the spiritual traditions of India for a variety of teachers, but what is equally important, also interacted with many of the modern leaders of his time. Sri Ramakrishna propounded a new spirituality based on the equality and acceptance of all religions and paths. He offered a new interpretation of Kali, the Divine Mother, as the dynamic aspect of Brahman, the Absolute and Ultimate Reality. But, perhaps, Sri Ramakrishna's greatest achievement was that he gathered around him and trained a band of young men who were destined to change the future of India. Of these, Narendranath was the leader.

After his guru's death, Swami Vivekananda founded an order of monks to spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and also to reawaken the sleeping conscience of India. To this end, he travelled all over India, and eventually left for the US in 1893. The excerpts from his writings that we shall study are from the speeches that he gave at this Parliament of Religions. After the Parliament, Swamiji lectured extensively in the US and in Britain. By the time he returned to India in 1897, he was already a hero and a celebrity. He had taken Indian spirituality, thought, and culture to the West and thereby restored, to a large extent, the national pride of India. Within a year of his return, he laid the foundations of the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Math at Belur, outside Calcutta. Today, the Belur Math is the international headquarters of a world-wide movement.

Swami Vivekananda's years on this earth may have been few, but they were packed and eventful. He inspired millions of Indians with a new sense of self-respect and self-esteem. He helped to lay the foundations of a new India that would not only be an independent nation, but a world leader. He saw India as a vast storehouse and reservoir of spirituality. It was by this force that India would rise and make her contribution to the rest of the world. It was this message of Swamiji's, in his writings and speeches, the power and majesty of his personality, and the work he did in establishing the Ramakrishna Mission that he is seen as a contributor to the building of modern India.

2.2.1 Introduction to Addresses at the Parliament of Religions, 1893

The Parliament of Religions, 1893, was perhaps the largest inter-religious gathering the world had witnessed. As such, it was certainly a sign of an emerging, global

community of religious people. Sri Ramakrishna's message of inter-religious harmony, in that sense, had already anticipated such a movement on a world scale.

During his wanderings in India, Swamiji had heard about this event and had resolved to make his appearance there, not only on behalf of his master's teachings, but, in a larger sense, on India's behalf. But he had no money; he was but a wandering monk. His disciple from Tamil Nadu, Alasinga Perumal, actually begged from door to door to raise some money for the trip. Later, the Maharaja of Khetri gave him a first class ticket and a purse. The Raja of Ramnad and the Maharaja of Mysore also helped. In a vision, Swamiji saw his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, encouraging him to go; Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother (Sri Ramakrishna's wife) also blessed him amply. Swamiji felt convinced that this trip to the West would show him to way to alleviate the miseries of his countrymen and women.

Swamiji set sail on the 31st of May 1893. His ship took him through the far East--Colombo, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Nagasaki, Kobe, and Vokohama--before reaching Vancouver in British Columbia, Canada. Though it was summer, he found the weather very cold. He reached Chicago by train after three days. He saw the World Fair that was taking place there and was quite bewildered by the affluence and splendor, not to speak of the technological development of the U.S.A. The Parliament was to begin in September; there were many months to go. Swamiji knew no one and was low on funds. Worse, he wasn't even an official delegate. The whole story of how he finally got invited to the Parliament reads like an incredible fable, full of miracles and unexpected connections. We don't have time to tell that story here, but you may read it in Swamiji's biography.

Swamiji gave six speeches during the Parliament. It is said that he was reluctant to speak when his turn came. He kept postponing it until he couldn't but take the floor. The first words that he uttered, "Sisters and Brothers of America," drew a long and thunderous standing ovation. Another miracle, perhaps!

From 11th to 26th September 1893, Swami Vivekananda made six addresses at the Parliament of Religions. We shall read and study all these here. In all these talks, I want you to notice not just common ideas, but similar modes of expression. How does Swamiji address his audience? What kind of language does he use? Is it a simple, everyday language, or is it very complicated and abstruce? Is it a technical language or is it famililar language? Are the sentences long or do they tend to be short? What sort of words does Swamiji use? I ask these questions to you so that you are aware of these talks as examples of rhetotic and communicative skills, that is language in active use, not just as a set of texts to read. Notice also how contemporary Swamiji's address is—doesn't it speak to our own times and our own present problems?

2.2.2 *Response to Welcome*

This is very brief speech, given in response to the words of welcome that Swamiji received as a delegate from India, representing the Hindu religion. It was at the start of this address that, as I already mentioned to you, he received a standing ovation for his opening words.

It is important that Swamiji accepts the welcome not on his own behalf, but on behalf his order of monks, of the Hindu religion, and of the millions of people of India. It is clear that Swamiji stood before the Parliament not in his private capacity but as a representative of the spiritual genius of Indian civilization.

Why does Swamiji call his order of monks the most ancient in the world? We know that it was he himself who founded this order not long after Sri Ramakrishna's death. We mustn't forget, though, that Sri Ramakrishna himself had received sannayasa diksha or had been initiated into monkhood by his guru, Totapuri, who belonged to

one of the ten prominent order of monks in India. These ten orders had been systematised by Sankaracharya in the 9th century, but the tradition of sannyasa or renunciation was much, much older in India. The Buddha instituted the sangha or the sacred community of monks and seekers in the 5th century B.C. It is believed that even before the Buddha there were holy men and women in India who wandered place to place. Clearly, Swamiji sees himself aligned to this ancient tradition of renunciates, which was much older than the Chrisitian monastic traditions.

Similarly, Swamiji calls Hinduism the mother of all religions. This may not be true literarlly in that there were several religions which originated outside the sphere of influence of Hinduism or India. I suppose what Swamiji means is not conventional Hinduism or even the various religions of India but Sanatana Dharma in its purest conception. Sanatana Dharma is so called because it is eternal, with no origin and end, no beginning and no termination, no inauguration and no closure. The Sanatan tradition, in this sense of the word, includes all the religions of the world, wherever they may have been revealed or wherever they may flourish.

Swamiji also thanks the organizers in the name of those millions of people of India, whose simple and pure faith sustains an ancient civililization. Though these people may be divided into many classes and sects, there is perhaps a unity and commonality in them, which Swamiji will talk of later.

Swamiji next emphasizes the tolerance and inclusiveness of India, which has already been pointed out as its unique characteristic. In this respect, India stands in stark contrast to other nations. In the latter, those who did not accept the dominant religion were often called heretics and killed, exiled, or persecuted. Swamiji clearly shows that India, quite an exception to this world wide trend, actually welcomed not only the Jews and the Parsees, it always stood for freedom of faith and belief.

India's strengh, thus, lies in its view that all the different paths lead to the same goal. the Supreme Lord, called by whatever name by His worshippers. Swamiji quotes from the Bhagawat Geeta and from another unnamed source to strengthen his argument.

But, what is perhaps the most important of Swamiji's points is his extremely clear statement against dogmatism, intolerance, and bigotry. He advoces the "death-knell of all fanaticism" so that there is an end to perseuctions of both "the sword" and "the pen." Unfortunately, fanaticism is still very much with us, as a threat not only to world peace but to freedom of speech and expression. Swamiji was well-aware of the futility of all such fanaticism as it had spilled the blood of countless innocents down the ages. The 20th century, at the edge of which he stood, was the bloodiest and cruellest in all human history. Swamiji spoke like a prophet warning against the dangers of fanaticism, but unfortunately few people paid heed to him.

All in all, this brief speech strikes the keynot of Swamiji's central ideas, not only at the Parliament of Religions, but in his other works as well.

2.2.3 *Why We Disagree*

In this speech, Swamiji uses the mode of the parable to illustrate his point about the futility of narrow-mindedness. His master, Sri Ramakrishna, we ought to remember, was a master of the parable. His words are full of stories and anecdotes. Why do you think great teachers such as Christ, the Buddha, and Sri Ramakrishna often resorted to stories? That's because a story is each to listen to and understand.

The story narrated here is not too complicated, is it? It deals with the frog in the well syndrome. Each frog believes that his well is the biggest. Swamiji doesn't exclude himself or the Hindu from this syndrome. We are all, according to him, guilty of it. We all think that we are the wisest and that our religion is the best. But like frogs in

the well, we might be deluded. This message is especially relevant to those religions which claim an exclusive and absolute claim to truth and salvation. These religions, or at least some sections of these religions, proclaim that theirs is the only true way and that everyone else will be damned or go to hell or perish or whatever. Swamiji wants to loosen the hold of such beliefs on his listener's minds. Hence the story.

From Swamiji's remarks it is clear that religious harmony can be created not just by recognizing the unity and underlying similarity in all faiths, but also to understand and accept the difference in them.

2.2.4 *Paper on Hinduism*

This is clearly the longest and most detailed of all of Swamiji's talks. He came to Parliament as a representative of the Hindu religion and therefore it is expected of him to speak on Hinduism. The main question for us is how does he define Hinduism?

It seems to me that, first of all, he points to its very ancient roots. He calls it a pre-historic religion, that is it goes back to times before recorded history as we know it. However, unlike Judaism and Zoroastrianism, both of which are also ancient religions, only Hinduism flourishes in all its pristine glory in the place of its origin and maturtion.

Swamiji next stresses the Vedas and the ancient perennial wisdom embodied in the Vedanta as the key sources of Hinduism. But notice how he at once includes agnostic Buddhisim and athiestic Jainism as a part of Hinduism. His definition of Hinduism is thus, once again, inclusive and broad. By Hinduism he therefore means not any restricted creed or set of dogmas, but the wide and inclusive movement of India's spiritual traditions.

Next, he tries to describe the essence of Vedic thought in modern scientific terms. According to Swamiji, it is only Hinduism whose worldview is not upturned or dislodged by the discoveries of modern science because Hinduism was also a science of the spirit not a collection of arbitrary beliefs or rituals.

Hinduism stresses the immortality of the soul, or atman, and declares that 'I am not my body but the everlasting, indestructable spirit'. This is the liberative gospel of Hinduism. From the Hindu point of view, there is no such thing as original sin; we are children of immortality, not of degradation.

Apart from the soul's immortality, Hinduism also stresses the law of Karma, of endless cause and effect. It is by this law that we can uplift ourselves, should we wish. Karma is not to be interpreted as destiny or blind fate, which binds us from life to life, but rather as the inheritance of certain traits or predelictions, which we can shape anew in a certain direction in this life.

Swamiji never fails to explain these ideas in a rational manner, always using logic rather than authority to substantiate his points. For instance, he declares, "verification is the perfect proof of a theory," something no modern scientist would disagree with. He wises to submit the assertions of religion to the same rigorous scrutiny as a scientist does a hypothesis. That is why he doesn't hesitate to ask a fundamental question: if our true nature is indeed perfect, why do we falsely identify ourselves with that which is imperfect? Why does God himself become the world? To this he humbly answers, "I don't know." Yet, the fact remains that the world does seem to exist and we continue to believe that we are our bodies.

According to Vivekananda, Hinduisim is not a religion of hopelessness or despair, but a liberative and self-perfecting way that encourages the soul to evolve. He defines God as Almighty, formless one, who is also all-merciful. God is best

worshipped through bhakti, or selfless love. Through Divine grace, when a soul is vouchsafed the knowledge of its true identity, it becomes free and enjoys unrestricted bliss and peace. Thus the Hindu dharma is not about believing in certain dogmas or rituals but in realizing oneself and one's inner perfection. Self-realization, Swamiji explains, does not consist in a loss of individuality, but the gaining of universal individuality.

Hinduism is not a system of polytheism or henotheism (the latter implies a belief in both one God and many gods), neither is it a worship of idols, of stones and stocks. The idol is merely a symbol, because the Hindu believes both in God with form and God without form. In those days, Hinduism was attacked for its idolatory and the Brahmo Samaj, a reform sect, even went to the extent of banning idol worship. Vivekananda therefore defends Hinduism from this charge. In the Abrahamic tradition, whether in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, idolatory is seen not only as an error, but as a great sin. Idolators are seen as evil, degenerate, and worthy of punishment. Swamiji, therefore, takes pains to clarify that the average idol-worshipping Hindu is neither a sinner nor an evil person. He or she is perfectly harmless and well-intentioned. Swamiji cautions Christians against bigotry, pointing to elements of superstition and idolatory in their faith. What he asks for is mutual tolerance in religions matters and mutural respect, not condemnation and hatred. Swamiji uses the argument that human beings start at a lower stage of evolution but move higher and higher; if this is true, the higher need not condemn the lower. The beauty of Hinduism is that it does not believe that we travel from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from the lower truth to the higher truth. In that sense, the absolute and the relative are not contradictory and opposed, but the absolute can only be realized through the relative.

Hinduism, ultimately, aspires to universal religious harmony. According to Swamiji, it is the only faith which does not say that the Hindu alone will be saved.

Vivekananda ends his speech with an appeal to all the assembled people to move to a new era of inter-religious harmony and tolerance. He believes that it is America's destiny to achieve it. In his enthusiasm for that country, he forgets American history of violence and imperalism, not only against native Amercians but against its neighbours such as Mexico, and hails it as the new hope of the world.

Throughout his speech, Swamiji has sought to be sensible and eloquent, trying to portray Hinduism in a modern, rationalistic light. In doing so, he lays the foundations of Hinduism's self-fashioning, offering strategies and techniques that will later be followed by a variety of thinkers including Sri Aurobindo and Gandhiji.

2.2.5 *Religion Not the Crying Need of India*

In this brief speech, Swami Vivekananda says that bread, not religion is the crying need of India. He exhorts Christian missionaries not to try to convert the poor and wretched people of India but to do famine relief work instead. India under British rule experienced hundreds of famines in which millions of people died. Vivekananda declares in unequivocal terms that "It is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics." He also stresses that according to Indian traditions knowledge is free, that is it cannot be bought and sold.

Here we can see Swamiji's great concern for the state of India—how his heart bleeds for the poor and underprivileged. Swamiji's great social mission is being unveiled where he clearly states his goal of seeking help from the West for India's poor. And yet he confesses **how difficult it is for a Hindu to get money out of** the Christian in a Christian country, **especially if the beneficiary is to be a heathen!**

When we read this speech of Swamiji's we must remember that it belongs to a long tradition of such writings, starting with Raja Rammohun Roy. Later, even Gandhiji

would criticise the missionaries for trying to convert the poor and the helpless. These controversies have still not ended, as you know. The argument against the missionaries is based on their double standards—how for instance they constantly criticise others but cannot take any criticism themselves, how they claim to save souls but have an extremely low opinion of other faiths; how they offer material inducements to encourage conversation while all the while claiming that they are interested in the spiritual well-being of those they work with. Swamiji here question this attitude of superiority. It must be granted, however, that missionaries have also worked to alleviate starvation, though usually with an ulterior motive—hence the term "rice Christians"—that is, those who converted for the sake of rice.

Issues such as conversion are no doubt controversial, but we need not shy away from controversy always. The aim is to discuss or examine these issues and form our own views on them.

2.2.6 *Buddhism, the Fulfilment of Hinduism*

Swamiji here makes certain arguments and claims that most Buddhists may find it hard to agree with. For instance, he says that there are no Buddhists left in India. Even at the time Swamiji gave this lecture, there were a large number of Tibetan Buddhists in Ladakh, Leh, Himachal Pradesh, and the North Eastern parts of India. Buddhism itself had undergone a reinvention in the 8th to the 10th centuries, absorbing a good deal of Hindu thought, ritual, and spirituality.

Yet, Swamiji is undoubtedly right in claiming that the Buddha did not ever claim to start a new religion or faith. Also that Hindus do not regard Buddhism as a rival or antagonist faith, but a part of the Sanatana traditions. That is why most Hindus accept Buddha as an incarnation. Swamiji is also right in pointing out that many of the Buddha's leading disciples were Brahmins and as such there was no antagoism between the two. But Buddhism, as it developed, did deny the notion of God, something that most people in India could not live without. This is what Swamiji says, but there is also the view that true cause of the decline of Buddhism in India is not merely doctrinal; it has to do with the destruction of monasteris, trade routes, and centres of Buddhist learning during the centuries of Muslim rule. Vivekananda does not mention this theory here. At any rate, what is more important in this speech is Swamiji's attempt not just to reconcile Buddhism and Hinduism but to plead for their reunification. The Brahmin mind and the Buddhist heart of compassion is what he calls for here, as he does the Hindu mind and the Muslim body elsewhere. We see Swamiji as staunchly in favour of unity here. His desire is to strengthen and rejuvinate the faith of the masses. He did not anticipate, for instance, that lakhs of untouchables would embrace Buddhism at the call of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Today, Buddhism is experiencing a revival in India, thanks to the presence of the Dalai Lama. Luckily, the relations between the two are very cordial.

What Swamiji's speech represents, then, is a sort of Hindu view of Buddhism. Hindus do not regard Buddhism as an alien or exclusive creed or even as something apart from the broader tradition of Sanatana Dharma. Buddhism, in other words, belongs as much to India as it does to Burma, Tibet, China, Thailand, Cambodia, or Sri Lanka.

2.2.7 *Address at the Final Session*

What is striking, once **again, is Swamiji's** fervant plea for religious harmony. Once again, he says that the **way ahead** is not through the domination of one faith over the others, but of the acceptance of and respect for the various faiths of the world. The Hindu need not become a Christian or vice versa, but both can continue to live in harmony. The great achievement of the Parliament of Religions, according to Vivekananda, is that it proves beyond a doubt that "purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church." That is why Swamiji pities those who believe

that only their own religion should survive while all others should be destroyed. He pleads for help, assimilation, harmony, and peace, as against fighting, destruction, and dissension among the various religions of the world.

More than a hundred years later, Swamiji's words continue to be relevant. The recent destruction not just of the Babari Masjid but of the Bamiyan Buddhas point to a continued need to stress tolerance and harmony between faiths. A lot of voilence and hatred continues to spread in the name of religion. In our own country, there are riots and bloodshed in the name of religion. All this is as true as it is deplorable. Reading Swami Vivekananda helps to put the matter in perspective. We see that this fight against intolerance and fanaticism is a very old one and that great leaders of this land have always stood against them. Vivekananda's construction of Hinduism, as we have seen, is not based against any other religion or group, but wishes to assimilate and learn from other faiths. Modern Hinduism, thus, owes a lot to this cyclonic monk who was not yet thirty when he made these speeches in distant Chicago, more than a hundred years ago.

2.3 SRI AUROBINDO: AN INTRODUCTION



Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Sri Aurobindo ranks among the greatest personalities of modern India. A multi-faceted genius, he was a politician, social critic, educationist, philosopher, man of letters, and, above all, a great yogi, a rishi, and guru. As a literary artist, his range is truly staggering. He was a journalist, editor, literary critic, linguist, translator, essayist, short-story writer, dramatist, and, more than all of these, *mahakavi*, or major poet. He had an extraordinarily supple intellect, a breadth of mind so extensive that there is scarcely an important field of human endeavor which escaped his notice. His collected works, numbering thirty volumes, bear ample testimony to his stupendous gifts. He was truly a Renaissance Man, not only in the traditional sense of the term, but also befitting its application to the Indian context--a man who stands with the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

Sri Aurobindo's life may be conveniently divided into four periods based on the major location of residence: namely, England, Baroda, Calcutta, and Pondicherry. He was born on August 15, 1872 into a Westernized upper-middle class Bengali family, the son of Krishnadhan and Swarnalata Ghose. In 1879, at the age of seven, he was taken to England to be educated there with his brothers. He lived first in Manchester, then in London, where he attended St. Paul's school from 1884-1890, and finally in Cambridge, where he held a senior Classics fellowship at King's College. A brilliant student, he was especially proficient in the Greek and Latin, securing a first division in the Classical Tripos. He also passed with distinction the written entrance exam to the prestigious Indian Civil Service, but did not enter the service because he repeatedly failed to appear for the riding test. Clearly, his heart was not set on serving the British Government in India. Instead, he obtained an appointment with the Maharaja of Baroda and set sail to return to India in January 1893. That marked the end of one phase of Sri Aurobindo's life. When he returned to India he hardly knew any Indian language, though he was proficient in Greek and Latin, acquainted with French, and, of course, expert in English, having already written a volume of poetry in it.

The Baroda period lasts for thirteen years, upto 1906. This is generally considered a phase of preparation and growth for his later work. Sri Aurobindo held various posts in the Baroda Service including Professor of English and Vice-Principal of Baroda College. Here he tried to regain contact with his Indian heritage through a program of rigorous scholarship. He studied Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages including Bengali, his mother tongue, and gained a deep insight into Indian culture and civilization. The publication of some of his early poetry such as *Songs to Myrtilla* (1895) *and Urvasie* (c. 1896) occurred during this phase. Towards the end of this period Sri Aurobindo began participating in two activities that would be crucial to his later life, namely politics and yoga. A particularly important year was 1901 in which he was married to Mrinalini Bose. During this year he also experienced his first definite spiritual realizations, which are reflected in some of his poems and reminiscences. These experiences culminated in transforming realization in Baroda in 1908 under the guidance of a yogi called Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Later that year he was arrested and detained for his anti-government articles in "New Lamps for Old," a column he wrote for the magazine, Indu Prakash.

In 1906 Sri Aurobindo left Baroda to join the newly formed National College in Calcutta, thus inaugurating his Calcutta phase. His political activities which had begun as early as 1902, when he met Lokmanya Tilak at the Ahmedabad session of Congress, continued most vigorously in Calcutta where in *Bande Mataram*, his influential periodical, he attacked British imperialism vehemently. In 1907 he was prosecuted for sedition, but acquitted. The next year, 1908, was in many ways, one of the most important in his life. That year, he was arrested and detained on suspicion of revolutionary activities. During these twelve months, he underwent further spiritual experiences, which prompted him to decide to withdraw from politics, at least temporarily. After a year in detention, he was acquitted following a stormy and celebrated trial, in which he was defended by the famous lawyer and politician Chittaranjan Das free of charge. In 1910 he retired to French Chandranagore, and on hearing that a third prosecution was to be launched against him, set sail for Pondicherry in South India.

Though, initially, he had not entirely given up political activity, he was never again to return to British India or to politics; he continued living in Pondicherry, uptil his death in 1950. During this period, he began the publication of Arya, a periodical in which the original versions of most of his famous works such as *The Life Divine*, The *Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Secret of the Veda*, etc., appeared. He also wrote poetry, criticism, drama, and translated extensively from Sanskrit and other Indian languages during these early years in Pondicherry.

For all these first ten years or so, Sri Aurobindo lived in a small rented house with only a few disciples. But in 1920, Mirra Richard, who had met him earlier, settled down in Pondicherry. She came to be known as the Mother afterwards, and took charge of Sri Aurobindo's household, gradually building the extensive and superbly organized Sri Aurobindo Ashram, which is internationally renowned today. For the next thirty years, Sri Aurobindo continued his literary and spiritual activities, living mostly in seclusion, but guiding his rapidly growing number of disciples through yearly darshans (public appearances), and an extensive correspondence. Sri Aurobindo died on December 5, 1950, three years after India achieved its independence in 1947--on August 15, his birthday.

2.3.1 *Is India Civilized?*

This essay by Sri Aurobindo was originally serialized in the quarterly *Arya* from December 1918 to February 1919. It was published in book form, along with other essays of related interest, under the title *Foundations of Indian Culture* in 1953 by the Sri Aurobindo Library, New York

The series of articles of which this is one was inspired by an attack on Indian civilization by a British critic, William Archer. William Archer and his attack are forgotten today, but Sri Aurobindo's response has become a classic. In fact, there had already been a response to Archer by the Indophile and Tantric scholar, Sir John Woodroffe. The title of the latter's book, *Is India Civilized?*, was meant to be a provocative, if rhetorical question. Sri Aurobindo uses the same title in the first series to underscore the importance of Woodroffe's argument, whose gist he recapitulates, here in the first section.

Sri Aurobindo begins by stating unequivocally how a culture or civilization may be evaluated: "A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements" (2) First of all, Sri Aurobindo clearly avows that happiness is indeed the goal of human life. Such an admission is important because it shows how life-affirming Sri Aurobindo is. He does not regard human life as intrinsically full of *dukkha* or suffering.

Next, it is important to realize that behind such a definition of what constitutes true happiness is a certain notion of what a human being is. In Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things, a human being possesses at least three levels of being--the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. And, what is more important, without a natural harmony between these three levels, we can never be really happy.

When Sri Aurobindo wrote this there were no internationally recognized yardsticks for evaluating the quality of human life as there are these days. Now we have recognized indices to measure such things, yet these never take into account the fact that we are spiritual beings too. The result is that in the most prosperous countries of the world, countries which score the highest on the quality of human life indices, there is still a high level of discontent. I am not only speaking of the discontent which comes from class and racial conflict or from poverty and unemployment, though such things are also found in these "advanced" societies. The fact is that the most privileged and affluent sections of these countries are also unhappy and discontented. How else can we account for the perennial fascination not only for drugs and alcohol in these countries, but for yoga, zen, and Eastern gurus?

As a corollory to Sri Aurobindo's statement, it follows that any country or society which caters only to the body or to the body and the mind, but leaves out the spirit cannot achieve true happiness. A culture, a society, a country should also make provisions to nourish the spirit of a human being otherwise neither the society nor the

individual can ever attain perfection. Such a society may attain very high levels of material prosperity, but it cannot attain or be conducive to true happiness. Our very nature is such that we cannot be truly happy until we have the opportunity to strive for perfection. So, we see that behind Sri Aurobindo's whole outlook is a basic premise about the nature of the human being itself. If you deny that a human being is essentially a spiritual creature, then you can also deny the rest of Sri Aurobindo's argument.

Next, Sri Aurobindo tries to sum up the distinctive features of the Indian civilization. He says: "India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and the realm of conscious morality, dharma" (2). These lines sum up not only Sri Aurobindo's notion of India, but his whole philosophy itself. He holds that matter is but the Spirit in its involved form. Striving to recover its true self, the Spirit struggles through matter and through life, until it reaches the mental plane in the human being. After this, evolution is not automatic, not merely subject to the natural process, but can be conscious. Dharma is nothing but a system that leads us on the path of spiritual progress. To Sri Aurobindo, the notion of progress in India is primarily spiritual. It is this that makes India special and distinct.

Now if we pause for a minute and ask how come people in India decided that the realization of the Spirit or of the Self was the most important thing to do, that that is the purpose of our birth? What made the Indians think this way? It seems to me that long ago, the best minds in India discovered that it was not very difficult to sustain life in this subcontinent. It was not very difficult to take care of all of one's bodily needs and necessities. They lived on fruits and roots; they bathed in the flowing streams; they lived in harmony with nature. Similarly, it was not very difficult to make a hut, a cottage, a hermitage. Nature provided enough. So they retired into the forest, devoted themselves to contemplating the eternal truths. Most of the time and energy could be devoted to self-realization, to *sadhana*. This does not mean that our ancient rishis and munis were isolated from society. Instead, they interacted with the kings and commoners, guiding both, helping to uphold Dharma. They held the remote control of our civilization in their hands, letting the kings and courtiers to handle the mundane, material aspects of life. While other cultures thought that it was more important to build cities, to subdue enemies, to increase one's comfort and power, Indians recognized that all these activities were not as important as self-realization. Without the latter, all human achievements were partial and transitory.

I believe that these ideals are still present in our culture. Everyone laments that we are becoming more and more materialistic, yet as a civilization we have yet to admit that that is the supreme goal of human life. You must have read in the papers how a couple of years ago, one of the richest diamond merchants in India, a young man, took *sannyas*. He distributed diamonds and pearls from atop a richly caparisoned elephant, which was taken out in procession through the streets of Ahmedabad. Now you may or may not approve of such ostentation, but the idea was that the life he was about to embrace was superior to all the wealth and riches that he had accumulated. Renunciation was superior to accumulation. This diamond merchant was a Jain, but all the religious traditions of this country, I think, share his outlook to the world, more or less. How else can you explain why Prince Siddharth left all the comforts of the palace to look for the ultimate Truth? All this means that in India we do not consider the satisfaction of bodily or mental needs to be the sole purpose or even the highest aim of life.

Now, Sri Aurobindo says that there are countries and cultures which are led by a different, even opposite conception of human life: "Since some centuries Europe has become material, predatory, aggressive, and has lost the harmony of the inner and outer man which is the true meaning of civilization and the efficient condition of a true progress" (4). Both Woodroffe and Sri Aurobindo admit that Europe was not

always thus, that in her medieval ages, she too was dominated by the religious ideal. Yet, as Sri Aurobindo clarifies, this idea was narrow and intolerant; it cramped the spirit of man. Morover, Sri Aurobindo reminds us, Christianity itself was of Asiatic origin. Whatever be the origins of modern Europe, it now subscribes to a totally different civilizational ideal.

Those of us who are mesmerised by the West would do well to reflect on Sri Aurobindo's statement. That Europe has become material, predatory, and aggressive should be obvious to anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of history. Since the 15th century, Europeans have overrun our earth, destroying entire civilizations, killing off populations, colonizing continents, subduing people, taking slaves, fighting wars, conquering territories, and so on. The entire history of humankind has never witnessed the scale and degree of violence that modern Europe unleashed on the rest of the world. What they did to Africa, to South America, to the native communities of North America, to India, South East Asia, to China, and so on, is well recorded. All along, Europe considered itself to be the most civilized part of the world, the leader, the carrier of enlightenment. How ironic! Does the essence of civilization lie in killing others, destroying their culture, enslaving them, grabbing their wealth, and ruling over the world?

However, the second part of Sri Aurobindo's statement is still perhaps difficult to accept for most of us. He says that the West has lost the harmony between the inner and the outer lives and thus what they have achieved cannot be considered to be true progress. Most of us are still dazzled and blinded by the achievements of the West. Naturally, we regard the West as our model; we must emulate them and try to have a similar society in India. We still regard progress as merely material progress; from such a standpoint the West is the most advanced society in the world. Yet, according to Sri Aurobindo, that is not true progress.

Sri Aurobindo believes that "Each nation is a Shakti or power of the evolving spirit in humanity and lives by the principle which it embodies" (3). If so, a clash and conflict between nations is inevitable. In fact, Sri Aurobindo defines the three stages of the interaction between nations. These are conflict and competition, concert, and sacrifice (5). At present, nations are in the first stage, that of competition and conflict. The second stage, that of cooperation, has hardly begun. People may talk of enlightened self-interest as the governing principle behind international diplomacy, but the word enlightened ought to be taken with a pinch of salt. What obtains more often is a brutal self-interest disguised behind high-sounding principles. As to the third stage, that will only happen after a nation has realized its Self. At present, only individuals have attained that high degree of realization which allows them to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. According to Sri Aurobindo, "the perfected *sannyasin*, the liberated man," may consider self-defence to be needless, but ordinarily, "To allow oneself to be killed, like the lamb attacked by the wolf, brings no growth, furthers no development, assures no spiritual unity" (5). Concert, unity, may come at a future time, but for the present, we must go through conflict and competition.

For Sri Aurobindo, there has been a perennial conflict for supremacy between Europe and Asia. In this conflict, either Asia will become Europeanized or Europe Asiaticised. William Archer's attack on India is a part of Europe's hegemonizing drive to subdue the rest of the world. Ever since England conquered India, it has endeavoured to subdue our civilization. First, was the attack on Hinduism by the missionaries. That was successfully fended off, not only by a Hindu revival, but by West to East movements like Theosophy. Now, the second wave of the attack is not religious, but rationalistic and materialistic. (There is actually a third wave which Sri Aurobindo doesn't mention. This is the attack on India by modern science and technology.) Asia is rising, but this empowerment is not fully self-conscious. It is a Europeanised Asia that is rising, an Asia which has turned its back on the Asiatic ideal.

Sri Aurobindo admits that "Spirituality is not monopoly of India," but elsewhere it lies submerged beneath veils of intellectualism. What makes India special is "spirituality made the leading motive and the determining power of both the inner and the outer life" which is quite different from "spirituality suppressed, allowed only under disguises or brought in as a minor power, its reign denied or put off in favour of the intellect or of a dominant materialistic vitalism" (10). In other words, many other nations of Asia, from Turkey to Japan, have "grown rationalistc and materialistic"; "India alone is still obstinately recalcitrant" (11). So, in this conflict between India and Europe, "Will the spiritual motive which India represents prevail on Europe and create there new forms congenial to the West, or will European rationalism put an end for ever to the Indian type of culture?" (11)--this for Sri Aurobindo is the crucial question, the question at the heart of the essay.

There are several people who have told me how uncomfortable they feel with this framework of confrontation. There are three chief ways in which their discomfort is articulated. On the one hand, they claim that both Sri Aurobindo in particular and Indian spiritual view in general are universal. There is no distinction between countries and cultures. So, why am I harping on this conflict between India and the West?

The second kind of objection comes from those who are quite comfortable with the level of synthesis that they seem to have achieved between their Indian heritage and the modern world. They have made the required adjustments and believe that we can have the best of both worlds. What is the need to confront the West or to confront ourselves? Why not go on living in this convenient synthesis?

The third kind of objection comes from those who consider Sri Aurobindo to be both outdated and essentialistic. They believe that such generalizations about cultures and civilizations are arrogant and unjustified. Each individual is different and that it is pointless to attribute any special characteristics to nations, peoples, or communities.

I shall respond only briefly to these interjections. Let me put my case rhetorically: why does it matter if Indian civilization is destroyed? So many civilizations have been destroyed in the past. Why not let this one be destroyed too? Actually, that is what these objections really imply, but they don't say so clearly. If that is what we believe, then that is what will happen. It will happen by default, if not by deliberation. So many of us are already devoting our energies to destroying our culture, our civilization, so what's new about it? There is a Latin American proverb which comes to mind: when the axe came to cut the trees, the some trees said that the handle is one of us. Similarly, there are several of us who are actively assisting in the destruction of Indian civilization. Contrarily, there are several Westerners who have devoted their lives to its preservation.

The question is not that of us versus them, but about two competing and conflicting value systems. To those of us who love India and what she stands for, the question of protecting Indian civilization or of fending off the West does not even arise. There is no choice here; we must live or die according to our beliefs. If we believe that the highest goal of human life is self-realization, then it is natural for us to strive for it. We don't need any special inducements or incentives to work for this ideal. To me, every Indian has the potential to be spiritual seeker, a *sadhak* or *sadhika*, whether we realize it or not. It is believed that this is a punya bhoomi, a holy land, where every inch of soil has been irradiated by the tapas of our seers and mahatmas. It is in our very blood to walk this path; it is natural for us. For Sri Aurobindo, ultimately, it does not matter if we are defeated or if we triumph. What is important is to uphold the life that we believe in.

Sri Aurobindo urges us not to indulge in a vigorous sel-defence as Woodroofe had advocated: "But defence by itself in the modern struggle can only end in defeat.and if battle there must be, the only sound strategy is a vigorous and aggression based on a strong, living and mobile defence" (8). Here Sri Aurobindo, like Mahatma Gandhi, does not advocate a weak-kneed, apologetic response to the West. He is saying that if our ideal is worth preserving, we must be bold and take the battle into the enemy's camp. This is precisely what Swami Vivekananda did. Similarly, Gandhiji believed in an aggressive *ahimsa*, not in cowardly non-violence. Indian spirituality, thus, needs to be aggressive, not cowardly.

But what does aggression mean? It means that we should actually teach the West: look here, you have solved several material problems with your high levels of prosperity. But you have not solved human problems. Who are we? Where do we come from? What is the purpose of life? And so on. For that a different approach is needed. Moreover, your prosperity is based on the exploitation of non-renewable resources, resources which rightfully belong to the whole of humankind. Such hedonism, luxury, and waste may lead not only to your own destruction, but to the destruction of the earth. So, before it's too late, you must alter your civilizational goals.

But what right do we have to teach others when we ourselves don't live by these ideals, when, instead, we are copying and outdoing the West in our conspicuous consumption? So we must bring about change in ourselves without waiting for our neighbours or friends to change. When there is a power failure, do we wait for our neighbours to light their candles, hoping thereby to get some borrowed light into our benighted houses? Or do we light a candle ourselves to dispell the darkness that surrounds us? Sri Aurobindo does not intend us to become second-rate imitations of the West. He wants us to become world-leaders. But we can do so only if we spiritualize our lives now, without postpoing it to some future date. No doubt, this is a slow process, but we must make a beginning. That is what is implied in Sri Aurobindo's words.

In the concluding paragraph of this section, Sri Aurobindo explains what he means by aggressive spirituality: "India must defend herself by reshaping her cultural forms to express more powerfully, intimately and perfectly her ancient ideal. Her aggression must lead the waves of light thus liberated in triumphant self-expanding rounds all over the world which it once possessed or at least enlightened in far-off ages"(12).

This belief in India's unique destiny as a world-Guru was not confined to Sri Aurobindo alone. Several people believe that if the world is to be saved, the light has to come from India. Fuji Guruji, the well-known Japanese saint and friend of Mahatma Gandhi also believed that India had this special responsibility: The Rev. Samdong Rimpoche, Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, also told me that Buddhists believe that India, which is the Arya Bhoomi, will point the way to the world. So, this belief is not typical to Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo also ends on a note of hope and optimism for those who dislike conflicts. He says, "An appearance of conflict must be admitted for a time, for as long as the attack of an opposite culture continues." But later, this very conflict, because it will help to bring out the best in us and in our adversaries, will "culminate in the beginning of a concert on a higher plane" (12). These are words not of an ordinary man, but of a yogi and visionary. We must therefore learn to take them seriously, however sceptical we may tend to be. It is only when a culture is under attack that it is impelled to bring out the best in itself. While we are under attack, we can use this opportunity to renew and revitalize the best in our traditions. Thus, even our follies and failures, conflicts and quarrels may serve to assist the mysterious workings of Divine Providence.

2.4 ANANDA KENTISH COOMARASWAMY: AN INTRODUCTION



Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947)

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) was an extraordinary geologist, art scholar, collector, curator, and philosopher. Born of an English mother, Elizabeth Clay Beeby and Sri Lankan Tamil father, Sir Mutthu Coomaraswamy, was born in Colombo. His father was a leading member of the native society in Sri Lanka, the first Asian to qualify for the bar, a linguist, and great scholar himself. Within a year of Ananda's birth, his mother set sail for England, probably finding life in Sri Lanka too difficult. Sir Muthu died on his voyage to join his family, with the result that Ananda was raised by his mother in England. He went to Wycliffe School, possibly the only English public school that encouraged vegetarian diet. (Incidently, many years later, Coomaraswamy sent his only son, Rama, to the same public school.)

Coomaraswamy did well in school and went to get a BSc from University College, London. Before he was twenty, he had already made his mark as a geoloist of note. He visited Sri Lanka, his fatherland. It was quite a discovery. He soon became busy cataloguing and studying the minerology and geology of the country. Sri Lanka was then a British colony. The colonial administration saw the utility of Coomaraswamy's services and appointed him as the Director of the newly established Department of Menerology of Ceylon. After all, identifying and cataloguing the mineral wealth of the colony would be highly useful and profitable for the colonial administration.

Coomaraswamy spent only a little over three years in Sri Lanka, but made major contributions. The University of London conferred a Doctorate on him for his findings and contributions. He not only discovered a new mineral, "Thorionite," which he refused to name after himself as was the fashion, but made extensive studies in the art, history, crafts, philosophy, and philology of the island, and thereby of India.

Coomaraswamy wa only twenty-six when he "discovered" Sinhalese art, but it changed his life forever. He gave up what was lucrative career as a geologist and turned instead to his true vocation, to articulate the spirit of Eastern arts to the world. In the process, he became not just a reformist but a nationalist, fighting on behalf of his father's country, Ceylon, against his mother's, imperialist Britain. Coomaraswamy not only wrote extensively on art, but also delved deep into

philosophy and religion. His father had translated from Sanskrit and Pali; now Coomaraswamy too studied original texts in Pali and Tamil.

Travelling through the length and breadth of the island, he discovered the hidden unity of South Asian art. Ceylon was merely a sprigboard to the greater riches of the sub-continent. In India, Coomaraswamy met some of the leading nationalist thinker, politicians, and reformers. Whether in Ceylon or in India, he found the remnants of a great civilization now gasping for breath under the imperial yoke. He found a fascinating continuity between the rich handicrafts and between classical art. He found weavers, metal workers, and skilled craftsmen all over the sub-continent, carrying on age-old traditions. What they produced was much greater both aesthetically and practically than modern, machine made goods.

Coomaraswamy felt that the regeneration of India would be possible through a revitalization of its arts and crafts. He began to see that such art and craft as ancient and medieval India produced was possible largely because of *varnashrama dharma*, the social arrangement in which castes and stages of life ordered human activity. He began to see this system as the Asian equivalent of guild socialism of medieval Europe. Instead of attacking this age-old social stratification of India as many social reformers did, he somewhat romanticised it. Coomaraswamy became a sort of neo-traditionlist, decrying the destructive effects of modernity and praising the traditional way of life.

He wrote and published extensively, often in the best journals in the world. His writings had a great and instant impact all over the world. He wrote with great authority and learning, each paper well-researched and documented. He even started his own publishing house, taking over the Old Bourne Press in Essex, that William Morris had founded. From here he published his high-quality monographs with breathtaking reproductions of Indian arts and crafts.

Of his many publications at that time, *Essays in National Idealism* (1911) is of great importance. It contains fifteen essays on themes as diverse as "Indian Nationality," "Gramophones and Why Not?" "The Influence of Modern Europe on Indian Art," "Memory and Education," and "The Christian Missions in India." In the Preface to this book, Coomaraswamy boldly declared that "nations are made by artists and poets, not by traders and politicians." He believed that the Indian nation could be great by reviving and adhering to great ideas, not by making great strides in material growth. The fate of India depended on the great ideals of this civilization not on its gross national product. Ultimately, he believed that India's freedom was also in Europe's interest; that was the only way of ensuring world peace in the long run. Otherwise, a Westernized and militarized India (and China) would overrun Europe just as Europe had once overrun Asia. The death of imperialism would also mean the end of the subordination of many countries by one; it would mean a recognition of rights of several free nations.

I had used the term "national idealism" earlier. As you can see, this was Coomaraswamy's term. By this Coomaraswamy meant an alternative conception of a nation that what prevailed in Europe. A nation was built not merely on the basis of racial, religious, or linguistic unity as was the case in most of Europe. If this were the case, India could never be a nation. A nation could be built on a geographical and cultural India such as India had throughout the ages. Coomaraswamy believed that a strong nation could be built not by developments in sciene and technology or by other modern devices. This is what several Indians, including Jawaharlal Nehru thought. For Coomaraswamy, the ideal was the basis of the material, and not vice versa. He wanted the great ideas of India to be revived and reestablished. That would be the basis of the Indian nation.

Naturally, Coomaraswamy became a strong advocate of Swadeshi. India was being ruined by its craze to imitate the West. We become second or third rate Westerners

instead of becoming first rate Indians. And could the fabrics or artefacts of the modern West match the grace and elegance of traditional Indian handicrafts? Never, according to Coomaraswamy. Anglicised India destroyed the beauty and romance that traditional Indian design, which he called "an inexhaustible treasure-house" possessed. That is why, when we turned out backs to tradition, we lost the grace, elegance, simplicity, and dignity of that lifestyle, exchanging it for something ugly and ignominous. We live in ugly modern houses and in ugly modern cities and wear ugly clothes and have become an ugly people. We have thought that a political and economic revival would be sufficient to rebuild the nation. We have thus ignored our arts and crafts, except for relegating them to museums and special showrooms.

During this period, Coomaraswamy also embarked upon a vigorous defence and interpretation of Indian art and culture. It was commonly believed that Indian art was grotesque and monstrous—figures with several arms and with contorted faces. European writers and critics believed that the Classical ideal, being absent in India, showed the inferiority of the Indian imagination. They also believed that it was the Greek influence in Gandhara that had given rise to Indian sculpture. Coomaraswamy disproved these claims. In the process, he countered critics like the William G. Archer, whom we have already encountered through Sri Aurobindo's writings earlier. Coomaraswamy conclusively proved that the Buddha image was not only indigenous, predated the Greek influence in Gandhara, but that the latter was really an inferior and bastardised style, inferior to the more serious and elevating native styles.

Coomaraswamy's Indian interlude, which lasted from 1907 to 1916, was perhaps the most productive and inspiring of this life. Then why did he leave India? The answer was complex, but the precipitating cause was that he could not get the freedom to set up a museum in India. Instead, the Boston museum of fine arts lured him away. A rich philanthropist and patron of arts, Denman Ross, not only bought Coomaraswamy's collection but had him appointed as the Keeper of Indian and Muhammedan Art at the Boston Museum. What is more, this was a lifetime appointment. This post had been previously held by Count Okakura, the well-known Japanese Indologist.

Coomaraswamy, thus spent the last thirty years of his life in Boston. He worked hard everyday, producing book after book, paper after paper. He kept in touch with India throughout these years and died only after India had attained independence. It was India's loss that it could not keep this great savant and scholar, but lost him to the "new world."

2.4.1 *The Dance of Shiva*

This essay became the title piece of a collection of fourteen published under that title in 1918. You will notice at once that it is a learned essay, full of learned quotations, foonotes, and citations. What is its main purpose? It is explicatory, that is, to explain the significance of the image of Nataraja, or the dancing Shiva. But in doing so, Coomaraswamy also helps us understand a whole philosophy and way of life, taking us into the very depths of an ancient tradition. One single image, if examined minutely, will reveal the whole tradition. This is how the microcosm reflects the macrocosm in Indic traditions. You will also notice how Coomaraswamy's method is often comparative, citing or quoting instances from other cultures to augment his point. This should alert us against mistaking him to be a sectarian or narrow fanatic. Indeed at the end of the essay, he quotes extensively from a Russian poet, Skryabin, to show that ideas and world-views have a universal dimension to them, even if they originate in one culture or the other.

Coomaraswamy starts by explaining one of the names and aspects of Shiva—Nataraja, or the master of the dance or the king of actors. Of course, Shiva is himself both the dancer and the audience. This aspect of Shiva is akin to that of Eros Protogonos of Lucian. Lucian (AD 11/-c.180) was a Greek satirist. The idea of Eros

Protagonos is that of a primary, creative, and life-affirming force, that Sigmund Freud later used to identify one of the primary drives of human nature. In other words, the primitive, frenzied dance of our ancestors was to imitate a cosmic act of creation, like the spurt of life-giving energy at the begnning of the cosmos.

Coomaraswamy mentions three dances of Shiva—the evening dance at Kailasa, the Tandava, and, finally, the Nadanta dance at Chidambaram. It is on the last that he focuses, because it is this dance that is depicted in the famous Nataraja bronzes.

You must have seen one of these bronzes, or at least its imitation. It is available in any curio shop. The image is as familiar as it is inscrutable to most of us. We are incapable of understanding what it represents. If you get an opportunity, though, you must got to see a good Nataraja bronze. There are several at the National Museum in New Delhi and I am sure you'll find them in good museums in other cities too. The whole compositon is circular, with Shiva, perfectly proportioned, poised on his right leg. It's a magnificent conception, both dynamic and controlled at the same time. Certainly, this image is one of the great masterpieces of Indian art. Coomaraswamy helps us understand it better.

The legend behind this dance is that of the submission of the Rishis in the Taragam forest. These Rishis did not accept the divinity of Shiva. They were, presumably, the followers of the Vedas—Coomaraswamy mentions Mimamsa, of the three pairs of classical Hindu philosophical traditions. Though Coomaraswamy doesn't interpret the legend, it suggests the harmonizing of the diverse elements in Indian tradtions, what might be called the Aryan and the Dravidian, the Classical and the folk. Clearly, Shiva belongs to the latter and the dominant tradition must bow before him, because he is the supreme Lord. The Rishis try to overcome and destroy Shiva, but are worsted in the fight. Like his victory over Daksha, Shiva's defeat of the Rishis represents the triumph of the higher over the lower. Shiva has already mastered the animal energies, that is why he is called Pashupati, the Lord of the beasts. That is why he can so easily disarm the fierce tiger and the poisonous serpant. The malignant dwarf underfoot may be taken to represent the ego—it is so small, but imagines itself to be so big. Thus Shiva, the beautiful and the auspicious, as his name implies, shows his true grace and power as the Lord of the Universe, in this dance.

Shiva, with four arms, braided hair, Ganga in his locks on which rests the crescent moon, adorned with both men's and women's ornaments, fluttering scarf and sacred thread, left foot upraised, and the right hand in the *abhaya* or reassuring gesture, thus represents a whole philosophy. In this image, you'll be able to identify several names of Shiva. For example, Bhalachandra, he whose forehead holds the moon or Chandrashekhar, he whom the moon adorns, or Gangadhar, he who holds the Ganga, of Vyomkesh, he whose locks are space itself, and so on. The dual nature of Shiva, how he is both male and female, the skull of Brahma, the Ganga in his locks, the drum—all these details have stories and myths behind them. So when we see the image it's like a short hand to a whole cultural tradition.

But, as Coomaraswamy explains, the image shows the five activities of Shiva—creation, preservation, destruction, veiling, and release. These five, taken together, explain a philosophical totality. Separately, they are the activities of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara, and Sadashiva. Note that the trinity of popular Hinduism is a different version of what Shaivit philosophy considers a five-fold process. Whatever we do or see may be thought of as belonging to one of these five categories. To see this image, therefore, to understand its deeper significane, is to be released or emancipated. It is nothing short of understanding the nature of the Ultimate Reality itself.

Books like *The Tao of Physics* have argued that Shiva's dance represents the whirl of subatomic particles that make up the texture of the cosmos. It is a vibration of matter and energy that contemporary physics are trying to understand. Shiva's dance is the

striking of the primeval cord that sets this huge cosmic force into motion. The balance of Shiva and Shakti, of Uma and Maheshwara, is like the balance of matter and energy, each turning into the other, but each remaining indestructable. When Shiva danced thus, the sages were liberated. They saw the entire cosmos as sacred, the play of Absolute in its various guises. The dance of Shiva is in Chidambaram, which is not only a real place in Tamil Nadu, but symbolizes the sky of consciousness. Where is this sky of consciousness? Ultimately, it is within the heartspace of each of us. There Shiva dances his magnificent dance. Meditating on his auspicious form within ourselves, we can attain divinity, bliss, and freedom from process—that is the meaning behind the iconography of the dancing Shiva.

Towards the end of his essay, Coomaraswamy elaborates his reading by references to the Shakta traditions of Bengal. Here, Kali, not Shiva is the dancer. Kali is the embodiment of the dynamic aspect of Shiva, of his energy. The two forms are related, even complimenting one another. In the end, the author talks of a contemporary poem, explaining with comments in brackets after selected lines, how it conforms to Hindu ideas.

All these references are meant to suggest the solution to the deepest questions of human existence. Why are we here? Who are we? Why was the world created. Looking at the dancing form of Shiva, the answers to these questions might be as follows. We are here as a part of the cosmic play of the Lord. The Lord's own body has become the universe. He sets the whole process of creation into being and can also withdraw it into himself at his will. Activity and inactivity are two simultaneous attributes of the Lord because he is both at peace and in activity at the same time. The Lord is both matter and energy, both male and female. He is pure consciousness, the eternal Spirit, and he is matter, the stuff of which the whole universe is created. His form is beautiful and full of joy, as is his creation. We are a part of his own consciousness, which is why we are aware of this dance of his. By remembering the auspicious form of the Lord in our own inner heartspace, we can understand the mystery of this universe. The whole world is a unity, both the here and now and the hereafter; both the material and the spiritual; both the profane and the sacred; both the imminent and the transcendental; both illusion and truth. By understanding this totality and interrelatedness, we may be free for ever and anon.

Towards the end of the essay, Coomaraswamy, quoting texts, identifies the image with the *panchkashara mantra*, the five-syllabled chant, namashivya. By adding "Om," which represents the Shakti, we have a complete mantra, what is traditionally known as the *mahamrityunjaya* or the great victory over death mantra.

As we have seen, Coomaraswamy "translates" the plastic, the iconic, to the verbal here, but in the process, he achieves much more. He restores us to an aspect of our heritage which we did not have the ability or the knowledge to understand. This is a great service to this culture because it helps to find meaning in our own traditions. Instead of being a grotesque image which superstitious and backward people worship, on proper understanding, the image of Shiva becomes a compressed embodiment of a most complex philosopohical conception of the universe. Coomaraswamy helps to restore the self-respect and dignity of the faith of an ancient people.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

I wish to mention here that all three figures that we've discussed in this unit have also been criticised for being revivalists, nationalists, and traditionalists. Some critics have accused them of being Hindu communalists in disguise. You have to read them yourself to decide if there is anything in their writings which warrants such a charge.

Are they preaching against other religions or denegrating those who are not Hindus? Are they sectarian, narrow-minded, irrational, or bigoted in any way?

Yes, if you disagree with their goals, with their methods, with their beliefs, it is another thing. Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Ananda Coomaraswamy, each in his own way, wished to create a proper understanding of things Indian, not only among Indians, but also among the rest of the people in the world. Their focus was on what might more narrowly be called "Hindu India," but again, this is strictly not the case. Coomaraswamy, for instance, was not only an expert on Mughal miniatures, but was also the Keeper of Muhammaden Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

The three have also been faulted on being male writers who are not very sensitive to concerns of women. Coomaraswamy, for instance, even wrote in favour of the ancient ideal of Sati. Swamiji Vivekananda, on the other hand, bewailed the condition of women in India, attributing the fall of the nation to its ill-treatment of women. At any rate, we need to understand that all three writers had a certain understanding of Indian traditions and believed that these traditions had much to offer to us in our present crisis. Each pointed a different path to a better future for India, but all these paths were related in their attempt to restore the self-respect and dignity of Indians. All three writers were staunch anti-imperialists and worked in their own ways for the freedom of India from the servitude to the British. Finally, they were all masters of the English language and extremely eloquent users of it.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Renaissance:	the period in Europe in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries AD especially in Italy during which there was a great revival of interest in art, literature and learning
Kant:	(1724-1804) German philosopher. Professor of logic and metaphysics who developed his own theory of knowledge
Schopenhaur:	(1788-1860) German philosopher, Chief expounder of pessimism and of the irrational impulses of life arising from the will
Spenser:	(1553-1599) English poet, showed a lot of Platonic influence in his works
Comte:	(1798-1857) French philosopher founder of positivism conceived by him as a scientific system of thought and knowledge applicable in all spheres of life.
Mill:	(1773-1836) Scottish philosopher, historian and economist. Appointed official in East India Company. Devoted 11 years to his highly critical *History of India*, known for his utilitarian theories
Monks:	religious renunciates
Sanyasa Diksha:	training for monkhood

Budha:	title given to Gautam Sidhartha, who was a religious teacher and the founder of Buddhism
Sanatam Dharma:	a title that designates Hinduism as an eternal and ever-existing religion. The word occurs in *Brahmanda Purana*
Bhagwat Gita:	religious scripture of the Hindus
Dogmatism:	belief in positive unsupported assertions based on a priori principle, not on induction
Bigotry:	having or expressing very strong, often unreasonable attitudes and opinions for showing disapproval
Fanaticism:	extreme and unreasonable behaviour
Judaism:	religion of the Jews, with belief in one God
Zoroastrianism:	principles of dualistic religious system propagated by Zoraster (the religion of the Magi and ancient Persia still followed by Parsees)
Vedas:	ancient Indian scriptures
Vedanta:	monastic Hindu philosophy founded on the Upanishads
Agonistic:	one who believes that nothing is known or likely to be known of the existence of God.
Buddhism:	the religion that teaches that the way to end suffering is by overcoming your desires.
Atheistic:	that which relates to the belief that there is no God
Jainism:	religious movement established by vardhamana Mahavira, in 6 century BCE, flourished with Buddhism on the same lines
Law of Karma:	action has a chain sequence i.e. cause & effect
Hypothesis:	a proposition, supposition etc. tentatively accepted to explain certain facts
Idolatry:	practice of worshipping idols.
Heathen:	one who has no religion or has a religion that is not Christianity.
Yoga:	type of exercise in various positions which helps to remain fit, improve breathing and relax mind

Daksha: son of Brahma, able, competent, intelligent He enraged Siva by not inviting him for sacrificial offerings. Uma, Shiva's wife urged Siva to display his power and assert his rights. After having destroyed him, Siva restored dead Daksha to life but as his head could not be found, it was replaced by that of a goat or ram.

Dalai Lama: religious head of the Tibetans

Freud: (1856-1039) Austrian neurologist and founder of Psychoanalysis

Rishi: exemplar and preceptor of renunciation and righteousness

Kailash: abode of Shiv in Himalayas

Ganga: sacred Hindu river

Shavit philosophy: refers to five activities of Shiva – creation, preservation destruction, veiling and release. Our life revolves round these activities.

Shakta tradition: as per this tradition Kali is the dancer. Kali is the embodiment of dynamic aspect of Shiva, of his energy.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the relevance of Swamiji's addresses to the Parliament of Religions to our own times and our own present problems.

2. How would you interpret *Sanatan Dharma* in its purest conception?

3. According to Swamiji, the world view of Hinduism is not upturned or dislodged by the discoveries of modern science. Develop in your own words Vivekananda's logic of this assertion.

4. Sri Aurobindo thought that the Indian Culture has sufficient dynamic qualities to save the world. Do you agree to this viewpoint?

5. What makes India special for Aurobindo is "spirituality made the leading motive and the determining power of both the inner and the outer life". Do you agree?

6. What does the bronze image of the dancing Shiva symbolise?

7. Discuss the legend behind the dance of Shiva.

2.8 SUGGESTED READING

Romain Rolland. *The life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel,* Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1965.

Tapan Raychaudhuri. *Europe Reconsidered Perception of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal,* Delhi, OUP, 1988.

H.R. Justa. *Aesthetic Vision of Sri Aurobindo,* Delhi, R.K. Books, 1987.

Sisir Kumar Chose. *The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo A Short Survey*, Calcutta, Chatuskone, 1969.

V.K. Gokak. Sri Aurobindo. *Seer and Poet,* Delhi, *Abhinav Publications*, 1973.

UNIT 3 GANDHI

Structure

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3.2 What is *Hind Swaraj*?
3.3 The Form of *Hind Swaraj*
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall study *Hind Swaraj* by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. This is a small but highly provocative and influential book, originally written in Gujarati, but translated into English by Gandhiji himself Though the whole book has been written in the simplest of style, it is really quite a complex and difficult text to understand. Thus, we shall approach it first from the life of its author, Gandhiji. Then we will look at its salient features, its form, its chapter-wise content, and then discuss it's importance. In the Summing Up at the end, I intend to raise the question of just how practical this book and its ideas are.

3.1 THE LIFE OF MAHATMA GANDHI



Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar on 2 October 1869 and died in Delhi on 30 January 1948. He is commonly regarded as one of the greatest men of the 20th century. An apostle of non-violence, he nevertheless lead India's struggle against the greatest and most powerful empire in human history. That is why he has been called the father of the nation and given the appellation, "Mahatma," or great soul. The outline of his life is known to every Indian, but some important details need to be remembered. However, before we recount these, let me suggest that no retelling of his life can be as effective as reading it in his own words in his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth.*

The very title of that book points to what is perhaps the most important thing about Gandhi's life. The whole life was lived as an experiment. Now what is an experiment? It is a coherent, consciously conducted set of actions to test a hypothesis. The word has achieved its currency in modern times as a part of the scientific vocabulary. The conduct of modern science is based on a clear method. It is based on making precise observations and recording results. If a hypothesis, or initial assumption, is verified under test conditions, it can be repeated. The scientific method thus offers predictability; it gives the experimenter a certain degree of definite knowledge and control.

No doubt, the word "experiment" in Gandhi's autobiography need not be seen as embodying such scientific precision, but its drift is similar. In other words, Gandhi's life was lived according to certain assumptions and in order to demonstrate certain results. It is up to us to find out how strictly conducted this experiment was and how successful its results. That Gandhi was himself aware of this dimension of his life is clear from one of his most quoted and well-known statements, "My life is my message."

What I have been suggesting all along is that the experiences in Gandhi's life, unlike most others, were not merely a series of random events, but a carefully crafted and shaped story in which he was both author and actor. The actual occurrences in Gandhi's life, hence, however great, unique, or interesting are not of paramount value in themselves--at least this is what Gandhi would have liked us to believe. Instead, they are important in so far as they illustrate the validity of certain eternal principals or "laws." These are spiritual and ethical laws, but, according to Gandhi, they are as "true" as laws of nature which science seeks to uncover and delineate.

It follows, therefore, that the other key word in the title of Gandhi's autobiography, in addition to "experiment" is "Truth." It is Truth, then, to which Gandhi's experiments are directed at and it is Truth which the events in story of his life illumine. But this still begs the question, "what is Truth." To Gandhi, Truth, is *sat*, the first component of the trinity *Satchitananda*, which is the Vedic definition of the Ultimate Reality. Truth is simply that which is; Truth is what exists, what is real. It is the ground of being, it is the substance of which the cosmos is made. Truth, therefore is objective, valid, and eternal, irrespective of one's subjective perceptions of it. Of course, how one perceives it conditions one's attitude to it.

Finally, Gandhi's life is a story; it is not a cut and dried or lifeless record of data. In other words, it is full of richly subjective detailing and narration. Gandhi is not superhuman per se, but superbly human. He rises higher and higher through endless striving and discipline. He is not born superior to us. In fact, he has the same failings and weakness as that of the rest of us, but it is his struggle against these that makes him shine as beacon of hope and the leader of millions. What I have been stressing throughout is that Gandhi's life is exemplary; all the extraordinary events in it are meant to uplift and inspire us. As such, Gandhi is a great modern hero, just as Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and many others after them, were great heroes.

We do not have the space here for an adequate biographical overview, but I wish to stress a couple of points which have special bearing on *Hind Swaraj*. Most of us know a good deal about Gandhi's life in India, especially about his leadership of the freedom struggle. Actually, Gandhi came back to India rather later, in 1915, when he was over forty-five years of age and already a great hero. Gandhi was formed in South Africa; he was already a Mahatma when he returned to India.

But let us back track a bit. After his early schooling in Rajkot and marriage to Kasturba in 1883, Gandhi left for England in 1888 to study law. After qualifying for the Bar in 1891, he came back to India but found no satisfactory work. He therefore set sail to South Africa in 1893 to take up his practice as a lawyer. South Africa, then, though a part of the British Empire, suffered from severe racial discrimination. Gandhi, soon, became involved in a struggle for justice for the entire Indian population. Perhaps, the turning point was his being thrown out of the first class compartment of a train at Pietermaritzburg in 1893, even though he possessed a valid ticket. That opened his eyes to the extent of the injustice prevalent in South Africa.

In any event, Gandhi soon organized the Indians against some of the unjust laws of the land. His struggle culminated in the Great March of 1913 from Charlstown to Volksrust. This forced the South African government to accede to his demands in the Gandhi-Smuts pact of 1914. It was after this crowing achievement of Gandhi's non-violent campaign that he decided to return to India.

During the South African years, Gandhi experimented with all the major ingredients of his praxis: community living in the Tolstoy and Phoenix settlements, experiments with diet and natural cure, the invention of satyagraha, the adoption of Truth and nonviolence, the vow of brahmacharya or chastity, and finally, the giving up of personal property. The South African years were thus, literally, the years of the making of the Mahatma, years of self-formation. It was during this period that Gandhi discovered his personal and political philosophy and hardly deviated from it for the rest of his life. And it was during this period that *Hind Swaraj* came to be written.

3.2 WHAT IS *HIND SWARAJ*?

Hind Swaraj is one of the most important books that Gandhi wrote. It was originally written in Gujarati and published in *Indian Opinion*, a journal that Gandhi used to edit in South Africa. The ms. was written in 1909 (not in 1908 as the Navjivan edition erroneously states) on deck of S. S. Kildare, the ship which was bringing Gandhi back to South Africa from London. It was written in long hand on the ship's stationary in a burst of sustained inspiration in ten days. When Gandhi's right hand tired, he commenced writing with his left. The ms. was later translated into English for the benefit of Gandhi's English friends. It was published as a booklet in Gujarati. but immediately banned by the government of the Bombay Presidency. Its English translation was published in book form in 1910.

What is the message of *Hind Swaraj*? As Gandhi himself says, "It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It pits soul force against brute force." What was its immediate context? What provoked Gandhi to write this book with so much passion? While in London, Gandhi met, in his own words, "every known anarchist." It is recorded that among these was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the leading ideologue of the extremist group and later of the Hindu Mahasabha. Savarkar was a brave and patriotic man, who wished to overthrow British rule through violent revolution. His study of world history had convinced Sarvarkar that no country had won its freedom without an armed insurrection. Sarvakar was therefore working to train a band of Indian terrorists in London With

the help of Shyamji Krishna Varma, Sarvakar had instituted a scholarship for Indian students in Britain, but his object was to indoctrinate and prepare leaders for violent revolt.

It was in one such meeting in London that Gandhi met Savarkar and actually shared a common platform with him. Gandhi and Sarvakar had detailed discussion over the means and ends of the struggle for India's freedom, but could not come to an agreement. Gandhi, unlike Savarkar, was convinced that it was India's unique genius and destiny not to imitate the other nations of the world, and that India, indeed, would win its freedom through moral and spiritual force which was superior to material force or the force of arms. Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* to explain his point of view.

3.3 THE FORM OF *HIND SWARAJ*

Hind Swaraj is written as a dialogue between an Editor and a Reader. The Editor is none other than Gandhi himself, while the Reader is a prototype of the kind of angry, young man that Gandhi met in London and wished to change. Gandhi adopts the dialogic mode because he wanted to write a book which "can be put into the hands of a child." Indeed, this studied simplicity went on to be the hallmark of Gandhi's style, not just in his writing but in all that he did in life. Gandhi was the master of the direct and plain style; in many ways, he was a minimalist, shunning excess, unnecessary ornamentation, and needless complexity. Gandhi simplified things; he dealt with very difficult topics and ideas in the language of common men and women. In that sense, he was a great communicator.

Gandhi, though a ceaseless innovator, was also a traditionalist. The dialogue form reminds us, at once, of both the Upanishadic and Socratic traditions. Gandhi, thus, uses a tried and tested form to convey his thoughts. *Hind Swaraj* is made up of twenty little chapters. The book itself is very small in volume, but packs in a very big punch, so to speak.

3.4 A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS IN EACH CHAPTER

Chapter I: The Congress and Its Officials

The Editor counsels the Reader to respect Congressmen like Hume, Wedderburn, Naoroji, and Gokhale for laying the foundation for Indian Home Rule (or Swaraj). He argues against hating every Englishman just because they rule India: "We who seek justice will have to do justice to others."

Chapter II: The Partition of Bengal

The Editor says that the real awakening of India took place with the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon: "The demand for the abrogation of the Partition is tantamount to a demand for Home Rule." The Partition taught Indians that "petitions must be backed up by force, and that they must be capable of suffering." The partition also divided the Congress into two factions: the moderates and the extremists.

Chapter III: Discontent and Unrest

This chapter analyses how reforms take place. According to Gandhi, "Every reform must be preceded by discontent."

Chapter IV: What is Swaraj?

Gandhi tries to define his idea of Swaraj in this chapter. He makes it clear that Swaraj is not merely independence, but a different form of government altogether: "Swaraj is not just the withdrawal of the British, it is not "English rule without the Englishman."

Chapter V: The Condition of England

Gandhi argues that the condition of Europe is not worth copying: "the Mother of Parliaments is like a sterile woman and a prostitute. ... If India copies England...she will be ruined." The pitiable condition of England is due to "modern civilization." under which "the nations of Europe are becoming degraded and ruined day by day."

Chapter VI: Civilization

Just material well-being is not a mark of civilization, Gandhi clarifies. Modern civilization is not just purely material, it is also immoral and irreligious. Modern civilization enslaves people with "the luxuries that money can buy."

Chapter VII: Why Was India Lost?

"The English have not taken India; we have given it to them." We must not blame others but scrutinize and correct our own weaknesses. The English "wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods."

Chapter VIII: The Condition of India

"India is ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization. ... We are turning away from God." India's suffering is due to our turning away from a religious life and accepting modern civilization.

Chapter IX: The Condition of India (Continued): Railways

"Railways, lawyers, and doctors have impoverished the country." Railways help spread all sorts of evil because while "good requires a long time" to travel, "evil has wings." It was the British who perpetuated the myth of divided India; before their advent India was one culturally.

Chapter X: The Condition of India (Continued): The Hindus and the Mahomedans India is one nation because it has the "faculty for assimilation." Religion and nationality are not synonymous. Hindus and Muslims are blood brothers and must learn to coexist.

Chapter XI: The Condition of India (Continued): Lawyers

Lawyers are often immoral because their profession thrives on quarrels and disputes. The British also use law courts to strengthen their illegitimate rule.

Chapter XII: The Condition of India (Continued): Doctors

Likewise, the medical profession has aided imperialism. Most diseases are caused by lack of discipline and by indulgence, which is encouraged through medication. Modern medicine is cruel because it vivisects animals. Doctors use their profession not to help people but to make money.

Chapter XIII: What is True Civilization?

"Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty." In this sense, India has nothing to learn from anyone else. "The tendency of the Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality."

Chapter XIV: How Can India Become Free?

"It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves." Only by freeing ourselves first can we dream of freeing others. India's strength is unique: instead of Europeanising ourselves, we can Indianise the British.

Chapter XV: Italy and India

Unlike Italy, India cannot easily rise up in armed rebellion. "Moreover, to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanize it." If assassination, terrorism, and violence is used to free India, we will make this holy land unholy. Though the English are influenced by "gunpowder ... what is granted under fear can be retained only so long as the fear lasts."

Chapter XVI: Brute Force

The Reader argues in favour of brute force, of obtaining the right end through whatever means. The Editor replies that there is "the same "inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. ... We reap exactly as we sow. ... The force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms." A petition which is not backed by force is, admittedly, useless, but instead of being backed by brute force, it should be backed by "love-force, soul-force, or, more popularly but less accurately, passive resistance."

Chapter XVII: Passive Resistance

The Reader asks what historical evidence there is to prove that passive resistance works. The Editor replies by defining history not as a record of wars and of the reins of Kings, but as the story of humanity. The fact that the world lives on inspite of wars proves that the force of love is greater than the force of hatred and violence. "Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering."

Passive resistance is not the weapon of the weak, but actually it requires more courage than the use of brute force. Is it harder to kill others or smilingly to die for one's beliefs? Passive resistance is for everyone: men and women, those weak in the body and those who are strong, singly or jointly. Passive resistance "blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used." Passive resistance is an Indian speciality because the common people of India have always used it down the ages. "We cease to co-operate with our rulers when they displease us."

This does not mean that we neglect our bodies; it is our duty to make our bodies strong too. Passive resistance can be perfected only through the practice of chastity, poverty, truth, and fearlessness.

Chapter XVIII: Education

Education is not merely the acquisition of letters, but the building of character. English education has enslaved the nation. Though valuable English books may be translated into our languages, religious or ethical education should take first place. Hindus should learn Sanskrit; Muslims, Persian or Arabic; and vice versa too; Northerners and Westerners should learn Tamil; the national language should be Hindi, whether in Persian or Nagari script. Religious education should not be left in

the hands of the hypocritical clergy alone, but should be an instrument of driving out Western civilization.

Chapter XIX: Machinery

Machinery, or rather the use by Indians of machine-made goods, has enslaved us. Capitalism is aligned to imperialism; both oppress the common man. Though machine-made products cannot be given up all at once, we must make a beginning without waiting for the world to change. "Machinery is bad"--we must keep this in mind even when we use it against itself.

Chapter XX: Conclusion

Moderates and Extremists must join hands to work for Swaraj. The English must be asked to stop exploiting India; they cannot rule us against our will. Indians, in order to be free, must reform and discipline themselves. We must eschew the English language; lawyers and doctors must use their knowledge for the benefit of others; European civilization must be resisted at every step even through personal sacrifice and suffering; all must take to the hand loom. "Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control. The way to it is passive resistance: that is soul-force or love-force. In order to exert this force, Swadeshi in every sense is necessary. ... I bear no enmity towards the English but I do towards their civilization."

3.5 DETAILED STUDY OF SELECTED CHAPTERS

In this section, let us take a closer look at the chapters prescribed for detailed study.

3.5.1 Chapter IV: *What is Swaraj?*

in this brief, but important Chapter, Gandhi tries to define his concept of Swaraj. Gandhi clearly indicates that driving the British out is not the same as attaining Swaraj. Though it is clear that British rule impoverished and ruined India, Gandhi still does not make the mistake of arguing that Swaraj can be achieved simply by substituting the British imperialists with the native bourgeoisie. The latter is, in fact, what the Reader wishes. "English rule without the English," Gandhi calls this position succinctly: this means the same sort of government, with armed forces and the whole bureaucratic machinery of the modern nation-state. But it is precisely this kind of system of governance that Gandhi opposes. He believes that it is exploitative and extremely harmful to the general interests of the population. While the Reader wants a whole scale incorporation of English, that is modern institutions, Gandhi has a totally different view of Swaraj. This view takes time to emerge; it is not fully defined in this particular Chapter. For this we shall have to look elsewhere in Gandhi's speeches and writings. Gandhi believed that Swaraj or self-rule should begin with at the bottom of society, with the poorest of the poor. What he had in mind was not a pyramidal society in which a few dominated and lived off the rest, but a society of ever expanding oceanic circles whose individual is the individual.

3.5.2 Chapter VI: *Civilization*

One of the most interesting things about *Hind Swaraj* is its cross-cultural comparison between modern Western civilization and the traditional Indian civilization. Gandhi realized that most educated Indians were totally awed and overwhelmed by the glamour and power of the former. How to wean them away from it and reorient them to their own cultural moorings was a question that exercised him. In this chapter, he mounts a frontal attack on modern civilization by calling it Satanic and ungodly.

Gandhi argues that modern civilization caters only to the body and totally ignores moral development. As such, it is degenerate. He says that Europe in the olden days was not all that different from India of today. Most people laboured with their hands to till the soil, plant the crops, and harvest the grain. It was an agrarian and religious civilization. Precisely what some Europeans called the Dark Ages, Gandhi thinks of as a worthy way of living. All that the modern developments have done is to enable a few to amass a great deal of wealth while the condition of the rest is "worse than that of beasts." While Gandhi is aware of the positive side to modernity, he acknowledges it only grudgingly and partially. This is because he is more concern with the negative fallout; what worries him the most is the official, value-neutral line such as scientists and engineers adopt even to this day. Gandhi is concerned with the dehumanisation that industrialism produced, but he does not concede the manner in which it freed both women and men from traditional, rather limited lifestyles and livelihoods. Gandhi does not envisage the possibilities of moving beyond the drudgery of industrialism through advancing technology. Instead he focuses on self-destructiveness of modernity, on its immorality and greed. In other words, far from regarding it as a panacea, he looks at modern civilization as a disease, but a curable disease.

In his indictment of modern civilization, perhaps Gandhi goes too far. After all the very English Parliament which he called a "sterile woman and a prostitute," both of which images are sexist, became the model for Indian democracy too. In this chapter, he says that "Parliaments are emblems of slavery," a view which those who don't have them will certainly not endorse. In other words, what I am suggesting is that Gandhi's remarks need to be viewed in the context of his times. Then it was very necessary to expose the hideous underbelly of modern civilization, especially to those Indians who were enamoured of it. That is what Gandhi succeeds in doing in this chapter. Of course, we should remember that Gandhi's remarks are not merely tactical; he genuinely believed that a simple way of life based on manual labour was the most conducive to moral and spiritual advancement.

3.5.3 Chapter VII: *Why Was India Lost?*

The key statement in this chapter is both simple and astonishing: "The English have not taken India; we have given it to them." The idea contained in this statement undermines all the conventional wisdom on imperial conquest. Here Gandhi focuses on the innate, inner strength of the oppressed. He wants us to know that no one can rule us without our consent. That is why he once called Swaraj nothing but a process of self-purification: we have permitted foreign rule to sully us; by purifying ourselves of it, we are merely returning to our natural, pristine state. Such a theory of self-cleansing assumes that our original natures are not corrupt or fallen, but perfect and divine. What Gandhi does is to build a theory of decolonization which stresses self-realization and self-scrutiny, instead of attacking the oppressors as African and other anti-colonial struggles all over the world did.

If we examine Gandhi's arguments carefully, we see that he is changing the very equation between the oppressed and the oppressor. The former considers himself powerless, helpless, abject, disarmed, and therefore unable to change his destiny. Gandhi blames not the victor, but the victim: "If I am in the habit of drinking *bhang* and a seller thereof sells it to me, am I to blame him or myself? By blaming the seller, shall I be able to avoid the habit?" Even if Gandhi held the seller of *bhang*, or the imperialist, responsible, he still wishes to drive home to the victim the latter's own complicity in his exploitation. To give the oppressed a sense of agency, to suggest to them that they are in charge of their own lives, that in fact, they could change their lives and end their oppression was a great gift that Gandhi gave to the people of India.

Gandhi doesn't stop there but offers the reasons why the British can retain their hold over India. He makes a very important point that British imperialism is, above all, an

economis system. The military is there only to support this systsem, but that it is not primarily militaristic. He wants Indians to recognize that to the British, "money is their God." The British, says Gandhi, "wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods." So, you can see how Gandhi anticipates what we call globalisation today. In other words, power according to Gandhi is not maintained with armies but with economic control. While we quarrel amongst ourselves, the British strengthen their hold on our economy. That is why, for Gandhi, swadeshi or economic self-reliance and internal unity are the two necessary ingredients of Swaraj.

3.5.4 Chapter XIII: *What is True Civilization?*

This chapter should be read in conjunction to the earlier one, Chapter VI "Civilization." Here Gandhi defines his idea of civilization after having already demolished the prevalent notions of it. For Gandhi civilization is simply *sudharo*. the Gujarati word, which means "good conduct." It consists of "performance of duty and observance of morality." In this respect, Gandhi feels that India has "nothing to learn from anybody else" because since times immemorial the mighty river of Dharma has flown through this land. For Gandhi, India was a land of Rishis and Fakirs, of the exemplars and preceptors of renunciation and righteousness. The common people lived in villages, away from the corruption of large cities. It is "this cursed modern civilization" that has spoiled India. Where it has not reached, the traditional ways of life continue as before, says Gandhi. He pursues the contrast farther by saying that while "the tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God." This is a rather severe condemnation, but is based on Gandhi's belief that modernity fundamentally changes the human being's equation with the cosmos by alienating us from the natural order and placing up on top. While he is not blind to the numerous faults of the traditional way of life, he considers these to be "defects," which are not integral to it. But, what would Gandhi have said if someone made the same arguments about modern civilization? If we said that the latter's defects, such as he identifies, need not be considered integral to it? I suppose Gandhi would have argued that colonialism, slavery, wage labour, moral decay and degeneration and many other problems are not merely the defects of modernity, but somehow central to it. Without them, there would be no modernity as we know it. I think each of you will have to make up your own minds on this vital issue. but do examine the complexities of the debate carefully.

3.5.5 Chapter XVII: *Passive Resistance*

This chapter brings us to the heart of Gandhi's praxis or method of action and activism. As such, it is probably the most important chapter in *Hind Swaraj* It is also. I think, the longest chapter. After you finish reading it you realize that "passive resistance" is anything but passive. In fact, it is a very proactive way of intervening in the world. That is why Gandhi preferred to call it "Satyagraha" or soul-force. It rather calls for extraordinary courage and self-discipline, not to speak of several other qualities. Passive resistance, thus, isn't easier, but much, much harder than violent reaction.

Gandhi argues that soul-force or truth force is a scientific principle without which the world would not have survived. Unfortunately, our history books merely chronicle the endless war and mindless violence of ruthless kings and conquerors. Soul- force on the other hand is present in every family, indeed, it has ensured the survival of the human species itself. History, on the other hand, " is really a record of every interruption [emphasis added] of the even working of the force of love upon the soul. " Gandhi defines passie resistances as " a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms."

Next, the discussion moves to law, especially to adjust lays. Like Henry David Thoreau before him, Gandhi agrues for the moral basis of civil disobedience when it

is directed against unjust laws. He says, "A man who has realized his manhood, who fears only God, will fear no one else. Man-made laws are not necessarily binding on him." Gandhi believes that just because the majority supports something or just because it has been made into a law it does not automatically become right.

Next Gandhi refutes the idea that soul-force is the weapon of the weak; on the contrary, he says, it requires greater courage to practise it than to practice violence. After all, it is easier to injure, even kill someone else instead of being injured or being killed oneself. Moreover, passive resistance, unlike violence, benefits both the subject and the object of it, that is both she who uses it and he against whom it is used. According to Gandhi, the Indian people have always used it against kings and governments, disregarding laws that they found unjust or obnoxious.

But, what are the qualities necessary for a passive resistor? If one looks at their list they include chastity, poverty, truth, fearlessness, and so on, all of which are very difficult to attain. The passive resistor, the *satyagrahi*, therefore, is like a saint; he is no ordinary person.

You may argue that no one wants to be a saint; instead all of us wish to lead "normal" lives. In Gandhi's scheme of things "normal" life requires the qualities listed above; without them, human beings will become akin to beasts. What is "normal" for Gandhi may be extraordinary for us, but we must ask ourselves if we should strive towards it or remain as we are.

3.5.6 Chapter XVIII: *Education*

This chapter on Education is directly connected with our own realities today. We have inherited a colonial system of education, which is hardly relevant to out real needs. The result is so many ignorant and job-less graduates, all of whom are too qualified to do any hard work. Many of us want cushy and secure government jobs by virtue of which we can live happily. We seldom realize that many of us are actually burdens on society. Gandhi anticipated this problem. He believed that true education was not merely literacy or the knowledge of Mathematics, but the development of high moral character. In fact, he believed that not everyone needs what we call education today. Most of those, for instance, who live in villages and practice farming, may make do with some rudimentary knowledge of letters; they don't need to go to school or college to earn degrees or diplomas.

The worst feature in the racket that is education is what was known as "English education." This was a system devised by Lord Macaulay and his successors to produce a "class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." Gandhi knew that English education would alienate the classes from their native culture. This is precisely what has happened. Those of us steeped in this type of education, therefore, need to work extra-hard to reconnect with our roots, to offer our advantages to the service of those on whose behalf we enjoy all our privileges.

Gandhi is not exactly anti-English, but wishes English to be given its rightful place, which is as an international link language. English should not dominate us as it has come to do today. Moreover, Gandhi wants every Indian to learn one classical language, like Sanskrit or Persian, and one more language other than mother tongue. This is the only way of avoiding linguistic chauvinism or fanaticism and encouraging a multilingual, multiethnic sensibility.

Gandhi also touches briefly on religious education. He believes that we need to return to India's pristine civilization by throwing out Western civilization, but also by cleansing our own traditions of the dirt and filth that has accumulated in them. If they could be cleansed, religious education would naturally substitute the kind of

secular education that we have. Gandhi's dream, however, was not to be realized. Education still remains woefully inadequate and ineffective.

3.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF *HIND SWARAJ*

We have already seen how, strictly speaking, Hind Swaraj cannot be considered a part of Indian writing in English. It was written originally in Gujarati, but what is equally important, translated by Gandhi himself into English. This is the only book of his which he himself translated. That is why, we need to remember that we have to discard narrow yardsticks of what constitutes Indian English literature. All of Indian English literature, more properly speaking, is a translated literature. Therefore, considering *Hind Swaraj* as a valid text, we have done well to include it in the syllabus. It's literary value, as I suggested earlier, is its direct and simple style. The sentences are short and avoid excessive coordination or subordination. This is a plain style with little or no ornamentation. It is prose of thought which does not strive after needless elegance. It is the same style that we find in Gandhi's later works, whether translated or written originally in English.

Yet, the importance of *Hind Swaraj* extends far beyond its literary value. It is, in my opinion, a seminal text for all those who wish to understand Gandhi. What is more, it is nothing less than a non-violent revolutionary's handbook. It should be compulsory reading for all Indians. Why do I make such a sweeping statement? That's because this book has the power to make us wake up from our stupor. We, who are intoxicated by modernity and westernization, who are continuing to be brainwashed daily via the mass-media to get entangled further into self-destructive lifestyles of consumerism, require the kind of jolt that *Hind Swaraj* offers.

The text extends much beyond its immediate political message, which, as we have already observed, concerns the achievement of Swaraj and the best means thereof. We have also seen how Gandhi clearly says that Swaraj obtained by violence will be no Swaraj at all, but will demean us to the level of our former colonizers. But, Gandhi's concerns are not merely political. Indeed, we need to recognize clearly that Gandhi's approach is not fragmentary, but holistic. In Gandhian thought what helps us attain political independence should also help us develop spiritually.

Gandhi's thought springs from a deep perspective which is not just intra-civilization, but trans-civilizational. He identifies India as a spiritual and religious civilization, whose culture is superior to that of modern western civilization. Here Gandhi makes a crucial point that western civilization today is merely modern civilization: at one time, before the onset of modernity, Europe was not much different from India. Why is modern civilization condemned by Gandhi? It is condemned not only because it is materialistic, but because it is essentially immoral. It encourages vice and makes us forget the purpose of life which is the cultivation of virtue. Modern life regards the human being as essentially a physical entity the aim of whose life is to accumulate comforts. In order to give us the comforts that we seek modern civilization adopts a predatory and destructive approach to nature. All the progress and development, we will realize, is at the cost of enormous damage to our environment. Some of this damage is irreversible. The other way in which much of what we call modern development happens is through the exploitation of human beings. Slavery, colonialism, indentured labour, and other forced or ill-paid systems have been evolved so that the majority of the poor toil for the comforts of the rich few. Gandhi shows us that modernity is driven by the baser instincts of greed, lust for power, urge to dominate over others, and so on. If all of us succumb to the craze for modernity, the whole species would be dehumanized. Gandhi recognizes this and therefore criticizes the West, which is the custodian of modernity.

He wants Indians to regain their lost pride in themselves and their culture, which he believes is superior to that of the modern West. That is because traditional Indian culture, at its best, was designed to ensure the moral and spiritual evolution of each of its members. Gandhi wants modern Indians to get rid of the colonial mentality which makes us worship everything that comes from the West. Instead, Gandhi deglamourizes the opponent, so that we can evaluate it afresh. The so-called backwardness of traditional India, according to Gandhi, was no backwardness at all, but a proof of its higher culture.

Gandhi considers the craze for machinery to be inappropriate to India. Here we have a surplus of labour, so labour saving machinery will actually render millions jobless. It will dehumanize and enslave those who are bound to machines in lifeless routines. It will concentrate the wealth in the hands of those few who own machines. Instead of so much centralization of power and wealth, Gandhi advocates decentralization. Each one must attempt to attain self-sufficiency; we should become both producers and consumers, or to use postmodern jargon, we should all become "prosumers."

Self-sufficiency, self-respect, self-realization are thus the planks of Gandhi's idea of Swaraj. Swaraj itself is a concept more deep and wide than independence. Swaraj is a Vedic word which means more than just self-rule. It suggests not just individual autonomy but a very high level of moral and spiritual development. Such Swaraj is a life-long project and includes every aspect of our lives. It is interactive and evolutionary, not just static or inert. By Gandhi's yardstick, we are still far from attaining Swaraj. Indeed, in the ultimate analysis, Swaraj is not just a self-centered or negative concept. It embraces all of humankind, both the oppressed and the oppressor. Political independence is merely the beginning. Swaraj will be impossible before the whole world learns to co-exist in peace and prosperity; it will be a world without the rampant inequalities, dehumanizing poverty, crippling disease, internecine warfare of today.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

After giving you an overview of *Hind Swaraj* I would like to take up the question of just how practical or impractical a text like *Hind Swaraj is*. To put it bluntly, of course it is impractical. But was Christ practical? Was the Buddha practical? Is any revolutionary ideal practical? Is the dream of transforming the world practical? No, most of these things are not practical and that is one reason why they are so special. Clearly, then, *Hind Swaraj*, is the work of an extremist. It is unique precisely because it is so unreasonable and provocative. No one, not even Gandhi, could practice in toto what it preaches. Gandhi himself used not just the railways but all sort of machinery in his lifetime. *Hind Swaraj* aims at transforming our attitudes. It cannot be followed literally. If we do so, we shall not be able to live for one minute.

Ninety years have passed since it was written. During these nine decades we have moved closer to modernity and farther away from Gandhi. But, at the same time, we are in a much better position to ascertain the value of what *Hind Swaraj* preaches. The whole world today speaks of protecting the environment. That is because the earth as an eco-system has reached a crisis of survival. Gandhi was a visionary who could foresee this crisis very clearly. He warns all of us against it. He calls on us to change our attitudes and our lifestyles. It is up to us how much we can understand him and follow his example.

Hind Swaraj, then, is an impractical text when seen from a limited perspective; when seen from a broader perspective, what it advocates seems to be the only possible way to survive.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Beacon: a person or thing that warns, offers encouragement or guidance etc. to light up

Bhang: an intoxicating drink

Hypothesis: a proposition, supposition etc tentatively accepted to explain certain facts.

Delineate: to mark out, sketch, or to trace the outline

Exemplary: serving as a model or an example worth imitating

Praxis: established practice or custom

Insurrection: a rising up against established authority. rebellion

Indoctrinate: to instruct in, or imbue with doctrines as of a sect

Seminal: containing seeds of reproduction or development

Stupor: a state in which the mind and senses are dulled, as from the use of a narcotic or from a shock

Intoxicated: being in a state of no control through the use of alcohol, or a drug, to excite to a point beyond self control.

Demean: to lower in status or character, degrade

Holistic: an integrated whole or a complete view

Interactive: acting on each other, reciprocal action or effect

Internecine: deadly or harmful to both sides, destroying effect

3.9 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on Mahatma Gandhi's life and theories relating to Truth and humanity in general. To what extent do you consider him as a true Indian or as the Father of our Nation"?

2 Gandhiji himself says "My life is my message" What do you think was the message, and as an Indian or as a human being how has that message affected you?

3. How far do you know about the formative years of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and the events and experiences that shaped his thinking and character?

4. When and why did Gandhi write the *Hind Swaraj*, and why was it banned?

5. Write a note on the form of *Hind Swaraj*? Do you think that writing in such a form would make things clear to the readers?

6. Write an essay on your understanding of the *Hind Swaraj*. What according to you is Gandhi trying to convey to the readers?

7. Explain Gandhi's view of the following concepts: Swaraj, Civilization, , Passive Resistance and English education. What role did the partition of Bengal have on the political as well as social development of India?

8. Do you agree with the Gandhian view that "Every reform must be preceded by discontent"? Substantiate your answer with proper examples.

9. What do you think of Gandhi's idea of Swaraj, with respect to your own views of it?

10. As a child of the 21st century, what do you feel about our culture and civilization? What measures can be taken to preserve and save this civilization?

11. With reference to what Gandhi is saying in chapters XV, XVI and XVII on the idea of peace, brute force, passive resistance and the use of armed rebellion in order to free India, analyse his views with respect to the present Kargil Border conflicts and war threats between two nuclear nations.

12. Socially, politically and religiously, what do you think about the unity and diversity in India. In what ways, do you think can we improve our present situation.

13. What does Gandhi say on various professions like that of the lawyers and the Doctors?

14. What do you think about the role Education plays in our lives? What are the views expounded by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* on Education: scientific as well as literary and religious?

15. In today's materialistic, modernist, mechanical world, where do you think does Gandhiji's idea of Swadeshi stand?

16. How can Gandhi's views of Swaraj and Swadeshi be effectively used for the benefit of India?

17. According to you, what is the relevance and importance of *Hind Swaraj*?

3.10 SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 4 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Structure

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to introduce you to the prose writing of Jawaharlal Nehru as exemplified in his *Autobiography*; (ii) through a study of a sampling from his *Autobiography* to familiarise you with the distinctive features of his prose style, and (iii) to enable you to place Nehru's writings in the context of the non-fictional prose written by other Indian writers of the twentieth century and those who are writing now.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Nehru is among the most distinguished Indians of the 20th century. As one of the makers of modern India, his life merges with the life of the nation. Inevitably, a study of his writings becomes not only a study of the man but also of the history of modern India.

Nehru's writings reflect his dynamism, his catholic taste and his broad sympathies, his freedom for cant and hypocrisy, and his sensitive use of words.

We would like you to first read the extracts from Nehru's *Autobiography*, 6 chapters in all which are preseribed for you and then form your own judgement about his writing. Do read other chapters also if you have time. In any case compare them with the writings of others. This will help you to discover the similarities and differences among them and also to identify their special features.

4.2 NEHRU-LIFE AND WRITINGS

4.2.1 Life

Nehru (1889-1964): The bare facts about Nehru's life can be told quickly. Born to rich Kashmiri parents, he had an exclusive education, first at home at the hands of governesses and then at Harrow and Cambridge and the Inner Temple. Soon after his return from England he plunged into the nationalistic struggle, went to jail a number of times, became President of the Indian National Congress, took a leading part in the negotiations that culminated in the freedom of the country and headed the Interim Government. He was Prime Minister of free India from August 1947 till his death on 27 May 1964.



Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964)

In case you are interested in more details, you could consult a biography of Nehru's.

4.2.2 Writings

Three main books of Nehru's which we owe to his prison days are:

An Autobiography (1936)
Glimpses of World History (1939)
The Discovery of India (1946)

Glimpses of World History first published in 1934-35 in two volumes contains. as the title page says,, "Further letters to his daughter, written in prison, and containing a rambling account of history for young people."

Tom Wintringham in his tribute to Nehru included in collection called *Abinandan Granth* called the book "better history" and "better English". He said: "If in the future some Indian children are to learn English they will do well to insist that they are taught from these *Glimpses* rather than from Macaulay or from Gibbon."

The Discovery of India (1946)

Written in Ahmednagar jail in five months, the book contains Nehru's reflections on life in general and on India in particular. The discovery of the title obviously took place during the 1936 whirlwind election tour of India. Chalapathi Rao in his *Jawaharlal Nehru* (1973) says: "There has been no better book about the cultural unity of India or the continuity of Indian civilization and it is monumental in conception, a book that deserves to be richly illustrated." Chalapathi Rao was right. The book was make into a beautiful film in Hindi, *Bharat Ek Khoj* by Shyam Benegal.

4.3.1 Preliminary Remarks

Nehru did most of his serious writing during his prison terms. His *Autobiography* was written entirely in jail in a period of less than 9 months from June 1934 to February 1935 or 14th February 1935 to be precise. As he explains in chapter LXIV, the task was begun in Dehra Gaol and completed in the District Gaol, Almora. The result was a massive manuscript of 976 pages and Nehru must have worked furiously at it.

Prison is central to Nehru's experience and the original title suggested by the author was *In and Out of Prison* with a sub-title *An Autobiographical Narrative with musings on recent events in India*. It was finally published under the bare title *An Autobiography* by John Lane The Bodley Head of London in April 1936. This included a postscript dated 25 October 1935 that he wrote at Badenweiler in Switzerland where he had gone for the treatment of his wife. Nehru obviously prepared the manuscript for publication in Badenweiler, for the preface to the first edition is dated 2 January 1936.

The book is dedicated to his wife Kamala who had died a few weeks before its publication.

4.3.2 Genesis of the *Autobiography*

How did the narrative come to be written?

Nehru explains the genesis of the book at two places - once in chapter LXIV dealing with 'Dehra Gaol Again' and in the preface to the first edition of the book. His primary purpose he says, was two-fold. It was to give himself a definite task that would fill in the long solitude of jail life and would divert his mind from worry and depression. It was also an attempt at understanding - understanding the past events with which he has been connected and understanding his own responses to them and thereby trace his own mental development. In, Dehra Gaol Again, he explains the mood of self-questioning in which the narrative began. "Distressed with the present, I began thinking of the past, of what had happened politically in India since I began to take part in public affairs. How far had we been right in what we had done? How far wrong? It struck me that my thinking would be more orderly and helpful if I put it down on paper" (559). At the end of chapter xxviii we find Nehru asking again; "Why am I writing all this here in prison?... I write down my past feelings and experiences in the hope this may bring me some peace and psychic satisfaction." (208)

His account is clearly and self-confessedly "egotistical" and selective. "I must warn him [the reader], therefore that this account is wholly one-sided and, inevitably, egotistical; many important happenings have been completely ignored and many important persons, who shaped events, have hardly been mentioned....a personal account can claim this indulgence. "(xv-xvi)

4.3.3 *The Autobiography* as a narrative

Jonathan Culler has suggested several elements that need to be taken into account for analysing a narrative. These are:

Who is the narrator?
Who constitutes the audience?
When was the narrative written?
What is the time gap between the events described and the recalling of the events?

The narrator of course is Nehru himself and he writes of past events in which he has played a part and of persons with whom he has been connected.

Every narrative has an audience and this is true for personal diaries as well as for less personal narratives. Given the self-clarificatory nature of his narrative, it comes as no surprise that Nehru should disclaim any intention of having any deliberate audience in view. But he hastens to add that his audience consisted of his own countrymen and countrywomen. This partly accounts for the generally intimate tone of the narrative. He knows that he enjoys the confidence of his people and is confident that what he writes about the country's turbulent years will interest them.

Nehru's autobiographical narrative takes the story of his years upto February 1935 when he was 45.

Like many narratives, this one tries to describe his moods and thoughts at the time of each event, "to represent as far as I could my feelings on the occasion." But he concedes that "It is difficult to recapture a past mood, and it is not easy to forget subsequent happenings" And that "later ideas must inevitably have coloured my account of earlier days". (596)

This preliminary discussion should help you to approach the *Autobiography* with great understanding and formulate your own views about the book.

4.4 CHAPTERWISE ANALYSIS

4.4.1 Chapter 1: *Descent from Kashmir*, (p 1-5)

In the first chapter Nehru describes his lonely childhood in a large prosperous family and also narrates the story of his Kashmiri origins from that an ancestor named Raj Kaul, who probably migrated to Delhi at Emperor Farukhsiar's instance.

Nehru opens and closes his autobiographical narrative with apt quotations.The opening quotation from Abraham Cowley refers to the dilemma of an autobiographer. His task, as Cowley says, is both hard and nice, nice perhaps because it grates his own heart to say anything of disparagement, and hard because it, grates the reader's ears to hear anything of praise for him. The closing epigraph from Talmud talks of the essential incompleteness of human labour.

Comments

The whole account of his early childhood and of his descent from Kashmir is given in a matter of fact manner that does not invite attention to itself. But the first sentence of the narrative could be called epigrammatic - "An only son of prosperous parents is apt to be spoilt, specially in India" (p1) and recalls the opening of *Pride and Prejudice* and though he does not say so here or elsewhere, the whole book could be seen as a refutation of the traditional wisdom.

Most of his narrative is taken up with an account of his ancestry, which expectedly narrows down to his father Motilal Nehru who succeeded eminently at the law and made lots of money and loved all the good things of life and took to western ways

In spite of his obvious admiration for his father there is no attempt to idealize him. One can also detect a certain obvious pride in his Kashmiri Brahminical heritage. which becomes clearer in the *Epilogue*.

Nehru's account is generally marked by a fine restraint. Here he presents facts about his father and the possible influences on him but he refrains from drawing any conclusions.

4.4.2 Chapter IV: *Harrow and Cambridge* (p 17-26)

In this chapter Nehru talks about his education in England at the expensive public school at Harrow, Trinity College, Cambridge and the Inner Temple. He also talks of the Indian students and Indian leaders he met there; of his being influenced by the aestheticism of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater and of the brief period when he cultivated expensive tastes and tried to live like "a man about town"

He also writes of his agitation at the big events in Indian politics and of his vague dreams of playing a gallant part in the fight for freedom. The chapter inevitably talks of his father's "moderate brand of politics and his frank dislike of religious nationalism", a view that Nehru himself shared.

Comments

Writing about himself as he was thirty years before, Nehru is disarmingly honest and objective. Additionally his self-deprecating tone and his quiet sense of humour are likely to appeal to the cultivated reader. Here is an early hint of Nehru's self-deprecating manner: "Always I had a feeling that I was not one of them [his classmates at Harrow], and the others must have felt the same way about me. I was left a little to myself. But on the whole I took my full share in the games, *without in any way shining at them*, and it was, I believe recognised that I was no shirker." (Italics added, p 17) Later while describing himself as a new entrant to the university he comes with a gem that combines amused self-deprecation with balanced phrasing: "With a self-conscious air I wandered about the big courts and narrow streets of Cambridge, delighted to meet a person I knew" (p 19) Still later when he tries living extravagantly like a 'man about town', his self-criticism becomes stronger: "I was merely trying to ape to some extent the prosperous but somewhat empty-headed Englishman who is called 'man about town'.This soft and pointless existence, needless to say, did not improve me in any way. My early enthusiasm began to tone down and *the one thing that seemed to go up was my conceit"*(italics added, p 25).

The self-criticism continues till the end of his chapter when he comes back to Bombay after a stay of over 7 years in England as "a bit of a prig with little to commend me."

Nehru's "writing is enlivened by a quiet sense of humour. Notice his dig at A.M.Khwaja as he got up at a public meeting in Cambridge to ask the visiting Indian leader G.K. Gokhale a question: "Khwaja got up from the body of the hall and put an interminable question, which went on and on, till most of us had forgotten how it began and what it was about.,"(p.22)

Nehru's usual weapon of criticism of those contemporaries whose conduct he did not approve of is irony. This is how he speaks of those who at Cambridge talked extremist language but ended up holding respectable jobs in British India: "Later I was to find that these persons were to become members of the Indian Civil Services, High Court Judges, very staid and sober lawyers, and the like. Few of these parlour firebrands took any effective part in Indian political movements subsequently."(22)

Besides, Nehru always has an eye for a vivid detail. Here is a very small example: "Eighteen years later I was again in Paris when Lindberg came *like a shining arrow from across the Atlantic*." (Italics added, p. 25)

4.4.3 Chapter VII: *The Coming of Gandhiji: Satyagraha and Amritsar* (p 40-47)

This chapter begins with a description of the post -World War I scene in India, of the air of expectancy of great constitutional changes among the middle classes and of unrest among the masses particularly among the peasantry.

In spite of universal opposition, the Government passed the Rowlatt Bill that provided for arrest and trial -- the checks and formalities the law is supposed to provide. The resulting agitation saw the emergence of Gandhiji as an all India leader. The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre followed which sent shock waves throughout the country and gave a new shape and a new orientation to the national movement.

The chapter narrowing its focus gives us a fascinating glimpse of Gandhi's power of leadership and how he obtains the assent of Khilafat leaders who doubted the efficacy of his policy of non-violence.

The chapter also gives a glimpse of the turmoil in the family caused by the prospect of the arrest of a dearly beloved son on offering satyagraha against the Rowlatt Acts.

Comments

The following points could be made:

1. The irony that the draconian Rowlatt Acts were not used even once during the three years of their existence is not lost upon Nehru. He observes: "One might almost think that the object of the measure [The Rowlatt Acts] was to bring trouble." (41) Further, the laws enacted later were far more harsh so much so that Nehru ironically says that the Rowlott Bills might almost be considered a charter of liberty":(41)

2. Honesty marks this chapter as it does the others as Nehru tries to probe the motives of his father's initial reaction to Gandhiji's plan of offering individual satyagraha.

> What good would the gaol - going of a number of individuals do, what pressure could it bring on the Government? Apart from these general considerations, what really moved him was the personal issue. It seemed to him preposterous that "I should go to prison. The trek to prison had not then begun and the idea was most repulsive [to the father]. (41-42)

He admires his father greatly but that does not prevent him now, as it did not prevent him earlier, from being critical of him.

3. Nehru is not bitter against Englishmen, not even against Gen Dyer of the Jallian Walah Bagh notoriety. He of course describes the terrible event as a 'massacre' and gives a graphic account of the murderous fire mowing down "people trapped within the four walls of the Bagh". But all that he does is first to refute Edward Thompson, a friend of Nehru's, who had suggested in an extenuation of Dyar's action that he (Gen. Dyer) was under the impression that there were other exits from the Bagh. Then he records that he overheard the hero of Jallianwala Bagh, as he ironically calls him, boasting in "an aggressive and triumphant tone' about what he had done: "He pointed out how he had the entire town at his mercy and he had felt like reducing the rebellious city to a heap of ashes, but he took pity on it and refrained." (43) Nehru abjures all condemnation and by way of comment simply says: "I was greatly shocked to hear his conversation and to observe his callous manner." (44) Deeds speak louder than any comment on them.

4. Nehru's report on the meeting in Allahabad in which the Muslim leaders came to accept Gandhiji's creed of non-violence is interesting on two counts. First his account is mildly humorous and is a testimony of what a great leader can achieve on the strength of his earnest convictions. Second it contains a brief but sharply etched estimate of Gandhiji that one is unlikely to forget easily. Here is a longish extract from the chapter.

> Gandhiji addressed them and after hearing him looked even more frightened than before. He spoke well in his best dictatorial vein. He was humble but also clear-cut and hard as a diamond, pleasant and soft-spoken but inflexible and terribly earnest. His eyes were mild and deep, but yet out of them blazed out a fierce energy and determination. (46)

Nehru reports Gandhiji's exhortation as follows:

> This is going to be a great struggle, he said, with a very powerful adversary. If you want to take it up, you must be prepared to lose everything, and you must subject yourself to the strictest non-violence and discipline. When war is declared martial law prevails, and in our non-violent struggle there will also have to be dictatorship and martial law on our side, if we are to win..... But as long as you choose to keep me as your leader you must accept my conditions, you must accept dictatorship and the discipline of martial law. But that dictatorship will always be subject to your goodwill. (46)

The crowning irony is - and the irony is not lost on Nehru - that it is the apostle of non-violence who is using what Nehru calls "military analogies:" "Something to this effect he said and these military analogies and the unyielding earnestness of the man made the flesh of most of his hearers creep. But Shaukat Ali was there to keep the waverers up to the mark, and when the time for voting came the great majority of them quietly and shamefacedly voted for the proposition, that is for war!"(46-47)

Nehru is sharply critical of Gandhiji in his *Autobiography* but the view of his personality given above is unforgettable.

4.4.4 Chapter XXX *In Naini Prison* (217-25)

This is one of the twelve chapters in the *Autobiography* that deal with Nehru's experiences in prison. These experiences begin from the time of his first imprisonment during the course of which he first stayed in Alipore jail and then Dehradun jail and finally Almora district jail.

In Naini Prison is largely reflective and shows Nehru's compassion for less fortunate prisoners. Nehru begins realistically with a brief description of the part of the jail called Kuttaghar where he was confined, the nocturnal jail noises he heard and of the inhuman practice of employing human labour-power to work a huge water pump in front of his enclosure.

He then goes on to talk the plight of the lifers - convicts sentenced to life and how inhuman treatment turned them into automatons responsive only to fear. Nehru stresses the need to distinguish between hardened criminals and the non-criminal types. He then goes on to point out the discrimination made between the facilities available to European prisoners and to Indian prisoners and stresses the need for a more humane treatment of them. He also feels a sense of guilt at having an easier time in the jail.

Towards the end of the chapter Nehru likens the efficient but heartless administration of an Indian prison with the working of the British government of India.

The chapter closes on a personal note with Narmada Prasad Singh joining him a month later and then ten and a half months later his own father and Dr. Syed Mahmud.

Comments

We shouldn't forget that prison is central to the *Autobiography*. Nehru had thought of calling it *In and Out of Prison*. Prison life meant a great deal of deprivation for Nehru. "One misses", he says in Chapter XIV 'Out Again', "many things in prison. but perhaps most of all one misses the sound of women's voices and children's" laughter." In Lucknow District Gaol he suddenly realised that he had not heard "a dog bark for seven or eight months". (98) But these experiences also result in an expansion of his sympathies. He becomes aware of what it means to spend long years in prison and of many a promising life lost in it. And of course prison life promotes introspection which results in the writing of the book.

This chapter "In Naini Prison" needs to be read along with some at least of the 11 other chapters on the subject.

Nehru conveys a sense of being cooped up in prison with the help of an anonymous quotation.

Referring to his circular enclosure, he wonders if a circular wall and the absence of corners and angles add to a sense of captivity. During the daytime he looked

> Upon that little tent of blue
> Which prisoners call the sky,
> And at every drifting cloud that went
> With sails of silver by.

At night he imagined "I was at the bottom of a well. Or else that part of the star-lit sky that I saw ceased to be real and seemed part of an artificial planetarium" (218).

Nehru is compassionate towards the non-criminal prisoners herded together with hardened criminals and he is guilt-ridden at receiving better treatment than most political prisoners. But he overdoes neither. His is an informed sympathy and he quotes Lewis E. Lawes the Warden of Sing Sing Prison in New York who, according to Nehru, says that "only 12-1/2 percent of his prison population is aggressively anti-social and are really bad." His simple idealism is reflected in the suggestion that "a more sensible economic policy, more employment, more education would soon empty out our prisons."(220)

Nehru's experience of Indian prisons leads him to compare them with the British rule in India. Both are efficient and heartless. He works out the analogy in some detail:

> Outside, in the government of our country, we see much of this duplicated on a longer, though less obvious, scale. But there the C.W.'s [convict wardens] or C.O.'s [Convict overseers] are known differently. They have impressive titles, and their liveries of office are more gorgeous. And behind them, as in prison, stands the armed guards with weapons ever ready to enforce conformity. (225)

Nehru does not stop there. He expands his meditations further and says that "in prison one begins to appreciate the Marxian theory, that the state is really the coercive apparatus meant to enforce the will of a group that controls the government." (225)

In chapter LII, Nehru uses another analogy to depict India's plight. He compares India to an "enormous country-house...that they [the British] owned," and expands it to some extent.

4.4.5 Chapter L IV: *The Record of British Rule* (433-49)

Nehru's views on Englishmen and on English rule are widespread throughout the *Autobiography.* While he resented the presence and behaviour of English rulers, he says he had no feelings whatever against individual Englishmen. "In my heart I rather admired the English." (6) Later he reported a story that accounted for his father's "anti-British politics of his being refused membership of a English Club, adding: " As individuals we had usually met with courtesy from the Englishman and we got as well with him, though, like all Indians, we were no doubt racially conscious of subjection and resented it bitterly.' (101) In the chapter on *What is Religion*? he censures the Church of England which has served the purpose of British imperialism and has sought to justify its predatory policy in Asia and Africa. (376) His censure of British rule goes to the extent of calling the Government of India metaphorically as one big efficiently run but heartless prison.

In this chapter Nehru subjects the record of British rule in India to a searching and systematic analysis. He states the different claims made for the British rule in India and then examines each one of them giving credit and blame where each is due. Most of all while he is grateful to the British for the one splendid gift of science and its rich offspring i.e. industry, he ensures them for enoouraging disruptive, obscurantist, reactionary and sectarian elements in the country. But more than the deficiencies of the British he is critical of the failings of Indians themselves.

Comments

The *Autobiography* offers several kinds of writing, narrative, descriptive, reflective and argumentative and often a combination of two or more kinds. This chapter entitled *The Record of British rule* shows Nehru at his argumentative best. But though he presents his case like a skillful lawyer, he is more interested in discovering the truth rather than in winning it

Nehru begins by stating the British point of view and he does so in the words of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform (1934) which could be expected to put the British case in strong terms.

The Report credits the Government with establishing political unity, the rule of law and a just and efficient administration and indeed with fostering the first beginnings of nationalism.

Nehru concedes that the British first opened India's" window to the West and bought her one aspect of Western industrialism and science. But having done it, Nehru says, they throttled the future industrial growth of the country. Thereby they delayed political growth and in fact preserved outdated feudal relics in the country.

Further, it has been claimed that the educational and material progress in the country has been greater during the British period than at any other period of her long history. But progress in these fields in almost every country has been tremendous during the past century. We need to be grateful to the British for the benefits of railways, telegraphs, telephone and the wireless but these things came to us primarily to strengthen the British rule.

The fault lay with the British concept of ruling India which was the police concept. The Government job was only to protect the state. The economic need of the citizens were sacrificed to British interests.

Nehru then examines the merit of the British claim of having fostered political unity. " Unity is a good thing." Nehru agrees but, "unity in subjection is hardly to be ,proud of" Political unity came about as a side-product of the British empire's progress but when that unity challenged the alien rule the rulers promoted disunity and sectarianism. Likewise, peace is necessary for progress, but peace imposed by an alien conqueror has hardly the restful quality of the real peace. On the contrary quoting William James, he applauds war or rather the moral equivalent of war because it fosters virtues like fidelity, cohesiveness, tenacity, heroism and several other virtues.

Nehru then proceeds to examine the British claim of progress in India. There have been big changes in India--railway, irrigation, factories, schools, colleges and huge government offices but India, according to Nehru, is still a servile state. He then proposes a vital test of progress--the wellbeing of the people as a whole and from this point of view "India makes a terribly poor show today." (437)

At this point he raises his voice and asks a series of rhetorical questions.

> We read of great schemes of unemployment relief and the alleviation of distress in other countries; what of our scores of millions of unemployed and the distress that is widespread and permanent? We read also of housing schemes elsewhere; where are the houses of hundreds of millions of our people, who live in mud huts or have no shelter at all? May we not envy the lot of other countries where education, sanitation, medical relief, cultural facilities and production advance is rapidly ahead, while we remain where we were, or plod wearily along at the pace of a snail?" (437-38)

Then he focuses on Russia, Backward Turkey and Fascist Italy all of which made giant strides towards widespread literacy ending with the words of the Italian Education Minister Gentile who called for "a frontal attack on illiteracy". That gangrenous plague, which: is rotting our body politic, must be extirpated with a hot iron." (438) Nehru's own comment is sharp and ironical.

Hard words, unseemly for a drawing room,... We are polite, here and use more rounded phrases. We move warily and exhaust our energies in commissions and committees." (438) Prophetic words these for they seem to script the course that governments have taken in modern India.

Nehru refers to the India of his day as "a poor and dismal sight", particularly to the grinding poverty of the Indian peasant and quotes 10 lines from the American poet E. Markham, that highlight his woes. But he does not absolve Indians of all responsibility for their plight which he says, are the inevitable consequences of their own weaknesses.

Nehru is very caustic about the virtues imputed to the civil services.

> Hierophants of the sacred mysteries of government, they will guard the temple and prevent the vulgar from entering its holy precincts. Gradually, as we make ourselves worthy of the privilege, they will remove the veils, one after another till, in some future age, even the holy of holies stands uncovered to wondering and reverent eyes." (440)

He then questions the views of Major D. Graham Pole, formerly a Labour member of British Parliament, who talks of the indisputable ability and efficiency of the Indian Civil Service. The ICS consists of men, Nehru says, who are on the whole mediocre and who are out of tune with the spirit of changing times. He quotes the example of the crisis of the civil disobedience movement saying that they came out poorly of the crisis.

India's poverty, according to the ICS, Nehru says, is blamed on her social customs, their *banias* and moneylenders and above all her population. But he says, we ignore "the greatest *bania* of all-the British government". About over- population, he says, that the much advertised increase of population in India has been at a much lower rate than in the West and that as in the West limiting factors are likely to check population increase in India also.

At this stage in the argument Nehru with the prescience of a statesman looks forward to the time when India will be free and will need the services of many ICS men both Indian and foreign but he is categorical in saying that no new order can be built so long as the spirit of ICS pervades our administration.

Towards the end Nehru devotes some attention to the Defence Services and shows up the follies of generals and admirals quoting from Lloyd Genge's *War Memoirs.*

At the end Nehru repeats the question he asked in the fist sentence: "What has been the record of British rule in India?"

Since the whole chapter is written in a heightened tone, he resorts to rhetoric: "Who are we to complain of its deficiencies when they were but the consequences of our own failings?" And two sentences later: "Are we to complain of the cyclone that uproots us and hurts us about, or the cold wind that makes us shiver?" (449)

He ends the chapter with a appeal to forget the past and move forward to the future:

> Let us have done with the past and its bickering and face the future. To the British we must be grateful for one splendid gift of which they were the beares, the gift of science and its rich offspring. It is difficult, however, to forget or view with equanimity the efforts of the British Government in India to encourage the disruptive, obscurantist, reactionary, sectarian, and opportunist elements in the country. Perhaps that too is a needed test and challenge for us, and *before India is reborn it will have to go through again and again the fire that cleanses and tempers and burns up the weak, the impure and the corrupt."* (449)

Nehru is not over fond of using metaphors and images but the image of fire that burns and cleanses and tempers is singularly apt in the context in which he was writing. The image reminds us Indians of Sita's fire ordeal that tested her chastity but it could remind Westerners of the fire of purgatory. It is characteristic of Nehru to have used an image having implications across cultures.

4.4.6 Chapter LXVIII: *Epilogue* (595-97)

Nehru ends as he had begun with an epigraph. The initial epigraph from Abraham Cowley spoke of the difficulties of an autobiographer. The present epigraph from Talmud draws attention to the essential incompletness of human endeavor.

Nehru records that the immediate labour i.e. the autobiographical narrative has been completed but he is over 45 and so many more years of life have to be lived.

His mood is reminiscent. He tries to sum up how he has been a part of a great mass movement: "Sometimes we were fortunate enough to that fullness of life which comes from attempting to fit ideals with action." (595) Life, he says, has been an "adventure of absorbing interest" where there is so much to learn. But he would not have it any different.

In Chapter LXIV *Dehra Gaol Again* he tells how he came to write the narrative. (559). Here he speaks about the difficulties of writing:

> It is difficult to recapture a past mood, and it is not easy to forget subsequent happenings. Later ideas thus must inevitably have coloured my account of earlier days..." (596)

The tentativeness suggested here is welcome as it leaves the final evaluation to the reader.

The reference to Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar is somewhat intrusive in a summing up. Nehru dismisses him as a full-blooded apologist of British rule in India. But he says. he agrees with C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar that "he [Nehru] does not represent mass feeling."

Nehru takes this opportunity to say that he is a queer mixture of the East and West. "out of place everywhere, at home nowhere." (596) His thoughts and his approach are, he says, more Western but India clings to him in numerable ways. Nehru is also proud of racial memories of generations of Brahmans. "I cannot get rid of either that past inheritance or my recent acquisition."(596) As a result he feels a stranger and alien in the West but he also has "an exile's feeling in his own country". This is candour at its disarming best.

After expressing his ambivalent feelings, Nehru uses the metaphor of climbing mountains recalling Pope's words in *An Essay on Criticism.* He then says "the higher one goes the more laborious becomes the journey and the summit recedes into the clouds. *Yet the climbing is worth the effort and has its own joy and sati. 'ion.* (597)

So pleas'd at first he tow'ring Alps we try,
Mount over the vales, and see to head the sky,
Th'eternal snows appear already past,
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last;
But, those attained, we tremble to survey.
The growing labour of the lengthen'd way,
The increasing proof act tries our mandring eyes
Hills peep over hills, ad Alps on Alps arrive!

Here is a proof, if a proof, is needed,of India clinging to Nehru for the italized sentence echoes the teaching of Gita.

4.5 HOW THE *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* HAS BEEN RECEIVED

The book was generally well-received in England and even those who disagreed with the point of view of the author recognised its importance and quality. Friends like Ellen Wilkinson, Edward Thompson and H.N Brailsford "hailed it as a basic utterance of one of the few great men of the time." According to *The Economist* any understanding of the last fifteen years in India was incomplete without reading it. Sir Standley Reed considered it to be an exceptional book. According to Nehru's biographer S. Gopal, the book "despite being a long and serious book, became a bestseller and within weeks ran into many editions."

Nearer home Tagore praised it highly: "I have just finished reading your great book and I feel immensely impressed and proud of your achievement. Through all its details there runs a deep current of humanity which overpasses the tangles of facts and leads us to the person who is greater than his deed, and truer than his surroundings." Perhaps the best praise has come from John Gunther who wrote in his best selling book *Inside Asia* (1974): "Nehru's *Autobiography* is subtle, complex,

discriminating, infinitely cultivated, steeped in doubt, suffused with intellectual passion. It is a kind of Indian *Education of Herry Adams* written in superlative prose--hardly a dozen men alive write English as well as Nehru-and it is not only an autobiography of the most searching kind, but the story of a whole society, the story of the life and development of a nation."

4.6 LET US SUM UP

The sampling of six chapters from Nehru's *Autobiography* has I suppose, given you a fair idea of the prose style of the writer.

Nehru's style reflects a cultivated consciousness, it is the style of a man who has read enormously and has absorbed a great deal of what he had read. Evidence of this is widespread in the book in the form of quotations used as epigraphs to chapters and other references. And he writes as one to whom writing came easy. Walter Cocer an Australian diplomat and Nehru's contemporary compliments him on his English saying that Nehru at his best wrote better English than "most of us born to the language." And he was not alone in doing so.

Nehru is disarmingly candid about himself and he tries to be fair to his opponents and hardly ever loses his temper. The writing is urbane and controlled but he is unalterable opposed to the continuance of British imperialism in India. This passion to see India free colours the entire book.

The writing is not without humour, though the issue of India's freedom does not afford much scope for it and it is sometimes enlivened by an apt metaphor or a comparison.

4.7 GLOSSARY

Nehru, Motilal (1861-1931):	Lawyer, Congress nationalist leader.
Harrow:	A public school at Harrow-on-the-hill, Middlesex and traditional rival of Eton college. The founding of the school goes back to the days of Queen Elizabeth I.
Tripos:	The honours examination for the B.A degree at Cambridge University.
Gandhi, Mahatma (1869-1948):	Father of the Nation.
Shaukat Ali, Maulana (1873-1938):	Khilafat leader; along with his more famous brother M.Mohammad Ali (1878-1931) plunged into the non-coperation movement; later drifted away for the Congress and Gandhiji.
Inner Temple:	One of the two Inns of court on the site of the Temple in London.
Raza Ali, Sir Syed (1882-1949):	Was a khilafat leader; later joined the Muslim League, presiding over its Bombay session, December 1924.

Sing Sing prison:	a New York state prison built in 1825-26, formerly notorius for its severe discipline.
George d. Lloyd (1863-1945):	British Liberal statesman; Prime Minister of England 1916-26.
Talmud:	the body of Jewish civil and ceremoniel law and legend.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. "Jawaharlal Nehru wrote with self-scrutiny and self-criticism but no self-pity." Do you agree? Discuss with reference to the excerpts from Nehru's *Autobiography* prescribed for you.

2. Write your personal reaction to Nehru's *Autobiography.*

3. Make an assessment of Nehru's prose style in his *Autobiography.*

4.9 SUGGESTED READING

Primary text

Jawaharlal Nehru. *An Autobiography* New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial fund OUP, 1936; 1980; rpt. 1982.

All references to the *Autobiography* a to this edition and are indicated in the text of the study material by page numbers.

Secondary Material

C.D. Narasimhaiah. "Autobiographie : Jawaharlal Nehru and Nirad Chaudhuri," in *Essays in Commonwealth Literatu Heirloom of Multiple Heritage* Delhi: Pencraft, 1995 (p.46-70)

CROCKER, WALTER *NEHRU, a Contemporary's Estimate*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1966.

Walter Crocker was the High Commissioner for Australia in India for six and a half years between 1952 and 1962, when it was his job to watch Nehru 'day by day.' See chapter 3 entitled 'Nehru's Personal Background 'p.58-68.

Dikshit, Sheila. etal. *Jawaharlal Nehru Centenary Volume*. Delhi: OUP, 1989. [Please see "A Man of Letters' by K. Natwar-singh, p 430-35 and Rabindarnath Tagore's letter dated 31st May 1936 to Nehru on the *Autobiography.*]

Gopal, Sarvepalli. *Jawaharlal Nehru: a Biography* Volume One 1889-1947 Bombay: OUP, 1975.

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UNIT 5 NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*
5.3 *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*
5.4 Critical Opinion
5.5 Let Us Sum Up
5.6 Glossary
5.7 Questions
5.8 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will read selections from Nirad C. Chaudhuri's autobiography. We shall critically examine one long chapter from *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, the book which catapulted Chaudhuri to fame, and then two selections from its sequel, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, to acquaint ourselves with Chaudhuri's distinctive prose style and his beliefs. His opinions are controversial, and critical opinion about his achievement is divided. You should aim at evaluating this leading writer of non-fiction prose yourself.

5.1 INTRODUCTION



Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897-1998)

Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897-1998) was born on November 23 into a middle class family in Kishorganj, a small town in Mymensingh District of East Bengal. He was educated in Bengal, and took his B.A. (Hons.) degree from the University of Calcutta in 1918. He studied for an M.A. degree in history, but was unsuccessful in the examination. Even as a school child, he was fascinated by books and the intellectual life. The atmosphere at home was conducive to an appreciation of Western literature and music. He was very well read, and had learnt European languages like French. German and Latin. Lack of a master's degree ruled out the chances of teaching in a college, and he found it difficult to get suitable employment. For some time he tried free lance journalism. From 1937 to 1941 he worked as a secretary to Saratchandra Bose (Subhas Chandra's brother). Fed up with Bengali insularity, he left Calcutta to settle down in Delhi, and took up a government job there. He worked for All India Radio from 1941 to 1952. But he found that Delhi, too, was full of Philistines.

He was extremely fortunate in marriage. As Amita Malik puts it (*Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The First Hundred Years, A Celebration* p.58): "Nirad Chaudhuri would not have been what he is without the patience and unfailing support of his wife". Following tradition, he did not want to see the girl chosen by his father; as he tells us in the second volume of his autobiography, he himself was not a very impressive physical specimen, being short, thin and dark-skinned. They had three sons, and his wife Amiya supported his eccentric ways in their six decades of married life. He was always extravagant in his love for art objects, and acquired them even if they were beyond his means. He recounts how his wife had to settle the account by selling off the gold coins she had received as a marriage present when he bought some expensive Cashmere shawls on credit. Their financial situation did not improve even after moving to Delhi, because of Chaudhuri's penchant for buying rare wines and books from money which could be better spent on routine household expenses.

His first book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (discussed in Section 5.2, henceforth referred to as *Unknown Indian*) made him famous. He was denounced as an Anglophile, but his mastery of English was admired. *Unknown Indian* is actually not his first significant publication. "Defence of India or Nationalization of Indian Army", a seventy-three page essay, was published in 1935 by the All India Congress Committee, Allahabad. Naik has observed that "Two interesting features of this early essay are the total absence from it of both his notorious anglophilia and his Hindu-baiting. There is also not the slightest trace here of those preconceived theories and prejudices about Hindu character and culture which gradually hardened into obstinate dogmas as Chaudhuri grew older" (Naik, 1984, p.106).

In 1955 he went abroad for the first time in his life. The British Council arranged for him to visit England, where he spent five weeks at the invitation of the B.B.C. to prepare some talks for its Overseas Service. The newspaper articles he wrote about his visit grew into his second book, *A Passage to England*, a very readable travelogue. *A Passage to England* received good reviews in the English press. According to Khushwant Singh, "Three editions were rapidly sold out and it had the distinction of becoming the first book by an Indian author to have become a bestseller in England"(Dasgupta 31). He has preconceived concepts of England drawn from his reading of English literature, and he is acutely conscious of the fact that England is very different from India. His happiness at seeing "a great many things that I had longed to see since my boyhood" makes this the most enjoyable of his books.

In 1970 he moved to England, and started work on a biography of Max Müller. Just as he had never gone back to Kishorganj after 1927, he never came back to India, and settled down at the university town of Oxford. He was badly disappointed when he found that contemporary English society was very different from the picture he had built up from his reading of literature. He could never accept a society which produced hippies and glorified the Beatles, and this disenchantment is expressed in his last book, *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*. (The three "horsemen" are individualism, nationalism and democracy, which he holds responsible for the

decadence which has overtaken civilization). The University of Oxford honoured him with a D.Litt. in 1990. The Queen conferred the CBE on him. He was a Fellow of the Royal Literary Society. He died in July 1998.

Chaudhuri's third book, *The Continent of Circe : An Essay on the Peoples of India*(1966) provoked fierce controversy. He proposed the thesis that Hindus are actually a race alien to India and are arrivals from Europe. Modern Hindus are descended from the fair-haired, blue-eyed Aryans who inhabited the region between the Volga and the Danube. Circe was a sorceress in Greek mythology. Anyone who drank from her cup was turned into a pig, and this was the fate of the companions of Odysseus (Ulysses)in *The Odyssey*. India is a sorceress; due to the climatic conditions, people who make it their home, in the course of time, become dehumanized and turn into swine. *The Continent of Circe* reveals Chaudhuri's detestation of India at its pathological extreme; the influence of this "Circe" has made "insanity" and "inertia" the principal attributes of present day Hindus. He reveals a perfectly "Orientalist" attitude to India (in the sense in which Said uses the term). He glorifies ancient Vedic India, but finds nothing good in the present. His attempt to trace a European lineage for himself (and all Hindus) has been called "an instance of acute anglophilia" (Kaul, p.54). His later books of intellectual exposition, like *the Intellectual in India* (1967) and *To Live or Not to Live* (1970) are slightly more objective in their comments on India and Indians, though he consistently criticises the anglicized Indian. His essays have appeared in journals like *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and *London Magazine*. A collection, *East is East and West is West*, edited by his son, was published in 1996.

His biography of Clive, *Robert Clive of India*, is overwhelmingly favourable to this Nabob, who enriched himself through loot. Chaudhuri attempts to justify Clive's rapacity on the grounds that "The acceptance of gifts was not contrary to the regulations then in force" (*Clive*, pp.260-61). Scholar *Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller* (1974) is generally considered Chaudhuri's best book, and won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975.

5.2 *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN UNKNOWN INDIAN*

In *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, Chaudhuri says about his first book that, "In spite of its title, the book was not truly an autobiography. It was a picture of the society in which I was born and grew up." Chaudhuri is quite clear about his purpose in writing *Unknown Indian*:

> The story I want to tell is the story of the struggle of a civilization with a hostile environment, in which the destiny of the British Empire in India became necessarily involved. My main intention is thus historical, and since I have written the account with the utmost honesty and accuracy of which I am capable, the intention in my mind has become mingled with the hope that the book may be regarded as a contribution to contemporary history. (p.ix)

He states his target audience: "I have written this book with the conscious object of reaching the English-speaking world" (p.ix). Perhaps this intended readership is responsible for Chaudhuri always using similes from European art, literature and history. Both the preface and the prefatory note to the first section are in the style typical of the book: there are long, involved sentences, and a liberal sprinkling of words from European languages. There are many situations where only the French or Latin quotation would do. But Chaudhuri seems to use foreign phrases even if English equivalents exist. The common reader may not be fully conversant with these phrases, and pausing to find out the meaning provides a needless break in the reading experience. Here are two sentences from the second paragraph of *Unknown Indian*:

> "These recollections of mine are in no sense *des memoires d'outre-tombe*. If anyone so chooses he may call them *memoires d'outre-Manche* in a figurative sense, in the sense that, retreating before the *panzers* of the enemy who has seized my past life, I have decided to put between him and me, between apparent defeat and acceptance of defeat, a narrow but uncrossable strip of salt water. (ix)

Chaudhuri declares that his autobiography is not to be treated as "*des memoires d'outre-tombe*" (an account from beyond the grave). He says that readers may call them "*memoires d'outre-Manche*", that is, an account from the other side of the sea (the English Channel, the arm of the sea separating England and France, is called La Manche in French). Chaudhuri's metaphors are always from the West; he refers to the German panzers,(literally "armour", the elite armoured corps of the German army, a truly fearsome fighting force in the Second World War). He assumes that his reader should be as erudite as he is, and never provides a translation. There is a tendency in Chaudhuri's prose for the main point to get lost in a haze of verbiage.

The dedication has been widely denounced, and Chaudhuri has been condemned as unpatriotic. We should pay more attention to the aptness and the style of the dedication, and consider how it expresses Chaudhuri's sensibility, before discussing Chaudhuri's political stance. The dedication is natural, even inevitable, considering Chaudhuri's warm feelings towards the British Empire. It also reveals Chaudhuri's egoism -- he assumes that everyone has the same admiration for the Empire, for he declares "Everyone of us threw out the challenge". It never strikes him that many Indians did not want to be British, they preferred independence to citizenship. The vast majority would not say, "Civic Britannicus Sum" (I am a British citizen). But a careful reading shows that the first part of the dedication does not shower praise on the British without reservations, Chaudhuri hints at British discrimination, when he mentions subjecthood without citizenship, implying that Indians were subjects to be ruled (and perhaps exploited), but did not have the privileges and rights of a citizen.

Unknown Indian is in four books. Book I, "Early Environment" (pp. 1-130) is devoted to the background, describing Kishorganj, his ancestral village, and his mother's village, and Bengali society at the end of the nineteenth century. Book II, "First Twelve Years", describes his birth and early life, while Book III, "Education", covers the years he spent at high school and college in Calcutta. He did well in his B.A. examinations, with a first class, and was placed first in order of merit. But his reading for his M.A. examination was encyclopaedic and over ambitious. As he candidly admits, he "disliked and even despised examinations when they were not an immediate reality" (p.367). As a result, he dropped out after sitting for three papers, and the third book of *Unknown Indian* ends with his failure in the academic field. But he became a self-taught scholar. All the people who knew him vouch for his encyclopaedic knowledge, and his biography of Max Müller brings out his best qualities as a scholar. Though he did not get his M.A. from Calcutta University, Oxford University honoured him with a D.Litt. degree.

Book IV, "Into the World" is an essay on life in Bengal in the nineteen-twenties, rather than an account of Chaudhuri's life after he left college. Like some of his later books like *the Continent of Circe*, it reveals more about Chaudhuri's mindset than about the topic discussed, because Chaudhuri chooses only the facts which support his argument, neglecting large chunks of history. The concluding chapter, "An Essay on the Course of Indian History" is full of easy generalizations; he believes that "Civilizations in the successive historical cycles in India are foreign importations" (p.489). Each of the four books has a prefatory note, in which Chaudhuri airs his views about matters contained in the book.

Chaudhuri is always very conscious of the fact that his knowledge of English and England is secondhand, yet he persists in describing things only in English metaphors. Chapter I begins:

> Kishorganj, my birthplace, I have called a country town, but this description, I am afraid, will call up wholly wrong associations. The place had nothing of the English country town about it, if I am to judge by the illustrations I have seen and the descriptions I have read, these being my only source of knowledge about England, since I have never been there, nor in fact anywhere outside my own country. (p.1)

This acceptance of England and things English as the norm for judging India is, no doubt, the effect of colonization. That all writers of Chaudhuri's generation need not accept England as the standard is shown by the opening chapter of the novel *Kanthapura* (published in 1938, long before Chaudhuri's book) by Raja Rao (b.1908). Rao begins his wonderfully evocative description of the village without any reference to English villages:

> Our village -- I don't think you have ever heard about it -- Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara.
> High on the ghats is it, high up in the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane. . . *(Kanthapura).*

The passage from *Unknown Indian* continues:

> Kishorganj was only a normal specimen of its class -- one among a score of collections of tin-and-mat huts or sheds, comprising courts, offices, schools, shops and residential dwellings, which British administration had raised up in the green and brown spaces of East Bengal (p.1).

One notices immediately that Chaudhuri's tone is quite detached -- there is no sense of closeness to his native village. The tone throughout tends to denigrate the village, it is one "among a score", and he is dismissive of all the buildings, whether "residential dwellings" or offices, schools or courts. From a height of five hundred feet, the buildings would have looked like "a patch of white and brown mushrooms." The comparison with "mushrooms" has pejorative implications, with the suggestions of unplanned, untidy, short-lived growth. There is no attempt to individualise the buildings; surely, the court would not have been a hut or a shed, it would have had a permanent brick building.

Chaudhuri's diction seems to be based on bureaucratic jargon, with endless reservations and qualifications. There is no poetic licence whatsoever. Instead of saying that the small town would have looked like a patch of mushrooms when seen from a height, or when seen from an aeroplane, he writes, "Had there been aeroplanes in our boyhood", as if he were giving evidence in a court of law. Metaphors are always from the West; to express the importance of the river in their lifer, Chaudhuri writes, "it was our Nile" (p.2). In referring to the boats which plied on the river, he does not care to describe them in detail, instead he institutes comparisons which are meaningless to the common reader, especially in India: the "country boats" have "the outlines and general shape of the model boats found in the tombs of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt" (p.4). The largest boats, used for passengers, "were our triremes" (p.5).

He is at his best when he gives us concrete particulars, as in his description of the rainy season (pp.5-8). Chaudhuri evokes this watery world through minute details -- their compound was so flooded that they "could not walk from the hut which was our bed-and living- room to the hut which was our kitchen except on a line of bricks laid at intervals of about two feet or on a gangway made of bamboos" (p.6). The reader

can visualise the child in the inner courtyard, fascinated by the "myriads of tiny watery marionettes" which were created by a heavy downpour (p.7). The destructive aspect of the heavy monsoon rain is revealed by the "pair of pied mynas, dead and stiff"(p.7).Chaudhuri is capable of using short, simple, balanced sentences:

> Everything was wet to the marrow of the bone. Neither we nor our clothes were ever properly dry. When we were not slushy we were damp. The bark of the trees became so sodden that it seemed we could tear it up in handfuls like moss. (p.6)

Chaudhuri's style is usually prolix -- he does not believe in using the minimum number of words. He uses many connecting phrases to link different paragraphs. An example is the beginning of the second paragraph: "I shall presently have something to say of the moral quality of our urban existence. But, to begin with, let me give some idea of its physical aspect" (p.1) The tone is somewhat formal, as in a document where a table of contents precedes the matter. C.D.Narasimhaiah labels his writing "inane", and declares: "Now like an Accountant's English, now like a District Surveyor's report or a village chronicler's, now like that of an ossified academic, seldom what one has associated with an imaginative writer" (Narasimhaiah, 1990,p.92). He gives many examples from the book:

> I summarize below the results . . (p.36)
>
> It is this house which I am going to describe now" (p.20)
>
> There was a story behind its building and it is this." (p.22)

The description of Durga Puja at Banagram, **(the next excerpt in your Reader)**, is one of the better passages in *Unknown Indian*. It is rich in adjectives. The gory scene of the buffalo sacrificed before the goddess becomes more vivid in its horror because of the details he gives us : "My relatives fell on it, rubbing its neck with melted butter so as to make the skin soft" (p.67). The changing moods are well captured. This bloody sacrifice is followed by chanting prayers to the Goddess.

One interesting feature Chaudhuri mentions about Durga Puja is that it is the occasion for married daughters to visit their parental home. He is aware of the bond between mother and daughter, and the loneliness of the mother after the girl is given away in marriage. To indicate the mother's emotions, he cite a parallel from French literature: "She kept thinking of her girl with an infatuation rivalling, if not surpassing, that of Madame de Sevigne for her cold and shrewish daughter" (p.70). The allusion reveals Chaudhuri's wide reading, but does very little to describe this tender bond in a culture where it was not permissible for the mother to visit or stay with her married daughter in her new home. After the festivities end, the married daughters have to go back to their husbands' homes. Chaudhuri has little sympathy for the ritual crying that goes on. This is how he describes it:

> Not only the mother and the daughter, not only the other women and girls of the family, but also all the visiting neighbours joined in a chorus of snuffling. The tradition was so well established that the newly-married girl, whose only thought was to get back to her husband-lover, and the matron, who felt ever so worried to have been away from her well-ordered household, kept up the wiping of the eyes until they were at least five miles beyond the parental village.(p.70)

There is a welcome touch of humour in Chaudhuri's account of the women pretending to weep; the young girl who wants to go back to her husband has to pretend to weep. because it prejudiced her reputation "if she remained dry-eyed on these occasions." The use of the word "snuffling" indicates that Chaudhuri has no sympathy for these hypocritical women.

"The English Scene" (the next excerpt in your reader) is a chapter from the second book of *Unknown Indian*, "First Twelve Years". He describes how he came to love the English language and English literature so much, and has some perceptive comments on teaching. He tells us that he read his elder brother's books, because they were taught English poetry and good stories, while students in his batch were forced to repeat "The fox sat on the mat" on the theory that textbooks should be Indianized (p.116). He is quite successful in conveying the enthusiasm that people in Bengal felt for western civilization. The concluding part of the chapter is typical of Chaudhuri's subsequent works. He criticizes Indians for suffering from a colour complex, giving anecdotal evidence from his immediate family. His style is clear and unambiguous when he is castigating Indians:

> When not thinking of the foreign conquerors and taking up a self-pitying attitude in consequence, a Hindu is unsurpassed in his exaltation of colour and proneness to make a fetish of it. This comes out most blatantly in connection with marriages. (p.126)

The fourth book, "Into the World" is in the same vein; it is a comment on Bengali society. We have to turn to the second volume of his autobiography, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* to learn about Chaudhuri's life after 1920.

5.3 *THY HAND, GREAT ANARCH*

"This book continues the story of my life and thoughts from the point of time at which it was left in *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian,*" writes Nirad C. Chaudhuri in the opening sentence of *Thy Hand*. The earlier book gave an account of his childhood and student days till 1921. This one takes the account till 1952. Many autobiographies bring the account up to date, but this, written in 1987, falls short by 35 years. There were major changes in Chaudhuri's life after that. After retirement from government service, he made a living by his writing. He visited England, and wrote a bestseller about his experiences, *A Passage to England*. In his seventies, he left India and settled down at Oxford. Chaudhuri started writing *Thy Hand Great Anarch* in 1979, when he was eighty-one years old, and took six years to complete it. He has not provided us with a sequel to it, so there is no autobiographical account of the last forty-seven years of his life, of which 27 were spent in England.

He says that he has made a conscious effort to "write the book on the same lines and in the same spirit as its predecessor." He is quite successful in this -- there is absolutely no difference in style or tone between the two volumes. The same self-satisfied stance of wisdom, the complete lack of modesty, can be found in the second book. In *Unknown Indian* he boasts about his "capacity for experiencing the emotion of scholarship":

> My appetite for information and explanation became as varied as my mental dentition became versatile. I could pass from physics to Sanskrit literature or from novels to astronomy with an agility which seemed like volatility to those who did not know me well. (*Unknown Indian*, p.343)

In *Thy Hand*, he talks about his wife, and how fortunate she is in having married such an eminent person:

> Even for my wife, I would say, it has been worthwhile, although I could, without unfairness, be accused of showing no consideration for the inevitable trials I was going to inflict on a young girl who had been brought up in affluence. But she is now the wife of Nirad Chaudhuri, instead of being the

> nameless wife of a nameless official or professional, rotting in the low prosperity of a suburban house near Calcutta. (*Thy Hand*, p.343)

Unknown Indian was very much concerned with the British empire and its civilizing mission in India. This book, which records the decline and end of British rule in India, takes its title from lines by Alexander Pope which describe the reign of chaos and disorder. The title page of the book bears the complete quotation from Alexander Pope's poem *The Dunciad*, Book 3:

> Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos! is restor'd;
> Light dies before thy uncreated word;
> Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
> And universal Darkness buries All!

The epigraph is in keeping with the tone of the book. When Britain withdrew from India, Chaudhuri felt an almost personal sense of loss. *Thy Hand! Great Anarch* is almost a thousand pages long, and covers the years from 1921 to 1952. It has ten chapters, with a long epilogue:

Introduction "Apologia pro Biographia sua"

Books I Livelihood and Politics 1921-1922.

Book II Towards a Vocation 1922-1925.

Book III The Scholar Gypsy 1926-1928

Part IV The Gandhian Rebellion 1927-1932

Part V Into Married Life 1932-1937.

Part VI Experience of Politics 1937-1939.

Part VII Indian Enjoys the War 1939-1941

Part VIII Migration to Delhi 1942-1945

Book IX Victor-Victim 1945-1947

Book X Crossing the Bar 1947-1952.

Epilogue Credo ut Intelligam

Chaudhuri intersperses the narration of his personal life with a highly subjective version of the historical events of the period. He takes free swipes at many figures of the freedom struggle, none of whom are alive to rebut him. According to him, . Gandhiji exuded benignity, but "his demands for money were made in the unabashed manner of all Hindu holy men". Chaudhuri holds Nehru responsible for the failure of the Cripps mission, feels that Subhas Chandra Bose (whom all Bengalis venerate as *Netaji*, "the leader") was unmethodical, inefficient and suspicious, and considers Sarojini Naidu "a victim of monumental egoism". The style, as usual, is almost Victorian, with long involuted sentences. His wide reading and scholarship (some might call it pedantry) are quite evident, and his use of quotations in French, Latin etc. seems to have increased. The first volume has a dedication in English with one Latin phrase; *Thy Hand* has three epigraphs, of which only the one pertaining to the title is in English. As in the earlier volume, there are occasional flashes of wit. He says that his father-in-law overlooked the fact that he was not rich, and said that "he was considering only the young man, and not his money. That attitude has

unfortunately disappeared, and nowadays all fathers boast about marrying their daughters to salaries, and not to men" (p.346).

"The Gandhian Congress" (the first excerpt in your Reader)is from Chapter 2 of Book VI, "1937-1939", while "My Credo" forms the concluding lines of *Thy Hand*. Both are representative examples of Chaudhuri's prose style, with long sentences. To illustrate his arguments, Chaudhuri uses erudite comparisons or anecdotes. Consider his account of the difficulties they encountered in getting vegetables of his choice fcr Mahatma Gandhi. Chaudhuri compares his host Sarat Chandra Bose's nephew with an obscure figure from French history:

> He wanted to rise to the occasion, and if he had failed to procure all the vegetables regularly, I am sure he would have killed himself like Vatel, the major domo of the Great Condé, who threw himself on his sword because, when M le Prince was receiving Louis XIV at Chantilly, he found that only two carts of sea fish had arrived instead of the forty he had ordered. (p.435)

This comparison may not work well because most readers would not know this incident in the life of the French king. Similes from common life are much more effective. Describing the men who surrounded Gandhiji, he compares these people who "acquire secondary, derivative power" to a vine. Chaudhuri gives us the common, as well as the scientific Latinized name, of the plant:
They climb upwards by twining themselves round the tree of power as I have seen the Russian Vine (*polygonum baldschuanum* or Mile-a-Minute) doing on the trees they can get to. (p.439)

But in many cases the abstruseness of the comparison completely invalidates it. Consider the image that springs to Chaudhuri's mind when he wants to convey "the extraordinary innocence and benignity" and the "beatific unworldly look" of Mahatma Gandhi. He writes, "On the animal plane . . . Gandhi suggested the primitive primate tarsier to me" (p.439). How many readers would have heard of a tarsier, leave alone being familiar with its appearance?

Thy Hand, Great Anarch combines autobiography with history, politics and social commentary. The Epilogue, "Credu ut Intelligam" (I believe in order to understand) is full of quotations from European authorities. In its long and difficult words, it is typical of Chaudhuri's philosophical essays. (His last book, *The Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*, is in the same style, and develops further the pessimistic view he takes of the world). The "Credo" is liberally sprinkled with French and Latin quotations. Chaudhuri admires Pascal, the French writer and theologian. The passage beginning "Quelle chimère est-ce . . ." expresses the same ideas as Shakespeare's "What a piece of work is man!" Pascal exclaims, "What an ephemeral thing is this creature called man". He is a study in contradictions; he is a judge of all things, yet has the vision of an earth worm, he is a repository of truth cloaked in error, the glory and the garbage of the universe.

Chaudhuri is not happy with the way Christian morality rejected the natural urges in man. After quoting from the *New Testament*, he adds the comments of Pascal, who is overcome by this vision of a world dominated by lust, "Unfortunate the accursed earth that is burnt rather than watered by these three rivers of fire." In the same paragraph, he discusses Latin, Greek and French versions of these three "rivers of fire": "the concupiscence of the body, the concupiscence of the eye, the concupiscence of the world". Chaudhuri's reading of English literature is also obvious; he refers to Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and quotes the lines "The world's great age begins anew . . ." from Shelley's poem *Hellas*.

Chaudhuri has always been inimical to the technological society, and it is not surprisingly that he condemns Americans for their technological advancement. Filled with overbearing pride, they forget that the laws of nature are supreme. Chaudhuri

expresses this in a witty manner: "they are so powerless against nature that even though they can send a rocket past Neptune by obeying it, they cannot prevent it from wrecking their homes through hurricanes." He says that Americans are the best *Homo faber* "manufacturing man" and the worst *Homo sapiens* "thinking man". He ends with lines from a French poem recognizing the duality of man's existence. People must have faith. The last line, "Peuples de la terre, chantez" means, "Peoples of the earth, sing!" Chaudhuri claims that he is doing just that, having faith in a higher dispensation and continuing with his creative work.

5.4 CRITICAL OPINION

Nirad C.Chaudhuri has provoked an emotional reaction, whether it is to the books or the person. Controversy has surrounded him, and there is no unanimity about the valuation of his work. Swapan Dasgupta's *Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The First Hundred Years: A Celebration* (see **Reading List** below) presents fascinating pictures of Chaudhuri's personality, as seen by eminent writers and critics like Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Khushwant Singh and Keki N. Daruwalla. They comment on his English and Bengali writings, in addition to describing the man.

Among all the critics, it is C.D.Narasimhaiah who has the poorest opinion of Chaudhuri's autobiography. He finds absolutely nothing praiseworthy in it. He has compared Nehru's autobiography with Chaudhuri's, and believes that they demonstrate "two kinds of Indian writing: one pulsating with human warmth, the other abstract, ponderous and dully academic; one meant for Indians, another for an English-speaking world abroad" (Narasimhaiah, 1995, p.64). According to him, "Chaudhuri's writing betrays an immaturity that one would not normally associate with a person of his age" (p.65). Illustrating with quotations from *Unknown Indian*, he condemns the "attitudinizing" and "looseness of thinking" of the book, and says that Chaudhuri "misses no chance to magnify things that have any relation to him whether it is the house he lived in, his mode of living, the fairs he visited, the festivals he celebrated, the books and paintings he owned and admired and the tastes he cultivated. Snobbery is writ large on every page" (p.67). Narasimhaiah challenges Chaudhuri's admirers "to produce from the autobiography any well-remembered chapter, section, or even a few pages of continuous writing which can be called distinguished prose" p.68). He points out that none of the people described are memorable, "They are not individualized, or they have nothing of interest to other human beings" (69). However, C.D.Narasimhaiah praises Chaudhuri's later work, "Mr Chaudhuri has made ample amends for his poor and irresponsible writing by contributing an excellent work of scholarship in his recent book on Max Müller. *Scholar Extraordinary*" (p.70).

Scholar Extraordinary seems to be the one book which has won the approval of almost all the critics. Nissim Ezekiel gave it a very favourable review, saying:

> His book is certainly a full and detailed portrait of the subject along with its social and cultural background. I cannot imagine any criticism, however valid, of specific insights or even of the treatment in general undermining the worth of this biography as a whole. Chaudhuri's admiration for Müller, which he declares without reservations, leads him to defend Müller against all detractors. But he defends persuasively, and always with a fair statement of their position. This means that at times one may disagree with Chaudhuri and still not feel that he is unduly partisan. (*Selected Prose*, p.154)

The most common charge against Chaudhuri is that he is partisan; he has already made up his mind which side he is on, and does not present alternative view points. But this is not true in the case of his biography of Max Müller. Perhaps because he

found the topic so appealing, or maybe the congenial environment of Oxford university where he wrote it, make this the most scholarly and least polemical of his works.

However, *Scholar Extraordinary* contains a few wild generalizations, and a "number of statements about Victorian love and sex which are very unsatisfactory, besides contradicting one another" (Ezekiel, pp.156-57). Ezekiel quote three of these statements, and comments:

> I suspect that it is not Chaudhuri the scholar who wrote these reckless sentences but the other Chaudhuri, the man of tall prejudices, whose self-pitying moralism taints so much of his intellectual output. I must add that this other Chaudhuri is not conspicuous in the biography of Müller. (p.157)

Sudesh Mishra has written in detail about this interesting aspect of Chaudhuri's writing, that there are two Chaudhuris, "Historical Witness and Pseudo-Historian". "The former Chaudhuri operates largely as a chronicler recording incidents and events to which he has borne personal witness" (p.8). The second Chaudhuri "evaluates history biologically, psycho-culturally, racially, philosophically and idiosyncratically by postulating his personal dilemmas as representative of the Indian people's collective predicament, and in particular of the Hindus" (pp.7-8). His neutral approach is evident in his descriptions of Kishorganj (*Unknown Indian* pp.27-28), or the account of his mother's village (pp.93-95), while the pseudo-historian's approach is evident in his comments about the debilitating effects of the Indian terrain and climate (p.57, p.514). This thesis is developed fully in *The Continent of Circe*, which shows his weakness as a historian. He tries to bend facts to suit his theory, and has no qualms about leaving out any facts that do not fit his theory -- the Indus Valley civilization and the Dravidian culture of South India are completely ignored.

C. Paul Verghese expresses the views of a majority of critics when he writes, "The main weakness of *The Continent of Circe* stems from the fact that the pseudo-sociologist in Chaudhuri conceived a theory about the Hindus and the aboriginals of India and the historian in him started looking for facts and when he did not find them, he depended on pseudo-history" (Verghese, 1973, p.115). Verghese finds something likeable in Chaudhuri's quality of holding convictions whole-heartedly, and feels that in later works like *To Live or Not to Live* Chaudhuri "is sharing with us his mature wisdom and knowledge of life." He concludes that self-contradiction is Chaudhuri's chief characteristic: "for Chaudhuri is an Indian who is anti-Indian, an Anglicized Hindu who is critical of other Anglicized Hindus, an Indian writer in English who sees no virtue in Indian novels in English, a historian who believes in objectivity, but leans heavily on subjective dogmas, a radical non-conformist who supports the caste system, and cow worship, . . ." (116).

5.5 LET US SUM UP

Chaudhuri was intellectually active till the very end, and very proud of this fact. As he writes in the preface to *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*, his last book:

> The very first thing I have to tell those who will be reading this book is that it is being written by a man in his ninety-ninth year. I have never read or heard of any author, however great or productive in his heyday, doing that.

He goes on to declare:

> I have never allowed my likes or dislikes, my predilections and prepossessions to influence my presentation of subjects. I have, so to speak, tried to keep the lens of my mind free from chromatic aberrations.

He thinks of himself as a "medium or amanuensis for the self-revelation of the subjects I deal with. . . . Yet whatever my own view of my vocation, readers in India have always attributed dogmatism, eccentricity and even arrogance to me."
It is true that Indian critics have always accused him of being dogmatic, and a confirmed lover of the Empire. But his actual experience of Britain disappointed him. Krishna Bose, daughter of Chaudhuri's brother, knew him quite well. (She refers to him as "Mejo Kaka" with love and respect.) She presents a fair evaluation of her uncle's reaction to Britain:

> Mejokaka had admired an imaginary Great Britain from afar and was bitterly disappointed on actually experiencing life in Britain since the 1870's. He then began to suffer from the illusion that the Britain of his dream must have existed at some time in the past. He lives mentally in Jane Austen's age. Hence his eccentricities, such as dressing up in period costume, which embarrasses his relatives and is considered bizarre by the contemporary British. He would doubtless have been happier to celebrate his hundredth birthday in the year of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign than on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence. (*The First Hundred Years*, p.12)

Nirad C. Chaudhuri is one of the few Indian English writers who have used the language for non-fictional purposes alone -- earlier writers like Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru have been orators, who made speeches because they were social reformers and statesmen; later writers like Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh have written fiction and poetry. Almost all of his ten books have received critical attention and sometimes substantial praise. His biography of Max Müller won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and has become the standard work. *The Continent of Circe* won the Duff Cooper literary award. His life of Robert Clive is quite provocative. We may not agree with his basic philosophy of preferring a dead empire to the lively chaos of modern India, but his books cannot be ignored by any serious student of Indian culture and literature.

5.6 GLOSSARY

Anglophilia: a craze or indiscriminate admiration for everything English.

Insularity: Literally, the quality of belonging to an island. Narrow- mindedness, prejudice, wishing to cut oneself off from the wider world.

Orientalism: According to Said, the Western image of the Orient has been constructed by generations of writers and scholars who have based it on texts, not first hand experience. They ignore the changing reality, and present an essentialist image of the orient which makes it a fit subject for imperial domination. The exotic aspect is stressed, and the orient is projected as the "Other". Scholarship becomes a means for legitimizing colonial control.

Panzer: Literally "armour". The Panzers were the armoured corps of the German army, a great fighting force in the Second World War.

Philistines: A person with a materialistic outlook who does not care for culture.

Ponderous: Heavy, unwieldy, solemnly laboured and slow moving.

Said: Edward Said (b.1935), author of *Orientalism* (1978) is considered the founder of post-colonial literary theory. A Christian Palestinian brought up in Egypt and U.S.A., Said studied history and English at Princeton and Harvard, and completed a doctorate on Conrad. His work reveals the influence of the Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and the French post-structuralist Michel Foucalt (1926-1984).

Trireme: An ancient galley with three rows of rowers. A galley was a small ship, having both sails and oars. They would usually have a large number of criminals or slaves to man the oars.

5.8 QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the view hat Nirad C. Chaudhuri is the greatest writer of non-fictional prose in modern India?
2. How far are Chaudhuri's autobiographical works a contribution to contemporary history?
3. Do you agree with the view that there are two Chaudhuris, a historical witness and a pseudo-historian? Give reasons.
4. "*The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* is one of the most remarkable examples of its genre in Indian English literature" (M.K.Naik). Discuss.
5. Write a note on Nirad C. Chaudhuri's credo. Does it reveal him as an anglophile?
6. "Chaudhuri's books cannot be ignored by any serious student of Indian culture and literature." Comment.
7. Compare and contrast the autobiographies of Nehru and Chaudhuri.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

There are two parts to this reading list; the first part lists works by Chaudhuri. You must make a close study of the works marked with a double asterisk (**), so it is a good idea to have a personal copy of *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, it is

available in paperback. Read some of his other works also, especially those marked by an asterisk (*). The second part contains secondary material, i.e. books and articles about Chaudhuri and his works.

Part 1: Books by Nirad C. Chaudhuri

*A Passage to England. London: Macmillan, 1959.

Clive of India. London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1975.

Hinduism: A Religion to Live By. London: Chatto & Windus,1979.

**Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974.

***The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian.*(1951). Bombay: Jaico, 1969.

The Continent of Circe. London: Chatto & Windus, 1966.

The East is East and West is West ed. Druva N. Chaudhuri. Calcutta: Mitra and Ghosh Publishers, 1996.

The Intellectual in India. New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1967.

Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

***Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India:1921-1952.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1987.

To Live or Not to Live. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1970.

Part 2: Books and Articles on Chaudhuri

Books:

Dasgupta, Swapan. Ed.*Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The First Hundred Years: A Celebration.* New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1997.

Karnani, Chetan: *Nirad C. Chaudhuri.* Boston: Twayne Publishers,1980.

Kaul, R.K. *Nirad C.Chaudhuri: The Renaissance Man.* Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1998.

Naik, M.K. Ed. *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English.* New Delhi: Abhinav, 1982.

Naikar, Basavaraj S. *Critical Articles on Nirad C. Chaudhuri.* Dharwad: Shivaranjani Publications, 1985.

Philip, David Scott. *Perceiving India through the Works of Nirad C. Chaudhuri, R.K.Narayan and Ved Mehta.* New Delhi: Sterling, 1986.

Sinha, Tara. *Nirad C. Chaudhuri: a Sociological and Stylistic Study of His Writings During the Period 1951-1972.* Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1981.

Verghese, C. Paul. *Nirad C. Chaudhuri.* New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann India, 1973.

Articles:

Ezekiel, Nissim. "*Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller*". *Selected Prose* ed. Adil Jussawalla. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992. pp.154-58.

Mishra, Sudesh. "The Two Chaudhuris: Historical Witness and Pseudo-Historian" *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XXIII:1 (1988) pp.7-15.

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UNIT 6 VIKRAM SETH AND AMITAV GHOSH

Structure

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall acquaint ourselves with the non-fictional prose written by two members of the post-Independence generation of Indian writers, Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh, who are better know for their fiction. We shall critically examine their travelogues: Seth's *From Heaven lake* and Ghosh's *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma,* by critically analysing excerpts from both these texts.

6.1 VIKRAM SETH : INTRODUCTION



Vikram Seth (1952-)

Vikram Seth (b.1952) was born in Calcutta, and educated in Dehra Dun. He got admission in St Stephen's College, Delhi, in Mathematics (Honours) course, but did not join. He won a scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Oxford University, and graduated in 1975 with honours in philosophy, politics and economics. He went to Stanford University, U.S.A. in 1977. He obtained his Master's degree in economics, and started work on a doctoral dissertation, "Seven Chinese Villages: An Economic and demographic Portrait." He spent two years in China doing research at Nanjing University. *From Heaven Lake* is based on his experience when he travelled to India overland, through Sinkiang, Tibet and Nepal.

His first book, *Mappings,* published by Writers Workshop, Calcutta, in 1982, contained poems written in English along with a few translations of Indian poets. His second book, *From Heaven Lake* (1983), which won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award, attracted a wider readership. His second book of poetry, *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985) won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for Asia in

1985, and the Alice Hunt Bartlett Award for Poetry. *The Golden Gate* (1986) won him international fame: this novel written in sonnets is a *tour de force*, even the acknowledgements and dedication are in the form of sonnets. It won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, the Sahitya Akademi Award, and the American "Book of the Month Club" New Voices Award. *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), his third collection of poems, won critical acclaim. *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1991) contains simple narrative poems with regular metre and rhyme. Seth retells animal fables from India, China, Greece, and Ukraine, and "directly from the land of Gup". He has also published a book of translations, *Three Chinese Poets* (1992).

His first conventional novel, *A Suitable Boy* (1993), became famous even before publication for receiving a very large advance from its publisher. Critical opinion was divided -- it won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1994, but the Booker Prize jury savagely condemned it. It presents a panoramic view of life in a north Indian town in the years just after independence. It has been condemned as lacking in depth, but no one can find fault with his vivid recreation of the social life of the time. The central story -- of Lata, a young girl who falls in love with a boy who is not suitable because he is a Muslim -- is only one of the many strands in the novel which is 1349 pages long. It is very readable, and is being made into a 500 part television serial, in English and Hindi.

His latest novel, *An Equal Music*, is much more like *The Golden Gate*, which was a romance set in California. *An Equal Music* is set entirely in the West, and there is no Indian element whatsoever. Life in modern London is recreated in loving detail, with some scenes set in Vienna and Venice. The narrator is a violinist in a string quartet, and the novel centres around Michael's love for Julia, a fellow music student, whom he has loved and lost. The descriptions of western classic music, full of technical words, make the novel slow reading for the uninitiated. The style is slow and convoluted, very different from the simple linear narrative of *A Suitable Boy*.

6.2 *FROM HEAVEN LAKE*

Vikram Seth lived in China as a student at Nanjing University from 1980 to 1982. In the summer of 1981 he returned home to Delhi via Tibet and Nepal. *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* is based on the journal he kept and the photographs he took while he was on the road. As he tells us in the "Introduction":

> The land route -- for this was a hitch-hiking journey -- from the oases of northwest China to the Himalayas crosses four Chinese provinces: Xinjiang (Sinkiang) and Gansu in the northwestern desert; then the basin and plateau of Qinghai; and finally Tibet.

The short book is divided into nineteen chapters, dealing with different stages of his journey, starting with "Turfan" (Chapter 1) and "Heaven Lake" (Chapter 2) and ending with "Kathmandu; Delhi" (Chapter 19). Seth provides a map of China, Nepal and a part of India, showing the route he took. The book contains about twenty black and white photographs, of the various scenes he describes -- Heaven Lake, the small town of Turfan and its people, a mosque at Lian, Lhasa, the Bhotakoshi river in Nepal, yaks, a dust storm, trucks stranded on a flooded plain. The second edition of the book, published in 1990, contains a foreword giving Seth's reaction to the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989, when the Chinese Army opened fire on hundreds of students who were demonstrating peacefully. He is filled with regret at China's increasing repression in Tibet. He makes it clear that *From Heaven Lake* was not intended as a political commentary. I quote the opening lines of the "Foreword to the 1990 Edition":

> This book is an account of what I saw, thought and felt as I travelled through various parts of the People's republic of China as a student. It is not intended as a summary of the political or economic situation of that country, although I did occasionally digress into such ruminations in the course of writing the book.

The book is basically a travelogue, describing his journey. Comments on the people and the Chinese political system are incidental.

Seth starts his account from Turfan, a small town in the province of Xinjiang which has a common border with U.S.S.R. A three-week tour has been organised by Nanjing University for its foreign students. Being part of an organized tour has advantages --the authorities have taken care of transport, accommodation, guides etc. But he feels stifled by the restrictions – in group travel, they have to follow a strict time schedule "rushing from sight to sight, savouring nothing" (p.5). He decides to leave the group in Urumquai, their next stop, even though he is aware of the restrictions on travel in China -- a travel pass is needed for every place, and the Chinese authorities do not want foreign students wandering away from a group. In all the places, it is the human interaction which is important. The second chapter, "Heaven lake" is memorable not for the wonderful description of the lake, but for the old man from whom he buys a cap. The people of Xinjiang are an ethnic minority, Muslim by religion, with their own language, Uighur, and it is only the schoolgoing boy who understands Seth when he talks to them in Chinese. Seth wants to communicate with the old man who is selling caps, so he lets them know that he is from India by writing the word "Hindustan" in Urdu (which has the same Arabic script as Uighur). The old man is touched. He not only reduces the price of the cap for the Indian, he even stitches it again to strengthen it (pp27-28).

Seth found his way across central China by travelling in a variety of vehicles. The excerpts in your Reader are from the middle of the book, Chapter 10 and Chapter 11, describes brief oldest part of his journey and the harsh weather conditions he had to face when crossing into northern Tibet. August 14th, the eve of India's Independence Day, finds him in a thoughtful mood, comparing India and China.

From Heaven Lake is written in a simple realistic mode. There is no attempt to follow anything but a simple chronological narrative, and he does not combine narrative with philosophical musings. The qualities which distinguish his fiction -- vivid recreations of places and situations, and character portrayal-- are revealed in this travelogue. Sui and Gyanseng, his companions in the truck, come across as very interesting people. Sui is Chinese, posted in Tibet; the lonely life of a truck driver crossing some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world is made tolerable by the friendships he has built up with people living in small towns and villages on the way. Gyanseng is Tibetan, and keen to be in Lhasa as soon as possible. Seth's talent for presenting memorable character sketches is not confined to prose; some of the poems in *All You Who Sleep Tonight* are centred around specific characters. Seth's experiences with bureaucracy in China could constitute a funny satire of bureaucrats the world over; but he also shows how some officials have very human feelings, and go out of their way to help him, a stranger in the land.

The poet in Vikram Seth is revealed in passages of nature descriptions. He gives us precise details, providing a sort of word painting of the scene. Consider his description of the yaks, for instance:

> . . . a herd of black, thick-haired yaks who emerge from behind a slight rise up ahead. They stop about a hundred metres up the road and graze calmly, lowing and snorting now and then. They are huge beasts, and have a solemnity becoming to animals their size; not so the little yaks, however, who run around, alarmingly playful and ebullient. Some of them stand in the middle of the road. When a truck passes every ten minutes or so, they stare at

> it in shock until it is almost upon them, then kick up their heels in panic and scamper off into the plain.
>
> Yaks look like Pekinese dogs of willow trees in the way that their hair sprouts downward off them. For all their largeness and solemnity, they are friendly beasts. I would like to see them at close range sometime. (p.96)

Seth uses short sentences, and common words, unlike Nirad C. Chaudhuri who always looks for Latinate adjectives. Seth uses no foreign words or quotations, and an educated reader does not need a dictionary when reading him. (This unit does not have a glossary.) This does not mean that Seth's vocabulary is limited; if the context demands it, he uses difficult words in order to write concisely, as in his description of the terrain at the ferry. He writes, "At Yanshipin, on the bank of this steam, is a ferry. The tall green hills are riven by serrated ribs of red rock" (p.96). "Riven" and "serrated" are not common words, but they are the most appropriate ones in the context.

Factual details are mentioned: "black, thick-haired", "hundred metres", "tall green hills". After a straightforward description (the yaks are grazing calmly, lowing and snorting"), Seth goes on to his impressions about them. He feels that the adult yaks move in a slow, serious manner which suits their big size. But the young ones are different. He describes the childish behaviour of the young yaks, who stare at the trucks till the last moment, and then run away in confusion. Chaudhuri says in his introduction to his last book, *The Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*, that he is "a speaker of the *mot juste*. I often ponder for a long time over the words of a given passage, and I never sit down to write or type until I have the whole wording in my head. . . . I request the reader to get my meaning from the following dictionaries: . . ." We do not know about Seth's method of composition, whether he "ponders for a long time" before writing it down, whether he consciously searches for the *mot juste* ("the exact word"). The important thing is that Seth always uses words which perfectly fit the meaning. Consider the word "scamper" in the above passage, which correctly describes the way the young yaks scramble to safety. Seth uses comparisons from ordinary life, not art or history. Many people would be familiar with Pekinese dogs, a breed with long, drooping hair which is very popular as a pet. Willow trees are very common in England or America. It is a tree which grows well in cool climates, so Indians who have visited hill stations would have seen this tree which has drooping leaves, hanging downwards. As we have seen in the passage about yaks, Seth consistently combines description ("buttercups and cornflowers among them") with his impressions; human qualities are imputed to the yaks who do not like to be disturbed, the herd "disperses indignantly".

As the truck crosses the 4000-metre-high Tangula range, Seth suffers from high altitude sickness (many people, including mountaineers on the Himalayas, suffer from headache, nausea and other distressing symptoms because of the cold and the thin air which provides less oxygen. He is conscious of the natural beauty of the place, but cannot appreciate it because he is suffering from headache and fever. He tells us how the beautiful scene has become like a horrible dream:

> Our route takes us straight into the low sun. The atrocious glare merges with my atrocious headache to give this beautiful landscape the quality of a scene in a nightmare. What's more, I cannot tell if the nightmare is in colour or in black-and-white. The antics of the light cause grass and water to turn suddenly from green and blue to black and silver. Round a corner the sun strikes directly again, and the scene is again green and blue. As with the Kunlun Pass, the higher we go, the flatter, more indefinite, more marshlike the terrain becomes. Then the sun sinks and everything is permanently black and silver. (p.97)

Seth manages to convey both the beauty of the scene, as well as the fierceness of his headache. The changing light makes the colours appear different: in direct sunlight, the land with grass growing on it looks green, and the rivers blue. But in shade, and after sunset, they look black and silver respectively.

Seth occasionally introduces short poems to break the monotony of the prose. These poems, like much of his poetry, are written in regular metre and rhyme. The short poem at the end of Chapter 9 sums up the difficult situation of the three travellers, and concludes by laying stress on their common humanity, their common love of home. All of them are suffering from the high altitude and cold: "I have my headache, a sore arm . . . Sui now has his smoker's cough compounded by a running eye. Gyanseng has neck-and toothache . . ." Each of them -- the Tibetan Gyanseng, the Indian author and Sui who is a Han (the majority community in China) all dream of home:

> And sleeping drag the same
> Sparse air into our lungs,
> And dreaming each of home
> Sleeptalk in different tongues.

Seth's expository prose is equally effective. He uses short sentences, without imagery or adjectives, to present facts:

> One overwhelming fact is that the Chinese have a better system of social care and of distribution than we do. Their aged do not starve. Their children are basically healthy. By and large, the people are well clothed, very occasionally in rags.

The comparison between India and China, their success and failure, which follows this passage is thought provoking. Seth has no hesitation about using long sentences, to explain his ideas better:

> I am often asked (and I fear that a new spate of such questions will be forthcoming from the moment I arrive in Delhi) about the relative success of our two large overpopulated countries in satisfying the most basic needs of their people. What is sometimes forgotten when making this comparison is that, except for the greater mineral wealth of China (a result of its far greater land area), all the *a priori* advantages lie on India's side. India's needs are fewer, and its agricultural production possibilities are greater.

This passage has parenthetical comments. The effect is that it gets a conversational tone. Seth puts in comments in brackets ("I fear . . .) to qualify what he is saying, interrupting the main sentence with a side thought. The next sentence is long and complex, but to express the same idea in short sentences would need half a dozen clumsy sentences. For once, he uses a phrase from a foreign language, *a priori*. But that is probably because there is no elegant English equivalent for the idea, he would have to indulge in long explanations like "as far as one knows, not based on experience or effects". Seth hardly ever uses foreign phrases.

The book ends with him reaching Kathmandu, and taking an aeroplane to Delhi: he actually walks down to the border between Tibet and Nepal, and crosses on foot. He is one of the few travellers to have made the journey from China to India over the Himalayas. His travelogue is a straightforward account of his experiences of travel, and his impressions of the Chinese people he met on the way. There is no attempt to explore history or philosophy. In the next unit, we shall read a very different kind of travelogue. *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma* is based on Amitav Ghosh's visit to Cambodia and Burma, but it is not a simple chronological account. It incorporates history in a fictional format to present complex philosophical problems about the growth of nations and cultures.

6.3 AMITAV GHOSH: INTRODUCTION



Amitav Ghosh (1956-)

Amitav Ghosh is the author of four highly acclaimed novels; the fifth, *Palace of Glass*, is going to be published later this year (2000). He was born in Calcutta in 1956, and spent his childhood in Calcutta, Dhaka and Colombo. He graduated from St. Stephen's College, Delhi, and went to England at the age of twenty-two to study social anthropology. After obtaining a D. Phil. from Oxford University, he taught at the prestigious Delhi School of Economics. In 1987 he started teaching social anthropology and comparative literature at various universities in U.S.A. At present, he is based in New York, with his American wife; they have two children. He has travelled widely. As a student, his research into the identity of a slave mentioned in a twelfth century manuscript took him to Egypt. He regularly contributes articles to literary journals like *The New Yorker* and *Granta*. His has written two books of non-fiction, *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma* (1998) and *Countdown* (1999), a powerful protest against nuclear testing by India.

His first novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986) reminds one very much of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The hero, an orphan, is called "Alu" (potato) because his head is shaped like a lumpy potato. He is brought up by his uncle Balaram, a school teacher and passionate believer in Louis Pasteur, who believes all evils can be fought with carbolic acid. Weaving is an important metaphor in the novel, and Alu is fascinated by the loom. Alu runs away from his home because the police think that he is a terrorist. Das, the police officer who is handling the case, follows him to the Western Ghats in Kerala and on to al-Ghazira, a small town in the Persian Gulf. From there Alu flees to Cairo and Algeria, meeting all kinds of unusual characters on the way, including a team of Indian doctors in Algeria trying to stage Tagore's play. There are all kinds of fantastic incidents, like Alu's miraculous escape from the basement of a multi-storeyed building which collapses.

Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) won the Sahitya Akademi award. It is an introspective work, centring around the growth and maturity of a nameless narrator. In Joseph Conrad's novel *The Shadow Line* (1916), the narrator crosses the line dividing early youth from maturity as a consequence of his experiences as the captain of a ship. In Ghosh, the lines have wider ramifications -- they are the lines on a map which separate countries in an atlas, the lines which divide cultures, the lines which separate reality from imagination. The narrator's experience of foreign lands, recreated from scraps of information he picks up from his Bohemian uncle Tridib and

well-travelled cousin Ila, is more real than Ila's actual experience. Three worlds -- of pre-Partition Dhaka, Calcutta and London -- are seamlessly woven together, with no dividing lines of geography or time. The characters, such as the narrator's grandmother, the beautiful Ila, and Tridib's brother Robin, the same age as the narrator, are presented with great clarity.

His fourth novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), is centred around Ronald Ross's discovery of the malarial parasite in 1895. The novel is partly a detective story, partly science fiction, and partly a tale of the supernatural. The novel operates in three time frames, in different centuries. It begins with Antar, an Egyptian in New York in the middle of the next century. He is searching for Murugan, a colleague who suddenly disappeared in Calcutta on August 21, 1995. Murugan was doing research on Ronald Ross, and had a theory that some people had secretly pushed Ross along certain paths in his research. Ghosh's fascinating narrative takes us to India in the 1890's and the events leading up to Ross's discovery. But the ending is somewhat unsatisfactory: we do not quite know what to make of this secret religious group with supernatural powers which has been manipulating Ross.

Of all his novels, it is his third novel, *In an Antique Land* (1992) which is nearest to non-fiction prose. Some critics have considered it a travelogue. It is interesting that R.K.Narayan's latest novel, published in the same year, also reveals a mixture of fact and fiction. In *Grandmother's Tale* (1992), the novelist's grandmother tells him the story of her mother, and this account is supplemented by Narayan's own reconstruction of the past. In his "Explanation" at the beginning of *Grandmother's Tale*, Narayan says, "The borderline between fact and fiction, between biography and the tale wears thin and ultimately vanishes in the following chronicle." This comment is equally true of Ghosh's book. The title is from Shelley's famous sonnet "Ozymandias", in which the ruined fragments of the famous king's statue show that fame and fortune are ephemeral. The poem begins, "I met a traveller from an antique land . . ." History usually deals with figures like Ozymandias, King of Kings. Ghosh is attracted by a minor figure, an Indian slave casually mentioned in letters found in the Cairo synagogue and subsequently kept in a Cambridge library. From the letters, Ghosh learnt about Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisia who journeyed from Egypt to Mangalore in the twelfth century. He acquired an Indian slave who travelled to Aden and back as his manager. As an academic, Ghosh has published a scholarly monograph on his research into this subject: *The Slave of MS H.6* (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1990). The novel has two travellers, Ben Yiju, the merchant, and Ghosh himself who travelled to Egypt as a research student. His autobiographical account of his interaction with the local people in a small village in Egypt provides a lot of humour, but also reveals the common human traits of the peoples of two "antique" lands, India and Egypt. Ghosh shows how intimately linked different cultures and religions are, though modern history and politics divide them into watertight compartments.

6.4 *DANCING IN CAMBODIA, AT LARGE IN BURMA*

Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma (1998) is based on three articles which had appeared in *Granta* (1993), *The Observer Magazine* (1994) and *The New Yorker* (1996). The first chapter, "Dancing in Cambodia" is based on his visit to Cambodia in 1993. Ghosh makes skillful use of counterpoint to evoke the admirable resilience of a society ravaged by the Pol Pot years. Descriptions of the present destitution are juxtaposed with an account of the visit of Cambodian dancers to France in 1906. People, past and present, come to life vividly, ranging from King Sisowath who visited France in 1906 to the young Bangladeshi sergeant working with the UNTAC to rebuild modern Cambodia. The second chapter, "Stories in Stone", describes his experience in Angkor Wat, and the dedication of the workers trying to restore the

monument. The life story of Kong Sarith, a forty-year-old worker totally devoted to Angkor Wat reads like a well written short story. "At Large in Burma" is dominated by Aung San Suu Kyi, who represents the very spirit of hope, but Ghosh also describes a Karenni guerrilla camp on Burma's eastern border, and sympathetically presents the point of view of the tribal minorities, who want to maintain their autonomy. Ghosh is completely self-effacing, he hardly appears in the book. *Dancing in Cambodia* outdoes Ghosh's novels in the felicity of the language, it is a moving account of the undying courage and the common humanity linking people of different countries.

The Khmer Rouge, lead by Pol Pot, took control of Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, on April 17, 1975. Then followed years of terror, when the upper and middle classes and everyone of Vietnamese origin was butchered. Society was broken up; intellectuals were sent into the countryside to work in the fields, where those who did not die of overwork or starvation were killed by Pol Pot's soldiers. These killing years 1975 to 1978 were followed by years of turmoil. Ghosh visited Cambodia in 1993, when a semblance of peace was being restored with the help of the United Nations, and elections were held under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). One of the first things Pol Pot did was to kill artists, and any cultural and aesthetic expression was banned. Dance, which had been encouraged by the royal family, was prohibited. The first part of Ghosh's book juxtaposes King Sisowath's state visit to France in 1906 with other journeys -- that of young Saloth Sar, who travelled to France to study and was inducted into the communist party, who disappeared into the jungles in 1963 to emerge as Pol Pot, the dictator of Cambodia, and Ghosh's own journey to Cambodia, and his travels there in search of Pol Pot's ancestral village. The revival of dance in war ravaged Cambodia is symbolic of their will to put their life together again. Many talented artists had been killed, others slowly emerged from hiding. Large quantities of musical instruments, costumes and masks had been destroyed. Instead of silk, they had to make their costumes from cheap cotton fabric. The city was full of debris, there was a shortage of food, but still the people came pouring in to watch the first show in 1988, and "wept through the entire length of the performance. It was a kind of rebirth: a moment when the grief of survival became indistinguishable from the joy of living." Ghosh's description of the revival of dance is based on the account of Eva Mysliwiec, one of the few foreigners present at the first performance (she had come to Cambodia to set up a Quaker relief mission) and his own interviews with the artists. But the description is so vivid that we feel as if we ourselves have witnessed it.

The huge multi-storeyed temples at Angkor Wat and the nearby ancient capital of Angkor Thom are world famous. They represent a global cultural heritage, and there is an international campaign to reclaim them from the tropical jungle which has grown over these stone structures. A French naturalist, Henri Mouhot, visited the courtyard of Angkor Wat in 1860. He spent three weeks among the ruins of the ancient monuments, preparing sketches which created a sensation when brought back to Europe. Earlier travellers, mainly merchants and missionaries from Spain and France, had mentioned a fabulous capital city swallowed up by the tropical jungle in Cambodia, but it was Mouhot's well documented, first person, account which aroused the interest of the western world. Many scholars and collectors travelled to this far away land to see this fabulous town. In 1867, the first photographic album of Angkor was published in Edinburgh, featuring sixteen photographs taken by the British explorer J. Thompson, and in 1873 the first comprehensive study of Khmer art was published: *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine* by Francis Garnier. Ever since, these magnificent monuments have captured the imagination of the world, and repeated attempts have been made to conserve them. These efforts received a severe setback during the Pol Pot years (1975-79). But now restoration work is in full swing, with the help of the United Nations. "Stories in Stones" (the excerpt in your Reader) examines the significance of Angkor Wat, and how this medieval monument has

become a symbol of modernity for the people of Cambodia. It also shows the importance of stories in human culture.

The main temple at Angkor Wat symbolises Mount Meru. King Suryavarman II (who reigned in the first half of the twelfth century) started its construction in 1119. Suryavarman himself was a worshipper of Vishnu, but he supported Buddhism and the worship of Shiva -- another temple in the metropolis has a shivalinga as the central idol. After his death, Cambodia was defeated by the king of Champa in a surprise attack from the sea in 1177. But its fortunes were revived by King Jayavarman VII, who came to the throne in 1181. He defeated Champa, and organized measures to revive the economy. He was an indefatigable builder. Ambitious irrigation dams and several new towns were built all over the country. The biggest was the royal capital of Angkor Thom, not far from Angkor Wat. Jayavarman made Buddhism the state religion, and so Angkor Thom is dominated by statues of the Buddha. The friezes there depict day-to-day life, and tell stories of military conquests and economic activity, unlike the Hindu Angkor Wat, which Jayavarman continued to foster. The monuments contain many inscriptions about the building activities of the rulers, giving us a clear idea of the social and economic systems of the time. The walls of the temples are covered with bas reliefs featuring stories from the Mahabharata and other Puranas; Angkor Wat presents Hindu mythology through sculpture.

"Stories in Stone" has a blend of narrative, descriptive and expository prose. Ghosh's account deals with basic concepts like the importance of storytelling in keeping a culture alive, but it also operates at the level of a simple travelogue, vividly showing us the places he has visited. He begins with a description of the monument: "The device is a vast one -- it is said to be the largest single religious edifice in the world-- . . ." He takes care to present facts: "The cast is the entire pantheon of gods, deities, sages and prophets with which that cosmos is peopled." Ghosh never tells us how impressed he was, how awesome he found the temple, how it was a unique experience etc. He lets the monument speak for itself, through his descriptions and the effect it has on the Cambodians. A unique characteristic of Ghosh's travelogue is that he never talks about himself -- the focus is always on the place, its history and people.

The people he meets are described in such a way that we can visualize them. Kong Sarith "was a thin, slight man, in his early forties, with a wispy, incongruously villainous-looking moustache. He spoke fluent English, in a rapid, gravelly voice that sometimes broke into a hacking laugh. His hands were never without a cigarette . . ." For him, the stories depicted in the bas-reliefs are alive, "he told them in the confiding, urgent way in which people describe their neighbours' overheard quarrels".

Without any overt comment, Ghosh shows how culture is not determined by geography or religious affiliations; the Hindu mythological stories of Angkor Wat have become part of the cultural life of a country where hardly anyone follows Hinduism. Ghosh lets us draw our own conclusions about the spirit of tolerance; for centuries, there had been a Buddhist monastery within Angkor, and it had to be shifted under pressure from French archeologists who were restoring Angkor Wat. Through neutral description, Ghosh shows how there can be more than one aspect of the truth, depending on our viewpoint. For people round the globe, Angkor Wat is a symbol of a lost civilization swallowed up by the jungle, and nineteenth century explorers like Mouhot are given the credit for discovering it. But it had never been lost for the people of Cambodia; Buddhist monks continued to live in the pagodas in the complex even after the Angkorian period, and it was well known to the Buddhist Sangha and to the nobility of Cambodia and Thailand. The West reinvented Angkor Wat: they "discovered a mirror for themselves of the Imperial State, *l'Etat*, in all its power and splendour." They separated the monument from the untidy uses of its present day inhabitants, as a prelude to restoring it scientifically. The contrast continues into the present day: tourists and archeologists go to the restored

monuments, the local people and pilgrims visit the Buddhist shrine in the great courtyard.

Ghosh helps us appreciate the importance of Angkor Wat in the life of the people by describing how it appears on flags, uniforms, banks and brands of beer the national airlines, Kampuchea Airlines "even succeeded in transforming this most earthbound of structures into a symbol of flight, by lending it a pair of wings." This image of a lost glory is used by the Cambodian people as a symbol of modernity. Another paradox is that Angkor Wat, a temple, never figures in anything to do with religion. The Buddhist Wats found all over the country bear no reference to Angkor Wat, these shrines ornamented with carved woodwork are very different from the massive stone structures of Angkor.

Ghosh effectively uses narrative prose to convey ideas that less gifted writers would express through expository prose. The story told by Kong Sarith is a terrible exposure of the terrors of the Pol Pot years; his tale is as effective as the photographs of mountains of human skulls. He saves his life by making up a story that he is poor and illiterate, not a student at the university of Phnom Penh. He invents a new identity for himself as a waiter in a roadside eating place. The well practised story saves his life, for intellectuals were killed without further enquiry. He is released from this labour camp in the north-west of the country only with the approach of the Vietnamese army. He started walking towards Phnom Penh; on the way, a young woman in their group reveals that she is an archeologist, and takes them to Angkor Wat. They listen spellbound as she tells them the stories carved on the panels.

Ghosh's prose in rich in detail: the pagoda is "an untidy, thatch-roofed structure", "the scrubbed tile floor of the shrine", the pilgrims "had come in share-taxis and others had bicycled all the way from the town of Siem Reap, several miles away", they "boiled their rice in empty milk-tins, over open fires." The similes he uses are quite original: the elderly Buddhist monk is "a tall, aquiline man whose saffron robes hung upon his skeletal limbs like sheets on a wire fence." There is often a touch of humour: the Buddhist monks "were allowed to remain within Angkor Wat, but in purdah, as it were -- on the condition that they moved the pagoda off its old site and rebuilt it at a suitable distance." Now the pagoda is hidden behind rows of trees in the great courtyard, instead of being directly in front of the galleries of the temple. Kong Sarith tells the mythological stories "in the confiding, urgent way in which people describe their neighbours' overheard quarrels".

Ghosh is as much concerned with metaphorical implications as with surface meaning. The dialogues he has with a variety of people is always expressed in simple, short sentences. Consider the concluding page of this chapter:

> "You must remember," said Sarith, "for years we had seen nothing but hunger, death and famine". Now they would not let the woman stop; they listened entranced as she recounted those old, old stories. Slowly they worked their way around the vast galleries, listening to the stories over and over again.

We are left to draw the conclusion for ourselves: storytelling is a strategy for survival. Inventing a new identity by making up a credible story saved the lives of Kong Sarith and the woman archeologist in the labour camp; now listening to old stories carved in stone provides a way for them to get back to normal human life.

6.5 LET US SUM UP

The two travelogues have significant differences, though both vividly recreate the countries the writers have passed through. Seth's prose is simpler, and can be read at

the literal level. We get a clear picture of the author himself, his emotions and experiences in the new places he travels to. He does concern himself with larger issues, such as the difference in the growth rates of China and India, and the progress the two countries have made. But these ideas are expressed separately, not blended into the narrative.

Ghosh has a gift for playing with ideas, and his English prose style has unrivalled beauty. In his hands, the general and the abstract turn into concrete realities. *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma* does not recognize any dividing lines between travel, history, cultural anthropology, and political analysis. The blend is used to provoke thought on the meaning of freedom, and why human society involves so much violence. We are told very little of Ghosh's own emotions and experiences. The enthusiasm with which he greets people with a link to India, such as the soldier from Bangladesh (in the first chapter) or the Burmese freedom fighter of Indian origin (Chapter 3), reveals his emotional attachment to his motherland, but there is never any direct expression of his feelings.

Seth always has both feet on the ground, he hardly ever strays into metaphysical speculation. *From Heaven Lake* is a very good conventional travelogue. Ghosh's book can be read and enjoyed at the primary level of a journey through modern Cambodia or Burma, but it is more than that, it is a travel through history, culture and philosophy.

6.6 GLOSSARY

abacus: a mechanical device for mathematical calculations. It consists of an oblong frame with rows of wires on which you slide coloured beads used as counters.

bas relief: a method of carving in which the design stands out from the surface; the objects depicted project outwards slightly. The walls of the monuments in Angkor Wat are covered with panels executed in bas-relief.

colonnaded: having a row of columns placed at regular intervals; the columns are generally used to support the roof above the hall or corridor

***l'etat*:** French for "the State". The imperial nation. Louis XIV, King of France, identified himself with his empire, declaring "L'etat, c'est moi" (I am the state).

Kampuchea: the native name of the country; Cambodia is the form popular in the west.

pagoda: a temple (usually Buddhist) with a many-storeyed tapering tower, each storey with a projecting roof, in the Far East.

quotidian: pertaining to everyday life, ordinary, commonplace.

riven: split, torn apart.

serrated:	having a saw-like, toothed edge.
sinuous:	with many curves, undulating, bending easily.
vegetal:	having the nature of plants, lacking in animation, of a level of life below the sensitive.
Ven.:	abbreviation for "venerable", used as an honorific for respected religious figures.
wat:	Buddhist shrines in Cambodia.

6.7 QUESTIONS

1. Seth's writing is said to be uni-dimensional, lacking depth. Do you agree with this view?
2. Write a note on Seth's prose style.
3. "Seth achieves an almost photographic realism in his travelogue. We feel that we are travelling along with him on his journey." Comment.
4. Do you agree with the view that people are more important than places in the book *From Heaven Lake*?
5. "We travel not through geographical space but through history and culture in Ghosh's travelogue." Discuss.
6. Comment on the significance of Angkor Wat as a symbol of the future, not the past, with reference to *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma*.
7. *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* is fiction, not a factual travelogue. Do you agree?
8. How does Ghosh bring out the significance of storytelling as a strategy for survival?
9. "The prose in *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* is a blend of narrative, descriptive and expository elements." Discuss.
10. Compare and contrast Seth and Ghosh as writers of travelogues.

6.7 SUGGESTED READING

This reading list has two parts. The first part lists works by Seth, the second by Ghosh. You must make a close study of the works marked with a double asterisk (**). Read some of the other works also, especially those marked by an asterisk (*). Secondary material, i.e. books and articles about the works of Seth and Ghosh, has not been listed, because they focus on their fiction and poetry, not their travelogues.

Part I: Books by Amitav Ghosh:

The Circle of Reason. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986; Delhi: Roli Books. 1986.

**The Shadow Lines.* (1988). Educational edition Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1995.

**In an Antique Land.* Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1992.

***Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma.* Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1998.

Countdown. Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1999.

Part II: Books by Vikram Seth:

Mappings. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1981.

***From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet.* (1983). New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1990.

The Humble Administrator's Garden. Manchester: Carcanet, 1985.

Beastly Tales from Here and There. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1991.

The Golden Gate. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986.

**All You Who Sleep Tonight.* New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1990.

Three Chinese Poets: Translations. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1992.

The Complete Poems. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1995; paperback edition 1999.

An Equal Music. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1999.

CONCLUSION

Prose can be used for a variety of non-fictional purposes. Indians have used it for political propaganda, for writing history and philosophy, and for bringing about social change. Indians have written biographies, autobiographies and travelogues in English. Then there is the field of *belles lettres*, light personal essays. In Units 2 and 3 you were introduced to the prose of ideas. Vivekananda used brisk prose for putting across his ideas. He was a very good public speaker. Speaking demands short, easily understood sentences. Sri Aurobindo and Ananda Coomaraswamy laid the foundation for an Indian school of literary criticism based on Sanskrit poetics. Their prose style reveals the carefully balanced, ratiocinative prose which is the hallmark of a scholar. Unit 2 revealed Gandhiji as a thinker; his concept of "Hind Swaraj" is especially important in the modern age, which is the era of globalization.

In the introduction (1.3) we had discussed different varieties of prose: descriptive, narrative and expository. In unit 4 you studied Nehru's *An Autobiography*, which many consider the best prose book of the century. Nehru shows that different categories of prose are not mutually exclusive: when narrating his prison experiences, one finds beautiful descriptions of nature. And he can analyse his thoughts even in the midst of describing the swift course of events, combining expository and narrative prose.

Unit 5 was devoted to Nirad C. Chaudhuri, the only writer here to have used the language for non-fictional purposes alone. He is perhaps the most well known prose writer outside India, for there is a tendency to think of Jawaharlal Nehru primarily as a statesman, playing down his contribution to writing. It is ironical that Chaudhuri's book which catapulted him to fame has the title *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, because he became very well known after it was published. He consistently courted controversy, and became notorious as an Anglophile who attacked all things Indian. Yet he was himself a bundle of contradictions, who was not happy even in England, for the England that he loved was a creation of his own imagination based on his reading of English literature.

Unit 6 contained the work of the new generation of writers born after independence. Colonization, politics and religion are no longer major concerns. These writers accept their international status with equanimity, though their concern with India and its problems is quite obvious. This is quite clear in their fiction: Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is deeply concerned with the direction the new-born republic of India was taking. His writing is in the realistic mode, while Amitav Ghosh works through imagination and introspection. *The Shadow Lines* is intimately concerned with the concept of nationhood, and how culture crosses geographical and political boundaries. In travelogues, it is natural for descriptive and narrative prose to be dominant. But the explicatory element enters when Seth starts comparing the achievements of India and China. In Ghosh, thought and philosophy is woven into the texture of the travelogue: even as he is describing his journey to Cambodia or Burma, and the people he met there, he is conscious of the ramifications in terms of history and culture. Comparisons with the Indian situation is often implicit. Sometimes it is explicit; an example is his account of his encounter with the Karenni, the minority tribe in Burma, and their feeling of being marginalised.

In post-independence India, the best non-fiction has been written by practising novelists and poets. Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have written at length about their craft. Rao is also the author of a thought provoking biography of Gandhiji, *The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1998), while Mulk Raj Anand is an art critic, who has written books like *The Hindu View of Art* (1933). R.K.Narayan's essays, travelogues and autobiography are as well written as his fiction. The younger generation of novelists -- Seth, Ghosh and Shashi Tharoor -- have published non-fiction works. Among poets, A.K.Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla

have written good literary essays, though only Ezekiel's and Ramanujan's prose has been collected and published in book form.

There is also another growing body of work -- memoirs. There is not much difference between an autobiography and a memoir: the term memoir is generally used when the autobiographical reminiscences are episodic and incomplete, not covering all the aspects of the writer's life. A large number of civil servants, army officers, police officers and other public figures have penned their memoirs. Rajeshwar Dayal and P.N.Dhar (bureaucrats), Julio Rebeiro and Ved Marwah (police officers), General Sunderji, Professor P.S.Sundaram and Amita Malik are among those whose memoirs appeared recently. One merit of these works is that they give a first hand account of their times: for example, V.K.R.Menon's *The Raj and After: Memoirs of a Bihar Civilian* published this year (2000) describes the life of an Indian I.C.S. officer in the second quarter of the twentieth century (he qualified in 1926), when India was ruled by the British.

Non-fictional prose is a very vast field. Every year, more than thirty new books of non-fiction are published -- these include biographies, autobiographies, humorous essays as well as serious books having philosophical undertones like Sunil Khilnani's *The Idea of India* (1998). Block 1 contains a small fraction of this wealth of writing.

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MAEN-117
Indian English Literature

Block

2

UNTOUCHABLE

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

As you know Indian Fiction in English is the most popular of all forms and has gone 'transnational' with Indian diaspora living in the west and writing beyond nationality. We hear of Indian English Fiction writers winning the most prestigious international awards and saddled with all kinds of honours. What is significant, however, is that even in the era of the Postmodern Novel, Indian English writers have not forsaken India.

You must remember that what looks as commendable culmination today had a beginning somewhere. The author, Mulk Raj Anand, we have selected for you is among **The Big Three** who helped to lift this form to international status and recognition. **The Big Three** phrase coined by William Walsh comprises of Mulk Raj Anand (1905), R.K.Narayan (1906-2001), and Raja Rao (1909-). You are going to read in greater detail about Narayan and Raja Rao in subsequent Blocks. The three authors have in their distinctive capacities contributed to the Novel's essential assumption, main themes, natural idiom and a distinct Indian sensibility.

Of these three novelists, Mulk Raj Anand is a socially committed novelist. He is completely devoted to the downtrodden-villagers, orphans, untouchables and urban labourers. There is a strong touch of humanism in his work. We cannot fail but recognise the man behind his writings. We cannot also ignore the politics and propaganda in his confessional strands and leanings. He has consolidated his creativity as also his position unshakably.

As is our want before taking up a detailed discussion on *Untouchable* we shall delineate a short history of the Indian English novel to make you familiar with the various strands in its growth till the turn of the millennium.

This Block consists of six units. **Unit One** surveys the history of the Indian English Novel. **Unit Two** looks at life and work of Mulk Raj Anand. **Unit Three** entails discussion on title, theme, Plot and characterisation in *Untouchable*. **Unit Four** gives you the Picture of a Fragment Nation. Thereafter **Unit Five** delineates the Gandhian Influence and finally **Unit 6** examines the style of *Untouchable*.

Questions are provided at the end of each unit for you to focus on your understanding of the Novel. We expect you to read the Novel before you start reading this Block.

UNIT 1 A SHORT HISTORY OF THE INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Early Essayists
1.3 Early Fiction
1.4 The First Indian English Novel
1.5 Other Early Novels
1.6 Towards Independence – Novels and Novelists
1.7 Post-Independence – Novels and Novelists till 1980
  1.7.1 The Trinity
  1.7.2 Other Novelists
1.8 Rushdie and After
1.9 Let Us Sum Up
1.10 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will delineate a short history of the Indian English novel in order to understand the trends in its growth from the very beginning till the turn of the millennium. We will try to identify the concerns and themes of the novelists.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

When we think of the early Indian English novel, we think of the trinity – **Mulk Raj** Anand (b. 1905), R.K. Narayan (b.1906), and. Raja Rao (b. 1908). All three began writing in the nineteen thirties and all three have seen the turn of the century. Their influence or their importance in the world of the Indian English novel cannot be measured. With Anand's **Untouchable,** Narayan's **Swami and Friends**, and Rao's **Kanthapura**, the Indian English novel found its place in the gamut of Indian literatures.

But the Indian English novel did not have its beginnings in the thirties of the twentieth century. How could that have been when the modern novel came to India in English, with the English?

English education was introduced in India in early nineteenth century. It is reasonable to expect that essays and articles and sketches would have begun to flow from Indian pens soon after, especially with the establishment of English journals and newspapers. With the English presence in India from even earlier, it should be expected that some Indians wrote in English even earlier than that. All this should lead almost naturally to fiction in English – short as well as long.

1.2 EARLY ESSAYISTS

But even to begin the history of the Indian English novel without mentioning other earlier prose writings is to do injustice to earlier writers. The stage for longer fiction was set by sketches and memoirs and short fiction. Dean Mohamed (1795-1851) has

lately been discovered to have the greatest claims to have been the first Indian writer in English with his travelogue laying claim to be the first published Indian English text. But usually the credit for this has been given to Cavelly Venkata Boriah (1776-1803) whose **Account of the Jains**, written c. 1803, was published in 1809. But the first Indian prose writer of note in English is not so surprisingly Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833). M.K. Naik regards his essay **A Defence of Hindu Theism** (1817) as the "first original publication of significance in Indian English literature."[1]

If Raja Rammohun Roy is well-known as a social reformer for his essays as well as his belief in and advocacy of English as a tool to eradicate the ills of Hindu society, there were other prose writers in the middle and later years of the 19th century. Some of the writers like Krishna Mohan Banerji (1813-85) and Ram Gopal Ghose (1815-68) were early beneficiaries of English education. Both were students of Henry Derozio, the famous poet. Ram Gopal Ghose was also known as an orator. Expectedly many of the pieces are about social reform and more than a few are journalistic pieces or treatises. As in the case of other Indian languages, it was the establishment of journals and magazines and newspapers that contributed to the development of Indian English prose.

In western India, one of the major essayists was Behramji Malabari (1853-1912). Malabari was also a poet but here we are interested in his role as one of the pioneers of Indian journalism. Malabari wrote periodical essays in the style of Addison and Steele. His essays were collected in two volumes, **Gujarat and Gujaratis** (1882), and **The Indian Eye on English Life** (1895). His style and humour make him an essayist of a high calibre. He too was a social reformer with a steady eye. Nagesh Vishwanath Pai (1860-1920) was Malabari's contemporary and equal in prose writing. His **Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore** (1894) is a collection of character sketches drawn from different strata of society. According to Ramamurti, Chakmakpore is the forerunner of Narayan's Malgudi.

1.3 EARLY FICTION

A Journal of 48 hours of the Year 1945 by Kylash Chunder Dutt was published in **The Calcutta Literary Gazette** (6th June 1835). This is the tale of an unsuccessful revolt against the British. This piece of literary fantasy once again underlines how Indian English literature (think also of Henry Derozio's poetry) was nationalistic in nature from the very beginning. Or to put it differently, Indian English literature felt the need to distance itself from any sense of complicity in British rule. Writing in English perforce meant critiquing the English as well as the local Indian reality.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1825-1886) was a JP and a Rai Bahadur. His short novel, **The Republic of Orissa: Annals from the pages of the Twentieth Century**, was published in the Saturday Evening Hurkaru on 25th May, 1845. The action in this tale takes place in the second decade of the twentieth century. The British are defeated and a republic is established in Orissa. Once again English is used against the English!

1.4 THE FIRST INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

As a matter of fact the famous Bengali novelist, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-94), wrote his first novel in English. This was **Rajmohan's Wife**, which was serialised as **Wife** in the Calcutta weekly, **The Indian Field**, in 1864. This was published in book form only in the 1930s, and republished in 1990s. Bankim was much influenced by the English novelists that he had read, Sir Walter Scott and

Charles Dickens in particular. **Rajmohan's Wife**, like his Bengali novels, deals with social issues of the day. In a sense, the main agenda of the Indian English novel was set in this first attempt itself. **Rajmohan's Wife** is about the effects of a bad marriage on the woman. The sufferings of a middle class housewife, Matangini at the hands of her husband, Rajmohan, in rural East Bengal forms the subject of the novel. This was the time of social reform and it shouldn't surprise us that the first Indian English novel isn't a historical romance as has been suggested some times but a social novel. Bankim may not have written another novel in English but his Bengali novels were to influence the course of the novel in India.

1.5 OTHER EARLY NOVELS

The second Indian English novel of note is also by a Bengali. Lal Behari Day published **Govinda Samanta, or, the History of a Bengal Raivat** in 1874. The novel is set in Burdwan district in mid-nineteenth century. The author's intention in his own prefatory words is to furnish "a plain and unvarnished tale of a plain peasant living in the plain country of Bengal." This novel is a family saga, which relates the life and times of Govinda Samanta, from his birth till death. We see the trials and vicissitudes of his extended family. The novel is said to have won a prize offered in 1871 for the best novel in Bengali or English illustrating the 'Social and Domestic Life of the Rural Population and Working Classes of Bengal.' What it therefore achieves and introduces into the Indian English novel is a high level of realism.

Lal Behari Day was aware of the challenges of portraying Indian reality in the English language. How would you have Bengali peasants speak in English? Day, like R.K. Narayan later, makes his peasants speak in 'good' English. He realises that his characters speak 'better' English than English peasants but as he says if he had made them speak in some kind of rural English dialect, "I should have turned them into English and not Bengali peasants."[2] He writes elsewhere of cultural differences and like all Indian English writers deliberately cross pollinates the English language with Indian cultural markers. The challenge of the medium was best articulated more than sixty years later by Raja Rao in his famous foreword to **Kanthapura**.

You would have noticed that most of the writers named so far are from eastern India. This is after all a short introduction and can name only a few select writers. But even so, the early writers in English all came from areas which had the greatest British influence, namely the Bengal region, the western coast, and the south. Since we are looking at the rise of the Indian English novel, we have concentrated on eastern India. If you want to know the names of essayists and prose writers from other areas of India, you should refer to M.K. Naik's history. You will also get to know the names of other early novelists. I am only going to refer to the more famous among them in this unit.

Toru Dutt (1856-77) is better known as a poet. But she may very well be the first woman novelist in Indian English, and perhaps the first Indian novelist in French! Her unfinished English novel, **Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden,** was published in Calcutta in 1878. This is a romantic love story set in England. Malashri Lal believes that Toru Dutt couldn't finish this novel because it was autobiographical and "mirrored the turbulence in her young life"[3] and that she was critiquing people close to her in it. Critics have felt it a great pity that the novel is incomplete because as K.S. Ramamurti puts it, if the novel had been completed, "it would have given us not only the first good Indian novel in English but a beautiful model for the Indian writers of English fiction, if not in terms of content, at least in terms of a natural graceful style."[4] Because her setting is English and even the Spanish characters are settled in England, Toru Dutt does not have the usual challenges of the Indian English

writer. Thus she can exhibit her felicity in the language, which makes for good reading, as Ramamurti points out.

Mention must be made here of another woman writer, Krupabai Satthianandhan (1862-1894). She was one of the earliest women medical students but unfortunately her health did not permit her to complete her education. She lived with her husband in Ooty and later Madras (now Chennai). She wrote for the South Indian Observer, and the National Indian Journal. What she is known for are her two novels. Both were published in the **Journal of Madras Christian College**. They were published in book form after her death. Both **Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life** (1894), and **Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life** (1895) are autobiographical in nature. **Saguna** is about her earlier years and depicts the transformation of a Hindu brahmin family into a Christian household. Saguna is set in present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat where Krupabai grew up. **Kamala** was written after the loss of her child and is about her sorrows and conflicts. Both these novels have been reprinted recently.

By now you would have noted that the impact of colonialism can be seen not only in the use of a new language to write in but also in concerns of the writers – from reform and defence of Hinduism and/or a new construction of India, to the depiction and sometimes celebration of conversion to Christianity. This is even more apparent in the genre of poetry.

While on the subject of women novelists, we must not ignore Shevantibai Nikambe, social reformer and educationist, who wrote **Ratnabai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Wife** (1895). This short novel holds forth the ideal of a companionate marriage. A young married girl, whose husband is away in England, is sent to school against all opposition by her father. She suffers much at the hands of her in laws but when her husband returns he finds a wife he can converse with and all ends happily. This was part of the larger discourse of reform and the treatment of women in Hindu society.

Other women writers who normally find mention in the history of Indian English fiction are Rajalakshmi Debi whose novel in verse form, **The Hindoo Wife or The Enchanted Fruit** , was published in 1876, and Cornelia Sorabji, a distinguished lawyer, who published three collections of short stories in the first decade of the twentieth century. These much admired collections are **Love and Life Behind the Purdah** (1901), **Sun Babies** (1904), and **Between the Twilights** (1908). While Sorabji never wrote a novel, Rabindranath Tagore's sister Swarnakumari Ghosal (1855=1932) wrote three – **The Fatal Garland** (1910), **An Indian Love Story** (1910), and **An Unfinished Song** (1913). The first is a historical romance while the last is novel of sensibility that shows the influence of novelists like George Eliot.

To turn to male novelists of late nineteenth and early twentieth century, we find that many wrote historical romances. But, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, whom we have already referred to, wrote **Shunkur: A Tale of Indian Mutiny 1857**, and **The Young Zamindar** (1883), both of which depict the greatness of the cultural heritage of the country and aim at raising the consciousness of the readers to fight for political freedom. H Dutt wrote adventure fiction and is known for two novels – **Bijay Chand: An Indian Tale** (1888) and **Lieut. Suresh Biswas: His Life and Adventures** (1900). Some of the historical romances written around that time are – Chakravarti Khetrapal's **Sarala and Hingana** (1895), and T Ramakrishna Pillai's **Padmini: an Indian Romance** (1903), and **The Dive for Death: An Indian Romance** (1911), S.M. Mitra's **Hindupore: A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest – An Anglo-Indian Romance** (1909), and Balkrishna's **The Love of Kusuma: An Eastern Love Story** (1910).

While Romesh Chunder Dutt translated his own Bengali novels into English – **The Lake of Palms: A Story of Indian Domestic Life** (1902), and **The Slave Girl of Agra, an Indian Historical Romance** (1909) – one a novel of social reform and

widow remarriage and the other a historical romance as promised in the title, Sarath Kumar Ghosh wrote a fantasy, **1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal** (1906), and **The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna** (1909). Ghosh's second novel is perhaps one of the earliest to explore the East-West encounter, a popular theme in the Indian English novel.

Two novelists from the early years of the twentieth century deserve mention here. They are Rajam Iyer and A Madhaviah, both from Madras. Both were pioneers of the Tamil novel, both publishing their first novels in Tamil in 1896. Rajam Iyer's importance is not so much in the number of novels he wrote – he actually wrote only one incomplete novel – but in that he wrote in English at all and in what he wrote. **True Greatness of Vasudeva Sastri**, which appeared as a serial in 1896-98, was published posthumously in book form in 1925. This religious novel about a vedantin is seen as a forerunner of novels by Raja Rao.

A Madhaviah wrote quite a few novels in English – **Satyananda** (1909), **Thillai Govindan** (1916), which was published earlier, in 1908, under a different title **(A Posthumous Autobiography edited by Pamba), Clarinda** (1915), **Nanda, the Pariah who Overcame Caste** (1923), and **Lt. Panju – A Modern Indian** (1924). **Thillai Govindan** is about a contemporary Tamil Brahmin youth and the impact of western education on his life. It ends with his rediscovery of faith in Hinduism **Clarinda** is a historical romance about a woman who was converted to Christianity in Tanjore. It is believed that she built the first church in that part of the country. According to Ramamurti, the church still stands in Palamcottah and is known as Glorianda Church. The novel traces the growth and development of a Maratha Brahmin girl from innocence and naivete to heroism. According to Ramamurti, one of the major achievements of Madhaviah is the language spoken by his characters. His Indian characters and his English characters speak very differently from each other even while he manages to make them speak in colloquial English. Ramamurti also feels that Madhaviah's humour is similar to that of R.K. Narayan's. He manages to portray the middle class India of his times with wonderful felicity and ease.

1.6 TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE – NOVELS AND NOVELISTS

When what Naik calls the Gandihian whirlwind struck India, many things changed including the novel. What we are talking about is the intensification of the sense of nationalism and the attempts to use all means to construct the idea of a modern India. Once again we begin with a novelist who was also a poet. This is K.S. Venkataramani (1891-1951). He has two novels – **Murugan, the Tiller** (1927), and **Kandan, the Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making** (1932). **Murugan** contrasts the life of two friends, Kedari and Ramu, the former a materialist and the latter a Gandhian. A Gandhian colony is established at the end of the novel and the two friends settle down there. **Kandan** is set during the period of the Civil Disobedience movement. Kandan, an ICS officer who has been educated in England, resigns from government service and joins the freedom movement only to be killed at the end.

The problem with Venkataramani's novels is that their narrative style leaves a lot to be desired. Venkataramani doesn't seem to have been impressed by any contemporary narrative models. This is true of his contemporary A.S.P. Ayyar as well. Ayyar, an ICS officer, was a dramatist as well. He couldn't write novels about contemporary politics because of his official position. So like nineteenth century poets, he resorts to Indian history to construct his idea of India. His novels are **Baladitya** (1930), and **Three Men of Destiny** (1939). He split the latter novel into two parts and published them separately as **The Legions Thunder Past** (1947), and **Chanakya and Chandragupta** (1951). **Baladitya** is set in the 5th century and is about the defeat of invading foreigners, in this case the Huns. **Three Men of Destiny**

is about the aftermath of Alexander's invasion of India. The three men are Alexander, Chandragupta Maurya, and Chanakya.

Another novelist we should name before we talk of the trinity is K. Nagarajan. His **Athavar House** (1937) is a family saga that depicts a Maharashtrian Vaishnava Brahmin family settled in the south. It portrays a joint family, and explores the impact of modernity and Gandhiism on the family. Nagarajan has another novel set in the thirties, but this, **Chronicle of Kedaram**, came out much later, in 1961.

As we know the trinity of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao began writing in the 1930s. You are studying all three writers though only two of them have their novels prescribed for you. R.K. Narayan finds place in your course only as a short story writer, but I advise you strongly to read his novels, especially one of the following two – **Waiting for the Mahatma** (1955), or **Vendor of Sweets** (1967), both of which treat Mahatma Gandhi and the impact of Gandhiism quite differently. All three writers began writing during the freedom struggle soon after the Civil Disobedience movement of early 1930s. The issues they tackled were all relevant issues of the time, issues that had to be depicted and debated in the quest to construct an ideal nation. You have Mulk Raj Anand's **Untouchable** (1935) and Rao's **Kanthapura** (1938) in your course and you'll know immediately that issues of caste and 'the upliftment of the downtrodden', modernity and religion, the role of religions, the effects of colonialism, the question of gender roles – mainly the place of women in society, the situation of the village and the peasantry, all find place in the Indian English novel as influenced by the trinity. Not that these issues had not entered the novel earlier but that these novelists had a great impact, which can be felt even today.

Mulk Raj Anand (b. 1905) is a prolific writer. He went to England in 1924 to do research in philosophy and came back a committed socialist. He even took part in the Spanish Civil War. His other interest than fiction has been art criticism – he is the founder editor of the art magazine, Marg. His first literary efforts were to chronicle the lives of the under-privileged. If **Untouchable** is about a sweeper, **Coolie** (1936) and **Two Leaves and a Bud** (1937) are about labourers. If **Coolie** depicts the lives of displaced labourers who are exploited by all kinds of economic forces including colonialism, **Two Leaves and a Bud** exposes the conditions of plantation life in British India. If in the first the protagonist comes down from the hills, in the second the protagonist is lured from Punjab to Assam. The trilogy – **The Village** (1939), **Across the Black Waters** (1941), and **The Sword and the Sickle** (1942) – on the Punjabi peasant followed next. The trilogy follows the life of Lal Singh who rebels against his village mores. He fights in the first world war in Flanders, is taken prisoner by the Germans, becomes a communist and ends up in prison again in India! In his last novel before Indian Independence, Mulk Raj Anand depicts one day in the life of a coppersmith. **The Big Heart** (1945) debates the virtue of the machine and modernity.

You would have realised through your reading of **Untouchable** that Anand is quite passionate about his causes. He displays what Naik calls "ruthless realism" (Naik, p. 160). He goes boldly where very few if any have gone before, inventing an English that has the flavour of Punjab. This is one of the major achievements of the trinity who each in his own way manages to write an English that is constructed by and constructs the geographical and social space depicted by their novels.

R. K. Narayan (b. 1906) is a very different writer from Anand. Narayan is one of the few Indian English writers of the earlier generation, or even any generation, who has been a full time writer. Thanks to television adaptations of his stories, his fictional town, Malgudi, is know to more than the readers of Indian English fiction. All his works have Malgudi as their setting, and he polishes and carves this one inch of ivory to perfection. His is the middle class world of the small town – modernity has impinged on this society but not whole sale westernisation. In his novels written before Independence, Narayan develops and fixes the ingredients of his recipe for his successful fiction. **Swami and Friends** is a delightful tale about the escapades of a

schoolboy. **The Bachelor of Arts** (1937)is about the goings on in the life of a bachelor, Chandran, who rebelling against the idea of an arranged marriage even becomes a sanyasi for some time. He, of course. returns to a traditional arranged marriage! **The Dark Room** (1938) is Narayan's attempt at something different - a story about the suffering and abortive rebellion of a housewife. Narayan never attempted such serious fiction again though **The English Teacher** (1946), which was written after the tragic death of his wife, is a poignant novel about loss and reconciliation. This novel explores the world of the supernatural, again a subject that Narayan does not deal with seriously ever again. This understandably was his last novel before Independence.

Kaja Rao (b.1908) who completes the trinity is as different from the other two as possible. You will not get the complete picture of this novelist from the novel in the course. **Kanthapura** is the only novel written by Raja Rao before Independence and this too shows a writer contemplating and depicting the changes that were taking place in the making of the modern nation. You will be studying the novel and I don't want to anticipate the discussion here but you would have realised after reading the novel that the foreword to **Kanthapura** is one of the most important documents in Indian English literature. It is here that an Indian English writer sets out as fully as Rao does the agenda for Indian English writers, their intents and the challenges they have to face. The problematic as he puts it is "to convey in a language not one's own the spirit that is one's own." So while the language is foreign, the experience is local. But the language isn't completely outside our ambit, he says. He identifies that English has the same position of power as Sanskrit or Persian had in their days. And the Indian English writer chooses to write in the language of power and the powerful. But, cautions Rao, this does not mean that the Indian English writer wants to be appropriated, he doesn't want to write like the English. The colonial encounter has changed all, and the Indian English writer has to use the space in between the coloniser's language and culture and the local traditional lives and experiences in order to create what the English writer cannot, and create what is made possible only because the writing is in English. Thus the Indian English writer is duty bound to create and use Englishes that makes it impossible for the monolingual English reader to appropriate his/her experience with any degree of ease. Don't write like the English, and don't write what can be easily written in the Indian language of your region. This is the agenda that Raja Rao sets forth and you will have to decide how well he achieves his own ends. Do you think the situation is still the same or that it has changed now?

There are some other writers and novels that need to be looked at however brief this history may aim to be. One of the most interesting novels of this era is **Twilight in Delhi** (1940) by Ahmed Ali. Ahmed Ali portrays middle class Muslim life in early twentieth century Delhi, and attempts to capture the decay of a culture. Ahmed Ali became a Pakistani citizen after Partition, but this novel remains a landmark in Indian English fiction. Iqbalunnisa Hussain's **Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household** (1944) delivers what it promises – an intimate picture of a way of life. Another novelist who deserves mention is K.A. Abbas who wrote many popular film scripts for Raj Kapoor, the note Hindi film maker. His novel **Tomorrow is Ours: A Novel of the India of Today** (1943), tries to construct an India with a role to play in world affairs. There are a number of other novelists who wrote novels on the freedom struggle and its impact.

1.7 POST-INDEPENDENCE – NOVELS AND NOVELISTS TILL 1980

1.7.1 The Trinity

The trinity have continued their long and distinguished career after Independence but there have also been a number of other major novelists during the period we are looking at. How many can you name?

Mulk Raj Anand returned to India for good in 1945 and didn't write for some time because of a nervous breakdown. **Seven Summers** (1951), his next book, was understandably a fictional recreation of his childhood, and was meant to be the first of a series of autobiographical novels with Krishan Chander as protagonist. After **Private Life of an Indian Prince** (1953), a novel about a milieu with which he did not have much familiarity, Anand returned to familiar territory with **The Old Woman and the Cow** (1960). The Old Woman and the Cow is about peasant life and the pressures on people that drives them to inhumanity in order to survive. The protagonist is Gauri, the 'cow' of the title, who is deserted by her husband and sold off by her grandmother who has to choose between her cow and Gauri. Gauri grows from a cow to a tigress!

Anand's next novel was **The Road** (1963) which travels the same territory as **Untouchable. The Death of Hero** (1964), which Anand reissued in the 1990s, is about Kashmir. His next two novels were part of his autobiographical series. **Morning Face** (1970), which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and **Confessions of a Lover** (1976) follow the career of Krishan Chunder through his schooldays, adolescence, college and an unsuccessful love affair, till he leaves for England.

R.K. Narayan achieved greater fame and fortune after Independence. He started off with **Mr. Sampath** (1949), a novel about the world of films, and then wrote **The Financial Expert** (1952), **Waiting for the Mahatma** (1955), **The Guide** (1958), **The Maneater of Malgudi** (1962), **The Vendor of Sweets** (1967), **The Painter of Signs** (1976), **A Tiger for Malgudi** (1983), and **The Talkative Man** (1986), **The World of Nagaraj** (1990), and **The Grandmother's Tale** (1993). Critics feel that Narayan was at the height of his powers from **The Financial Expert** till **The Vendor of Sweets**. Narayan is a delightful comic writer who studies middle class small town South Indian mores. **The Guide**, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, is perhaps his most famous book and did very well in a movie version that R.K. Narayan himself did not feel too happy about.

Raja Rao has written more than he has been able to publish and his second book **Serpent and the Rope**(1960), which won him his Sahitya Akademi Award, showed him in very different light from **Kanthapura**. This novel, autobiographical in tone, is about the travels of a young man abroad and his life and loves till he understands that he needs to search for the true Guru for an understanding of life. This philosophical novel, in which, as Naik puts it, "the philosophy is not in the story – the philosophy is the story", signals the arrival of the philosopher novelist. Rao's **The Cat and Shakespeare** (1965) is a metaphysical comedy. Rao tries a different kind of novel in Comrade Kirilov (1976) where he looks at the life of an Indian intellectual, Padmanabha Iyer (the Kirilov of the title), in the 1930s and 40s in England. His recent work is the voluminous **The Chessmaster and His Moves** (1988). His attempt overall is to espouse an Indian philosophical point of view in the novel.

1.7.2 Other Novelists

A major novelist who began writing in 1947 is Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906-1988). Another social realist, he has said that every novel should have a social purpose. His first novel, **So Many Hungers** (1947), is set during the years of the Bengal famine. It depicts the various kinds of exploitations that took place during that period, from that of the colonial power to that of the local traders. **Music for Mohini** (1952) is an attempt to wed the city and the village, through the marriage of a city bred girl who has to then move to a village. In **He Who Rides a Tiger** (1952), Bhattacharya has Kalo, a blacksmith who is jailed for stealing a bunch of bananas, takes revenge on society by becoming a godman. **A Goddess Named Gold** is an allegory where a magic talisman raises false expectations. His next novel, **Shadow from Ladakh** (1966), which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award, is set against the background of the 1962 war with China. In this Gandhiism is pitted against modern technology. **A**

Dream in Hawaii (1978) is Bhattacharya's attempt to explore the East-West encounter. Bhattacharya has had a successful career with his novels being translated into many languages.

Another novelist from Bengal who was quite popular during that period was Sudhindranath Ghose (1899-1965). His tetralogy – **And Gazelles Leaping** (1949), **Cradle of the Clouds** (1951), **The Vermilion Boat** (1953), and **The Flame of the Forest** (1955) – follows the life of a nameless narrator-protagonist through about twenty years of his life. The central theme is the growth of the narrator's mind. This is a wonderful attempt in terms of narrative experimentation, written more like a magic realist tale (in other words, a traditional Indian story) than a western novel. Perhaps Ghose will be back in fashion some time.

If Bhattacharya believes in the novel with a social purpose, the novelist who believes in complete entertainment is Manohar Malgonkar (b. 1913). Among his novels, **Distant Drum** (1960), his first novel, and **Bandicoot Run** (1982) are based in an army setting, a setting with which Malgonkar, as a retired army officer, is familiar. The latter novel is a spy thriller of a high order. He had written another competent espionage novel earlier, Spy in Amber (1971). **Combat of Shadows** (1962) is another attempt at writing a fast moving tale of passion and murder. **The Princes** (1963) is a picture of the times when the princely states merged with India and is considered a critical success because Malgonkar seems more interested in the issues than in just telling a fast tale. His novel on the Partition, A Bend in the Ganges (1964), is again a readable novel written on a large scale. The Devil's Wind (1972) is an attempt to portray the Revolt of 1857. In **Cactus Country** (1992), Malgonkar sees the 1971 war from the point of view of a Pakistani officer. Malgonkar is an exciting writer who deserves to be better known and deserves to be always in print.
Among other novelists of this period are Khushwanth Singh (b. 1918), Kamala Markandaya (b. 1924), Nayantara Sahgal (b.1927), and Arun Joshi (1939-19). These are all novelists with a substantial amount of works. But perhaps this is the time to pause and look at certain novels which have had a great impact in Indian English fiction.

One such novel is G.V. Desani's **All About H. Hatterr** (1948). This is a book that displays great comic virtuosity and anticipates many a post-modernist novel in form and style. It is not easy to summarise this novel which has to be read to be admired for all that it attempts and attempts successfully. What I can say here is that Desani manages to use the language with great flexibility and it is a pity that neither he nor any of his contemporaries could pull it off again, or even tried to do so.

Another novel that I must direct you to read, and this is more easily available and more easily readable, is Attia Hosain's **Sunlight on a Broken Column** (1961), which is an account of life in pre-Partition Lucknow. It is a classic of its kind, looking at the impact on the Muslim aristocracy of the winds of change brought about by the freedom struggle as well as notions of modernity.

Khushwanth Singh's **Train to Pakistan** (1956), which has been made into a feature film recently, is his first and most famous novel. It is the story of the impact of Partition on a village in the western border and how the peaceful life of two communities is rent asunder by forces that they cannot understand. It is a wonderfully paced novel that also tells a love story as it delineates a society. In **I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale** (1959) Khushwanth Singh's portrays a Sikh family and all that it goes through the freedom movement and the 1940s. Singh also has an enormously popular late novel, **Delhi**; to his credit.

Kamala Markandaya has a number of novels to her credit. As a diasporic writer her major concerns seem to be the East-West encounter and the different roles of women. Foreign characters people her fictional Indian world, which in any case shows the effect of processes of modernisation and urbanisation. **Nectar in a Sieve** (1954) is

her first novel and critics have often wondered where in India such a village as depicted in the novel could be. Some of her other novels are: **Some Inner Fury** (1955), **Silence of Desire** (1960), **Possession** (1963), **A Handful of Rice** (1966), **The Coffer Dams** (1969), **The Nowhere Man** (1972), and **Two Virgins** (1973). Markandaya's output is substantial and her novels are eminently readable.

Nauyantara Sahgal, who belongs to the Nehru family, is the only political novelist in Indian English fiction. Her construction of the political space also includes the struggle for identity of the post-Independence Indian woman. **A Time To Be Happy (1958)** is her first novel and it immediately announces the arrival of a fresh new voice. It deals with the last phase of the freedom struggle and the newly independent India. In Maya, it has the first of Sahgal's trapped-in-bad-marriage women. **This Time of Morning** (1968), and **Storm in Chandigarh** (1969) depict situations in Independent India and contain portraits of recognisable political figures. Both portray strains within marriage and the polity. **The Day in Shadow** (1971) is again about a marital breakdown as much as it is about political goings on, and **A Situation in New Delhi** (1977) deals with India after Nehru's death. Her finest and most ambitious novel so far has been **Rich Like Us** (1985). This novel deals with the entirety of the history of modern India culminating in the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi. The novel tries to trace the almost inevitability of the journey from Mahatma Gandhi to Indira Gandhi. It is an extremely complex novel which cannot be summarised in this space. Her **Plans for Departure** came out in 1986.

Arun Joshi's **Strange Case of Billy Biswas** (1971) is a wonderful introduction to the world of post-Independence Indian English fiction. This is an extremely well paced book and tells the story of an Indian who returns from the west and where his search for identity takes him in the new nation. He ends up leading a tribe in so called 'primitive' India and is shot dead by a policeman ironically during an effort to secure him by his well wishers Even his first book, **The Foreigner** (1968), was about a similar theme, of alienation. Joshi's heroes search for meaning in life, for an identity beyond the given. This holds true for two of his other novels, **The Apprentice (1974)**, in which the life of an idealistic youth is delineated, and **The Last Labyrinth (1981)**, which won him the Sahitya Akdemi Award. But Joshi's **The City & the River** (1990) is a political allegory that shows the cyclical nature of human greed and deceit. Joshi is another of the novelists who deserve to be read by future generations.

You have Anita Desai's **Clear Light of Day** (1980) in your course. Anita Desai (b. 1937) is novelist whose career began in 1963 and is still going strong. To a large extent Desai's focus is on the inner world of her main characters, usually women. From Maya in **Cry, the Peacock** (1963) to Uma in **Fasting, Feasting** (1999), her main characters are essentially lonely and struggling with the forces of existence. I don't need to say more here since you will be studying about her. Suffice to say that among women writers, Desai largely shifted the theme from the outer world. This is not entirely true of all her fiction, of course.

I must mention here another single novel that many of you may like to read, Rama Mehta's **Inside the Haveli** (1977), another winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award. In this novel the author portrays the married life of an urban educated woman who is forced into Purdah in a Rajput household. Very well written the novel surprises the reader in advocating compromise with this way of life.

1.8 RUSHDIE AND AFTER

1980 is a watershed year in Indian English fiction. The preceding decade had seen the effervescence of Indian English poetry and a sense of ennui had actually descended on the novel. But the publication of **Midnight's Children** by Salman Rushdie (b.

1947) changed all that. This novel led to increased interest in and market for Indian English writing and coupled with a Governmental decision about import of books into India, and the entry of Penguin, led to a boom in publication of Indian English books.

Again you have **Midnight's Children** in your course and therefore I shall not anticipate the discussion of the novel or of Rushdie's works as a whole. Suffice to say that the novel articulates the viewpoint of a migrant who looks at all constructions of nation as fiction. If till **Midnight's Children** you have had Indian English novelists attempting to delineate continuities and define nation-ness, if they have tried to show life in Independent India so as to work towards redefinitions of good citizenship and governance, **MC** brings in the notion of the flawed imagination of nation, of the impossibility of a modern India. As an iconic text of postcolonial literature, MC (and Rushdie) celebrates the hybridity of the migrant and argues against alternate Indian visions of purity or continuity or possibility of cultural one-ness. This fiction as true history has influenced many a subsequent novel. His use of joyfully pollinated English language has had an equally great impact.

Among the host of novelists and novels that have come to the fore after 1980, I must look briefly at the career of Amitav Ghosh (b. 1956). Beginning **with The Circle of Reason** (1986), and **The Shadow Lines** (1988), where he shows the constructed and thus shadowy nature of boundaries between states, this immensely talented writer has dissolved the boundaries between fiction and anthropological and historical research. **In an Antique Land** (1993) and **The Glass Palace** (2000) are examples of such uncategorisable writings. In between he wrote a science fiction mystery thriller, **The Calcutta Chromosome** (1996). He has also been an influential essayist writing on subjects as varied as the nuclear bomb and the jungles of Burma.

A writer who has been writing throughout this period and whose reputation has grown quietly is Shashi Deshpande. In her explorations of the lives of middle class women, Deshpande shows you a different facet of society from Anita Desai. Among her novels, you may like to read **The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980) and That Long Silence** (1988) in order to get a picture of this accomplished writer.

Other novelists and novels you may wish to read are Upamanyu Chatterji (whose **English, August** explores the empty and angst ridden life of the upper middle class Indian youth has a cult status), Vikram Seth (whose **Golden Gate** is wonderful example of poetic skills used for narration and whose A Suitable Boy is a sprawling social realist book of the India of the fifties), I. Allen Sealy (whose **Trotter Nama** heralded the arrival of a great Anglo Indian novelist, and who has followed it up with the critically acclaimed **Everest Hotel) and Githa Hariharan (whose award winning** debut novel **The Thousand Faces of Night** established her as a careful craftsperson, a reputation she has safeguarded through her other works). There are many other novelists – for example, the Booker Prize winning Arundhati Roy **(God of Small Things)**, Mukul Kesavan **(Looking Through Glass)**. Manju Kapoor **(Difficult Daughters)** – that you may already be aware of. There are again a number of diasporic writers including Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta, and Rohinton Mistry. There are any number of other writers of varying critical reputation and you have to make your own choices as regards your reading..

1.9 LET US SUM UP

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her influential study of Indian English fiction, **The Twice Born Fiction**, states there were three kinds of fiction from the 1920s till the 1970. They are the historical novel, the socio-political novel, and the novel of identity. The first two broadly occur before Independence and the third occurs after. As she herself

points out this is not meant to be a rigid framework and the phases may overlap, and individual exceptions may always be there. She also identifies the major themes as – 'The Making of a Nation', East-West Encounter', and 'Renunciation as an Ideal' [5] The major problematic she identifies is that of language and the expression of Indianness. This is tackled both in the language that the writers fashion and the narrative techniques that they use including the use of myths.

The question of language is seen differently by the new writers. As far as they are concerned the language they write in is theirs, English is their first language. But this is an English that has undergone many changes. But even this English cannot represent the complete daily life of any individual in India, where even the die-hard English speaker will have to use some other Indian language(s) in various social situations. If this is not taken into account, many nuances which can be exploited by the writer can be lost to her/him. Also, many Indians do not use English at all in their daily lives. How does the Indian English writer represent them? So even if English is the first language of the new writers they should be aware of the challenges that have always been there for Indian English writers.

After Rushdie, the Indian English novel has gone transnational with many writers living in the west and writing from a perspective beyond nationality. On the other hand, though always with the chance of international exposure, there are many novelists who live and publish in India, who still work on questions of identity in this multicultural multilingual nation. This may be the era of the postmodern novel but Indian English novels still do not forsake India.

1.10 QUESTIONS

1. Write down in point form the milestones in the growth of the early Indian English novel.
2. Assess the contribution of the trinity of Anand, Narayan, and Rao to the growth of the Indian English novel.
3. Name some major women novelists and write about their contribution to Indian English fiction.
4. Examine Raja Rao's foreword to *Kanthapura* and then formulate in your own words the major challenges that the Indian English novelist faces. Name some novels that have met these challenges successfully.
5. Assess the state of the Indian English novel after 1980.

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UNIT 2 LIFE AND WORK OF MULK RAJ ANAND

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Early Life
2.3 Literary Career
2.4 Literary Awards
2.5 The Thirties Movement
2.6 The Writing and Publication of *Untouchable*
2.7 Let Us Sum Up
2.8 Questions
2.9 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to introduce you to the life and work of the pioneer Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand. Also a section of the unit is devoted to the Thirties Movement which greatly influenced the writing of Anand. The unit also deals in detail with the circumstances in which Anand's first novel *Untouchable* was written and published.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding unit of this Block we have given you a bird's eyeview of the rise of the Indian English novel from the very beginning till the turn of the millennium. In this unit we shall discuss Mulk Raj Anand who, with R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, established Indian English novel in the gamut of Indian and world literatures. Anand's life may be divided into three periods, according to the place of his residence and activity: (a) the early years in India until his departure for England 1905-1925; (b) the years in Europe, 1925-1945; and (c) the later years in India, 1945, until the present. This division corresponds to the different stages of his literary career. The first period reveals the various strands and influences that shaped his mind and later came to bear upon his writing. The second period is concerned with Anand's hard struggle to become a novelist and the eventual success that he got. The third period reveals his achievements in the social and cultural life of India.

2.2 EARLY LIFE

Mulk Raj Anand was born in a Hindu family of Kshatriyas on 12 December 1905 in Peshawar, the central city of Northwest Frontier Province, now in Pakistan. He was the third of five sons of Lal Chand, a silversmith turned sepoy. Anand's father belonged to the Thathiar caste. People of Thathiar caste were workers of copper and silver. Lal Chand left his hereditary occupation to attend school. He learnt English, took a British military examination and served in cantonments including Sialkot, Ferozepur, Peshawar, Mian Mir, Nowshera and Malakhand. He was appointed a head clerk, attached to the Thirty-eighth Dogra Regiment. He was said to be the only literate man in the whole regiment. He was a worldly man, highly ambitious for his sons' education and economic status. As an Arya Samaji, Anand's father also served

as president of the Nowshera Samaj from 1910 to 1913. As the society incurred the hostility of the British Officials for its rebellious activities, Lal, fearing the displeasure of his superiors and the British rulers in India, withdrew from the group. Mulk Raj Anand inherited from his father a professional artisan's industry and minute attention to detail as also the revolutionary temperament.



Mulk Raj Anand (1905-)

Anand's mother came from a devout Sikh peasant family of Sialkot, a part of Central Punjab. She was a religious woman who had a great faith in orthodox beliefs. She had a vast knowledge of folk tales, having heard them in her childhood from her own mother, as also legends, fables, myths and other narratives of gods, men, birds and beasts. "So sure was my mother's gift for storytelling," says Anand, "that sometimes I found myself rapt in her tales with an intensity of wonder."

The first twenty years of Anand's life seem to have been spent in the Punjab area. After passing his matriculation in 1920, Anand entered Khalsa College, Amritsar. He joined non-violent struggle against the British government and courted arrest. His early recollections focus on two cantonments, Mian Mir and Nowshera. In 1925, he graduated from Punjab University with Honours in English. The first break in Anand's life came when he received a scholarship for research in philosophy under Professor Dawes Hicks in London. It is here that he started creative writing. In 1926, he completed dissertation on the thought of great philosophers: John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume and Bertrand Russell. In 1928, he was awarded Ph.D. degree by London University. He then associated with T.S. Eliot's literary periodical *The Criterion*.

2.3 LITERARY CAREER

Mulk Raj Anand enjoys the reputation of being a pioneer novelist because of a corpus of creative fiction of sufficient bulk and quality. He is a prolific writer and is continuing to write and publish at the age of ninety-six. Besides novels and short stories, he has written a number of books on art, paintings and literature.

Anand became an exciting name with his early novels *untouchable* (1935), *Coolie*(1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) in which he started the new trend of realism and social protest in Indian English fiction. In his novels, he portrays the doomed lives of the downtrodden and the oppressed. His protagonists-a sweeper, a

coolie, a peasant - are all victims of exploitation, class- hatred, race-hatred and inhuman cruelty. Over the years, Anand has become a vigorous champion of the oppressed and the downtrodden.

Untouchable, a powerful novel, can be regarded as quintessential Anand since it projects most of his characteristic concerns and fundamental issues of life. The main theme of the novel is untouchability as a problem in Hindu society.

In 1939-1942, Anand wrote a trilogy, a series of three novels dealing with the same protagonist called Lal Singh. The novels were titled *The Village* (1939), *Across Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942).

In 1951, he published *Seven Summers*, the first of a series of seven novels which anand planned to write as a kind of autobiography in seven parts, corresponding to the seven stages of a man's life as described by Shakespeare in his play *As You Like It. Morning Face*, the second of the seven novels in the series, was published in 1968 and received the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1971. This has been followed by *Confession of a Lover* (1976), *Bubble* (1984), *Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi* (1990) and *Nine Moods of Bharata* (1999).

Besides novels, Mulk Raj Anand has written more than seventy short stories which have been published in various collections entitled *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944). *Corn Goddess and Other Stories* (1947), *Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other Stories* (1953), *The Power of Darkenss and Other Stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973). In addition, he has retold older Indian tales in two collections: *Indian Fairy Tales* (1946) and More *Indian Fairy Tales* (1961).

2.4 AWARDS

In 1952, Anand was awarded the International Peace Prize of the World Peace Council for promoting peace among the nations through his literary works. In 1967, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the President of India for distinguished service to art and literature. In 1978, he won the E.M. Forster award of Rs.3000 for his novel *Confession of a Lover* which was adjusted the best book of creative literature in the English Language.' This was the first annual award instituted by M/s Arnold Heinemann.

2.5 THE THIRTIES MOVEMENT

"Among the Indo-English novelists," observes Anniah Gowda, "Mulk Raj Anand is the most conspicuously committed writer... Perhaps the best word for it is the plainest: it is propaganda writing."[1] The Propaganda novel in the true sense is one so dominated by its author's ulterior purpose that the propaganda cannot be ignored, and normally one who dislikes that line of propaganda would find the book unreadable. Such a novel, Gowda opines, cannot rank among the great works of literature. In a similar vein, Chetan Karnani complains of the extra-literary intentions of the novelist: "The trouble with Anand is that he is not able to hide his proletarian sympathies."[2] These 'determined' detractors of Anand, and some others, charge him of having used the artistic medium of the novel for pure propaganda. Indoctrination, they hold, does not go with the creative process and aesthetic experience.

Anand is not deterred by such criticism: "I do not in the least mind criticism, even adverse probably because the suffering from which my novels have been written has

already been rewarded by the fact that they have gone into so many languages of the world in spite of their truthfulness and exposure of many shams, hypocrisies and orthodoxies of India."[3]

This is true, for in his fiction Anand was heeding his artistic conscience than following any pre-conceived formula. And that accounts for the abiding appeal of his novels.

Untouchable, as also some other early writings of Anand, cannot be fully appreciated unless studied in relation to the movement of the nineteen-thirties in Western Europe. For, as a writer he was shaped in the Thirties when several problems bogged the intellectuals. The problem that Anand "tried to face as a writer was not strictly a private, but a private-public problem."[4] As it was, he found it impossible to maintain aloofness from politics in the post-World War Europe.

Anand stayed in London for over two decades, from 1924 to 1945; he was therefore deeply influenced by the Progressive Movement in literature that flourished in the Thirties. In London, Anand came under numerous literary, political and social influences and it is in them that the sources of his synthesis of Marxist and humanist thought can be seen. "You will find that amorphous as my books are," writes Anand, "I did stick to the novel form, more or less, as an imaginative interpretation of Indian life rather than use it as a vehicle to sermonize. And the posing of the problems of human beings in the 30s by people like Malraux, Celine and Hemingway gave the necessary sense of discrimination to my own treatment of the predicament of our people as against the European view."[5] He was an overt nationalist and championed the socialist cause in his fiction in common with many European and American writers of the day.

The peculiar conditons during the early decades of the century in Europe and elsewhere put a great pressure on the writers to sympathize with the social cause. The complacency following the First World War, based on the erroneous belief that the League of Nations was going to preserve peace and security, was suddenly exploded, leaving a feeling of loss and disenchantment. There was complete erosion of human values.

Another event that had a profound influence on writers like Anand was the General strike of 1926 in the Great Britain. It made people conscious of the class war between haves and have-nots in modern civilization. On his arrival in England, Anand had admired Britain for her achievements in science and technology. Living through the strike, this illusion of his was shattered with a bang. He increasingly came to realize that the scientific and technological discoveries if controlled by a select band of people need not result in social benefits. "And it was no use speculating on the beneficence of science," avers Anand, "if its discoveries were to be manipulated to their own advantage by a small group of individuals who controlled the key industries and had an absolute say in matters of domestic and foreign policy."

The object of the General Strike was to attain specific rights for the mine workers; in a way it was a proletarian challenge to the government and its capitalist bias. Anand and a group of his colleagues sided with the workers; they felt dismayed at the failure of the strike. The strike had revealed the reactionary character of the English State "that it could put back human progress for a thousand years."[7] Anand felt convinced "that the people of Britain, no less than the people of India, had yet to win their liberty."[8]

After the destruction wrought by the First World War, European society had plunged anew into the shadows of economic depression and cynical mood. The economic depression caused disastrous effects; it gave rise to unemployment that brought in its fold unending distress and appalling misery.

The rise of Fascism in Italy under Mussolini and the Nazi power in Germany in 1933 under Hitler reflected the paralysis of the Western democracies. The Japanese aggression on Manchuria in 1931, the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in 1935, the extinction of Spanish Republic at the hands of Germany and Italy in 1936-37, all in succession tolled the death knell of the league of Nations.

Such a distintegrating world disillusioned the intellectual of the day; he strove for a commitment that would restore order and save his world from the existing chaos. The writer was not only absorbing the atmospehre as a participant but also seemed readily inclined to reflect it in his writing.

Alarmed at the situation the intellectuals of the West prominently led by Maxim Gorky of Russia, Romain Rolland of France, Thomas Mann of Germany, and E.M. Forster of England assembled in Paris in 1935. They raised the voice of liberty as Shelley and Dickens had done in their own times. "I want greater freedom for writers," declared Forster, "both as creators and critics for the ... maintenance of culture."[9] He appealed to the writers to be courageous and sensitive to fulfil their public calling; he urged them to come forward and arouse the people to act and struggle for creating a just and humane society. The conference was dominated by the writers with a socialist background, or having some affiliation with communism. They posed a premonition of a threatening situation, caused by the aggressive imperialism of the day. The psychology working in the background was the moving force that impelled the writers to use their talents against fascism and write for the working classes.

Inspired by these ideas some Indian students studying in England assembled in London a few months after the Paris Conference and formed the Progressive Writers Association. Their meetings were attended and occasionally addressed by Ralph Fox, Karnford and Caudwell. They framed a manifesto of the Association, which was finalized, amongst others by Mulk Raj Anand and Sajjad Zaheer.

Sajjad Zaheer who played a prominent role in the organization vividly recalls his association with Anand: "I have had the good fortune of having known Mulk...since 1930, when we were both young and in our twenties and were students in England. In 1935, Anand and I, together with a few other young Indians founded the Indian Progressive Writers Movement, spreading to almost all the great languages of India, blessed and supported by such eminent figures as Tagore and Premchand."

The progressive writers believed that the principal function of literature was to reflect and express the aspirations and fundamental problems of the toiling masses and ultimately help in the formation of a socialist society. Even those who were not Marxists adhered to the idea of a basic social transformation and political independence. A new content is discerned in literature, which not only bears out a radically revolutionary character but also a basically new rationale for such a change. "That truth alone should matter to a writer," says Anand in his essay "Why I Write?," "that this truth should become imaginative truth without losing sincerity. The novel should interpret the truth of life, from felt experience, and not from books."[10]

The Progressive Movement then has a reaction against the esoteric and inward-looking art of the nineteen-twenties. In England, it began with the publication of Michael Robert's anthologies, *New Signatures and New Country* which grouped Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, Isherwood and Edward Upward together for the first time. These writers were responsible for making social realism and tendentious literature of revolt fashionable in both Europe and America. It was during the same time that Anand was working on his novel *Coolie*. He essentially shared the political and social philosophy of the left wing intellectuals: "there was ample confirmation in the thinking aloud of the younger writers life Aragon, Malraux, Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and others that the questions they were asking themselves were more or less

similar to ours in India, and, irrespective of race and colour, we shared similar concepts and aspired towards kindred objects."[11] *Left Review*, an important organ of the new writers, carried extracts from the then unpublished *Coolie*.

The particular conditions of the Thirties account for many close resemblances between Anand, Mahatma Gandhi and George Orwell; both had much in common; esp. a passionate sense of social justice, "a recognition, more than a recognition, indeed knowledge--of the innumerable frustrations and suppressions. Both men hated the social prejudices that helped to maintain the oppressive status quo; the class system in England, the caste system in India."[12] Moreover, both the writers shared a profound dislike of colonialism. In tone and temper, Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* carried the same burden as Anand's *Coolie*.

One of the notable consequences of this movement was a growing rejection of the aestheitc theory of "art for art's sake." Anand has felt, from the very initial stages of his awareness of the human predicament, that the writer cannot shut himself in an ivory tower; he cannot stand on a high perch, but has to go into the raging storm itself, to be with the people to ally himself with their many sorrows and little joys. The purpose of the novel, according to Anand, is to change mankind, and through mankind society. He is vehmently opposed to the formalists or aesthetes who hold that art, though influenced by life, is essentially governed by its inner logic and not by outside forces. Nor has he any sympathy with the writers who are self-centred subjectivists indulging merely in petty variations of Proustian aestheticism.

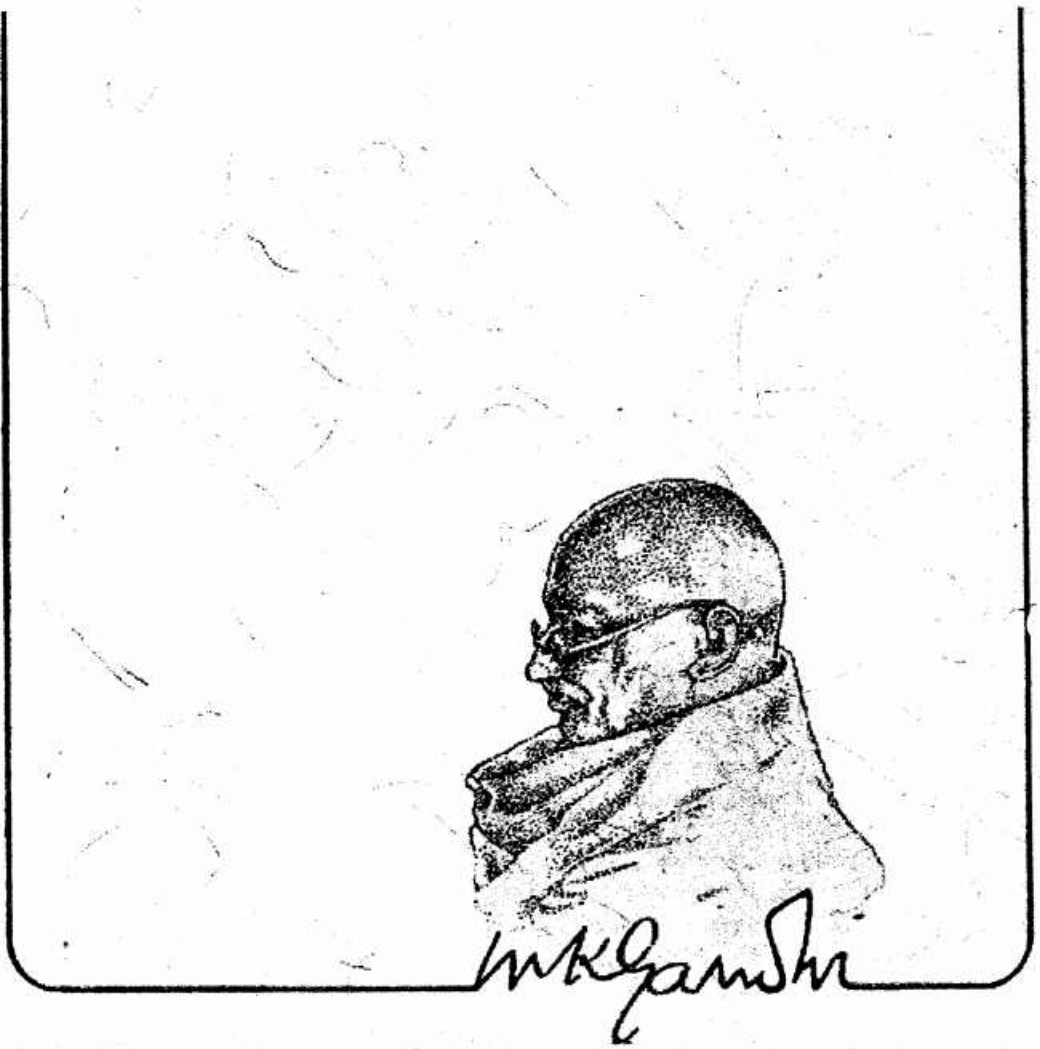
The Thirties movement defin: a it: specific terms the position of the artists and the functions of his art. In *Apology for Heroism*, Anand places the writer on a very high pedestal, glorifying him as "precisely the man who can encompass the whole of life."[13] He is superior to the moralist, the scientist and the politician, each of whom takes a limited view of man, while the writer "is uniquely fitted to aspire to be a whole man to attain, as far as possible, a more balanced perspective of life."[14] A novelist like any other artist is concerned chiefly with the truth. And he reveals it not like the philosopher who does it in a cold statement of dogma but only in terms of life, rendered through the devices of dramatization.

Anand, like Lawrence, Gorky, and Eric Gill, believes that the work of a genuine creative writer is inspired by a mission. He seems to be in full agreement with Arnold's dictum that literature at bottom is the criticism of like. He is strongly committed to his creed, and in his opinion "any writer who said that he was not interested in a condition humane was either posing or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism--a perverse and clever defense of the adolescent desire to be different."[15]

The Thirties movement proved to be a watershed in the literary sensibility in Europe. It shook the writers from age-old slumber and awakened them to the realization of new possibilities, which had so far eluded them. The early fiction of Anand was truly representative of the movement. His fictional world depicted not the feudal splendors and mysticism of traditional Indian literature, but the hard and suffering lives of the millions of his countrymen. Anand thus ushered in the realistic fiction.

In the choice of themes, therefore, Anand is unquestionably an innovator. He is the first novelist writing in English to choose as his raw material the lower-class life of the Indian masses. In *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, he almost dreads the flight of imagination, feels shy of soaring high and keeps close to the ground with a vengeance. He does not hesitate to turn the floodlight on the darkest spots in Indian life.

2.6 THE WRITING AND PUBLICATION OF *UNTOUCHABLE*



Untouchable was written over a long weekend in 1930. Mulk Raj Anand tells us that it poured out like hot lava from the volcano of his imagination, and that during its composition he hardly slept for more than six hours in three days. In his article *On the Genesis of Untouchable: A Note*, Mulk Raj Anand tells in detail about the writing of the novel. During a long week-end in the early twenties in Dublin, he started writing the first draft of the novel, then called Bakha. A little later, he came across a poignant story about a sweeper-boy Uka, written with utmost simplicity by Mahatama Gandhi in *Young India*. Anand wrote to the Mahatma and was allowed to meet him in three months' time. In April 1929, he went to see Gandhiji in the Sabarmati Ashram in the boiling heat of Gujarat. He showed Gandhiji the novel he had written.

Gandhiji was opposed to the writing of a novel depicting the love-affair of a boy and girl. Anand explained to him that it was about Bakha, a sweeper-boy, an untouchable. Gandhiji suggested that he should write a straightforward pamphlet about Harijans. Anand defended himself by saying that he wanted to tell the story just as Gandhiji had narrated his story about the sweeper Uka. Anand was allowed to stay in the Ashram provided he promised not to drink, not to think of his English girlfriend and clean latrines once a week. The three-month stay in the ashram rejuvenated Anand. The austerities that he practised there awakened his conscience and converted him to a life of sincerity, simplicity and truth.

Anand read some portions of the novel to Gandhiji who suggested that he should cut down more than a hundred pages, specially those passages in which Bakha seemed to be thinking and dreaming like a Bloomsbury intellectual. Following Gandhiji's advice, Anand revised the entire novel during his three month stay in the ashram. Out of two hundred and fifty pages, only one hundred and fifty pages were left. He read the revised version to Gandhiji who gave his approval to it.

However, the book failed to draw the attention of the publishers for more than two years. Anand felt quite disheartened by the fact that no publisher found the book worth publishing. Edward Thompson, an eminent writer of several books about India, wrote a letter to Anand giving reasons for the publishers' rejection of the manuscript: "It is true that Indian books do not sell. There is such a welter of propaganda and sentimentalism over everything Indian-British die-hard, National Congress journalist, fake poet and mystic, theosophist, Gandhi-adorer, American Women's club, all combine to make everything Indian depressing to anyone not half-witted. I seem to find signs that india is beginning to bore even Indians."[16] As a matter of fact, the novel was not accepted because it was unlike the traditional books. The main objection to the book was the squalor and dirt that it depicts.

Even Bonamy Dobree, a leading literary figure and friend of Anand, found the book wanting in some respects. He advised Anand "to make the beginning a little more different.....It does smell rather strong." He wanted Anand to delete the descriptions of dirt and cruelty in novel, for he felt that "the average reader does not want to be instructed but amused." [17]

Following the advice of Dobree and other critics, Anand revised the novel several times. For example, he tones down the opening pages of the novel. In writing of these, he had been greatly influenced by Dickens' description of London slums. Jonathan Cape, The Bodley Head, Chatto and Windus, and several other publishers turned it down, in spite of strong recommendation from Dobree.

Perhaps the most encouraging response came from E.M.Forster. After reading the manuscript, Forster wrote to Anand a letter on 5 May 1934: "I found it extremely interesting.....you make your sweeper sympathetic yet avoid making him a hero or a martyr, and, by the appearance of Gandhi and conversation about machinery at the end, you give the whole book a coherence and shape which it would otherwise have lacked."

By September 1934, the novel had been rejected by as many as nineteen publishers. Anand felt so disheartened that he contemplated suicide. At that juncture, a young British poet Oswell Blakeston took the manuscript to Wishart Books. The pubilsher accepted to publish it on the condition that the eminent English novelist E.M.Forster should write a Preface to protect it against being called 'dirty'. Forster not only quickly supplied the Preface but also insisted that Anand should accept the fee received for writing the Preface. He wrote the Preface as a matter of conviction. "It will be a great pleasure to me," he said, "if I should be of any help in introducing such an interesting and original piece of work to readers in this country."

The book was published on 1 May 1935. It received a mixed response to begin with, but soon it established for itself a popularity that remains unrivalled for a work of fiction by an Indian author. In 1944, the Penguin edition of the novel was published. By now, the novel has been translated into thirty-six languages of the world. Anand now lives in Khandala, a small hill station about hundred kilometres from Bombay and is leading a very active life-writing, attending seminars and conferences, meeting people and doing social work. His busy schedule of work shows him to be one of the most energetic of literary men of the twentieth century.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the shaping influences on Anand's life- parentage, association with the writers of Twenties and Gandhiji. We have also told you in detail the genesis of his master piece *Untouchable*. With these insights you should be in a better position to appreciate Anand's contribution to literature and society.

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. What major influences moulded the literary career of Mulk Raj Anand?

2. Trace the literary achievement of Mulk Raj Anand.

2.9 SUGGESTED READING

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[2] Chetan Karnani, "Mulk Raj Anand: The Novelist as a Socialist Chronicler," *Thought*, 23 August, 1974, pp.19-20.

[3] Saros, Cowasjee, ed. Author to *Critic: The Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Saros Cowasjee*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1973, pp. 15-16.

[4] Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism*. Bombay, 1957,p.78.

[5] Cowasjee, Saros. *So many Freedoms: A study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977. p.24.

[6] A.H. Anand. p.32.

[7] Ibid;p. 32.

[8] Ibid; p. 35.

[9] E.M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest*. London, 1953, p. 768.

[10] Mulk Raj Anand, "Why I Write?" *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*, vol. II, No. 1 Spring 1977, p. 251.

[11] A.H. Anand. pp.79-80.

[12] Dhawan, R.K.ed. *Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction*. New Delhi: Bahri, 1982, p.80

[13] A.H. Anand. p. 87.

[14] Ibid; p. 87.

[15] Ibid; pp. 81-82.

[16] Mulk Raj Anand, "On the Genesis of untouchable: A Note," in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1992, p. 80.

[17] Ibid.

UNIT 3 *UNTOUCHABLE*: TITLE, THEME, PLOT & CHARACTERISATION

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Title
3.2 Theme of Untouchability
3.3 Plot and Structure
3.4 Narrative Technique
3.5 Characterisation
3.6 Other Characters
3.7 Questions
3.8 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to acquaint you with the important aspects of the novel *Untouchable*. Here we shall discuss in detail the title of the novel, the theme of the evil of untouchability in India, the broad framework of the plot, and the narrative technique of the stream-of-consciousness and the flashback. This unit will also focus on Anand's art of characterisation, a detailed critical analysis of the protagonist Bakha and other characters.

3.1 TITLE

As stated in Unit 2.5, the novel was originally titled 'Bakha' and was almost double its present length. During his three-month sojourn at Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, Anand narrated the story to the Mahatma and also read Gandhi's poignant story about the sweeper-boy Uka, written in utmost simplicity and published in *Young India*. In his article "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*: A Note," Anand tells us that on the advice of the Mahatma, he removed the portions which were his "deliberate attempts at melodramatic contrasts of the comic and the tragic motifs, through which the spontaneous feelings, moods and lurking chaos in the soul of Bakha, had been somewhat suppressed."[1] Gandhi also suggested to Anand that he should cut down more than a hundred pages, especially those passages in which Bakha seemed to be thinking, dreaming and brooding like a 'Bloomsbury intellectual.' Incorporating these suggestions and revisioning the plot from the sensibility of a novelist rather than a pamphleteer, Mulk Raj Anand finally published the novel in 1935 with its present title *Untouchable*.

The absence of the definite article 'the' before the title makes the novel a symbolic saga of the miserable lives of the millions of untouchables in India who are at the lowest rung of the caste-ridden Hindu society in India and are victims of social injustice. In fact, Bakha becomes that representative untouchable who exemplifies the predicament of not only the sweeper-untouchables but also of all the dispossessed and deprived classes in every society who are forced to lead a life of self-pity and helplessness; and are treated as 'social outcasts' by the so-called superior castes, both at the physical and psychological level. The title thus is quite apt and appropriate, evocatively indicative of the main theme of the novel.

3.2 THE THEME OF UNTOUCHABILITY

Mulk Raj Anand has been described as a novelist with a deep social commitment. A close study of his works shows that he juxtaposes the social evils against the mindsets of individuals and some privileged sections of the society. In *Untouchable*, he has chiefly dealt with the ghastly evil of untouchability afflicting the Hindu society of the pre-Partition era, in the larger backdrop of the caste-configurations within the Hindu society that have successfully stifled the healthy growth of a considerable section of Indian community for centuries.

Anand has vividly depicted in the novel the miserable lot of the unfortunate untouchables and suggested that they can be freed from the shackles of killing orthodoxy and tradition only if men infuse into their own hearts some sympathy and tenderness and if the men who are humiliated as pariahs muster enough courage to live boldly and healthily.

Anand has artistically portrayed the harsh reality of the Hindu society which was getting divided into various pigeonholes. E.M. Forster comments on this aspect of the novel in his preface to *Untouchable*:

> The sweeper [untouchable in this case] is worse off than a slave, for the have may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. Thus he is a disquieting as well as a disgusting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming. No wonder that the dirt enters into his soul, and that he feels himself at moments to be what he is supposed to be. (U, p.6-7)

The opening paragraph of the novel epitomises the 'big divide' between the untouchables and other resident communities in the town:

> The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. (*U*, p. 9) References to the text are from the Orient Paperbacks 1935 rpt. edition of *Untouchable*.

A strong believer in the dignity of man and equality of all men, Anand is naturally shocked by the inhuman way the untouchables are treated by those that belong to superior castes—especially the Brahmins or the so-called "twice-born." The degradation and humiliation inflicted on the unfortunate sections of society is highlighted through the oft-repeated refrain of Bakha 'Posh, posh, sweeper coming. The very fact that they were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the only source of drinking water in the town of Bulandshahr called 'the caste-well', and had to wait sometimes for hours together for the generosity of some caste-Hindu to pour water in their empty pitchers, speaks volumes about how deep-rooted this evil had become. Although Bakha and his other outcaste friends sometimes played hockey with the two boys of the Hindu babu, yet the mere touch of a caste Brahmin unleashes an invasion of abusive epithets and physical assault on Bakha. He had purchased the mouth-watering jalebis and is lost in enjoying the taste of eating a portion of them when he unconsciously touches the tunic of a caste Hindu who immediately starts shouting:

> Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning. (*U*, p. 51)

Coming out of his reverie, Bakha is completely taken aback and his hands instinctively join together in apology without uttering a single word. He only bends his forehead over them and mumbles something but the 'touched' man does not care to hear what he says as he is not satisfied with Bakha's dumb humility. He again starts abusing him:

> 'Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! offspring of a pig!' he shouted, his temper spluttering on his tongue and obstructing his speech, and the sense behind it, in its mad rush outwards. 'I . . . I'll have to go-o-o . . . and get washed-d-d . . . I . . . I was going to business and now . . . now, on account of you, I'll be late.' (*U*, p. 51)

The situation results in a crowd gathering round to see what the row is about and this encourages the aggrieved man further in his denunciations. Bakha felt further confused by this fresh development and the novelist describes his misery, hopelessness and helplessness in these words:

> His first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, away, far away from the torment. But then he realised that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the onlookers, but a moral one. He knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men. And he could already hear in his ears the abuse that he would thus draw on himself. (*U*, p. 52)

One of the urchins in the crowd falsely accuses Bakha of 'beating them.' When he protests against the false accusation and asks for forgiveness for his present crime of 'forgetting to call his arrival' and 'touching the caste-Hindu', no one in the crowd believes a word of what he says. The peculiarity of his problematic situation is echoed aptly in these observations of Anand:

> He was really sorry and tried hard to convey his repentance to his tormentors. But the barrier of space that the crowd had placed between themselves and him seemed to prevent his feeling from getting across. And he stood still while they raged and fumed and sneered in fury: 'Careless, irresponsible swine!' 'They don't want to work.' 'They laze about!' 'They ought to be wiped off the surface of the earth!' (*U*, p. 54)

The sympathy that miserable Bakha draws from a passer-by Mohammedan tonga-wallah infuriates the 'touched man' further who gives Bakha a harsh and sharp slap on the face and it results in his turban falling off and the jalebis in the paper bag in his hand getting scattered in the dust. This unfortunate incident makes him indulge in pitiable self-analysis of his plight in this interior monologue:

> Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. Why didn't I shout to warn the people of my approach? That comes of not looking after one's work. I should have begun to sweep the thoroughfare. I should have seen the high-caste people in the street. That man! That he should have hit me! My poor jalebis! I should have eaten them. But why couldn't I say something? Couldn't I have joined my hands to him and then gone away. The slap on my face! The coward! (*U*, p. 56)

He becomes acutely aware of his low social status and protests in his mind:

> The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. Why are we always abused? The santry inspictor that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That's why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high-castes. (*U*, p. 56)

He is moved by the kindness of the tonga-wallah but the word "untouchable" haunts him:

> The tonga-wallah was kind. He made me weep telling me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Muhammadan. They don't mind touching us, the Muhammadans and the sahibs. It is only the Hindus and the outcastes who are not sweepers. For them I am a sweeper, sweeper—untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!' (*U*, pp. 56-57)

Another aspect of untouchability is unfolded by Anand through the kind of treatment meted out to Bakha and other outcastes by the Mohammedans, Christians and the men in the armed forces. Bakha is humanely consoled by the Mohammedan tonga-wallah after he is slapped by the touched-Lalla. Havildar Charat Singh too offers him tea and gives him a hockey stick. The unexpected visit of Hakim Bhagwan Das to Lakha's house when Bakha's condition had deteriorated to the extent of impending death establishes the nobility of the medical profession.

Towards the end of the novel, Anand seems to suggest a few solutions to this evil of untouchability. One of these refers to the efforts being made by the Christian missionaries through their local Salvation Army, the head of which is one Colonel Hutchinson. According to him, Christianity and Christ stand for equality of all human beings. In an answer to Bakha's constant questioning as to who Christ was, the Colonel says: "He sacrificed Himself out of love for us. . . . He sacrificed Himself to help us all; for the rich and the poor; for Brahmin and the Bhangi." (*U*, p. 142) Bakha seems to feel that in Christianity, there is no difference between 'the pundit of the morning' who thought himself defiled and polluted by his touch, and a sweeper-boy or bhangi like him. But the question of the Original sin and all human beings being sinners baffles him. He also cannot bring himself to accepting conversion to Christianity for the sake of equality.

In this confused state of mind, he confronts a crowd of people who had gathered at the Golbagh to listen to Mahatma Gandhi's speech. Here in this sea of humanity, he finds people from all classes and castes together as if Gandhi was a magnetic force to bring the much-needed equality for all and the eradication of the evil of untouchability. But he also felt that

> There was an insuperable barrier between himself and the crowd, the barrier of caste. He was part of a consciousness which he could share and yet not understand. He had been lifted from the gutter, through the barriers of space, to partake of a life which was his, and yet not his. He was in the midst of a humanity which included him in its folds, and yet debarred him from entering into a sentient, living, quivering contact with it. Gandhi alone united him with them, in the mind, because Gandhi was in everybody's mind, including Bakha's. Gandhi might unite them really. (*U*, p. 151)

Fortunately Gandhi is speaking on the evil of untouchability in the Indian society in that meeting. As a Congress volunteer puts it rather authoritatively', "The government has allowed him out of goal only if he will keep strictly within the litmes of his propaganda for harijans for the removal of untouchability." (*U*, p. 155) During the course of his speech, Gandhi clarifies :



Lost childhood

As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity. For me, the question of these people is moral and religious. When I undertook to fast unto death for their sake, it was in obedience to the call of my conscience. (*U*, pp. 160-61)

He further says that he regards untouchability as "the greatest blot on Hinduism" (*U*, p. 161) and exhorts the harijans not to accept the left-over food from the Hindus but the grain. He also expresses the opinion that all public wells, temples, roads, schools and sanatoriums must be declared open for the untouchables.

Another solution to the evil of untouchability is offered by R.N. Bashir, an advocate, and his young poet friend Iqbal Nath Sarashar who think that the introduction of the flush system will automatically put an end to this obnoxious social evil. As Sarashar says:

> Well, we must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognise an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone. The Mahatma didn't say so, but the legal and social basis of caste having been broken down by the British Indian penal code, which recognises the rights of every man before a court, caste is now mainly governed by profession. When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone to handle it—the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (U, p.162)

However, there is no definite and final solution to this deep-rooted social evil which seems to have eaten into the very vitals of the caste-ridden Hindu society. Therefore it cannot and does not lend itself to any easy solutions within the fixed parameters and the novel seems to have done a yeoman's service in highlighting the theme of untouchability in all its multi-faceted perspectives through its open-endedness.

3.3 PLOT AND STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL

Untouchable has no story interest; it is just an impassioned plea for a social cause. And it is this singleness of purpose i.e. exposing the evil of untouchability and analysing its various aspects—social, moral, psychological, religion-based, etc.—that provides structural unity to the plot. The plot of *Untouchable* can, unmistakably, be hailed as one of the most compact and coherent plots in Indian English fiction. This view finds confirmation in the fact that getting convinced of the advice of Mahatma Gandhi, Anand reduced the size of his manuscript to almost half of the original, keeping out extraneous details. In his well-known essay *On the Genesis of Untouchable*, Anand observes:

> In retrospect, I feel that, under the tutelage of the Mahatma, who did not pretend to be an artist, I was able to exorcise all those self-conscious literary elements which I had woven into the narrative in anticipation of what the critics might approve. He thought that the paragraphs of high-sounding words, in which I had tried to unite the miscellaneous elements, in what was essentially a walk through the small town of my hero, must go. Also, the old man suggested the removal of my deliberate attempts at melodramatic contrasts of the comic and tragic motifs, through which the spontaneous feelings, moods and lurking chaos in the soul of Bakha, had been somewhat suppressed.

And the Mahatma asked for the deflation of those clever tricks, which had made the expression of concrete detail into a deliberate effort at style.

Out of two hundred and fifty pages, hundred and fifty were left. [2]

Observing the three Aristotelian unities, though unconsciously, the novel records a day's events in Bakha's life which serve as a mirror to the pathetic condition of the untouchables who form the lower stratum of society in the caste-ridden orthodox Hindu society, especially in the pre-Partition times.

The novel begins with an autumn morning in Bakha's life. He is in bed, half-awake, "covered by a worn-out greasy blanket, on a faded blue carpet which was spread on the floor, in a corner of the cave-like, dingy, dark, one-roomed mud-house." (*U*, p. 10) It is so early that the sun has not risen.

Bakha is the son of Lakha, the 'Jemadar' of all the sweepers in the town and the cantonment. His chief duty is to keep the three rows of public latrines clean. These latrines are used by men from both the town and the cantonment. Bakha has for sometime worked in the barracks of a British regiment. He had looked at the Tommies, with wonder and amazement when he first went to live at the British regimental barracks with his uncle. He had had glimpses, during his sojourn there, of the life the Tommies lived: sleeping on low canvas beds covered tightly with blankets; eating eggs, drinking tea and wine in tin mugs; going to parade and then walking down to the bazaar with cigarettes in their mouths and small silver mounted canes in their hands. And he had soon become obsessed with an overwhelming desire to live their life. He knew they were white sahibs. So he tried to copy them as much as he could in the exigencies of his peculiarly Indian circumstances. His father had

been angry at his extravagance, and the boys of the outcastes' colony teased him on account of his eccentric dresses and called him 'Pilpali sahib'. And he knew, of course, that except for his English clothes, there was nothing English in his life.

As he is still lying in his bed, Bakha hears his father's stern and authoritative call, "Get up, ohe you Bakhya, ohe son of a pig!" (*U*, p. 13) He is angered at the abuse as he is already feeling depressed that morning. His father's abuses create a growing dislike in his heart for the short-tempered, sickly old man. But he has fond memories of his mother and thinks of the days when she was alive. She showed him all the affection that warmed his heart. She used to give him a brass tankard full of a boiling hot mixture of water, tea-leaves and milk from the steaming earthen saucepan. It was so delightful, the taste of that hot, sugary liquid, that Bakha's mouth watered for it on the night before the morning on which he had to drink it.

Bakha comes out of his reverie as he hears the shouts: "Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, scoundrel of a sweeper's son. Come and clean a latrine for me!" (*U*, p. 15) It is Havildar Charat Singh, the famous hockey player of the 38th Dogra regiment. He suffers from piles and accuses Bakha for his ailment: "Why aren't the latrines clean, ohe rogue of a Bakha? There is not one fit to go near. I have walked all round. Do you know you are responsible for my piles! I caught the contagion sitting on one of those dirty latrines!" (*U*, p. 16) Bakha picks up his brush and basket and sets out to clean the latrines.



Human excreta is being carted away to disposal sites after it was physically Cleaned and carried from household toilets by scavengers

Though his job is dirty, Bakha remains comparatively clean. He looks intelligent, even sensitive, with a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger, who as a rule is uncouth and unclean. The Havildar is thoroughly impressed by Bakha's quickness and efficiency in doing his job: "You are becoming a 'genterman', ohe Bakhya!" (*U*, p. 17) With a grin which symbolises two thousand years of racial and caste superiority, he asks Bakha to see him that afternoon and take the gift of a hockey stick from him.

Bakha feels grateful at this gesture on the part of one of the best hockey players of the regiment. Charat Singh's generous promise calls forth that trait of servility in Bakha which he has inherited from his forefathers: the weakness of the down-trodden, the helplessness of the poor, the passive contentment of the bottom dog, suddenly

illuminated by the prospect of fulfilment of a secret and long-cherished desire. He salutes his benefactor and bends down to continue his work again.

When he gets to the end of his work in the third row of latrines for the second time during the morning, he feels a cramp in his back and stretches himself out from the bent posture ne has maintained all the while. After the process of cleaning the latrines in the final fourth round, he feels extremely exhausted but he is intuitively reminded of his next job.

The real ordeal for Bakha begins when he goes into the town to sweep the streets as a substitute for his father who has said that he was not feeling well. Bakha is not only scolded but also slapped by a Hindu merchant who alleges that Bakha has touched him and thus polluted him. Says this man: "This dirty dog bumped right into me. So unmindfully do these sons of bitches walk in the streets." (*U*, p. 52) Bakha stands motionless, with a hopeless expression of meekness on his face. The entire crowd gathered there forms a circle round Bakha, but takes care to keep at a distance of several yards from him. They all are on the side of the man who has been complaining about Bakha's misdemeanour. Bakha feels as if he will collapse. A street urchin who has just joined the crowd says that this sweeper-boy, namely Bakha, has been beating small innocent chaps like himself. Bakha tries to defend himself by saying that he has never beaten this urchin but nobody comes to his rescue. The crowd feels absolutely no sympathy for Bakha. Rather the onlookers take a sadistic pleasure in watching him in distress. It is only a Mohammedan tonga-wallah who shows sympathy towards him.

Bakha now becomes acutely aware of his being an untouchable and begins to announce "Posh, posh, sweeper coming" (*U*, p. 59) as he starts walking. With booming rage in his mind, he asks himself why he was treated in such an abusive and insulting manner by the Hindus. He also wonders why the sahibs and Muslims don't mind touching them. The cruelty and orthodoxy of the Hindus is thus sharply focussed. These factors, the novelist seems to hint, are the probable reasons for conversion of a large number of low caste Hindus to Christianity.

After roaming around aimlessly, though fascinated by the stalls where the brass band musical instruments are displayed, Bakha goes to the temple where he is to sweep the courtyard. The sight of the stone deities from a distance (as he is not allowed to enter a Hindu temple) seem to calm his troubled mind. Driven by his curiosity to know more about the caged snake-god, he climbs a few steps leading to the holy place inside. Deeply moved by the rhythmic singing there, he instinctively folds his hands as if to worship inwardly the unknown god. He hears just then a loud cry "polluted, polluted, polluted!" (U, p. 67) This runs a wave of shock among the devotees. Bakha thinks he is undone, having come so near the deities.

Just then, Bakha catches sight of his sister Sohini standing at a short distance from him. As he goes near, the crowd also closes in, shouting that Bakha had defiled the holy precincts. Sohini tells him a different story altogether. While she was cleaning the lavatory of the priest's house, the priest had tried to outrage her modesty. When she protested and screamed, he came out of his place shouting that he had been polluted by her touch. The priest had not only disgraced Bakha's sister but had also attracted the sympathy of the crowd by accusing him of having polluted the premises.

Though he feels much troubled at heart, Bakha realises his helplessness; he can do nothing to expose the hypocrisy of the priest. He takes hold of Sohini and they walk towards the outer gate of the temple in order to go home. On the way, however, he realises that he too was fully aware of his sister's charm and he hated the very idea of her being married to a stranger. The next moment he feels a wild desire to retaliate when the thought of the priest's action returns to him. But realising his helplessness, he wishes that his sister were not beautiful.



Human excreta as headload

As they approach the outcastes' colony, Bakha is reminded that his father has asked him to collect food for the family. Asking his sister to go home, he himself goes to the silversmiths' colony. He shouts: "Bread for the sweeper, mother; bread for the sweeper." Feeling tired and defeated, when no one responds to his requests, he sits down on the wooden platform of a house and, leaning against the door, falls asleep. Bakha sees a dream now where he finds himself on a railway platform. There is a train consisting of a large number of wagons loaded with goods of all kinds. Then he imagines himself in a small village with narrow muddy streets with cows wandering about and two big carts stuck in the mud. He also sees himself in the compound of a school where boys are reading aloud.

As his dream continues, Bakha suddenly hears loud words, "Alakh, alakh," the shouts of a half-naked sadhu and the women coming out with chapatis and dal for the holy man. A housewife becomes furious when she sees Bakha on the threshold of the house and scolds him "Perish and die" as he has defiled her house. Bakha asks for her forgiveness and appeals for food. After a lot of fuss, she flings a chapati as if giving it to a dog. Bakha's tolerance now reaches the nadir and he returns home with only two chapaties and does not know how he would explain the situation to his old father. He is uncertain whether he should inform his father what had happened to him and Sohini in the town. But he is unable to make up his mind.

The old man calls him a good for nothing scoundrel and expresses the hope that his younger son Rakha might bring something nice to eat from the barracks. Bakha's mind travels to those days when he used to get plenty of food from the Hindu families and the degrading incidents of the morning engulf him. Seeing him lost in thoughts, his father feels that something is wrong. Bakha gives a poignant account of all that had happened to him and Sohini and tells his father that he would not go to the town again. Lakha consoles his son impressing upon him the hopelessness of their situation and asks him not to abuse any Hindu and not to hit back at any stage. He then narrates an incident how during Bakha's acute illness in his childhood, he had

been ill-treated at the Hakim's house and also how the Hakim had later visited their house in the outcastes' colony to save dying Bakha's life.

When his younger brother Rakha comes with some food from the barracks, they all start eating from the same basket but Bakha suddenly stops when his hand touches something sticky in the pieces of the left-over chapatics and his mind is filled with a sense of revulsion that it might be mixed up with somebody's saliva. He excuses himself from eating by telling a lie that he had been invited by Ram Charan to his sister's marriage where he will receive his share of sweets.

Bakha reflects in an interior monologue his early association with Ram Charan's sister and his desire to marry her. But the girl's mother Gulabo thought it below their dignity and had taken two hundred rupees from another person for the hand of her daughter. Being washermen, they considered themselves superior to Bakha in the hierarchy even among the outcastes.

When he reaches near the place of the marriage, he meets his other friend Chota and cannot muster enough courage to join the marriage festivities. But having been seen by Ram Charan, both of them call him out so that they can go for playing hockey for sometime. However, Bakha starts behaving in a strange manner. Lost in his thoughts, he does not respond to their jovial behaviour. On learning about unhappy and disgusting experiences of the morning, both Chota and Ram Charan express sympathy with him and wonder if they could catch hold of the swine-like pundit to kill him on the spot. However, they realise that this will be impossible and futile. Ram Charan and Chota now ask him to get the hockey stick from Havildar Charat Singh and promise to return soon for the play.

On his way to Charat Singh's house, Bakha once again sees with longing eyes at a sola hat hanging in the quartermaster's room of the 38th Dogras. He had always longed to own that kind of hat and had even thought of stealing it somehow but the fear of the alert sentries makes him change his mind.

When he ultimately meets Charat Singh, he finds that the latter is a broad-minded person who offers him tea and gives him the promised hockey stick. Bakha is filled with deep gratitude for Charat Singh for his kindness and leaves the barracks in a happy mood.

On the way, Bakha meets the military babu's two sons who also want to play hockey. The younger son is not allowed to play as they feel that he might get hurt during the game. In fact, the younger son does get hurt and is carried by Bakha when he is still bleeding profusely. The Babu's wife is surprised to see her injured son and accuses Bakha of defiling her house by coming there. This confuses his mind and infuriates his heart. In a dejected mood, he returns to the playfield to find that all the boys have gone home. After hiding the hockey stick among the bushes, he starts trudging towards his home.

Bakha is ill-treated by both his father and younger brother for wasting his time instead of engaging himself in the job of cleaning the latrines in the barracks. When he is told to leave home, Bakha is filled with utmost despair. He starts wondering what he had done to deserve the misery he was experiencing. He says that he would rather prefer dying to being ill-treated both at home and outside.

In this dejected mood, Bakha sits under a tree and suddenly he is accosted by Colonel Hutchinson, Chief of the Salvation Army in the region. Bakha is overwhelmed by the foreigner's interest in him but is unable to understand what he is told about the love of Christ, the Original Sin and other related stories.

The rude behaviour and insulting remarks about the sweepers made by Colonel Hutchinson's wife fill Bakha's mind with pain once again and he starts moving

aimlessly when he suddenly hears some people shouting "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" followed by another group shouting still louder "The Mahatma has come!" Along with the crowd of people, he too goes to the Golbagh where Mahatma Gandhi is going to address a meeting. There he finds the Hindu Lallas, the Kashmiri Muslims, the Sikh rustics, red-cheeked Afghans, Indian Christians and many people from the outcastes' colony together in the crowd. He realises that it was only Mahatma Gandhi who could bring unity among all the castes. He overhears some babus talking about Gandhi being a legend and the freedom becoming a reality soon under his leadership. He also learns that Gandhi had been released from the jail on the condition that he would not make any political speech. Just then there arises a shout from the crowd "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai! Hindu, Mussulman, Sikh ki jai! Harijan ki jai!" and he sees the little man escorted by Kasturba Gandhi on one side and his English disciple now called Miraben, on the other.

During his speech, Gandhi declares untouchability to be the greatest blot on Hinduism and says that it was very strange for Indians to seek freedom from the grip of a foreign nation while they themselves were trampling upon millions of their fellow human beings for centuries. Then he relates the story of the scavenger boy Uka, an untouchable, for whose sake he always pleaded with his mother in his childhood. The Mahatma expresses the wish to be born a scavenger in his next life so that he could realise their misery in toto and talks of removing the social evil of untouchability. He then exhorts the untouchables to give up their evil habits of drinking alcohol and eating meat. He asks them not to accept the remains of the food from the high caste Hindus but to insist on payment in sound foodgrains. Gandhi concludes his speech with the words: "May God give you strength to work out your soul's salvation to the end!" (U, p. 164)

Bakha is deeply touched by the concluding words of the Mahatma's speech which seemed to convey Bakha's own feelings of horror and indignation at the ill-treatment of the untouchables by the caste Hindus. When the Mahatma leaves, people again shout, "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" but he also hears a dissident voice that says that Gandhi is a humbug, a fool and a hypocrite. He voices his disgust about Gandhi living in the ancient times without realising the benefits that could accrue to India from modern technology.

Iqbal Nath Sarashar, a young poet, and his friend R.N. Bashir, a Barrister-at-Law, now discuss how the Indian society can be rid of its bane of untouchability. They talk of introducing the flush system for sewage disposal and recognising equal rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone as was the case with the legal system. Bakha feels bewildered and his mind is filled with gloom once again when he is left alone. The conflict in his mind makes him more miserable and he makes up his mind to go home and seek some solace by relating the story about Gandhi's visit and his speech to his father. As E.M. Forster says in the Preface:

> Some readers may find this closing section of the book too voluble and sophisticated, in comparison with the clear observation which has preceded it, but it is an integral part of the author's scheme. It is the necessary climax, and it has mounted up with triple effect. (U, p. 8)

The plot of *Untouchable*, though linear in form and simple in content, is perhaps one of the best experimental plots in the elementary stage of Indian novel in English. The use of the narrative techniques of stream-of-consciousness, flashback, reverie, interior monologue etc. and confining the action to less than twenty-four hours in the life of its hero Bakha makes it one of the most well-structured plots. The single-purpose theme of untouchability, being defined and analysed from different viewpoints and in all its complexity, provides it the much-desired coherence as is clear from Anand's observation in his essay on *On the Genesis of Untouchable*:

The binding together, the orchestration, and the interplay of Bakha's inner feelings and outer experience, with the apperception of the intangible "cloud of unknowing" hovering over his head, was not achieved merely spontaneously. The different elements had to be knit together, with intense effort, to achieve some sort of coherence. [3]

Though *Untouchable* does not have the conventional form of a proper beginning, middle and end, it does have a conclusive open-endedness offering three probable solutions to the removal of the evil of untouchability viz. conversion to Christianity, Gandhi's exhortation to the Harijans to shun the bad habits and get integrated into the mainstream of the Indian nation slowly but surely, and the introduction of the flush system. In this connection, Forster's observation in the Preface to the novel is quite relevant:

The book is simply planned, but it has form. The action occupies one day, and takes place in a small area. The great catastrophe of the 'touching' occurs in the morning, and poisons all that happens subsequently, even such pleasant episodes as the hockey match and the country walk. After a jagged course of ups and downs, we come to the solution, or rather to the three solutions with which the book closes. . . . Bakha returns to his father and his wretched bed, thinking now of the Mahatma, now of the Machine. His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand. (*U*, pp. 7-8)

3.4 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Indian novel has gone through a major transformation owing to the impact of the West, in the early decades of the twentieth century. This metamorphosis of content and form is evident in the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand who writes in the English language. Talking about the creative process at work in his novel *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Anand says that these novels "bridge the gulf between the surviving recitalist narratives in the languages of India and the residual influences of modern techniques in the West." [4] As a result, they take the novel form from the somewhat narrow provincial boundaries of Indian languages into the longer tradition of the international epic novel.

Mulk Raj Anand has admitted that he was amply influenced by the technique of James Joyce. And he has unconsciously imbibed the lessons of style and construction of the contemporary novel. Anand defines the novel as "the transformation by imagination of human beings through their conflicts in a given time space continuum as against the recital which is rooted in the timeless narration of Eternity." [5] But Anand is very clear and declares eloquently that the influence exerted by European technique does not make his novel less Indian or inferior in any way. The richness of content, the ideas and the action: of our struggle to be human, to remain alive and grow, in our Gandhian time, keeps him unmistakably Indian and invests the narrative with 'aliveness' and 'intensity.'

About the form of the novel, Mulk Raj Anand says that he had begun writing a bardic realist narrative, under the influence, mainly, of the enormous feudal Urdu epic *Fasana-I-Azad* by Ratan Nath Sarshar, in the early twenties. This amorphous narrative seemed to be endless, protracted, "like a flood in the Ganga, arising from Shiva's head, in the Himalayas, which hoped someday to flow into the ocean of story." [6]

As Anand was thinking of the method for writing his works, he came across James Joyce's novels. After reading Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he felt constrained to rewrite his loose narrative as a self-conscious novel, from which he

began to cut out the ballast, the outpourings, the long philosophisings, and the sermons, in order to reflect, from the constructed novel, the prismatic view of the characters, so that they would reflect their auras, radiances and atmosphere, without overt interpretation and personal comments.

As this task proceeded, he tried to take certain characters from his recital and began to work upon them in order to put them in compact long short stories. One such fundamental character in his endless narrative, who had been compelling attention, from the labyrinth depths of disaster, chaos and strife of India of that time was Bakha, the sweeper boy, whose tragi-comic life seemed to him symbolic of all untouchables. Anand wanted to transform the raw material of the conflict-torn rhythms of Bakha's existence into a narrative that would evoke response from the reader.

Also, Anand decided to create the atmosphere of the work-a-day world of his hero-antihero, who would be the very opposite of Joyce's lower middle class Jesuit intellectual, but would be integral to his own North Indian village landscape.

Anand wanted to create the plot, characters and milieu of his novels on the sound base of 'social, political, cultural, realities.' Being the son of a clerk in the army, he had the knowledge of lived experiences of life in the British Indian cantonments and he creates a strong segment in Bakha's life in his attempts to copy the Tommies by acquiring the sola topi, trousers, blanket and the hockey stick. The novelist had also gone through the 'misery, pain and humiliation in the lives of the outcastes as the loyalty of their family to the Ismaili Aga Khan faith made them a sort of 'untouchables' in the eyes of most of the orthodox Hindu brotherhood. Therefore, the pity for Bakha is aroused not so much from 'sympathy' but from 'understanding' of the degradation of outcastes, from sharing their pains, humiliations and inner aspirations. By maintaining 'distance' and 'objectivity', he was able to make his *passion* turn into *compassion*.

Anand's writings gained authenticity from his own awareness of the subhuman conditions. And he developed technical skill to communicate anger without bitterness. He was averse to creating a tragic character, for the life of Bakha would then be a tragedy. He therefore created Bakha as one of the first tragi-comic heroes of Indian fiction.

The stream-of-consciousness of the hero Bakha in *Untouchable* runs throughout the novel, with the undercurrents of reminiscence, reverie and intuition indicated in certain phrases, symbolic words and truncated thoughts. Anand puts into the middle of the day a dream sequence which was culled from the hero's imagination as a fable of his pilgrim's progress. Anand's own observation becomes very pertinent in this context as he writes:

> The atmosphere of the reverie was to hint at the turbulent world of his broken unconscious. The presentiments of the unknown fate which inspired him to pursue his quest, and which would be baulked by the taboo against him. The heart of his human enigma was placed here as a poem of his bodily movements, to indicate the movement of his soul. I wanted to show the monotony, the flatness, and the sameness of Bakha's life through which he would go, urged by the incurable urge of curiosity itself, but thwarted, desolate and derelict. [7]

At the end of the hero's reverie, in this strange haunted world, Bakha is not allowed to place an offering before the saint. And he finds himself among a swarm of monkeys. This is the novelist's way of keeping Bakha within the confines of his own hell. The images chosen are the images of the world around him: the bullock cart; the Sikh man, dressed in the uniform of the English army, blaring out discordant music; railway station with the goods train with an engine at each end, pulling both ways; himself getting on to a wagon, a sola topi on his head; a small village with narrow

streets; sparrows on the heap of grain; crow pecking at the bruised neck of a bullock; a little girl outside a sweet shop; a silversmith fashioning ornaments; an emaciated man on the steps of the ritually ornamented building; soldiers carrying him to a burning ground, where there were mounds of human bodies; holy men pouring the ashes of their dead into their hair; a white man smiling on the scene; an ascetic ten thousand years old performing a magic trick by which the white man was turned into a black dog; Bakha offering a gift and being disallowed; a swarm of monkeys jumping down.

Anand tries not to create these scenes through Bakha's eyes. As a novelist, he is looking on from the side so that he could see him during his pilgrim's progress, confronting his routine cosmogny. Says Anand, "Although I could see Bakha alone, a kind of expatriate, an exile, the outcaste, I wanted to put him into his own setting. And he was rendered in terms of his own human situations." [8] The most important thing for the novelist is to impart actuality to the scene through which the sap of his life flows, making everything into his felt experiences and not an abstract statement. The novel succeeds in giving a direct impression of the reality of Bakha's life, indicating the sources of his inner rhythms and vibrations.

Untouchable is essentially a contemporary novel. There is implicit in this novel the beginning of the free natural man of our era, enslaved by circumstances, and who is in revolt against the suppressions. The narrative techniques of flashback, reverie, reminiscence, instinctive awareness of reality, intuition, etc. coupled with symbolic images, words and phrases, truncated thoughts, and Mulk Raj Anand's conscious awareness of bringing about the objective correlative from a distance, make *Untouchable* a modern novel in the real sense of the term.

3.5 CHARACTERISATION

Are characters in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* individuals of flesh and blood or mere types? Does the novel have flat or round characters? Is the hero of the novel, Bakha, the bearer of the main theme, the vision of the author, and the representative of an important segment of society? The answers to these questions will determine the success of the novelist as a creator of strong and lively personages with the help of which the content and form of the novel get suitably illuminated?

It is significant to note that the main character in each of Anand's novels undergoes a certain experience through which he matures. Bakha in *Untouchable* is a much more complex character than Munoo, the protagonist in the novel *Coolie*. He is not passive or static. He changes and grows during the course of the novel. At the end of the novel, Anand offers the alternatives for Bakha in a three-fold approach: the attempt of an Englishman to convert Bakha to Christianity, the speech Gandhi delivers on untouchability, and the talk between a progressive poet and a semi-educated Babu. But Bakha himself steps out of the story: he is only a passive listener. Having received no education, he does not understand many of the issues raised. Still, Gandhi's simple words and the poet's mentioning of a new machine which will revolutionize the sweeper's job fill Bakha with a hope for a better future.

The characters, especially the hero-antihero of *Untouchable*, are individuals striving to change their destiny with their own grit and determination. Often thwarted by the onslaughts of a system that lays great value on one's birth in a particular caste and the economic status in the society, Mulk Raj Anand makes the following pertinent observation in this connection while commenting on *Untouchable* and *Kanthapura*:

> They reveal the change of consciousness from the old feudal orthodox life to the new modern confrontation of human values in the individual life. They

> dramatise the conflicts of the characters, beyond the age of the gods, into the age of man where the evil in other men became important and when the release into future growth began to seem possible through the acquisition by the individual of democracy, thus giving man the right to feel, to think, to breathe in his own skin, to be aware of his own vital sentience.[9]

Untouchable is spun round the happenings of a day in the life of the sweeper boy Bakha who has been elevated to the position of a hero in the novel. In creating a sweeper boy as the protagonist, Anand makes a revolutionary departure from the tradition of fiction writing in India. The portrayal of Bakha in the novel is so realistic and convincing that it imparts to the work a new meaning and depth. Bakha, it must be noted, is both an individual as well as a type. As the title of the novel *Untouchable* does not have a definite article, Bakha seems to be a representative untouchable, exemplifying the predicament of not only a specific untouchable but also of dispossessed men everywhere.

Bakha, the central character, is introduced to us on the very first page of the novel. He is described as a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied, who does his job of cleaning the public latrines promptly and satisfactorily. His father is a 'Jemadar' (chief) of all the sweepers in the town and is officially in charge of three rows of public latrines which line the extreme end of the colony.

Although his job is dirty, Bakha remains neat and clean. He does not let even his sleeves become soiled in the process of his sweeping and scrubbing the commodes. His laborious work results in his developing a fine physique. His muscular figure gives a wonderful wholeness to his body and imparts a certain nobility to him which is in contrast to his filthy profession and to the sub-human status to which he is born.

Bakha appears as a victim of social injustice at the very outset. He must get up early in the morning and attend to his work of cleaning the public latrines. He sleeps in a corner of his father's one-roomed mud-house. His father, Lakha, shouts at him if he is late in getting up from his bed which is by no means warm and comfortable. Bakha does not get a moment's rest and is frequently abused by his father who is very proud of being addressed as 'Jemadar' by the Indian sepoys. If Bakha goes to play with other boys, his father calls him back in the middle of the game and orders him to attend to the latrines.

On the particular day, to which the story pertains, Bakha is not only ordered by his father in a stern manner to get up but is also summoned by Havildar Charat Singh, who is waiting outside the latrines. He jumps from his bed as he hears him shout: "Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, scoundrel of a sweeper's son. Come and clean a latrine for me." (*U*, p. 15)

Bakha has a desire to look like a Sahib, to create his own world modelled after that of the English. Absolutely aware of his position, the sweeper does not accept his status but is eager to make others ignore it. As Anand says: "he had built up a new world which was commendable, if nothing else, it represented a change from the old ossified order and the stagnating conventions of the life to which he was born."

The flesh and blood character of Bakha is epitomised in the fact that Anand has taken care to caricature Bakha at times, especially in his fanciful efforts to imitate the ways of the 'sahibs' so much so that his friends Chota and Ram Charan nickname him "Pilpali sahib." (*U*, p. 12)

Bakha is stronger than Munoo, the central character in *Coolie*. He boldly faces his fate and is also mature sufficiently to analyse critically any situation with which he is confronted. It is evident in Bakha's fury about his father's unjustified abuses and his revolt against the hypocritical society which erupt over and again.

The futility of Bakha's rebellion and the extent of his suffering reveal an aspect of the conflict between the individual and the society. In spite of his revolt and strong resistance to opposing forces, Bakha is helplessly bound to his low caste status. He is conscious of the fact that his protest and rebellion will lead him nowhere. After he has polluted the temple and has learnt about the priest's immoral behaviour towards his sister, he becomes furious and wants to give the priest a piece of his mind: "And yet, there was a futility written on his face. . . . So in the highest moment, of his strength, the slave in him asserted itself, and he lapsed back, wild with torture, biting his lips, ruminating his grievances."

Bakha has not been idealized or glorified by Mulk Raj Anand. Though an exceptional lad among the sweepers, he remains a true representative of his class. As E.M. Forster says in the Preface to the novel:

> Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive: we can recognize his broad intelligent face, graceful torso, and heavy buttocks, as does his nasty jobs, or steps out in artillery boots in hopes of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hand.

The different traits of his character stamp him as an individual human being.

3.6 OTHER CHARACTERS

Bakha is undoubtedly one of the strongest individual and symbolic characters in Indian English fiction. But Anand's strength in the art of characterisation also lies in the fact that the other characters in *Untouchable* complement and highlight not only the structural role of the hero but are also functional in mirroring the kaleidoscopic environment of the caste-ridden Hindu society of the pre-Partition days in the history of India.

One of the significant minor characters is Bakha's father Lakha who is the 'Jemadar' of the sweepers in the cantonment of Bulandshahr. He is a kind of patriarch who holds his children in great awe especially after the death of his wife. His reprimands and scolding, though resented by both the sons, do not produce any open protest from them. He is an egoist who likes to be addressed as 'Jemadar' and is proud of his 'izzat.' Though he bullies his children, yet the tenderness of his heart as a father is evident when he relates the story of Bakha's illness in his childhood. He acknowledges his subservience to the caste-Hindus and is reconciled to his low and inferior position in the society.

Lakha's younger son Rakha is a sort of a foil to Bakha. Unlike his elder brother, he has no element of intuitive protest in his character and lacks Bakha's love for cleanliness. He also does not attend to the work of sweeping and cleaning in the same efficient and natural manner as does Bakha. Anand has given a penetrating pen-portrait of Rakha:

> His tattered flannel shirt, grimy with the blowings of his ever-running nose, obstructed his walk slightly. The discomfort resulting from this, the fatigue, assumed or genuine, due to the work he had put in that morning, gave a rather drawn, long-jawed look to his dirty face on which flies congregated to taste the saliva on the corners of his lips. The quizzical, not-there look defined by his small eyes and his narrow, very narrow forehead, was positively ugly. (U, p. 92)

Sohini, an important female character in the novel, has a pleasing personality like her brother Bakha. The charm of her physical beauty is evidenced when she is described as having a sylph-like form, an arched narrow waist and globular breasts. Bakha is proud of her beauty and charm but cannot stand the humiliation suffered by her at an attempt of molestation by the priest in the temple. This episode shows the remarkable integrity and moral uprightness of her character. In fact, it seems that Anand has introduced the character of Sohini with the aim of exposing the hypocrisy of the caste Hindus who like all other human beings can and do fall prey to the sensuous charms of the female body. At the well, the priest of the temple goes out of his way to pour water into Sohini's pitcher, ignoring the others who have been waiting for a longer time than Sohini. Again, Pundit Kali Nath tries to seduce her in the lavatory of his house where Sohini has gone as per his order earlier in the day. Sohini's maternal instinct towards her brothers is of great significance in the novel. Her mother being dead, it is she who looks after the household, and the needs of her father and two brothers.

Pundit Kali Nath, like other minor characters, is a functional character with whose help Anand puts to satire and ridicule the hypocrisy and cruelty of conventional religion. He is one of the priests of the local temple in Bulandshahr. He is an ill-humoured old devil who gets ready to draw water from the village well when persistently requested by the crowd of untouchables to do so. However, it is not out of any sense of sympathy towards them but chiefly because of his selfish motive of the exercise of doing some good to the chronic constipation from which he suffers. He favours Sohini because he is enamoured of her physical charm. Later on, when Sohini protests against the attempt of molestation, he exploits his religious respectability and comes out shouting "polluted, polluted" and the crowd in the temple seems to be on his side. Thus he becomes a representative of the traditional tyranny and injustice often inflicted on the low castes in the name of religion by the so-called high castes.

In Charat Singh, we meet a generous-minded caste Hindu who stands in full contrast to the hypocritical priest. He is a Havildar in the army and is a famous player of the 38th Dogra regiment. He has a high sense of humour and mentions his piles to Bakha in a typical comical style. He is above caste prejudices and is free from the 'pollution' complex. He not only gives Bakha the promised hockey stick but also offers him a cup of tea. Bakha is duly impressed by his generosity and fair-mindedness.

Colonel Hutchinson, like his nagging wife, is one of the two English characters in the novel. He has been drawn in the comic spirit of caricature. The dress he designs for himself is a funny mixture of English and Indian costumes: a pair of white trousers, a scarlet jacket and a white turban with a red band across it. On his way to church, he starts singing with the hope of adding another convert to his list. He is made the purveyor of one of the probable solutions for the removal of the evil of untouchability. He is physically thin and lean and balding, and is fired with the zeal of converting low caste Hindus to Christianity. He tries long to persuade Lakha to become a Christian but the reply the sweeper always gives him is that the religion which was good for his forefathers is good for him also. In spite of his advanced age, Colonel Hutchinson is quite active and acts with a missionary zeal in the colony of the outcastes for which he is often criticised by his wife.

Iqbal Nath Sarashar, the poet, is a young man. He is a revolutionary social reformer who has a progressive outlook and seems to be a sort of the mouthpiece of the novelist offering the introduction of the flush system as another alternative solution to the removal of the evil of untouchability. He becomes the representative of those who consider modern technology to be the saviour of mankind. He is in favour of an organic change in society to the Marxian ideology. With his character, Anand endows the novel with a significant perspective to the main theme.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Mulk Raj Anand's novels portray Indian social problems realistically. Discuss with reference to the novel *Untouchable*.

2. Write a critical note on the plot-construction in *Untouchable*.

3. Discuss the narrative techniques employed by Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *Untouchable*.

4. Bakha is not just a suffering abstraction but a man of flesh and blood convincingly portrayed by the author. Discuss.

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Mulk Raj Anand. *Untouchable* 1935; rpt. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1970.

Mulk Raj Anand. "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*: A Note." In *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R.K. Dhawan New Delhi: Prestige, 1992.

Mulk Raj Anand. "Roots and Flowers." In *Creating Theory: Writers on Writing*, ed. Jasbir Jain New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000.

References

[1] Mulk Raj Anand, "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*: A Note," in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige, 1992), p. 11.

[2] Ibid., p. 11.

[3] Ibid., p. 12.

[4] Mulk Raj Anand, "Roots and Flowers," in *Creating Theory: Writers on Writing*, ed. Jasbir Jain (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000), p. 50.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[7] *Ibid.*, p.56.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

UNIT 4 THE PICTURE OF A FRAGMENTED NATION IN ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 The Picture of a Fragmented Nation
4.2 Hinduism
4.3 Islam
4.4 Christianity
4.5 The Religion of Humanity
4.6 Let Us Sum Up
4.7 Glossary
4.8 Questions
4.9 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to understand the emerging picture of the Indian nation in the colonial period as it appears in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. In the novel, Anand focuses on the three given religions– Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. In addition to these is the fourth—preached by Gandhiji—the religion of humanity.

4.1 THE PICTURE OF A FRAGMENTED NATION

A cursory reading of the text makes it obvious that *Untouchable* does not directly deal with the complexities of nationalism. But in presenting the life of Bakha, an untouchable, the novel shows that the idea of Indian nation / national culture emerging in the colonial period failed to include within its body the whole of the demographic mass that it claimed to represent. Partha Chatterjee in *Nation and its Fragments* (1994) argues that "the formation of a 'national culture' was *necessarily* built upon the privileging of an 'essential tradition,' which in turn was defined by a system of exclusions."[1]

How does Anand convey the isolation and exclusion of the untouchables in a novel which covers a time span of only one day? The novel opens with a description of the outcastes' colony which is excluded both from the town and the cantonment.

> A group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment; but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and the other outcastes from Hindu society. (*U*, p. 11)

However, the next paragraph describes Bakha, the untouchable, as a "strong and able-bodied" man, who "thought" the outcastes' colony to be "an 'uncongenial' place to live in," (*U*, p. 13) and who was at the same time "caught by the glamour of the white-man's life" (*U*, p. 14) Thus Anand humanizes the untouchable by letting the reader see things from Bakha's perspective and by giving the reader an access to his private thoughts and emotions. The impact of Bakha's sufferings is further accentuated by the near total identification of the narrative voice with that of the

hero's. Saros Cowasjee remarks: "So strong is the identification with his hero that for the best part of the novel we forget the presence of the novelist."[2]

The exclusion of the hero is further accentuated by the novel's episodic structure in which each episode serves as a form of community existence from which Bakha is socially or emotionally excluded.[3] For instance, Bakha's casual walk through the main street of the city becomes loaded with meaning when it highlights the humiliation that an untouchable constantly experiences. Even while paying for sweets Bakha's "head was bent [and] he was vaguely ashamed and self-conscious at being seen buying sweets" (*U*, p. 51). This is followed by the crucial moment in the novel when Bakha is slapped for 'touching' an upper caste Hindu. Anand observes:

> His [Bakha's] first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, far away from torment. But he realised that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the onlookers, but a moral one. He knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men. (U, p. 52)

The incident jolts Bakha into an awareness of his position in the social order. When surrounded by the mob, Bakha realizes that the barrier was not "a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulder would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like onlookers, but a moral one." (*U*, p. 54) The moment is crucial because it is for the first time that Bakha becomes painfully aware of the fact that he is an untouchable:

> Like a ray of light shooting through darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance of his lot dawned upon him. . . . A shock had passed through his perceptions, previously numb and torpid, and had sent a quiver into his being, stirred his nerves of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, all into a quickening. 'I am an Untouchable!' he said to himself. (*U*, p. 59)

His helplessness is further demonstrated in the next episode when his sister is molested and subsequently humiliated by the priest. Through these and other episodes, Anand shows the marginalized status of the Untouchables in India.

Further, instead of a simplistic portrayal of a Hindu-Muslim divide, the novel shows the complexities of the problems involved in the emerging model of the nation by highlighting the alliance between the lower caste Hindus and Muslims; the lower caste Hindus and English; and the rifts within the Hindu lower castes itself. It is impossible for the outcastes' to organize themselves into any sort of a movement against the oppression of the upper caste Hindus since they are themselves divided into a hierarchy of castes. Gulabo, the washerwoman, "thought herself superior to every other outcaste, firstly because she claimed a high place in the hierarchy of the castes among the lower castes, secondly because a well-known Hindu gentlemen in the town who had been her lover in her youth was still kind to her in her middle age." (*U*, pp. 27-28) Bakha's situation is peculiar since he not only belongs to the lower class but within the lower caste he belongs to the lowest category: "Ram Charan was admitted to be of the higher caste among them, because he was a washerman. Chota, the leather-worker's son, came next in hierarchy, and Bakha was of the third and lowest category." (*U*, p. 108) Thus Bakha faces a double alienation since he is alienated both from the upper and the lower caste Hindus.

The exclusion of the lower castes shows the gaps in the model of the nation based on privileging an essential tradition: on the one hand a bulk of the population does not figure in the model of the nation and, on the other hand, the dominant Hindu religion

faces a threat from within, since exclusion of the lower castes forces the formation of a possible alliance of the lower caste Hindus with the Muslims and the Christians.

Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* also deals with a similar phenomenon. The native community begins to break apart after the arrival of the Christian missionaries, who admitted the outcastes into the church. "These outcastes, or *osu*, seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such abominations, thought that it was possible that they would also be received."[4] Initially there is a protest against the inclusion of the outcastes, but Mr. Kaiga, who is in charge of the congregation, argues that "Before God . . . there is no slave or free. We are all the children of God and we must receive these our brothers."[5]

A similar issue is raised by Anand in *Untouchable*. Colonel Hutchinson, chief of the local Salvation Army targets the Untouchables as possible converts to Christianity. He was always seen "talking to some Untouchable in the rubbish heaps about divinity and trinity." (*U*, p. 135) For the Untouchable Bakha, conversion into Christianity not only promises an equal status with other human beings but also in the bargain the hope of becoming a *Sahib*. Bakha, even though the priest's songs baffle and bore him, follows him

> because the Sahib wore trousers. Trousers had been the dream of his life. The kindly interest which the trousered man had shown him when he was downcast had made Bakha conjure up pictures of himself wearing the Sahib's clothes, talking the Sahib's language and becoming like the guard whom he had seen on the railway station near his village. (*U*, p. 143)

At the same time Bakha is influenced by Christ's message of equality: "'He sacrificed Himself for the rich and the poor, for the Brahmin and the Bhangis' . . . 'Han, han, Sahib, I [Bakha] understand, 'Yessuh Messih makes no difference between the Brahmin and myself'." (*U*, p. 144) But most of what the Salvationist says makes no sense to Bakha:

> He hadn't understood very much what the Salvationist said. He didn't like the idea of being called a sinner. He had committed no sins that he could remember. How could he confess his sins? Odd. What did it mean confessing sins? 'Does the Sahib want some secret knowledge?' He wondered. (*U*, p. 145)

The Salvationist instead of understanding the actual problems of Bakha mystifies the Christian religion which repel Bakha from the possible option of conversion to Christianity. Unlike Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in which the conversion of the outcastes to Christianity breaks the clan, Anand in the *Untouchable* does not deal with such a possibility in any depth. However, by highlighting the possibility of an alliance between the lower castes and the Christians, the novel shows the dangers the Hindu community was facing from within.

As mentioned earlier, the novel demonstrates how the exclusion of the lower caste Hindus and Muslims forces the formation of an unspoken alliance between the two. Bakha feels "much nearer" to the Muslims whom "the Hindus considered outcastes." (*U*, pp. 48-49) It is a Muhammadan tonga-wallah who comes to Bakha's rescue when he is humiliated by the 'touched' Hindu in the market:

> 'Leave him, never mind, let him go, come along, tie your turban,' consoled the tonga-wallah, who being a Muhammadan and thus also an Untouchable from the orthodox Hindu point of view, shared the outcaste's resentment to a certain degree. (*U*, p. 57)

4.2 HINDUISM

It is significant that Bakha is constricted by a "moral" hindrance and by a notion of defilement. Both concepts are products of orthodox Hinduism which misinterprets the caste-system invented by the Aryans. What had begun as a classification based on the type of work performed by individuals, eventually decayed into a rigid stratification with the Brahmans forming the top of the pyramid, followed by the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas, with the Shudras forming the base. Thus caste was a group system based on services and functions. It was meant to be an all-inclusive order without any common dogma and allowing the fullest latitude to each group.

While the first three castes occupied fairly important positions in their society, the Shudras were treated as the outcastes. These outcastes—though important for keeping the caste stratification intact—were made to feel superfluous and unwanted. Their function of keeping their society clean earned them the rubric of "untouchables" and progressively they were pushed to the margins of their society—literally and figuratively. Their plight is focussed on through little cameo scenes in the novel which speak for themselves, like the scene at the well, the events at the temple, Bakha's humiliation in the market-place, and the attempt on Sohini's honour.

Anand also stresses the fact that "defilement" and "pollution" are not related to a sense of hygiene in the Hindu community, but instigated by religion. At the opening of the novel, when Bakha is cleaning the toilets, we are told:

> And though his job was dirty he remained comparatively clean. He didn't even soil his sleeves handling the commodes, sweeping and scrubbing them. . . Havildar Charat Singh, who had the Hindu instinct for immaculate cleanliness, was puzzled when he emerged from his painful half an hour in the latrines and caught sight of Bakha. Here was a low-caste man who seemed clean. (U, p. 17)

The contradictions inherent in the practice of untouchability are highlighted through Bakha's interactions with different sections of Indian society. On the question of education, Bakha ruminates on the absurdity of not being allowed to go to school on the pretext of being a sweeper's son, when "most of the Hindu children touched him willingly at hockey and wouldn't mind having him in school with them." (U, p.42) The betel-leaf seller and the sweet-shop owner take his money, even cheat him, but not before they have thrown water on the coins and thereby purified them. This throwing of water instead of "ganga-jal"—the traditional purificatory instrument—for removing the pollution from an untouchable's money, throws light on the hollowness of jaded, inherited, notions of purity which have lost their significance and meaning but not their practice. Mulk Raj Anand explores the manner in which untouchability is addressed in different religions and the outcome of his study is truly illuminating.

The religion which dominates the population of Bulandshahr, the setting of Anand's novel, is Hinduism. Though important for the dominant social structure to validate and propagate itself, the outcastes are forever at the mercy of the upper-castes. So congenital is their subservience that even wrongful abuse is countered by servile admission; a point well-illustrated by Bakha's plea to the affronted upper-class Hindu: "I have erred now. I forgot to call. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again. I forgot. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again." (U, p. 53) Bakha's innate sense of dignity is blunted by inherited notions of servility—"They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us" (U, p. 88)—and in the temple sequence, his curiosity to see the shrine pulls him towards it and we are told:

But he soon lost his grace in the low stoop which the dead weight of years of habitual bending cast on him. He became the humble, oppressed underdog that he was by birth, afraid of everything, creeping slowly up, in a curiously hesitant, cringing movement. (U, p. 64)



An old lady with her grandchildren

Throughout the novel, the Hindus are shown treating him worse than they treat their animals. The barrage of insults which are showered on his head by the upper-castes—men and women alike—are merited by the accident of his birth as an untouchable. We are shown a community which is ridden with superstition, false notions of class, and hypocrisy. The Hindu priests—the Brahmans—are the worst of the lot and in the figure of Pundit Kali Nath we see the worst possible conjunction of decadent traditions and hypocrisy. Though he would never allow an untouchable to enter the temple, he has no compunctions in making indecent suggestions to Sohini and even tries to molest her. Sohini's plight far exceeds that of Bakha for she is doubly oppressed—as an untouchable and a woman.

What comes through, quite unequivocally, is the unbridled exploitation of the outcastes at the hands of the upper-castes; through the figure of Bakha, Anand questions the assumptions based on which Hinduism practises untouchability and records the movements against untouchability, which were gaining force since the 1920s, in Bakha's questioning of his deplorable position in society.

4.3 ISLAM

Though the novel is dominated by a Hindu population, considerable space is given to the Muslims. This segment of the population is unconscious of the Hindu bias against the outcastes as Islam treats all human beings equally; and therefore, has no practice similar to untouchability.

The empathy which Bakha, technically a Hindu lower-caste, feels with the Muslims "whom the Hindus considered outcastes and who were, therefore, much nearer him," (U, p. 47) comes through in a series of scenes in which Bakha interacts with them. While the Hindu betel-leaf seller flings a packet of cigarettes at Bakha "as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his shop," (U, p.46) the Muslim barber asks Bakha to bend down and light his cigarette from his hukkah. The abuses which the Hindu showers on a hapless Bakha in the market place is counterpointed by the compassionate response of the tonga-wallah,

> 'Leave him, never mind, let him go, come along, tie your turban,' consoled the tonga-wallah, who being a Muhammadan and thus also an Untouchable from the orthodox Hindu point of view, shared the outcaste's resentment to a certain degree. (U, p. 55)

Bakha's response to the event is in keeping with his original empathy towards the Muslims: "The tonga-wallah was kind. He made me weep telling me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Muhammadan. They don't mind touching us, the Muhammadans and the Sahibs." (U, p. 57)

4.4 CHRISTIANITY

The third segment of the population, of Bulandshahr, is composed of the "sahibs" in the cantonment. Bakha's interaction with the "tommies," occasioned by his employment in the barracks of a British regiment, offers him an avenue to see himself as something other than an untouchable. We are told: "The Tommies treated him as a human being and he had learnt to think of himself as superior to his fellow outcastes." (U, p. 10)

Mulk Raj Anand introduces the Christian angle in the novel through the comico-pathetic figure of Colonel Hutchinson, chief of the local Salvation Army. A true believer in his cause of saving souls, Colonel Hutchinson is a propagater of conversion. We are told:

> He was marvellously active for his three score years and five, laying himself in hiding of yore in deep pits of filth or behind heaps of dung, to wait for some troubled outcaste who might be tired and hungry and would listen in his despair to the gospel of Christ. (U, p. 134)

It is this impulse which makes the colonel approach Bakha and invite him to visit the "girja-ghar." (U, p. 138) Though Bakha does not understand much of what the Colonel is singing or saying, one statement of the Colonel goes straight to his heart: "He [Christ] sacrificed Himself to help us all; for the rich and the poor; for the Brahmin and the Bhangi." (U, p. 142)

Bakha, though doubtful of the Colonel's designs on him, follows him because he is too much in awe of this Sahib who mixes with the outcastes and also because he feels

that the Colonel might, out of kindness, gift him a pair of used white trousers. The farcical and comical aspects of conversion, as a possible solution for the outcastes to end their misery, are exposed by Bakha's inability to comprehend how he is a 'sinner,' (U, p. 143) and the Colonel's inability to break out of his jargon to satisfy Bakha's curious and questioning mind.

Moreover, the Colonel's wife's outburst, "I can't keep waiting for you all day, while you go messing about with all those dirty bhangis and chamars," (U, p. 145) shows Bakha that social snobbery would leave no scope for Christian tolerance and his dignity as a human being would suffer despite the act of conversion.

4.5 THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

> It was as if the crowd had determined to crush everything, however ancient or beautiful, that lay in their achievement of all that Gandhiji stood for. It was as if they knew, by an instinct surer than that of conscious knowledge, that the things of the old decadence must be destroyed in order to make room for those of new. (U, pp. 150-51)

The above extract, taken from the novel, elucidates the unifying power of Gandhiji's personality. He is referred to, in the course of the novel, as "a legend, a tradition, an oracle," (U, p. 153) and his crusade against untouchability is thrown into relief by the response he elicits and the words that he speaks. Gandhiji's experiences as a child, his desire to be born as an untouchable, and the story of the eighteen-year-old Brahmin doing scavenger's work in his ashram, touch Bakha's heart and he feels that "he could put his life in his hands and ask him to do what he liked with it. For him he would do anything." (U, p. 163)

Gandhiji's views on Untouchability are clearly defined in the novel. In his speech, Gandhi observes:

> As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity. For me, the question of these people is moral and religious. When I undertook to fast unto death for their sake, it was in obedience to the call of my conscience.' (*U*, pp. 162-63)

However, Gandhi's views are not accepted *in toto*. The Poet at the end of the novel, even while he accepts Gandhi's views on most subjects, questions Gandhi's stance vis-à-vis the introduction of machine in India. He argues that India by remaining agricultural "has suffered for not accepting the machine. We must, of course, remedy that. I hate the machine. I loathe it. But I shall go against Gandhi there and accept it. And I am sure in time we will learn to love it." (*U*, p. 169) It is the new laws introduced by the British in the Indian penal code along with the introduction of machine that will probably lead to the eradication of Untouchability:

> We must recognise an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone. The Mahatma didn't so say, but the legal and social basis of caste having been broken down by the British-Indian penal code, which recognises the rights of every man before a court, caste is now mainly governed by profession. When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it–the flush system. Then the sweepers will be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (*U*, p. 173)

The novel ends on a hopeful note with a probable solution for the Untouchables but in the process it reveals, directly or indirectly, the various problems that were inherent in the model of the nation that was based on a system of exclusion of minorities, Untouchables and outcastes. The possible alliance of the lower castes with the Muslims and Christians was a serious threat to the Hindu community around which the model of the nation was apparently based. Though there is a glimmer of hope at the end of the novel, there is no genuine possibility of a re-incorporation of outcastes into the Hindu community. Bakha till the end remains a passive spectator and not a doer: he can only hope for the introduction of the flush system but can himself do nothing about it: "'That machine,' he thought, 'which can remove dung without anyone having to handle it, I wonder what it is like? If only that 'gentreman' hadn't dragged the poet away, I could have asked him.'" (*U*, p. 174)

While in the crowd, Bakha is aware of "an insuperable barrier between himself and the crowd, the barrier of caste"; but he also feels that "Gandhi alone united him with them, in the mind, because Gandhi was in everybody's mind, including Bakha's." (U, p. 151) Anand offers no solution in the novel, with regard to untouchability, for it would be beyond his scope as a novelist, but what he does do—by playing off different points of view—is implant a seed of hope in Bakha's mind of the possibilities which the future might hold.

Through Gandhiji's presence, Bakha is given a real possibility of recognizing himself as a human being in his own society. In a letter to Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Gandhiji argues: "Caste has nothing to do with religion . . . it is harmful to both spiritual and natural growth. Varna and Ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do with castes." By calling the outcastes "Harijan"—the children of God—Gandhiji was striving to unite a sundered limb of Indian society to its body for achieving more effective social and political ends.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

We see, from the above discussion, that Mulk Raj Anand uses the novel to explore different points of view with regard to untouchability and expose the exploitation of the downtrodden in the name of religion. Anand critiques not only Hinduism but the other religions also to show how each offers only a partial solution to the problem of untouchability.

4.7 GLOSSARY

Congenital: Existing since birth.

Conversion: Changing one's religion.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. Write a detailed note on the social picture of colonial India that emerges from the novel?

2. Write a short note on Gandhi's views on Untouchability in the novel?

3. Comment on M.R. Anand's criticism of Hinduism with regard to the practice of untouchability.

4. Does the novel provide a viable solution to the eradication of untouchability? Discuss.

4.9 SUGGESTED READING

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[1] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* Delhi: OUP, 1994, p. 135.

[2] Qtd. in P.K. Rajan, "A Dialogue with Mulk Raj Anand," *Studies in Mulk Raj Anand* New Delhi: Abhinav, 1986, p. 29.

[3] Alastair Niven, *The Yoke of Pity: A Study in the Fictional Writings of Mulk Raj Anand* New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1978, p. 48.

[4] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* London: Heinemann, 1958, p. 111.

[5] Ibid., p. 135.

UNIT 5 THE GANDHIAN INFLUENCE

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 Gandhian Ideology
5.3 Gandhi in Indian Fiction
5.4 Gandhiji's Speech on Untouchability in the Novel
5.5 Let Us Sum Up
5.6 Questions
5.7 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will deal with the influence of Gandhi on Indian fiction in general and Mulk Raj Anand in particular. It will describe in detail Gandhi's appearance in the novel *Untouchable* and his speech on the theme of untouchability.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the early decades of the twentieth century, writers felt deeply inspired by Gandhi, Marx and Freud. Interestingly, none of them was a man of letters proper. But each was, in his own way, a prophet and a seer who made people think vigorously. They provoked intellectual turmoil and awakening amongst the intelligentsia. Of these, Gandhi's influence on Indian writers was most direct and significant.



Gandhi is indeed one of the most significant and influential figures of the present century. Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian Nobel Laureate, described Gandhi as "Mahatma in a beggar's garb." In spite of Gandhi's bitter protest against it, the appellation of Mahatma (the Great Soul) has stuck. The magnetic personality of Mahatma moved the spirit of Indian multitudes to act with high devotion to the cause

of winning independence through non-violent means and inspired a number of novelists in all Indian languages to write their works projecting the Gandhian ideology.

5.2 GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY

Gandhi stripped urban life of its pretentiousness and stressed that religion without compassion and culture without conscience were worthless. He wanted the writers to abandon their futile adulation of the past and boldly face the reality of India as she was. It was a country which was poor and starving, devoid of the luminous halo with which it had been associated by shallow intellectuals. Gandhi served as a beacon of light to the Indian intelligentsia, enlarging their mental horizon and adding a new dimension to their thinking. He provided a strong stimulus to the shaping of the literary trend and shifted the focus from Romanticism to Realism.

5.3 GANDHI IN INDIAN FICTION

The independence struggle traversed boundaries of language and community, involving the whole nation in the movement. India's struggle for freedom is a popular theme in Indian fiction. Mahatma Gandhi, a London-based Indian barrister, led this movement with his unique weapons of non-violence, non-cooperation, truth and love. Gandhi's advent on India's socio-political scene inspired a number of novelists in all Indian languages to write their works projecting his ideology. So strong was the influence of Gandhi on these writers that the eminent critic K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar names a particular period in Indian literary history as the "Gandhian Age": "The period between the two World Wars and comprising them both was the Gandhian Age in India. . . . Life could not be the same as before, and every segment of our national life—politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature—acquired a more or less pronounced Gandhian hue." Gandhi exercised a potent influence on Indian literature both directly through his own writings and indirectly through the movements generated by his revolutionary thought and practice. Iyengar goes on to say: "As he [Gandhi] grew in stature, the nation grew in self-consciousness and strength." M.K. Naik describes the phenomenon of the strong influence of Gandhi as "the Gandhian whirlwind."

Premchand, the noted Hindi novelist, was immensely inspired by Gandhi. To put the Gandhian thought into practice, he resigned his government job and settled down in a village to experience the rural life in all its simplicity and austerity, and write about it. The dominant note in the later career of Premchand as a novelist reveals his deep insight into the life of the village folk and his abundant sympathy with their miserable existence. Gandhi's passionate crusade against colonial exploitation of the weaker nations by the stronger, his strong condemnation of any form of economic exploitation and his insistence on the upliftment of the downtrodden made a deep impact on his followers.

After World War I, the Indian writing underwent a sea change. It became more realistic and less idealized. Literature became a useful vehicle to convey the nationalist and revolutionary cause. It was the time when the nationalist movement in India was accompanied by a literary renaissance and social realism and tendentious literature of revolt had become fashionable. Thus the emergence of the Indian novels of social realism and political revolution after the first World War can be seen best suited to the times and condition. Social revolutionary tendencies became quite evident and pervasive in the literature of the Twenties and Thirties. Kai Nicholson rightly says: "A character who has loomed large in Indo-Anglian fiction during and

after his lifetime is Mahatma Gandhi." Sometimes he appears as a person and in novels as an unseen hidden presence. In *Untouchable* (1935) and ***The Sword and the Sickle***, Mulk Raj Anand brings him in as the central character in the plot. He appears in person also in R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), Khwajā Ahmed Abbas's *Inquilab* (1955) and Nagarajan's *The Chronicles of Kedaram*. Raja Rao introduces him through a representative in *The Cow of the Barricades* (19470. In *Kanthapura* (1938), which you shall read, he presents the central character Moorthy as a Village-Gandhi. In Mulk Raj Anand's *The Road*, Dhooli Singh is a Village-Gandhi. K.S. Venkataramani's *Murugan, the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, the Patriot* (1932) are truly representative of Gandhian thought and politics extolling the ideals of Satyagraha and exhorting Indians to work for freedom and regeneration as a nation. In C.N. Zutshi's *Motherland*, Zeenut Futheally's *Zohra* and Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) also, the struggle for independence appears to be a major theme.

5.4 GANDHI'S SPEECH ON UNTOUCHABILITY IN THE NOVEL

Mahatma Gandhi is held in high respect by the people in the novel *Untouchable*. A large crowd is gathered in the golbagh to listen to the great man whose arrival is greeted with the words: "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai." (*U*, p. 157) There is a lot of excitement among the large crowd assembled there. The crowd is shouting Gandhi's name which has a magic effect upon Bakha who does not know anything about the great man but who has certainly heard his name and the word "Mahatma" in this connection. Bakha finds that among the crowd there are businessmen from the town, Kashmiri Muhammadans from the local carpet factories, the rough Sikh rustics from the near-by villages, red-cheeked Pathans—the followers of Abdul Gaffar Khan, the black-faced Indian Christian girls from the Salvation Army colony, and also men and women from the outcastes' colony. Here and there, Bakha also sees a stray European. All these people have come to pay their homage to Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi.

Bakha feels that there is "an insuperable barrier of caste between himself and the crowd." (*U*, p. 151) He feels that he has been lifted from the gutter to partake of a life which is his, and yet not his. He finds himself in the midst of a humanity that includes him in its folds, and yet debars him from entering into a living contact with it. Gandhi alone unites him with the crowd around him because "Gandhi was in everybody's mind, including Bakha's." (*U*, p. 151) It seems to Bakha that Gandhi might ultimately unite him with this crowd in every other respect also.

Bakha eagerly recalls all that he had heard of this man. People had said that Gandhi was a saint, that he was an *avatar* or an incarnation of the gods Vishnu and Krishna. Bakha hears a Hindu say: "The Sarkar is afraid of him." (*U*, p. 152) The Hindu adds that the local magistrate had withdrawn his order against Gandhiji's entry into Bulandshahr. Another Hindu says that actually the government has released Gandhiji from jail unconditionally. A rustic nearby asks if Gandhiji can overthrow the government. A babu replies that Gandhiji certainly has that power, and that he can even change the whole world. The British government is nothing before him. India's religious culture makes this country superior to the West. Neither cigarettes nor cinemas nor sensual pleasure can lead to the path of religious discipline that alone is considered the highest bliss in the world. Gandhi would show this path to the modern world, and Gandhi would teach the Indian people the true religion of love of God. One of the men listening to the babu's words feels deeply impressed. To this man, "Gandhi was a legend, a tradition, and an oracle." (*U*, p. 153) His wife had told him of the miracles that the saint Gandhi could perform. He had heard from time to time that Gandhi was the incarnation of Lord Krishna.

Bakha recalls having heard that "Gandhi was very keen on uplifting the Untouchables." (*U*, p. 155) It had been rumoured that Gandhi had been fasting for the sake of bhangis and chamars. Of course, Bakha cannot quite understand what fasting has to do with helping the people of the low castes. Probably Gandhi thinks that by not eating food for a few days, he can save it for the poor. Then Bakha hears a Congress worker telling the crowd that the government has allowed Gandhi to come out of jail on condition that he can speak to the people only on behalf of the harijans and for the removal of untouchability. Bakha wonders what the word "Harijan" means. Bakha would like to tell Gandhi about his experiences of that day and inform him how he had been slapped for having accidentally touched a caste Hindu.

About Gandhi's appearance in the novel, Saros Cowasjee writes: "Perched on a tree, not quite unlike an ape, Bakha gets his first view of Gandhi. With superb skill, Anand fashions the image of Gandhi as all knew him: the little man swathed in a white shawl, with his big protruding ears, expansive forehead, quixotic smile and determined chin. But more than the physical details is the magic of Gandhi that Anand has been able to capture."

When Gandhi arrives on the scene, he is accompanied with his wife and an English woman Miss Slade, now known as Miraben. The crowd shouts "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" (*U*, p. 158) The Mahatma raises his right arm and blesses the crowd with a gentle benediction. Someone stands up to sing a hymn. The Mahatma closes his eyes, as if lost in prayer.

After the singing of hymns, the Mahatma begins his speech. In a single sentence, Anand sums up the unique mass appeal of Gandhi: "This strange man seemed to have the genius that could, by a single dramatic act, rally multi-coloured, multi-tongued India to himself" (*U*, pp. 158-59) The stage is set for Gandhi to speak, but his power lies not so much in his message as in what he has come to signify to the common mind. It is for this reason that Anand devotes twice as many pages to the Gandhi legend—"no sword could cut his body, no bullet could pierce his skin, no fire could scorch him"—and the audience's frenzied reaction to the arrival of the Mahatma, as to the speech itself.

Gandhi's speech is carefully drawn from his autobiography, *Young India* and other writings. Gandhi begins by saying that he would speak only about the so-called untouchables whom the government has tried to alienate from Hinduism by giving them a separate legal and political status. Gandhiji then tells his listeners that the Indians themselves have, for centuries, trampled upon millions of human beings without feeling the slightest regret. He says that he has undertaken a fast to death for the sake of those downtrodden millions in obedience to the call of his conscience.

The opening words of Gandhi's speech are unintelligible to Bakha, but when the Mahatma says that he regards untouchability as "the greatest blot on Hinduism" (*U*, p. 161) and elaborates on it in personal terms as to how he reacted to it in childhood, Bakha is thrilled. Gandhiji goes on to relate the story of a scavenger named Uka who used to clean the latrines in his house. He says that often he had asked his mother why it was wrong to touch him and why he was forbidden to do so. He tells that if he accidentally touched Uka, he was asked to perform ablutions; and though he obeyed, it was not without protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion. He often had arguments with his parents on this matter. He told his mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

Gandhiji also expresses his genuine love for the outcastes. He tells people that he was at Nellore on the National Day. He met the untouchables there, and prayed as he had done that day. He says that he did not want to attain spiritual deliverance; he did not want to be reborn. But if he were to be reborn, he would wish to be reborn as an untouchable so that he may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at

them, in order that he may endeavour to free himself and them from their miserable condition. Therefore he prayed that if he were to be born again, he should be so, not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, but as an untouchable, an outcaste. Bakha is struck by this love of Gandhiji for his class.

Gandhiji further says that he loves scavenging and that, in his ashram, an eighteen-year-old Brahmin is doing a scavenger's work in order to teach the lesson of cleanliness to ashram sweepers. This Brahmin lad, says Gandhiji, is a regular reader of the *Gita*, and he regularly says his prayers; but this lad feels that his achievement would be incomplete until he has become a perfect scavenger. Bakha is delighted to hear Gandhi's words about the boy and Gandhiji's wish to be born as an outcaste in his next life. Bakha begins to adore Gandhiji in his mind. Bakha would like to do anything for Gandhiji. In fact, he would like to go and work as a scavenger in Gandhiji's ashram.

Continuing his speech, Gandhiji says that the untouchables should realize that by working as sweepers and scavengers they are cleaning Hindu society but that, in order to succeed in their work, they must purify their own lives first, and must cultivate habits of cleanliness. Those among them who are addicted to the habits of drinking alcohol, gambling and eating meat, must get rid of such habits. If the untouchables are oppressed by the Hindus, the fault does not lie with the Hindu religion but with the people who profess this religion. At this point, Bakha feels that the Mahatma is not fair because he is blaming the untouchables by referring to their habits of eating meat and drinking. He fears that the Mahatma is drifting from the main issue.

Gandhiji further urges the sweepers to stop accepting the left-overs of the meals of high-caste Hindus. The sweepers should accept only sound and wholesome grains and not the rotten grains. These words of the Mahatma are liked by Bakha who wants to tell the Mahatma that on that very day he had felt compelled to pick up a loaf of bread from near the gutter and that his brother had found it necessary to accept leavings of food from the plates of the sepoys. The great man's words have the effect of a balm on Bakha's troubled mind. Bakha wishes that Gandhiji should tell his father not to treat Bakha so harshly because Bakha is already a victim of the callousness of the caste Hindus.

Gandhiji then goes on to say that he is an orthodox Hindu and that he knows that the Hindus are not sinful by nature. The Hindus are only sunk in ignorance. Gandhiji further says that all public wells, temples, roads, schools and hospitals should be declared open to the untouchables. This is how the evil of untouchability is to be rooted out. Gandhiji wants all those who love him to carry on propaganda against untouchability and also to take care that they do not use compulsion or brute force in securing this end. Gandhiji says that peaceful persuasion is the only means to this end. Two of the strongest desires of Gandhiji at this time are "the emancipation of the Untouchables and the protection of the cow." (*U*, p. 164) When these desires are fulfilled, India would really be free, and his own soul would also feel free. He concludes his lecture with the words: "May God give you strength to work out your soul's salvation to the end!" (*U*, p. 164)

Gandhiji's lecture contains the second possible solution to Bakha's problem and to the problem of the entire class of sweepers and scavengers. The other two solutions are proposed by Colonel Hutchinson and the poet-Iqbal Nath: the former proposes conversion to Christianity, the latter the introduction of the flush-system, that cannot by itself remove untouchability though it would enable the sweepers to get rid of an unpleasant duty.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

It may be noted that all the solutions suggested in the novel are now obsolete because the Constitution of India has already declared untouchability to be a punishable crime. In fact the government of the day has introduced a system of special rights and privileges for the Scheduled Castes and the Backward Classes which include the sweeper community.

Gandhiji's solution of peaceful persuasion suggests that Bakha must passively wait for a change of heart in the Hindus of India. Ultimately Bakha goes home, thinking of Gandhiji and also of the possibility of the introduction of flush-system suggested by Iqbal Nath though he does not know exactly how the flush-system works.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Trace the influence of Gandhi on the Indian fiction written after the first world war.

2. Do you think Gandhi's appearance in the novel enriches it? Do you find the solution suggested by Gandhi viable in the present context.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 6 STYLE

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 Diction
6.3 Modes of Narration
6.4 Imagery
6.5 Let Us Sum Up
6.6 Glossary
6.7 Questions
6.8 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will examine Anand's style of writing and his use of imagery in his novel *Untouchable*.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Style is generally defined as a unique verbal pattern which a novelist has developed and which, therefore, carries his indelible stamp. In other words, the total of the qualities that characterize an individual writer's style constitutes his literary personality and reflects his psychological one. A writer's style is reflected in his diction, his choice of genre, narrative type, and imagery, among other things.

6.2 DICTION

The English which Anand employs in his works is, on the whole, correct and idiomatic; but not without a strong colouring of the Indian manner of speaking English. He tends to be accurately descriptive and his proclivity towards using more words than required to press home an idea is unmistakable. His word patterns give the impression of unplanned and spontaneous speech, in the dialogues, which contrasts with the controlled language of the descriptive passages, e.g., the description of the inner sanctum of the temple is accurate, detailed, and familiar yet, because Bakha sees it for the first time, every detail is attended to with cinematographic fidelity:

> In the innermost recess of the tall, dark sanctum, beyond the brass gates, past what seemed a maze of corridoors, Bakha's eyes probed the depths of a raised platform. There, from a background of gold embroidered silk and velvet draperies stood out various brass images dimly shrouded in the soft tremors of incense that rose from a dish at their feet. (*U*, p. 65)

In contrast, Bakha's effusive apologies to the offended Hindu smacks of a spontaneous torrent of words over which the speaker has no control: "I have erred now. I forgot to call. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again. I forgot. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again." (*U*, p. 53)

As a social realist, Anand tries to achieve verisimilitude in his writings and so the speeches attributed to the characters are in keeping with their station in life. For example, Lakha, Bakha's father, can never speak without prefixing the choicest of pejorative words to his dialogues. For the same reason, Anand's writings are peppered with the use of Indian words which fall into three categories: (a) Untranslated Hindi or Punjabi words, e.g., *girja ghar, jalebis, harijan, babu,* etc., (b) Proverbs and swear words which are translated into English, e.g., son of a pig, cock-eyed of a bow-legged scorpion, rape-mother, rape-sister etc., and, (c) English words which have become a part of Indian vocabulary by subsequently adapting themselves to Indian pronunciations, e.g., *injan, gentreman,* etc.

Anand, explaining the reason for this extensive use of vernacular vocabulary, says: "The English language was the only accessible medium to me when I began writing, but I tried to translate into it the metaphors and imagery of Punjabi and Hindustani. If the resulting style is awkward, it is not unlike Irish English or Welsh English, with a rough rhythm of its own." His free use of slang, swear words, jargon of abuse, epithets of low-life, and verbal coinages, take Anand nearer to his avowed purpose of evolving a language as rich and powerful as Irish or Welsh English.

6.3 MODES OF NARRATION

The narrative modes which Mulk Raj Anand makes use of in *Untouchable* include the stream of consciousness technique, interior monologue, and, descriptive narration. Anand the author has complete control over his characters, and he gives us absorbing narratives with effective beginnings and thought provoking ends. *Untouchable* is remarkable in its being the chronicle of a single day in the life of an untouchable. Banal as it may sound, tremendous dramatic interest is generated by the presentation of this 'one day' as a graph of the myriad emotions which a human mind experiences, and how an ordinary work-day harbours the potential for future liberation.
The opening of the novel is a good illustration of descriptive narration:

> The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. . . . A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it. . . . The absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive smell. (*U*, p. 9)

Anand, from the very opening of the novel, establishes the marginal position of the outcastes along with showing that they are an integral part of Bulandshahar society. The description encompasses sight, sound, and smell, besides functioning on a temporal scale of past beauty and present filth.

The stream of consciousness technique refers to the depiction of the thoughts and feelings which flow, with no apparent logic, through the mind of a character. An instance of the stream of consciousness technique may be located in Bakha's ruminations on his illiteracy:

> He was a sweeper's son and could never be a babu. Later still he realized that there was no school which would admit him, because the parents of the other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of a sweeper's son. How absurd he thought, that was, since most of the Hindu children touched him willingly at hockey and wouldn't mind having him at school with them. But the masters wouldn't teach the outcastes lest their fingers which guided the students across the text should touch the leaves of

> the outcastes' books and they be polluted. These old Hindus were cruel. He was a sweeper, he knew, but he could not consciously accept that fact. (*U*, p. 42)

Anand, in this passage, focuses attention on the growth of consciousness in Bakha's mind vis-a-vis his social position. Unwittingly Bakha reveals the actual problem behind the plight of the untouchables. The deep roots of Hindu orthodoxy are shown as the reason behind the deplorable condition of the outcastes, besides illustrating that this concept is an invention of religion.

The incident in the market place, where Bakha is brutally abused by the upper caste Hindu, furnishes an example of interior monologue:

> Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. . . . My poor jalebis! I should have eaten them . . . the cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. (*U*, p. 56)

In this passage self-analysis is carried to an extreme of passion and is a crucial moment in the development of Bakha's character. The short sentences reflect the tempo of inner questioning and veers between humiliation, regret, and rage.

6.4 IMAGERY

In general, the term Imagery refers to the use of language to represent descriptively things, actions, or even abstract ideas. Anand is a novelist who relies a great deal on imagery to convey subtle ideas. We find two images which recur periodically in *Untouchable*: The sun and the river.

The sun is a creative and regenerative force in the novel, indicating the upsurge of life:

> As they sat or stood in the sun, showing their dark hands and feet, they had a curiously lackadaisical, lazy, lousy look about them. It seemed their insides were concentrated in the act of emergence, of new birth, as it were, from the raw, bleak wintry feeling in their souls to the world of warmth. . . . The great life-giver had cut the inscrutable knots that tied them up in themselves. It had melted the innermost parts of their being. And their souls stared at the wonder of it all, the mystery of it, the miracle of it. (*U*, p. 38)

More specifically, as is evident from the following illustration, the sun concerns Bakha; it is an emblem of his vital impulse, a movement of energy, an effluence. It is also a symbolic index of his day and of his emotions:

> Where the lane finished, the heat of the sun seemed to spread as from a bonfire out into the empty space of the maidan beyond the colony. He sniffed the clean, fresh air around the flat stretch of land before him and vaguely sensed a difference between the odorous, smoky world of refuse and the open radiant world of the sun. . . . He turned his hands so as to show them to the sun. He lifted his face to the sun open-eyed for a moment, then with the chin upright. It was pleasing to him. . . . He felt vigorous in this bracing atmosphere. (*U*, p. 36)

The second image, that we find in the novel, is the river. It is symbolic of the discontent and anguish of the hero. The image stands for the flow of existence and temporality:

He advanced eagerly. The old river lay on his right like a stormy sea of discontent whose mountainous waves the wind had swept, till the boulders and rocks reared up in knife-edges against the sky or rolled quietly over the earth. (*U*, p. 108)

However, not all the imagery in Anand's novel is visual. There are some powerful kinetic and auditory images such as in the following extract:

In the hills and fields, however, there was a strange quickening. Long rows of birds flew over against the cold blue sky toward their homes. The grasshoppers chirped in the anxious chorus as they fell back into the places where they always lay waiting for food. A lone beetle sent electric waves of ground quivering into the cool, clean air. Every blade of grass along the pathway was gilded with light. (*U*, p. 146)

6.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we see that Mulk Raj Anand through his diction, modes of narration, and imagery, succeeds in forging a style which is distinctly his own. In addition to creating a language that can carry the burden of his experience as an Indian novelist.

6.6 GLOSSARY

Pejorative: Expressing disapproval.

Verisimilitude: A quality possessed by a work the action and characters of which seem to the reader sufficiently probable to constitute an acceptable representation of reality.

6.7 QUESTIONS

1. What are the various elements which constitute Anand's style of writing?
2. Discuss the use of imagery in *Untouchable*.

6.8 SUGGESTED READING

Krishna Nandan, Sinha. *Mulk Raj Anand*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972.

NOTES

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MAEN-117
Indian English Literature

Block

3

KANTHAPURA

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION : *KANTHAPURA*

A discussion of Raja Rao's novel, *Kanthapura*, is spread over the **Five Units** of this Block. **Unit 1** places Raja Rao in the context of the Indian novel in English, briefly examining the contribution of two of his major contemporaries – Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan – assessing his own career and works, and analysing the influences that shaped his philosophical outlook of life and literature. In **Unit 2**, we consider the sources of *Kanthapura*, its historical and political background, the impact of Gandhian thought on the novel and the form and style of Raja Rao's English. Thereafter, in **Unit 3** we give you an introduction to the village (which is the location of the novel), the Skeffington Coffee Estate, and examine thematic issues such as caste segregation, and how Moorthy leads the satyagraha in the village.

In **Unit 4**, while examining the structure and form of *Kanthapura*, we discuss the narrative technique, Achakka the narrator, the *Harikatha* element as well as myth and symbolism that Raja Rao employs in the novel. Finally, in **Unit 5**, we examine his art of characterization with special emphasis on Moorthy, the women characters, and some other important figures. After you study the novel and this Block you should be able to answer all the questions that are given at the end of the Units.

UNIT 1 RAJA RAO : CAREER AND WORKS

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Raja Rao and the Indian Novel in English
1.3 Two Contemporary Writers : Anand and Narayan
1.4 Raja Rao : Career and Works
1.5 Influences on Rao's Philosophical Outlook
1.6 Let Us Sum Up
1.7 References
1.8 Glossary
1.9 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to introduce Raja Rao to you as a writer of fiction whose contribution to Indian writing in English is much valued. We also tell you briefly about two of his major contemporaries, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, and their works. A brief life-sketch gives you the necessary background knowledge of Raja Rao and his writings. Besides, you get to know about his philosophical bent of mind and views on literary communication.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Block, we have attempted to tell you something about the Indian novel in English; how and when it appeared on the Indian literary scene; and what are its central themes. In this unit we have tried to place Raja Rao in the context of this literature. Information is provided on the achievements of two of his major contemporaries, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. We have furnished some details of the life and literary career of Raja Rao and mentioned his major works. Next we have tried to tell you about the books and authors, both Indian and Western, that have exerted a lasting influence on his mind and shaped his genius as a writer. It is important to know how he came under the sway of some French poets and philosophers. Raja Rao's philosophical bent of mind and his views on literary communication are also introduced to you in Unit 1.

1.2 RAJA RAO AND THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

The art of story-telling attained a high degree of success in ancient India, as is evident from the popularity of the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and collections of short stories like *Kathasaritsagar*, *Puncha Tantra* and the *Jataka Tales*. In modern times, with the appearance of Indian writing in English towards the close of the nineteenth century, the novel came on to the scene rather late in India. It was the British who introduced the Indians to the novel as a form of literature. The Indian novel in English emerged in the 1920's and established itself as a popular form in the next thirty years. Social realism and the reform movement generated by liberal humanist ideals gathered momentum and assumed a national form between 1920 and 1940 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The Gandhian ideals of *Satyagraha*

(demands based on truth) find expression in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. Their blend of political ideology and social realism ensured that the English prose fiction would be the medium for the definition of a new India and its aspirations. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* belongs to the same class of Indian novel in English.

Raja Rao goes beyond common realism and dramatizes the national struggle as a mythic and symbolic event. The *Kanthapura* village in his novel is a piece of mythic land containing within it the memory of the village community's traditions and beliefs. While R.K. Narayan in *The Guide* is content to show the progression of events in the life of an individual, Mulk Raj Anand in his novels like *Untouchable* and *Coolie* gives evidence of a total commitment to the socialist doctrine. Anand also presents a cross-section of the Indian society through the national struggle for freedom, which is not only a political event but also a comprehensive emotional experience for the people involved in it. There is a shift of emphasis in the post-Independence Indian literature in English. The novelists writing after 1947 show a sense of disenchantment with the actual reality of freedom, and their anger finds expression through a sense of humanistic compassion for the suffering Indian masses.

A theme that has dominated the Indian novel in English is the contrast of cultures between East and West. Those who have written works dealing with this theme include Raja Rao, Balachandra Rajan, Kamala Markandaya and Shantha Rama Rau. While Rajan explores the theme of alienation, Shantha Rama Rau examines the conflict of attitudes and values. Kamala Markandaya, on the other hand, depicts the East-West encounter as an inevitable accident of history, and passes no judgement on it. Raja Rao's work is a class apart from that of the other novelists writing on the same theme, for his examination of the East-West dilemma is characterized by a deep sense of crisis in human relationships. In *The Serpent and the Rope* and other novels that he wrote after *Kanthapura*, he lays stress on this very aspect of the crisis. He believes that individuals are conditioned by religious and cultural diversity, and, therefore, they fail to recognize the essential oneness of the human spirit, which is the same everywhere.

One of the main traditional Indian precepts underlying Raja Rao's fiction is , "Brahmin is he who knows Brahman." At the back of his writing are a mind and vision of life that are concrete yet elusive. All his heroes are in one way or another involved with the problem of knowing God and thereby realizing themselves. To fully understand what Raja Rao says in his short stories and novels requires some knowledge of the philosophy and metaphysics of Hinduism. This guide-line also applies to his three early novels – *Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare* – and later works like *Comrade Kirillov* and *The Chessmaster and His Moves*. Yet Raja Rao deliberately writes in English for a Western audience and an exclusive English-knowing Indian reading public. In his short stories, he writes of the privations of family life, frustrations of the widow in Hindu society, place of myth in India, impact of Gandhi's message on the youth of his time and the sad reality of the Indian peasant's life in the context of the struggle for freedom. All these primary concerns of Raja Rao figure as themes in *Kanthpura*, his first novel. S.C. Harrex avers thus:

> Some of the short stories also contain various interior monologue and rhythmic effects which can be regarded retrospectively as a useful technical prelude to the stream-of-consciousness form of *Kanthpura*[1]

He goes on to say:

> It is clear that in his short stories and *Kanthpura* Raja was endeavoring to formulate a style which was capable simultaneously of faithfully rendering social behaviour and expressing nuances of Indian sensibility[2]

A seeker after truth, Raja Rao appears to have discovered the mantra of truth in the classical literature of ancient India. He is forthright in admitting

> I am interested in discussing the problems of the truth-seeker. I publish what I enjoy, I believe one should seek truth, whatever it is, and pay the price for it.... All writers write only autobiography. Certain aspects of my life are emphasised in each book, ...[3]

In 'A Pilgrimage to Europe', a Kannada article contributed to the journal *Jaya Karnataka*, Raja Rao writes of his boyhood dreams of going to far away countries. G.S. Amur refers to it while highlighting Rao's firm determination to realise this dream:

> [He] conquered with a firm mind all the odds of this world, remembered with gratitude all the friends who had maligned him, loved like a brother the father who had discarded him, starved when he could get nothing to eat, worshipped the food-giver as a god, refused to be cowed down by calamity, ...
> drove the soul onward as one does a pair of bullocks, obtained a scholarship from the Government, and left his town for Colombo with the joyous blessings of one and all.[4]

The Indain novelists in English have experimented with the foreign medium that they have adopted for their literary expression. Their style and language bear the influence of the regions to which the individual writers belong. All the three major novelists – Narayan, Anand and Raja Rao – have attempted an experimental prose style which successfully conveys their appreciation of the Indian way of life that they express through the medium of English. Anand renders the Punjabi expressions in English and thereby enhances the authenticity of his fiction. The simplicity of Narayan's language and style presents the reality of Indian life and character. Raja Rao goes a step further in mingling the grace and tone of the speech rhythms of his mother tongue, Kannada, with that of English, the foreign medium of his novels and short stories.

1.3 TWO CONTEMPORARY WRITERS : ANAND AND NARAYAN

K.R. Srinivasan Iyengar regards Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao to be the three major writers of the Indain novel in English. It is a significant coincidence that all the three of them started writing about the same time, i.e., the thirties of the present century and are still active in literary production. For this reason, they need to be studied together, and you have a rare opportunity to do so in the present course. Hence, we would like to give you a brief introduction to the other two in this first Unit on Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. The consistency and prolific output of Anand and Narayan are particularly admirable. Both of them have managed to hold on to their chosen course, and each has to his credit fiction of sufficient bulk and notable merit. Anand comes from North India and Narayan belongs to the South. Of them Iyengar writes in his *Indian Writing in English* :

> Between them they comprise as it were the North and the South, extension and concentration, vigour and urbanity, vitality and artistic reticense.[5]

For the style, period and themes of Anand's novels, he is regarded as a pioneer of the Indian novel in English. Apart from fiction, he has written autobiography, works on art, cookery, criticism and philosophy. Despite the wide range of his literary activity, there is a unity to all his work. His novels identify with the outcasts and the oppressed while he attempts to affirm the true values of life and faith in the moral order. Anand is a 'committed' writer who, long ago, made the break from the literary and historical image of a passive India to a literature that reflects the new national awareness. By critically examining the traditions of Indian culture, he represents a new order. In spite of the tension between propaganda and literary realism, he maintains the balance in his works. His characters are victims, oppressors, virtuous social workers, and enlightened politicians, who must all together help to create a just social and economic order. When he wrote *Untouchable* (1935) in the early thirties, he stayed with Gandhi in the Sabarmati Ashram, and Gandhi appeared in this novel. It was followed in quick succession by *Coolie* (1936). *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), and the trilogy : *The Village* (1939) *Across The Black Waters* (1940) *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942). Later appeared an autobiographical novel, *Seven Summers : The Story of an Indian Childhood* (1951).

Born in Madras, in 1906, but living at Mysore, R.K. Narayan writes a distinctive regional fiction. While Anand is a reformer and Rao a philosopher, Narayan is a moral analyst. For his novels and short stories, he has created a special geographical identity. The imaginery town of Malgudi, which is the location of all his fiction, represents South Indian small town provincialism and culture. Most probably a fictional version of Mysore, it contains a rich variety of Indian life. Its busy markets are full of the hustle and bustle of life; the river is a place of sanctity, tragedy and recreation; the Memphi Hills with their forests and cave-temples attract hunters, archeologists and religious recluses. In fact, Malgudi is a microcosm of India. and its fixed setting allows Narayan to analyse the complex elements of the vast country. Narayan's multiple themes are nationalism, modernization, the impact of education, family planning, the attraction of going abroad, and the rebellion of the young against the old. But Malgudi shapes the gentle humour and irony that sets him apart from Anand and Rao. Though comedy is not a major form in the Indian novel in English, Malgudi provides a locale where humour is possible. Narayan recreates the web of life in a South Indian small town through clear and lucid standard English, which is a contrast to some of the vernacular touches of 'Indian English' that we come across in the works of Anand and Rao. Narayan's major works are : *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1927), *The Dark Room* (1939), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of signs* (1976). Makarand Paranjape sums up Raja Rao vis-a-vis the duo thus writes in his 'Introduction' to *The Best of Raja Rao*:

> Raja Rao is generally regarded as one of the most important Indian novelists. The reasons for his pre-eminence are both historical because his first novel, *Kanthapura*, was published during the decade of the 1930s when Indian English fiction began to gain recognition... This coming of age was heralded by the publication of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), R.K. Narayan's *Swamy and Friends*(1935), and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938).
>
> Artistically, Rao is important because of his unique formal and thematic accomplishments. Although his five novels seem modest in comparison to Anand's or Narayan's more prolific output, Rao's achievement is probably more impressive. Anand and Narayan are both highly regarded as novelists, but I would argue that not a single one of their works makes the kind of claims to great art as does Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope or The Chess master and his Moves.*[6]

1.4 RAJA RAO : CAREER AND WORKS



Raja Rao belongs to an ancient Brahmin family of Mysore, now part of the Karnataka state. After his birth in 1909, he was brought up in the neighbouring state of Hyderabad, now part of Andhra Pradesh, where he was exposed to two other Indian languages, Telugu and Urdu. He was the only Hindu student in the Muslim Public School of Hyderabad where the only teachers to impress him were British. So, at a very young age, Raja Rao came under the influence of the West. Later, he went for higher education to Aligarh Muslim University, where one of his teachers was Eric Dickinson, poet and painter, who taught him the appreciation of European art and philosophy. After graduating with English and History, Raja Rao went, in 1929, to study at Montpellier, France. Shortly afterwards, he married a French school teacher, Camille Mouly. She had a role in Rao's development as a writer since she advised him to explore the possibilities of writing in his own mother tongue. He complied by writing a long poem and a few short stories in Kannada. But the work that made people take note of him was his first novel in English, *Kanthapura* (1938), which is about the Gandhian *Satyagraha* Movement in a South Indian village.

Meanwhile, Raja Rao's French marriage failed as it was regarded as an act of rebellion by his orthodox Hindu family. Back in India, he visited a number of spiritual ashramas including those of Ramana Maharishi and Sri Aurobindo. In 1941, he spent some time with Gandhi at Sevagram. Six years later appeared *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories*, which is a collection of some of his translated Kannada stories and others written in English. There followed a period of long silence during which he studied philosophy. *The Serpent and the Rope* was published in 1960. It was widely appreciated as an exploration of intercultural encounter and won for Raja Rao the Sahitya Akademi Award. He was invited to teach Indian philosophy at a university in the USA, and, in 1965, married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. In the same year was published *The Cat and Shakespeare : A Tale of Modern India*. It is a short novel of great merit with some philosophical content and has evoked conflicting reactions from literary critics.

The reading public did not show much enthusiasm for Raja Rao's next novel, *Comrade Kirillov* (1976), which explores the depths of the mind and soul of an orthodox Brahmin communist who is a confused bundle of contradictions. *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978) is a collection that includes some of the stories of *The Cow of The Barricades and Other Stories* and a few new ones. The *Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) meant to be the first part of a trilogy, was awarded a prize by the Oklahama University, USA. In this ambitious work of fiction, Rao returns to the theme of multi-cultural confrontation. *On The Ganga Ghat* (1989) is a collection of connected stories that presents vivid glimpses of the permanent reality of Indian life.

Raja Rao's second marriage also broke up, and his third marriage was with another American woman.



1.5 INFLUENCES ON RAO'S PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK

Most of Raja Rao's works have a philosophical content, and this is part of his literary art. He believes man to be 'a metaphysical entity', and his own writings have the bearings of a metaphysical life. To the Western educated mind, India represents spirituality, and Raja Rao supports this outlook. Therefore, he projects such a point of view in his fiction for the benefit of his Western readers. At the same time, he asserts the superiority of Indian philosophy over Western thought. Among the Indian works that have influenced him are the two classical epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the Buddhist texts in English translation, medieval Kannada poetry, the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi, and the philosophy of Ananda Coomaraswamy. Among the Western influences on him, Raja Rao himself mentions the Bible, Plato, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Gorky, Malraux, Kafka, Rilke and Andre Gide.

Raja Rao's Indian background does not provide him with a model for his fiction. The literary models that he seems to follow are all European and not British or American. His life-long struggle to come to grips with a foreign medium and literary form inevitablly chains him to his European – mainly French – background. The quest for identity that runs through his works is, in fact, a quest for form. This is what he writes about himself in the Preface to *The Policeman and the Rose* :

> A South Indian Brahmin, nineteen, spoon-fed on English, with just enough Sanskrit to know I knew so little, with an indiscreet education in Kannada, the French literary scene over-powered me.

According to Raja Rao, the key to man's existence as a social being lies in the soul, not in the body. The characters in his fiction live both at the physical and spiritual planes. They are moved by a code of conduct which preaches that the only commitment that one should have in the world is to oneself. The quest of the real self is the object of the heroes of Raja Rao. For him, literature is *Sadhana* (devoted practice), not a profession but a vocation. It is a severe discipline, painful and exhausting, not an intellectual adventure as for a Western writer. Therefore, he would like an Indian writer in English to discover and identify himself as an Indian first, and then commence to write. Raja Rao believes that a book has three constituents : the author, the word, and the reader. The word is in the middle and makes communication possible between the author and the reader. One cannot communicate unless one has the desire to communicate, and it is this very desire that makes writers possible. For Raja Rao literary creation is the transformation of subjective experiences into a work of objective art. His models in the narrative art are the ancient Indian *Puranas*, which are characterized by a lack of personal involvement of the writer. *Kanthapura*, the text prescribed for your study, is a novel that belongs to this very tradition. Its narrator tells the story of the action involved objectively even though she is part of it.

P.C. Bhattacharya writes thus on Raja Rao:

> Next to Shankara and Ramanuja, Raja Rao was influenced most by Gandhi. The Gandhian movement was not merely a political one; it was a real social revolution, albiet without the concomitant hatred and violence. Gandhi, in his turn, was influenced by such Western thinkers as Ruskin, Marx and Tolstoy. His ideas about trusteeship, social justice and non-cooperation with the evil can be traced to these sources. However, the basic principles of Gandhi were derived from the thoughts of the ancient Indian thinkers, especially as contained in *Gita* and *Ramayana*. Even his fasts, which some thought to be a kind of political blackmail, were of a piece with the Brahminic spirit...
> Naturally Raja Rao, [a] Brahmin, felt a strong affinity with Gandhi. *Kanthapura* is the story of such a Brahminic self-sacrific. The village was destroyed; its men were beaten, arrested, or killed; its women raped, tortured and driven away... Yet there is no sense of despair, no feeling of failure, no bitterness at losing a battle. Rather it is just the opposite.[7]

According to G.S. Amur, Raja Rao's advice to Indians is couched in the following words of his essay, 'A Pilgrimage to Europe':

> We may read Keats and Thackeray as often as we like, but unless we pore over the writings of our own great poets, the great seers who preached us their priceless philosophy, our knowledge will not be our own. It is our great misfortune that, blinded by foreign rule, we have forgotten our great men and have nothing but scorn for them, We have lost the knowledge that was our own, and the little that we got from the West rolls away and does not touch our souls. What great knowledge can we ever hope to find than the knowledge offered to us by the *Gita* and the epics ? Don't they offer us the whole knowledge of the universe ?[8]

Raja Rao's mind is firmly rooted in the Hindu culture and philosophy, but he is not averse to receiving ideas from the Western thinkers. His sense of nationalism does

not prevent him from assessing the narrowness and limitations of some of his countrymen. Being a product of the Gandhian Age, he believes in the free exchange of ideas between India and the West. For the readers, it is hard to remain unaffected by his sincerity of purpose and authenticity of statement; the message comes out bright and clear in all his writings – essays, short stories and novels. Ultimately, however as Makarand avers:

> Raja Rao is an artist, not a philosopher. It is as an artist that he is to be judged and understood. And as such he has been true to his calling. In terms of language, style and theme, he has been perfectly consistent, fulfilling the promise he made in his *Foreword to Kanthapura*. It is this consistency, this integrity of purpose, this concern with the Ultimate Reality, coupled with stylistic innovation and an inspired use of language, that makes him one of the most significant and interesting writers of the world.[9]

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have given you a brief introduction to Raja Rao, placing him among the major writers of the Indian novel in English. Along with Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, he is the pioneer of this genre of writing. Though he shares much with them, yet he has a place of his own in the history and development of the Indian writing in English in the last sixty years of the twentieth century. We have also informed you about the life and works of Raja Rao as briefly as could be encompassed within the limited scope of this Unit. His *Kanthapura* dramatises the national struggle of Gandhian *Satyagraha* as a mythic and symbolic event in the history of a South Indain village. Elements of Indian and Western philosophy and cross-cultural concerns are projected in *The Serpent and the Rope*. The influences that shaped his mental outlook are the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, Kannada poetry, Gandhi, Plato, Shakespeare, and some Russian and French writers. Raja Rao, in his writings, lays more stress on the spirit of human beings than on their physical aspect. For him, literature is *Sadhna*, not a profession but a vocation. He belives that one cannot communicate unless one has the desire to communicate. His models in the narrative art are the ancient Indian *Puranas*, and *Kanthapura* is structured like one.

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1.8 GLOSSARY

East - West dilemma: Conflict of the cultures of the East and the West.
Foreign medium: English is basically a foreign language in India.
Outcasts: People thrown out of society.

Regional fiction:	Fiction about a particular geographical region.
Provincialism:	Manners peculiar to an area.
Dostoevsky:	Russian novelist, author of *Brothers Karamzov*.
Gorky:	Russian novelist, author of *Mother*.
Malraux:	French novelist.
Kafka:	Jewish writer born in Prague, author of *The Trial*.
Rilke:	German poet, a great stylist.
Andre Gide:	French novelist, dramatist and poet.

1.9 QUESTIONS

1. Place Raja Rao in the context of the evolution of the Indian writing in English.

2. Compare and contrast Raja Rao's contribution as a writer to that of two of his major contemporaries, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan.

3. Write a short essay on the literary influences that shaped Raja Rao's philosophy of life and literature.

UNIT 2 *KANTHAPURA* : BACKGROUND

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Historical and Political Background
2.3 Gandhian Thought and Its Impact
2.4 Raja Rao's English : Form and Style
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 References
2.7 Glossary
2.8 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to give you some background knowledge about *Kanthapura*. When you finish a careful reading of this Unit, you would have gathered information about the following topics :

- the sources of *Kanthapura*;
- the historical and political background of the novel·
- the impact of Gandhian philosophy on Raja Rao as presented in this novel;
- the form and style of English as a medium evolved by Raja Rao for narrating the events that form the plot of *Kanthapura*.

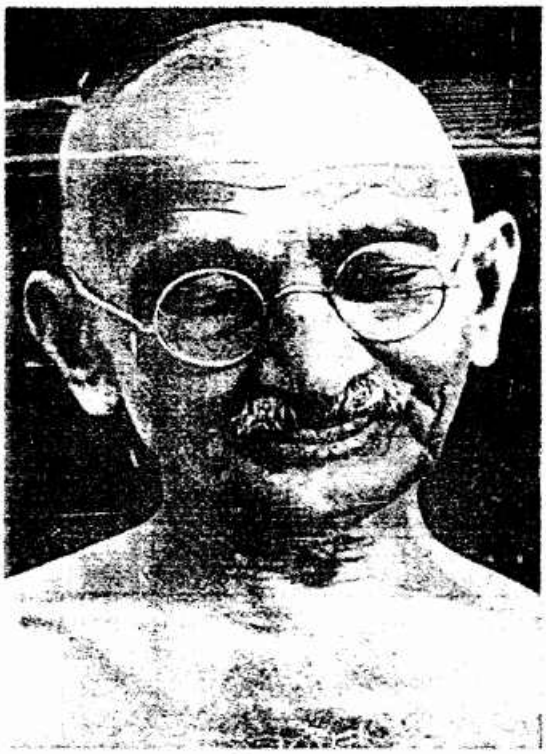
2.1 INTRODUCTION

While studying Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* as a text, one needs to have a background knowledge of several things. For instance, you, as a student, ought to know about the sources — ancient and modern – that inspired the author to write this book. The theme, structure, characterization, language and style of a novel are generally determined by the models that the writer has in mind and of which he is constantly thinking while writing the book. Hence, it makes the task of understanding a text easy if one has a fair knowledge of its sources. Similarly, since *Kanthapura* is a social document about a village in turmoil and the people living in it, you need to know about the historical time and the political movement that are shown to have caused the upheaval. Mahatma Gandhi is a living presence in *Kanthapura*, and his philosophy of life and political struggle is reflected by the thought and action of several characters. All this must be taken into account while proceeding with the study of the novel. There is yet another aspect of the book – its language and style – which you need to know so that you are able to appreciate the peculiarities of expression that you will come across when reading the novel. All these various elements of background study form part of this Unit.

2.2 SOURCES OF *KANTHAPURA*

In language and style that recall ancient Indian epics, Raja Rao describes in *Kanthapura* an archetypal South Indian village inspired by Gandhi's *Satyagraha* and

crushed by the police force of the British rulers. The Skeffington Coffee Estate and what goes on within its boundaries represents the pattern of British oppression in India. In spite of its social realistic mode, the novel evolves round its mythic and symbolic framework. Rao writes a narrative that not only takes us back to the world of the Hindu epics, but also interprets experience in the forms of Hindu thought. Events of the plot are illusory; life is symbolic; and the struggle of the men and women of *Kanthapura* village is part of the continuing *Ramayana*. Gandhi is an *Avatara* (incarnation) of Rama sent from heaven to rescue India (Sita) from the British (Ravana). The old and the new orders are mingled together. Non-violence of *Satyagraha* is integrated with the ancient, violent tradition of the Indian epics, which repeats itself hundreds of times over in the course of Indian history.



Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

Rao builds up an image of India that apeals to the West without sacrificing realism. Ancient history, religion, characters from the epics, natural landscape, and ordinary life of the village community of *Kanthapura* – all these elements are synthesised to raise the message of the novel above mere nationalism. The life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi provide constant refrains to hold the characters and various strands of the plot of *Kanthapura* together. Gandhi's moral values and practice in politics, Moorthy's socialistic ideas, the mythology of the man who tells the *Harikatha* (story of God), the personal likes and dislikes of the narrator, the ruthlessness of the oppressors – all these various elements of the novel offer interpretations of the place of nationalism and of good and evil in Indian life. No single view is allowed to dominate the novel. *Kanthapura* symbolises India, *is* capacity to absorb influences and yet remain essentially the same.

In the process of writing *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao was aware of the problem of expressing purely Indian experience through the medium of the novel of European origin. As a consequence, he does not strictly adhere to the Western model, but makes it suit his purpose by mixing into it the purely Indian elements of the epic, *Purana*, and *Harikatha*. In the process, he succeeds in his endeavour of achieving a fusion of theme, form and discourse, which are authentically Indian and modern at the same time. *Kanthapura* is a novel that has the freedom of the romance, the broad canvas of the epic, and symbolism of the fable. It is history and fictional narrative

unified to form a prose poem. Its historical action covers nearly ten years of Indian struggle for freedom, including Gandhi's famous Dandi March during the Salt Satyagraha and the Civil Disobedience Movement. As a *Purana*, it recalls the legendary exploits of Rama and Krishna, which are known to most Indians from their very childhood. Through the skill of his art, Raja Rao integrates broad Indian experience and Gandhian philosophy into the destiny of the village community of *Kanthapura*. As K.R. Rao writes in his book, *The Fiction of Raja Rao* :

> *Kanthapura* does not project the Indian spirit
> isolatively, but as a living experience moving
> in time and space. The three levels of action
> in the novel, political, social and religious,
> are all related to unified concept of India both
> as a tradition and as a living culture,
> as a magnificent past to be rediscovered
> in the enormous present.[1]

2.3 HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The actual historical and political situation of India in the 1930's provides the background of the story that is narrated in *Kanthapura*. The Indian National Congress Committee was already a broad-based political organization that had spread its branches in the length and breadth of India. Mahatma Gandhi, after his return from South Africa, was already recognized as a leader of national stature who had launched his revolutionary campaign based on *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* against the British rule. There are recurring references in the novel to important political events of that time, such as the Salt Satyagraha, the Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi, the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Round Table Conference, and the Gandhi – Irwin Pact. Whatever was happening on the political scene in India in those years finds its due reflection in the novel. Characters like Moorthy, Rangamma, Ratna and Range Gowda are not only aware of what is happening all over India, but they also take an active part in the rebellion against the British rulers. They subscribe to newspapers, which are read in communal gatherings, and thus the villagers of *Kanthapura* come to know about the great freedom struggle that was at its peak then in the length and breadth of the country.

The enthusiasm of the people truly reflects the actual mood of the nation. To defy the British symbol of oppression, the villagers go out on a protest march towards the Skeffington Coffee Estate to picket the country liquor shop (toddy shop) near it. The following passage, quoted from the Orient Paperbacks edition (1971) of *Kanthapura* tells us how the people of the surrounding areas supported the march. Subsequent references to the text will be from the same edition.

> And we march on and on, winding up the Karwar
> Road to the Kenchamma grove, and at every step
> there are corn – people and puffed – rice and Bengal
> gram people and bangle sellers and buttermilk
> people and betel-leaf people, and they stop us and say,
> 'Take this, take this, Mahatma's men !' (193)

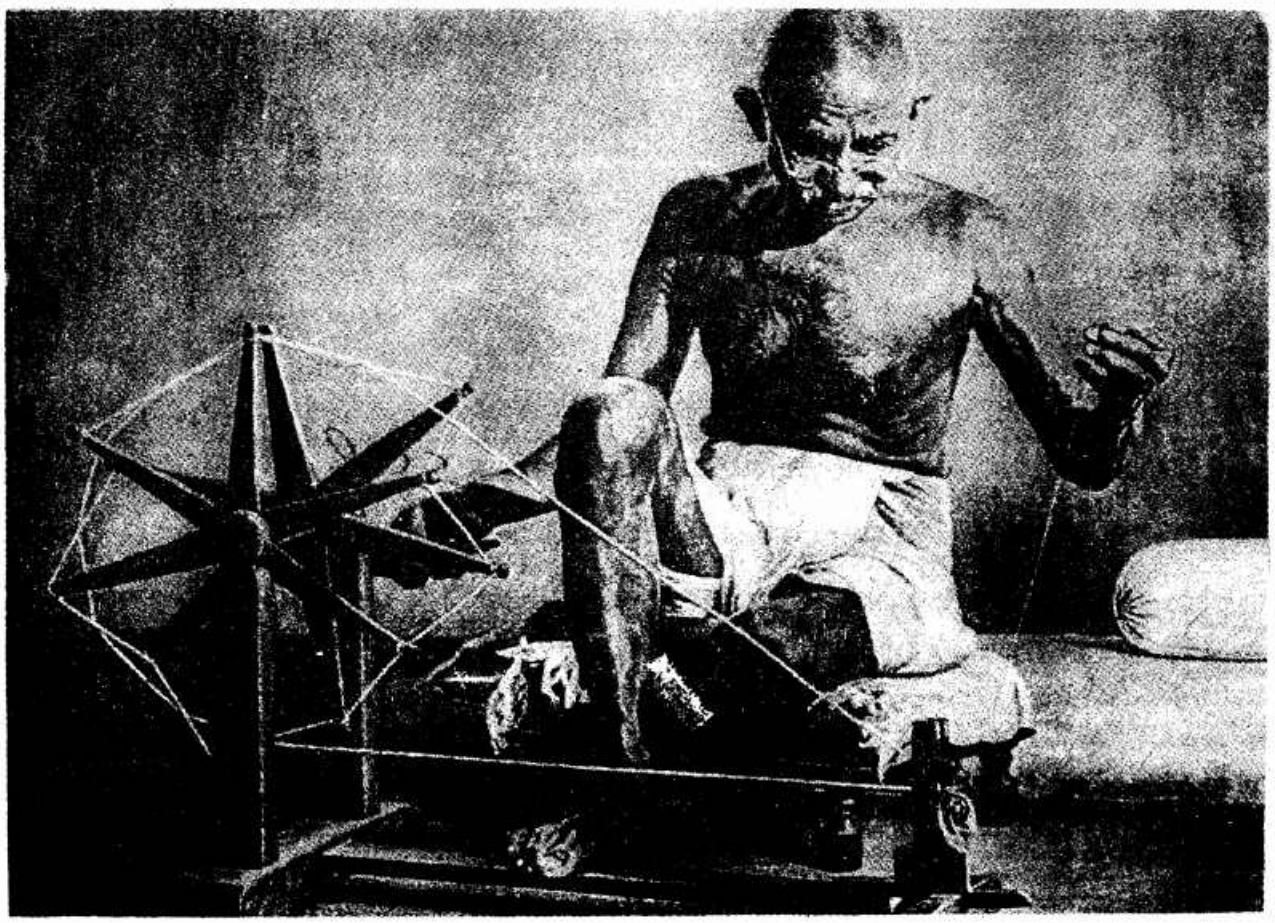
There is an oblique reference to the Round Table Conference in London, when they say that the Mahatma will go to the Red-man's country (England) to get them *Swaraj* or self-rule.

The action of *Kanthapura* dates back to the time when the Gandhian ideas fired the imagination of the Indian nation and paved the way for a non-violent revolution against the British rule. Whatever happens at *Kanthapura* was happening everywhere in India. This is equally true of the ruthless handling of the situation by the Red-man's police force. Bade Khan is a typical police officer in the service of the British

government. He strictly follows the orders of his masters to suppress the popular uprising in the village and its surroundings at any cost. His men shower lathis on the gatherings of the villagers and trample them under their heavy boots. They do not let go of any opportunity to molest their women. There is no exaggeration in Raja Rao's description of such happenings as things were the same all over India during the freedom movement. To counter the police brutalities, Moorthy advises his followers to take recourse to passive resistance in response to a call from Gandhi, but it does not achieve the objective of putting the oppressors to shame. It is an unequal fight, and the main leaders of the village are arrested and jailed. The villagers wait in suspense for them to return and resume their leadership of the movement against the Red-man's rule. K.R. Rao sums up the situation in these words :

> Moorthy's release renews the dedication and enthusiasm of the community. The villagers launch on the 'Don't – touch – the Government campaign', which is succeeded by the 'no tax compaign' and other forms of Civil Disobedience ... But it proves an unequal fight and the satyagrahis are mercilessly put down, and all ends in a terrible fiasco. Yet the valiant struggle attains the dimensions of a heroic myth. Kanthpura is 'destroyed, but not defeated'[2]

2.4 GANDHIAN THOUGHT AND ITS IMPACT



Mahatma Gandhi does not figure in *Kanthapura* as a character, but his invisible presence and the wide impact of his thought is felt throughout the book. Gandhian philosophy is introduced into the novel through Moorthy, the main protagonist, who comes under the influence of Gandhi at a young age. Moorthy regards Gandhi as a role model, and follows him in every way, in word and deed. He preaches to the villagers the chief tenets of Gandhian philosophy such as to practice *ahimsa* and speak the truth. He also persuades them to make cotton yarn on the spinning wheel and to wear cloth spun and woven by their own hands. British made foreign clothes are to be discarded and destroyed in bonfires. Moorthy tells his village followers that Gandhi says, 'Spinning is as purifying as praying'. This creates the image of Gandhi as a Mahatma, a great soul and a deeply religious man, whom they venerate and whose words they follow as the law. To them, he is a mighty godly figure who emanates spiritual power that is going to overthrow the British rule in India.

The people of *Kanthapura* and the adjoining areas are exhorted in the name of the Mahatma not to drink toddy or liquor in any form. The toddy shops in the neighbourhood are picketed to prevent sale of liquor. Gandhi's practice of singing *Bhajans* (hymns) at his prayer meetings is generally appreciated. The people take out *prabhat pheries* (morning outings), getting up at dawn, gathering at the temple, and going through the streets in the twilight, singing religious songs. They also sing new songs in which Gandhi's image appears as that of a king of humble origin. Here is an example :

> Our King, he was born on a wattle - mat,
> He's not the King of the velvet bed,
> He's small and he's round and he's bright and he is sacred,
> O, Mahatma, you're our king and we are your slaves. (203)

And, again :

> There's one Government, sister,
> There's one Government, sister,
> And that's the Government of the Mahatma. (207)

The villagers proudly declare that they are all for Gandhi; they are Gandhi's men and will do anything at his command. On several occasions in the novel, thundering slogans are raised to the skies; 'Vande Mataram !' 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai !' and 'Inquilab Zindabad !' They invest Gandhi with super-human powers. But there is one thing about Gandhi's teachings that the people of *Kanthapura* do not understand. Why should he advise the upper caste Hindus to mingle with the lower caste Pariahs – to live with them, to eat with them, and to inter-marry with them. They find such behaviour so un-Mahatma like. Some of them like Bhatta and Venkamma repeatedly belittle Moorthy in the eyes of the others for his association with the pariahs of the village. When Moorthy tells Renge Gowda, one of his ardent followers, that Gandhi wants people to pluck out hatred from their hearts and love even their enemies, Gowda replies, 'That's for the Mahatma and you Moorthappa – not for us poor folk !' The idea is that Gandhi and Moorthy have attained such an ideal height where they can practise whatever they preach but the lesser people cannot forget their simple enemities.

Gandhi believed in simple living, and all his life tried to live the life of the ordinary people. But an impressive image of Gandhi is projected in *Kanthapura*, when he is spoken of in the same breath as some of the gods of the Hindu Pantheon. Jayaramachar, the *Harikatha* man comes to Kanthpura and tells a new kind of tale in which he mingles Hindu mythology with contemporary politics. He compares Gandhi to Lord Siva when he says, Siva is the three - eyed, and Swaraj too is three - eyed : Self - purification, Hindu - Muslim unity, Khaddar.' Mohan being one of the names of Krishna, Gandhi's full name, Mohandas Karamchand , gives Jayaramachar the

idea of paralleling his achievement to that of Krishna. Just as the god as a young boy slays the serpent Kali, we are told that Gandhi goes from village to village slaying the serpent of foreign rule. Again, just as Krishna teaches Arjuna the wisdom of how to be a true man of action. Gandhi teaches Moorthy how to be a true satyagrahi. Since Gandhi interpreted self-rule as an ideal form of government in the manner of *Rama - rajya*, the Gandhi myth is finally expressed in these terms in *Kanthapura* :

> They say Mahatma will go to the Red-man's country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall all be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravna will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of air, and brother Bharatha will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the Master on his head. And as they enter Ayodhya there will be a rain of flowers. (257)

On the fair carts of *Kanthapura*, the pictures of Rama, Krishna, Sankra and Gandhi are placed side by side.

Summing up his views on '*Kanthapura* and Gandhism,' P.Dayal writes in *Raja Rao : A Study of His Novels*,

> *Kanthapura* remains primarily a novel about the Freedom Movement. It propounds the political beliefs of Mahatma Gandhi, as Gandhism forms the basis of the book. The novel expounds the Gandhian values on non-violence and abolition of untouchability. The tremendous religious activity, the mythicising of Gandhi and mother India and the spiritualization of the Freedom Movement within the framework of Indian cultural tradition suggest Raja Rao's zeal for Indian philosophy. The references to the *Karma* philosophy, the omnipresence of God, the immortality of soul and the doctrine of incarnation which are derived from the *Bhagavad Gita* signify the novelist's fascination for Vedanta.[3]

2.5 RAJA RAO'S ENGLISH : FORM AND STYLE OF *KANTHAPURA*

Raja Rao's 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura* contains significant comments on his literary style and diction. It shows that he uses these in a cautious, tolerant manner as instruments that mediate between the emotional quality of the Indian experience and its expression in English in intellectual terms. He says :

> One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language... English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. (5)

Rao's style in *Kanathpura* is so unconventional because he has attempted to introduce into English the speech rhythms of his own mother tongue, Kannada. His is not the English of the educated and sophisticated Indians; it is the natural speech of the South Indian villagers rendered into simple English. Summing up the effect, Srinivasa Iyengar writes :

> ... it is as though one sees a familiar
> landscape through coloured glasses. The
> colouring, the strangeness, is unavoidable,
> but it does not alter the essential truth
> of the things seen or the movements observed.[4]

Raos' objective in choosing English as his medium is to find in a foreign language the stylistic equivalent of the Indian experience. In other words, he has tried to express through English his understanding of the Indian life.

Raja Rao dissociates the English language from those elements which identify it with purely Western experience and culture. There is a profusion of 'local colour' in the speech of his characters in *Kanthapura*. It is a deliberate distancing effort to make the language shed its European connotations, and so to transform it into what is generally known as 'Indian English'. Rao borrows extensively from Kannada to replace the English idiom and proverbs that he discards. For instance, he writes 'a crow-and-sparrow story' instead of 'a cock-and-bull tale', and replaces the English 'nip in the bud' by the Kannada 'crush it in its seed.' When the poor untouchables of *Kanthapura* get their free spinning wheels from Moorthy, 'they go back with their spinning wheels upon their shoulders, their mouths touching the ears with delight.' (33) This is another example of Raja Rao using non-English forms of expression. Elaborating on this theme, Esha Dey writes in *The Novels of Raja Rao* :

> Then there is a sprinkling of words connected
> with the physical reality of India and Hindu
> behaviour patterns, like *pollution*, *caste*, *coconut*,
> *camphor*, *lantana*, *bamboo*, *ablution*, *banana*
> *puffed-rice*, etc. in short the items which
> 'Indianize' the language essentially for their
> semantic funciton in respect of Hindu/Indian
> culture. But linguistic patterns remain the
> same, in the effort to present reality as actually
> perceived by the senses. [5]

In the context of Rao's synthesis of theme and style, Makarand Paranjape comments:

> Both stylistically and thematically ... Rao succeeds in capturing the spirit of India in his works. His innovations with form and style have expanded the expressive range of English and have influenced other writers who share his predicament: the task of writing about a culture in a language that is not native to it.[6]

There is a poetic quality in Raja Rao's prose in *Kanthapura*, and this is especially noticed in his descriptions. He gives lists of sonorous South Indian names, indulges in repetitions, and strings together a number of clauses to build a rhythmic effect that sounds almost like verse. This is noticed in the opening pages of the novel where the author leads the reader up the winding road of the Ghats to the *Kanthapura* village. The same touch is again noticed in Rao's naration of how Goddess Kenchamma fights a demon to save the people from his attacks. As he says in the 'Foreward', *Kanthapura* is written as a *sthala-purana* (the exclusive mythic tale of a particular

place), its language has the tone and quality of an epic. This is particularly true of the story of Mahatma. And then, the description of the Kartik Festival of Lights is an excellent piece of rhythmic prose :

> Kartik has come to *Kanthapura*... with the
> glow of lights and unpressed footsteps of the
> wandering gods; white lights from clay-trays
> and red lights from copper-stands, and diamond
> lights that glow from the bowers of entrance-leaves;
> lights that glow from banana trunks and mango
> twigs, yellow lights behind white leaves, and
> green lights behind yellow leaves, and white
> lights behind green leaves; ... (118)

In this passage, there is a peculiar rhythm which is part of the magical scene that is vividly and imaginatively described by Rao. The reader feels himself inexorably drawn towards the fireworks of colours and lights created by the skilful use of suggestive words and images. The scene recalls many memories of the Diwali celebrations in the month of Kartik.

Raja Rao's prose style in *Kanthapura* has an orientation towards oral speech, and that is only natural since the story is told by a narrator who has a socially distinct manner of telling a tale. Achakka, a grandmother of the village, humble of origin but rich in experience, has a memory full of folk-lore and traditional myth. She uses these assets to enrich the narrative. Rao decorates her descriptions with repetitive phrases and sentences that are full of sound-effects in alliteration and assonance. This adds to the distinctive quality of his language and style. Raja Rao's skilful use of long sentences complements his descriptive power which he achieves through animated and rhythmic English prose. S.C. Harrex describes the overall effect in apt words as follows:

> Considered in terms of the development of the
> Indian novel in English, *Kanthpura* clearly has
> a special place as the first work to demonstrate
> convincingly, in terms of form and content, that
> the novel in English was a medium which could
> be adapted to the Indian sensibility.[7]

Regarding the similarity between Raja Rao's style in *Kanthapura* and that of the ancient Indian Purans, Paranjape writes:

> *Kanthapura* shares certain narrative techniques with the Puranas. The story is told rapidly, all in one breath, by a village grandmother and the style reflects the oral heritage also evident in the Harikatha...The Puranas contain detailed, poetic descriptions of nature; similarly, the novel has several descriptive passages which are so evocative and unified as to be prose-poems themselves. Examples are the coming of Karthi . daybreak over the Ghats and the advent of the rains.[8]

2.6 LET US SUM UP

Raja Rao's *Kanthpura* is about life in a South Indian village, but its central theme is the Gandhian Satyagraha Movement against the British rule in India. The author introduces parallels to characters and events drawn from the *Ramayana*. Mahatma Gandhi's story is told in the form of a *Harikatha* by Jayaramachar. The novel is projected as a *sthala - purana*, i.e., the mythic tale of a particular place. The three

levels of action - political, social and religious - present a unified concept of India. The action belongs to the decade of the 1930's when the Indian National Congress Committee spread the Gandhian message of Satyagraha and *ahimsa* through the length and breadth of India. The villagers of *Kanthapura* also follow these principles. They take out protest marches towards the Skeffington Coffee Estate and suffer harsh treatment at the hands of the police. Their leader, Moorthy, launches the Civil Disobedience Movement against the British. Gandhi does not figure as a character in the novel, but the various aspects of his philosophy and teachings are projected as the story unfolds. He is compared to the gods, Siva and Krishna, for destroying the demon of foreign rule.

In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao conveys a purely Indian experience through the foreign medium of the English language. He uses his style and diction as instruments that achieve a balance between the emotional quality of the Indian experience and its expression in intellectual terms. He introduces into English the speech rhythms of Kannada. Instead of English proverbs, he employs Indian proverbs translated into English. The Indian rhythm of his prose lends it a poetic quality. His descriptions are rich in colour and imagery. Alliteration and repetition add to the flow of his narration.

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2.8 GLOSSARY

Discourse:	Expression, speech
Ahimsa:	A Sanskrit word meaning ' non-violence'
Toddy:	A kind of country liquor popular in South India
Picketed:	Placed men on watch to prevent customers from buying
Pariah:	One of low caste, untouchable
Pantheon:	All the gods collectively
Harikatha:	A story of some god or goddess told with the accompaniment of music and dance
Ghats:	The north - south mountain ranges along the eastern and western coasts of South India
Alliteration:	Repetition of the same initial sound in words
Assonance:	Recurrence of vowel sounds

2.9 QUESTIONS

1. Write a short essay on the sources of *Kanthapura*.

2. What do you know about the historical and political background of *Kanthapura*?

3. How deep and wide is the impact of Gandhi's personality and his thought on the theme of *Kanthapura*?

4. How does Raja Rao convey in *Kanthapura* the spirit of Indian life through a foreign medium?

UNIT 3 *KANTHAPURA* : THEMES

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 The Village
3.3 The Skeffington Coffee Estate
3.4 Consideration of Caste
3.5 Moorthy Leads a Satyagraha
3.6 Let Us Sum Up
3.7 Glossary
3.8 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Unit is to give you an overall view of :

- *Kanthapura* village and its surroundings.
- The happenings at the Skeffington Coffee Estate.
- The caste system and its influence on the villagers.
- How Moorthy leads the satyagraha in his village.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we give you a brief account of *Kanthapura* and the village community that lives there. The chief landmarks around the village and some of the main characters are also mentioned. We tell you about how Moorthy spreads the message of Gandhi in the village. There follows an account of how the Skeffington Coffee Estate was formed and the happenings there at the time of the action of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. A section of the Unit is devoted to explaining the distinctions of caste and how these influence the thinking of the villagers. Finally, we tell you briefly about the satyagraha movement in the village as this theme will be referred to again and again in the Units.

3.2 THE VILLAGE

Kanthapura, as described in Raja Rao's novel, is a village in the province of Kara in the former princely state of Mysore, which is now part of Karnataka. Far above the port city of Mangalore, it is high on the Western Ghats, up the steep mountains that face the Arabian Sea. In the lands around the village are grown coffee, cardamom, rice and sugarcane. While crops of coffee and cardamom are shipped to England, rice and sugar are consumed at home. The nearby forests are full of teak, sal and sandal trees. *Kanthapura* is situated on the road that connects the sea-coast with the interior. Day and night long caravans of bullock carts can be seen on the road carrying the produce of the land. The carts of two village traders, Rama Chetty and Shubba Chetty, are also seen carrying the merchandise on the winding road.

Some of the landmarks of the village are the Main Street, the Potter's Lane, Chennayya's Pond, the Brahmin Street and the Temple square. There are two temples in the village. One is devoted to the worship of Kenchamma, the goddess of the hill of that name, and the other is dedicated to Goddess Kanthapurishwari, the deity of the village. There is a legend about Kenchamma that ages ago she slayed a demon who came to ask for the young men of the village as food and the young women as wives. The blood of the demon soaked into the earth to make the Kenchamma Hill red. The goddess is believed to protect the people of *Kanthapura* in times of famine, disease, death and despair.



The village is divided into several quarters. In the Brahmin quarter there are twenty-four houses, including those of postmaster Suryanarayana, Patwari Nanjundia, Bhatta, Achakka (the narrator), Front-House Akkamma, Waterfall Venkamma, Moorthy and Rangamma. (Note the narrator's habit of naming people according to their calling or some personal traits). The other part of the village consists of several quarters : the Pariah quarter, the Potter's quarter, the weaver's quarter, and the Sudra quarter - all together nearly one hundred huts. There is no social interaction between the Brahmins and the Pariahs. The nine-beamed house of Patel Range Gowda, who happens to be a Sudra, is near the Temple Square.

The villagers lead a calm and placid life till Moorthy disturbs it by bringing in the Gandhian Satyagraha Movement into their life. The village is no longer the same after that as it becomes part of the countrywide struggle against the British rule. The air resounds with the cry of slogans - 'Vande Matram', 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai', and Inquilab Zindabad'. People are exhorted to give up their foreign clothes and dress in Swadeshi Khaddar. Free spinning wheels are distributed so that people can spin cotton yarn. Moorthy tells them that the Mahatma himself spins for two hours every morning, and regards it as purifying as praying. Moorthy leads the villagers in an attempt to picket the toddy shop near the Skeffington Coffee Estate to prevent the coolies and other people from buying and consuming country liquor. The police tries to foil their attempt and beats them mercilessly. Protest marches are organized against

the repression let loose by the police. It provokes more lathi charges, arrests and police brutalities. But Moorthy and his followers remain firm in their resolve.

As time passes, it brings many changes in the life of the village community, but the village and its topography remain the same. The hill and the river, the land and the sky, and the surrounding fields are not altered by the passage of time. But the day to day life of the villagers and their social intercourse undergo a big change. Under the impact of the Gandhian national movement, the cross-currents of the time take the village to the brink of total destruction, but its permanent image lives on in the pages of Raja Rao's novel. Goddess Kenchamma and the River Himavathy symbolize the permanent quality of the traditional life of the villagers, which is buffeted by the winds of change. It is remarkable how the social life of *Kanthapura* revolves round an endless cycle of fairs, festivals, and religious gatherings. The Gandhian movement too is coloured by the ritual practices. The secular message of Gandhi is transformed into folk-song, prayer and *Harikatha*. That is the only way the villagers of *Kanthapura* can feel one with the national movement of Mahatma Gandhi. But what follows is the destruction of the village. Eventually, as Range Gowda reports at the end of the novel, there is left

> Neither man nor mosquito in *Kanthapura*, for the men from Bombay have built houses on the Bebbur Mound, houses like in the city, for coolies, and they own this land and that, and even Bhatta has sold all his lands, ... and he's now gone back to Kashi. (258)

3.3 THE SKEFFINGTON COFFEE ESTATE

As a counterpoise to the village in *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao presents the Skeffington Coffee Estate. The village stands for the Indian values, traditions, myths, faith and influence of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. The coffee estate, on the other hand, is a citadel of the British supremacy, colonialism, and enslavement of the people of India. It is a vast estate, spread across the land from the Babbur Mound on one side, the Kenchamma Hill, on the other, right up to the jungles of the Horse-head Hill. Nobody knew how large it was or when it was founded; but all said it was at least ten thousand acres wide. Some people in *Kanthapura* remembered having heard of the Hunter Sahib who used his hunter and his hand to reap the first fruits of his plantation. Then it grew bigger and bigger till it touched all the hills around the village.

More and more coolies came from below the Ghats. They talked Tamil or Telugu, and brought their families along. Half-naked, starving armies of coolies marched past the Kenchamma Temple and up to the Skeffington Estate. They carried bundles of their belongings in their arms or over heads and shoulders. The Sahib's maistri had gone to far flung villages to spread the news of availability of work in the Estate. He offered one-fourth of a rupee to a man and one-eighth to a woman for a day's labour. Still they came eagerly as there had been a drought in their province , and the maistri enticed them with the advance of a rupee to each and the promise of plenty of food in the Estate. He told them that the British master of the Estate was a kind and generous man who would be good to them. So the coolies left their homes, travelled part of the way in a train, and marched the rest of the distance on foot. When all of them passed through the entrance of the Estate, the maistri closed the gates behind them. He led them to the master, and told them that they would be treated well if they worked hard, but beaten up if they worked badly. Little did they realize that they had become virtual prisoners in the Estate, and slaves of the British Sahib.

The coolies were taken to the foot of a hill where they erected their thatched huts. They all said, 'This will be a fine place to live in,' and they slept the sleep of princes. The next morning they rose with the sun and were put to work. Then they realized what lay in store for them. The work was heavy and the wages inadequate; the Estate was crawling with snakes; the rainy season brought with it bouts of fever. The Sahib prescribed them pills as medicine, but there was no respite from hard labour. Some of them perished, but there was no escape from the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Years passed, the old Sahib died, and his nephew was the new Sahib. He was not harsh or cruel, but he wanted the young women of the coolies for his pleasure. When one man resisted this exploitation, the Sahib shot him dead. The case was taken to the British court where the Sahib was forgiven.

Two Brahmin clerks from the city, working at the Estate, took a few of the coolies to Moorthy at *Kanthapura*, asking him to do something for them. Consequently, Moorthy came to the Estate, but was prevented by Bade Khan, the policemen, from entering. There was a scuffle at the gates in which two coolies hit Bade Khan with his own lathi. The next day the family of one of them was expelled from the Estate, but they were provided shelter by Moorthy. The other coolies rallied together to rebel against the harsh treatment they received from their master. The villagers of *Kanthapura* went on a march towards the Estate to demonstrate their solidarity with the coolies. That is how the Gandhian Movement reached even the Skeffington Coffee Estate, and created a turmoil within its boundaries. It was only after this incident that Moorthy began his 'Don't-touch-the Government compaign', in other words, Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement.

3.4 CONSIDERATIONS OF CASTE

Achakka, the narrator of *Kanthapura*, is an upper caste Brahmin, belonging to the family of Veda Sastra Pravina Krishna Sastri. It is only natural that there are many references to considerations of caste in her narrative. When she begins her account of the social structure of the village, it is of the Brahmin households that she talks of first and that too in some detail. Only after that she mentions the other quarters of the Pariahs, Potters, Weavers, and Sudras. She frankly admits that she has never been to that part of the village, and has only a rough idea of the number of huts situated there. The only member of the lower castes that she speaks well of is Patel Range Gowda, who is well off and wields considerable authority in *Kanthapura*. She adds :

> The other sudras were not badly-fed householders
> and they had as usual two or three sons and
> a few daughters, and one could not say whether
> they were rich or poor. They were always badly
> dressed and always paid revenues due and
> debts after several notices. But as long as
> Range Gowda was there, there was no fear.
> He would see them through the difficulties.
> And they were of his community. (15)

Moorthy is a prominent Brahimn youth of the village, but swayed by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, he learns to care for the lower castes and the untouchables. When he gets free spinning - wheels from the Congress Committee, he distributes them among the villagers of all castes. He even goes to the Pariah quarter, and the people there are so happy to have a Brahmin visiting them that they say 'Yes, yes, learned one.' They were going to spin, and if that Brahmin boy was to be believed they would have clothes to wear, blankets and shirts and loin-cloths. Later, when they are told about Russia, where pariahs and Brahmins are the same, they find it hard to believe in such talk. But Waterfall Venkamma, another Brahmin, is not impressed by

this 'non-sense.' She does not think much of Moorthy, whom she regards as a good-for-nothing fellow, who has taken to this Pariah upliftment business. She declares that because of his sins she will not give her daughter in marriage to him even when he is not keen on it. To his mother, she says that she is happy not to have tied her daughter ' to the neck of a pariah - mixer.' She goes on :

> 'Do you hear that, Narsamma? Well let
> him take care, Moorthy. And our community
> will not be corrupted by such dirt-gobbling
> curs. Pariah ! pariah !' She spat at the
> door and walked away, ... (57)

Bhatta reports that the Swami in the city was going to excommunicate Moorthy if he continued his pariah business. He also says that Moorthy retaliated in these words. :

> Let the Swami do what he likes. I will go
> and do more and more pariah work. I
> will go and eat with them if necessary. Why
> not ? Are they not men like us ? And the
> Swami, who is he ? .... He may be learned
> in the Vedas and all that. But he has no heart. (63)

From then on Moorthy sits by the kitchen threshold and eats his food served by his mother like a servant. It breaks the heart of his mother, but she feels helpless caught in the awkward web of casteism. Moorthy continues to visit the Pariahs, to give them cotton to spin and yarn to weave, and to teach them alphabets, grammar, arithmetic and Hindi. But he remains conscious of the fact that he is a Brahmin and the spirits of his ancestors are watching from above.

On one occasion, Moorthy visits Pariah Rachanna's hut. Rachanna's wife is overwhelmed, and invites him in. It is with a trembling heart that Moorthy crosses the threshold. When she offers him milk to drink, he finds excuses to avoid doing so. She persists :

> 'Touch it, Moorthappa, touch it only as though
> it were offered to the gods, and we shall be
> sanctified; and Moorthy, with many a
> trembling prayer touches the tumbler and brings
> it to his lips, and taking one sip, lays it aside. (105)

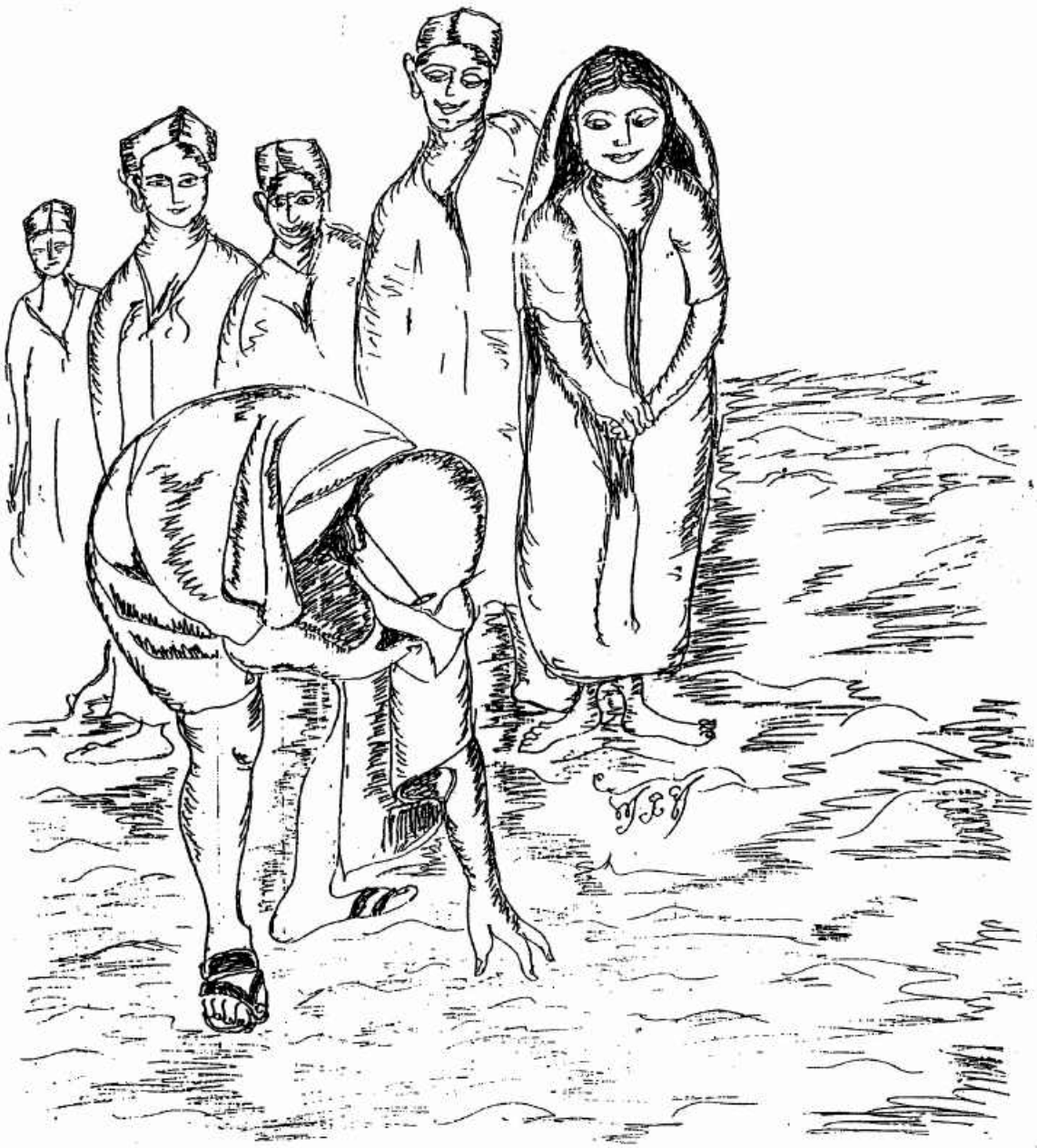
This episode shows how deep are the consideration of caste in a Brahmin, and that one might be a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi but one cannot, in spirit, be exactly like him. It is not only the upper classes but the lower classes too that are shackled by the traditional views about the distinctions of caste. What is true of the rest of India is equally true of *Kanthapura*.

3.5 MOORTHY LEADS A SATYAGRAHA

Moorthy tries his best to educate the people of *Kanthapura* in the Gandhian principles, but they find it hard to break their links with the past which persists in the form of superstition, casteism and orthodoxy. Quite a few of them remain unaffected by his teachings and the personal example that he provides them. Waterfall Venkamma and Bhatta lose no opportunity of using their poisonous tongues against him. While struggling against the British oppression, Moorthy and his disciples have to fight the conservative forces entrenched within their own community. It takes time for the villagers to understand the true significance of the freedom movement and

Gandhian satyagraha. Moorthy never despairs, and continues his good work in spite of the heavy odds against the success of his mission.

Moorthy is encourged by the enthusiasm of his followers like Rangamma, Ratna and Range Gowda. They realize that the villagers can be won over only through a religious approach. Hence, they project Gandhi as a Mahatma, a superior soul of great faith and tremendous spiritual powers. They arrange Bhajans and *Harikathas* at the temple and other places to subtly plant political ideas in the minds of the people in the form of religious preaching. Moorty succeeds in persuading people from all sections of the village to spin cotton yarn and weave Khaddar. Range Gowda is elected President of the local Congress Committee. The national spirit is further strengthened when Rangamma subscribes to some papers that carry news about the activities of Gandhi and the Congress. She reads out choice items of news to those who care to listen to her.



A new wave of patriotism and national consciousness comes over *Kanthapura*, and the Satyagraha Movement gains strength. The villagers go on protest marches and picket the local toddy shop to prevent the coolies from wasting their meagre earnings on liquor. After arresting the main leaders of the movement, the police lets loose a reign of terror in the village. While Moorthy is in prison, Rangamma organizes the 'Sevika Sangha,' a voluntrary group of women to continue the passive resistance against the British rule. The police force does not spare them, and uses brutal measures against them, but they remain staunch in their resolve. When Rangamma too is arrested, Ratna takes over the leadership of the group. After some time, Moorthy is released and he is welcomed by the people of *Kanthapura*. It gives them a renewed hope in the success of their unequal fight against the police. Moorthy tells them to contribute to Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement against the British by pursuing 'Don't - touch - the Government campaign' and the 'no tax campaign.' These campaigns coincide with the famous Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi, which formed part of his Salt Satyagraha. The protesters in the village are mercilessly beaten up by the police, but they do not yield, nor do they give up the struggle. Ultimately, *Kanthapura* is destroyed but not defeated. In spite of failure, the sources of inner resolve within the village community remain strong. This is mainly due to their following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and the leadership provided by Moorthy.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Kanthapura of Raja Rao's novel of that name is a village in the former Mysore state, now part of Karnataka. It is situated high on the Western Ghats on a winding road that goes down to Mangalore on the Arabian Sea. There are two temples in the village : one dedicated to the Goddes Kenchamma of the Hill and the other to Kanthapurishwari. The village is divided into several quarters according to the different castes. Moorthy, a young man of the village, brings the message of Gandhi to his people, and starts his own satyagraha movement against the British. The Skeffington Coffee Estate on the periphery of the village is a symbol of the British attempt to enslave the Indians. Moorthy carries the message of Gandhian teachings to the Estate, and it causes much turmoil all around as the police tries its best to suppress the movement. But the people of *Kanthapura* remain staunch followers of Moorthy even when he is imprisoned. One of his followers starts a 'Sevika Sangha' group among the women of the village. The people of *Kanthapura* suffer greatly at the hands of the police but remain defiant to the end.

Though Moorthy unites his community in the name of Gandhi and the principles that he stands for, it remains divided on considerations of caste. The tradition - bound orthodox Brahmin do not mix with the lower caste Pariahs and Sudras, who contribute equally to the satyagraha with the rest of the people. Even the emancipated Moorthy, a Brahmin by birth, has qualms of conscience when he visits one of the untounchable families. That shows how deep-rooted the distinctions of caste are in the Hindu mind.

3.7 GLOSSARY

Waterfall Venkamma:	The Character is so called for her talkativeness, words coming out of her mouth non-stop like the flow of a waterfall.
Sudra:	The lowest of the four main Hindu castes
Inquilab Zindabad:	Hindustani for 'long live the revolution'
Buffeted:	Blown this way and that

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. What picture have you formed of *Kanthapura* and its people?

2. What is the significance of the Skeffington Coffee Estate in the overall account of the village in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*?

3. Write a short essay on 'Considerations of Caste' in *Kanthapura*.

4. How successful is Moorthy in leading his followers in the satyagraha movement of the village?

UNIT 4 *KANTHAPURA* : STRUCTURE AND TECHNIQUE

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 The Structure of *Kanthapura*
4.3 The Narrative Technique in *Kanthapura*
4.4 Achakka, the Narrator
4.5 The *Harikatha* Element
4.6 Myth and Symbolism
4.7 Let Us Sum Up
4.8 References
4.9 Glossary
4.10 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to give you some idea of the following:

- The structure of *Kanthapura*.
- The narrative technique used by Raja Rao in *Kanthapura*.
- Achakka, the narrator of the novel.
- The use of the *Harikatha* element in the novel.
- Myth and symbolism in *Kanthapura*.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

For students like you, it is important to know the structure of a novel that is prescribed for your study. So, first of all, in this Unit, we analyse the structure of *Kanthapura* for you. Next, we discuss the narrative technique that Raja Rao employs in this novel. It is an important element of the fictional art through which he communicates the story and his message to you. An important part of the technique is Achakka, the narrator, who tells you the story. Some of the other elements that Raja Rao makes use of are the *Harikatha*, myth and symbolism. In this Unit, we have given you information about all these important aspects of *Kanthapura*.

4.2 THE STRUCTURE OF *KANTHAPURA*

Kanthapura shows Raja Rao's artistic skill in achieving a fusion of theme, form and narration in a literary form which is indian and modern at the same time. He superimposes the Indian tradition of imaginative romance over the Western form of the realistic novel, and mingles actual history with mythic 'Purana' to create a poetic work in prose. K.R. Rao rightly points out:

> *Kanthapura* does not project the Indian spirit isolatively, but as a living experience moving in time and space. The three levels of action in the novel, political, social

> and religious, are all related to a unified concept of India both as a tradition and as a living culture, as a magnificent past to be rediscovered in the enormous present.[1]

In his 'Foreword' to the novel, Raja Rao describes the book as a *sthalapurana*, a legendary history of a particular place. He writes:

> There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich sthalapurana, or legendary history of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village - Rama might have rested under this pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell. (5)

Let us now try to analyse the structure of *Kanthapura* in the light of these two statements, one of the author himself, and the other of his critic.

Taking up the author's statement first, on the very opening pages of the novel, Raja Rao creates a distinctive sense of the village *Kanthapura*. He situates it in a special location in the Western Ghats, surrounded by several hills and skirted by a river. The winding road passing through it connects it with the trade and commerce of the region. It brings the coolies to the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the Congress volunteers from the city to the village, and in their wake the formidable police force that causes havoc at both the places. The mood for the Puranic content of the novel is also set at the very outset through the narration of the legend of Goddess Kenchamma of the hill. After this virtual invocation to the goddess, her name is repeated again and again through the novel. At all times of trouble, the villagers turn to Kenchamma to come to their rescue, as she once did in the remote past. She is their powerful saviour who can overcome even the most formidable of enemies.

In the true Indian (Hindu) tradition, myth, religion, politics and social behaviour mingle to produce a *sthalapurana* that Raja Rao set out to write in the first place. Even a mortal like Gandhi acquires the status of a saint and avatar. The *Harikatha* man projects him as Krishna descended from heaven to destroy the serpent of foreign rule, and the villagers call him the Big Mountain, one of their names for Lord Siva. In the same breath, Moorthy is called the Small Mountain, and they hope the two mountains will protect them. Achakka, the narrator of *Kanthapura*, in a flowing, breathless style, tells the story not as a history of events, but as the Puranic tale of a village, which, even as it is nearly destroyed, acquires the permanence of a legend. The events of the novel belong to the first half of the twentieth century, but the manner in which they are described lend them the flavour of an ancient epic, where gods and mortals come together in sublime action. Raja Rao's attempt at writing a *sthalapurana* is not a failure, but a unique success.

Now, let us turn to K.R. Rao's comment that the three strands of action – politics, society and religion – are woven together in *Kanthapura*. No one can deny the fact that the novel has a political background. The central action of the book is Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement and how Moorthy draws his community into it. There are many references to Gandhi and his activities, to episodes from his life, and, in particular, to his famous Dandi March during the Salt Satyagraha. The villagers keep track of the march and celebrate it by their own march to picket the toddy shop near

the Skeffington Coffee Estate. The social content of the novel is found in the inter-relations and inter-actions of the villagers. It is also found in the extended space that is alloted to the considerations of caste and how it divides the community into distinct groups. Moorthy is singled out for special treatment in this regard on account of his voluntary mixing with the untouchables. It affects his prospects of marriage though he is not keen on it. Since he is the unchallenged leader of the village, social and political strands of the action mingle in him. But when he follows the Gandhian method of rallying the common people for a political purpose in the name of prayer and religion, the three levels of action are unified to form the triple–pillared structure of the novel. Supporting the same view, Esha Dey writes:

> With the Mahatma's political programme translated into the paraphernalia of worship as practised in the Hindu religion, the whole political action of *Kanthapura*, generated by an *avatar*, an incarnation, has to centre in a temple, the temple of Kanthapurishwari. The election of the Congress Committee is preceded by a god's procession and devotional song. The aim of the Congress has to be explained with an offering of camphor and coconut to the gods. It is right in front of the gods in the temple that the very vow of spinning, practising non-violence (*ahimsa*) and of speaking the truth, is to be sworn.[2]

A special narrative feature in *Kanthapura* is the relationship of style to structure. As S.C. Harrex puts it,

> A stylistic characteristic resulting from Raja Rao's rhythmic use of point-of view is seen in the way in which [he] frequently achieves a synthesis of conversational tones -- that of the narrator and of the characters in question – while at the same time preserving a sense of distinct individual rhythms...
> Raja Rao's often-used leviathan sentences also contribute significantly to the structure of *Kanthapura*, and are in keeping with his comments in the Foreword about the interminableness of the Indian story-telling style. Long sentences prove useful, for example, in transporting the reader to unfamiliar locality; in providing a sense of action, of diverse comings and goings and violent skirmishes; and in creating tangible images of the populatous variety of India.[3]

4.3 THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN *KANTHAPURA*

Raja Rao presents the story of *Kanthapura* as a *sthalapurana* in English, coloured by the regional idiom of South India. The narrative that he offers recalls a visionary experience. The narrator of the story, Achakka, having herself gone through it all, is reliving in memory an unforgetable experience of the heroism and tragedy of the entire village. Since *Kanthapura* is a novel of memory, Raja Rao freely uses reflection, dream, flash-back, reminscence and narration of inter-connected episodes. Rejecting the 'stream of consciousness' technique, he employs the local form of narration, which is a kind of non-stop, breathless style of story-telling. Starting with an account of the village and its surroundings, the narrator passes on to introducing the main characters, and straightaway plunges into describing how the Gandhian Satyagraha Movement came to the village and what repercussions it had on the village community. From the beginning to the end, it is a non-stop emotion-packed narration that is bound to touch the heart of the reader.

Raja Rao's narrative art retains the native Indian flavour in spite of his using the foreign medium of English. The narrator has an easy manner of presentation without being in any way – uneasy, awkward or self-conscious. Her language suffers from no distortion even though it belongs to the Indian situation and absorbs the Indian manner of speech and gesture. The peculiarities of the narrative art are in tune with the complexity of the experience that it presents. The captivating rhythm of narration may be noticed in the following description of the Satyagraha Movement:

> ... day after day Revenue Notices fell yellow into our hands, and we said, 'Let them do what they will, we shall not pay our revenues.' And the new Patel came, and behind the Patel came the policeman and behind, the policeman the landlord's agent, and we said, 'Do what you will, we shall not pay, (206)

Thish is how the indomitable and unwavering spirit of the satyagrahis is projected in and iduring narrative of the Indian experience. The reader of *Kanthapura* participates in the breathless action from the beginning to the end.

Raja Rao's narrative art in *Kanthapura* consciously represents the reality in its descriptions of the setting. The digressions in which he indulges from time to time help to fill the gaps in the story and also provide some breathing space to the reader. In the detailed description of the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the elaborate digression on the Indian poisonous snakes is perhaps presented for the information of the non-Indian Western readers. The legend of Goddess Kenchamma is, on the other hand, deliberately given at the beginning to set the tune of a *sthalapurana*. Through subtle changes in the narrative technique, from time to time, the focus of the novel is shifted, now narrowed down to the village, now broadened to include the whole of India.

The distinctive touch of Raja Rao's technique at the beginning of the novel is to give a wealth of detail about the location, the village, its various quarters, and the prominent people living there. Without wasting time over a lengthy introduction, he quickly draws the reader's attention into the activities of the villagers and their inter-relations. He employs a very intimate way of individualizing them by referring to the peculiarities of their houses, calling or mannerisms. In this way, the author fixes the reader in the living world of a South Indian village at a definite point of time. Take, for instance, the encounter between Patel Range Gowda and Bade Khan, when the policeman first comes to the village. Patel's expression of contempt for the policeman symbolically represents the reaction of an entire community against the British rule.

Esha Dey writes in this context :

> The same technique, embodying a general idea or ethos in concrete details, individual and telling, is evident in various happenings, usually habitual or common visits to each other, village-women's meeting at river steps, their gossip and squabbles, nuptials and marriages, ... as well as expressive details of the mundane, perceptible reality.[4]

Raja Rao's telling of the story of *Kanthapura* is at the level of a mythical plane. The continuous flow of the monologue of the narrator is particularly suited for psychological analysis of characters and their motives. The uninterrupted monologue initates the flow of speech, and helps to reveal the different levels of consciousness of the village community, including that of Moorthy.

Raja Rao's narrative style in *Kanthapura* accomodates descriptive and dramatic modes; thereby he maintains the interest of the readers and avoids monotony. In the words of S.C. Harrex,

> Snippets of dialogue serve to spotlight a character or attitude, while Raja Rao's adaptation of the traditional Indian story-telling convention justifies the narrator's tendency... to present Moorthy in terms of an [sic] heroic archetype – that of the saintly sage (from Sankara to Gandhi) dedicated to Truth. Another virtue of the discursive style... is that political comment is seen to come spontaneously from the characters instead of appearing to be artificially imposed upon the narrative by the author.[5]

It is evident that Raja Rao is quite successful in making his kind of Indian-English 'an authentic basis for imaginative writing'. *Kanthapura* has a vitality of language and style which comes from the author's ability to put into practice the literary principles outlined by him in the Foreword of the novel. The appropriateness of his narrative technique is established by the life-story of Gandhi as told by Jayaramachar, the *Harikatha-man*, at the end of the first chapter of the novel.

Raja Rao's understanding of the folk psyche and his skill in rendering this understanding artistically is a genuine quality of *Kanthapura* that has the appeal of a novelty to the Western readers. Quite easily, he mingles popular superstition with metaphysical institution to present the belief of the villagers in Goddess Kenchamma's power of intervention in human affairs. Their unshakable faith in the ancient sayings, and the relevance that these have to the present, project the idea of a hereditary fate.

4.4 ACHAKKA, THE NARRATOR

The name of Achakka, the narrator of *Kanthapura*, apears only once in the novel, but it is through her eyes and from her point of view that we see everything that happens in it. She belongs to the upper caste Brahmin family of Veda Sastra Pravina Krishna Sastri, and is proud of that fact. Her grandson, Seenu, and Moorthy are of the same age and inseparable like Rama and Lakshamana in the *Ramayana*. Therefore, she has a high regard for Moorthy and great faith in the Satyagraha Movement that he launches in the village. Being an elderly grandmother, Achakka has seen life in *Kanthapura* for a long time, and has a good deal to say about it. Being a devout Hindu who knows the *Puranas*, she has a good collection of stories from legends and epics, which she refers to again and again while narrating the story of her village. She tells the story of Goddess Kenchamma at the very beginning, and it is apparent that she has great faith in the goddess and her power of protecting the village community from all calamities. That is why she invokes her name repeatedly in the course of the narrative.

Achakka is a garrulous old woman, who herself participates in the satyagraha led by Moorthy. No wonder, she narrates the events of the struggle with a sense of pride and a sense of achievement. Gifted with a sense of the past, she is a wonderful story-teller who, at once, grips the attention of the reader, and holds him captive as a listener to the end. Apart from her remarkable memory, she has a vivid imagination to be able to visualize what must have happened at the Skeffington Coffee Estate where she was not present. That is possible because Raja Rao employs her as his mouth-piece, and grants her the author's privilege of omniscience. After all whatever she says in her narrative is what the writer himself allows her to say. But it goes without saying that she appears to be an authentic and convincing narrator. This impression is strengthened by the way she tells us little things about and interactions among the characters involved in the story that unfolds through her narrative.

Srinivasa Iyengar discovers a consummate art of the narrator in Achakka's feminine touches and mannerisms, effortless rotation of the tongue, meandering sentences and massive paragraphs. He finds there is careful selection behind the artless abundance of detail that marks her narration. She does not divulge all the details about the characters but tells us only the essentials which are necessary for the development of the story. There is definitely a method in the plotless grandmother's tale. The

narrative method of her tale demonstrates the style of a village story-teller. It has all the familiar elements of the same: the garrulity, the use of direct address to the reader, the language with its repetition and lengthy description. Even the opening words of the novel evoke this feeling.

> Our village – I don't think you have ever heard about it – *Kanthapura* is its name, and it is in the province of Kara. (7)

Achakka is a dramatized first person narrator that is an established tradition in European novel. Raja Rao has adopted this tradition as a suitable substitute for the oral tradition of story-telling by a common man. The intimacy and the personal touch predominate the narration of the grandmother in *Kanthapura*. And it is not by chance that Achakka is the narrator of the novel. Raja Rao has made his choice after much forethought. It is evident from what he writes of the story at the end of the 'Foreward':

> It may have been told of an evening, when as the dusk falls and through the sudden quiet, lights leap up in house after house, and stretching her bedding on the veranda, a grandmother might have told you, newcomer, the sad tale of her village.

S.C. Harrex rightly points out:

> The narrator is a physical and psychological presence in the the story, like that of the *Harikatha*-man, who, surrounded by an enthusiastic all-night audience in the village temple, retells the religious epics. Raja Rao employs a number of rhetorical devices to sustain the illusion that the reader is part of a live audience listening to the grandmother telling the tale of her village of *Kanthapura*... The narrator is a Brahmin and, accordingly, her perceptions and feelings derive from a tradition-oriented sensibility. Thus she is quite at home in the immemorial conventions of the story-teller. In her mind past naturally mingles with the present and gods with men, and so it is with proper and sincere reverence (as distinct from artificial rhetoric) that at the beginning of her story she prays to the village goddess, Kenchamma: 'O Kenchamma! Protect us always like this through famine and disease, death and despair...' [6]

Achakka's personality and her art of rendering concerete mental impressions of the characters who figure in her story are a big draw to the reader. She is also endowed with an imaginative freedom coupled with a maternal compassion which comes quite naturally to her. Achakka's compassion is all-embracing and it includes even the vicious money lender, Bhatta, in its kind fold. The message that Raja Rao wants to convey is very clear indeed. In the Hindu society, the grandmother plays a special role. She presides over the household, binds it together with love and authority, and also narrates stories to her children and grand children. Achakka plays all these roles to perfection, and that is how Raja Rao intends her to be taken by the readers.

4.5 THE *HARIKATHA* ELEMENT

Harikatha is a religious ritual that a devout Hindu is expected to organize or attend from time to time. It may equally well be held at home or at a temple. As the term itself suggests, it is the telling of the story of an incarnation of Vishnu (also known as Hari) or any other god to the accompaniment of singing and dancing. Entire villages

or communities participate in a *Harikatha*. It generates religious fervour, and earns merit for the participants. As in the rest of India, *Harikatha* is equally popular at *Kanthapura*. All the villagers flock to the temple when they hear that a *Harikatha* has been arranged.

Jayaramachar is the famous *Harikatha*-man. He has a special way of doing the *Harikatha*. Somehow or other, he brings in an element of Gandhian teaching into the stories that he narrates. While telling the story of Siva and Parvati, he says that Siva is three eyed and Swaraj too is three-eyed, referring to the Gandhian message of self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity and Khaddar. The villagers of *Kanthapura* had never heard *Harikathas* like this before. Since Jayaramachar could sing too, he keeps them rapt in tears for hours together. They can never forget the *Harikatha* he did about the birth of Gandhi, which is a fine example of how the religious plank is suitably used for political awakening. The people of *Kanthapura* find no harm in this as both are desirable ends.

In his special *Harikatha*, Jayaramachar recalls the ancient glory of India that produced such great kings as Asoka, Chandragupta, Vikramaditya and Akbar, and such sages as Krishna, Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja. But this very land of the Himalayas, Ganges and Cauvery is enslaved by a nation of the Red-men from across the seas. The rishis beseach Brahma to do something to free the nation from foreign bondage. With the blessings of all the gods, there is born in a family in Gujarat a son such as the world never beheld before. He is named Mohandas and grows up to become Mahatma Gandhi, who wages a relentless fight against the serpent of foreign rule, and one day he will destroy it and bring Swaraj (self-rule) to India. The police take Jayaramachar away after this *Harikatha*, and he is never again seen in *Kanthapura*. His story of Gandhi is an allegory of India's freedom struggle.

Jayaramachar's story of Gandhi, apart from its appropriateness as a *Harikatha*, also serves to introduce the political theme of the novel. Being a true follower of Gandhi, Jayaramachar dedicates his art of narration to political education of the common people as also to free public entertainment. He gives his stories of the gods a contemporary relevance that is amazing even as it educates the illiterate villagers of *Kanthapura*. Jayaramachar's recounting of the birth of Gandhi as a symbolic saviour of the Indian people, and his pursuit of the chosen mission of eradicating the British rule in India, are politically effective ways of introducing Gandhi to the illiterate villagers in his role of the national leader of India. What Raja Rao implies through the *Harikatha* is that if the people of India, of all castes and creeds, are to accept Gandhi as their chosen leader, he ought to be relevant to them in the light of their inherited traditions and beliefs. It is a fact of Indian history that the Gandhian revolution spread in the length and breadth of the country because the great man's staunch principles evolved not only from the traditional wisdom, but were also presented to the Indain masses in the acceptable form of their ages-old attitudes to life.

Paranjape has this to say about the religious spirit of the novel:

> *Kanthapura* is ... imbued with a religious spirit akin to that of the Puranas. An important idea which runs through it is that of incarnation [which] ... is central to the Puranas ... The avatar in this novel is Gandhi, whose shadow looms over the whole book, although he is himself not a character. Incarnation ... extends into *Kanthapura* itself, where Moorthy, who leads the revolt, is the local manifestation of Gandhi, and by implication of Truth.[7]

4.6 MYTH AND SYMBOLISM

Myth is defined as an ancient traditional story of gods or heroes, especially one offering an explanation of some fact or phenomenon. It is a story or allusion with a suggestive meaning. Myths are traditional as well as inventions of poets and writers.

Symbol, on the other hand, is an image which suggests or evokes an idea or conception. It is a manner of representation in which what is given (usually something material or concrete) suggests, through association, something more or beyond (usually something immaterial or abstract). In a poem or work of fiction, these two figures appear separately or together. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a novel in which myth and symbolism mingle to lend an exclusive colour to the narrative. The main reason for this is that the novel is conceived and structured as a *sthalapurana*, and myth and symbol are unavoidable elements of the Puranic tradition. The second reason is the author's preference for using these elements as aids to his narrative technique.

Raja Rao is keenly aware of the fact of individual experience having its roots in the native tradition. When he wrote *Kanthapura*, his object was to integrate his consciousness of the past tradition with his experience of contemporary time in the thirties of the twentieth century. Therefore, in his narrative art there is a mingling of myth and realism. At the very beginning of the novel, Raja Rao presents the legend of Kenchamma, the goddess of the hill, and raises it to the level of a myth. As the popular proof of the goddess having killed the demon of the legend, he points out that the earth near the actual spot of the killing is red. This cannot be accepted as a scientific fact but only as a traditional myth in which the people of *Kanthapura* have blind faith. Another belief arises from the same myth, which is that Kenchamma will come to their rescue whenever they are faced with a calamity. Hence, they invoke her name whenever they are in trouble.

Jayaramachar narrates Mahatma Gandhi's story as a *Harikatha*, which is a deliberate attempt on his part to mix politics and religion. But one could go a step further in saying that it is also a deliberate attempt at myth-making by Raja Rao. He uses it as a powerful argument in favour of the leadershp provided to the Indian nation by Gandhi. He raises Gandhi to divine heights by comparing him to Siva and Krishna. Like Siva's three eyes, Gandhi's political programme is three-pronged. And, again like Krishna, he goes from village to village, slaying the serpent of foreign rule. The relationship existing between Arjuna, the Pandva prince in the *Mahabharata*, and Krishna is duplicated by Moorthy, the disciple, and Mahatma Gandhi, the master. Gandhi's teachings have the same significance for Moorthy as the message of the *Bhagvadgita* for Arjuna. Towards the end of the novel, Raja Rao draws a parallel between the Ramarajya myth and Gandhi's call for Swaraj. Gandhi (in London) is Rama gone into exile to rescue India (Sita) from the tyranny of the British (Ravana), while Jawahar Lal (Brother Bharata) awaits the return of his leader from the Second Round Table Conference. In this manner, Raja Rao transforms facts of real history into myths that fill the imagination of the people of *Kanthapura* with hope and enthusiasm.

Besides indulging in deliberate myth-making, Raja Rao also makes wide use of symbols in *Kanthapura*. When the village leaders are arrested by the police, the women of *Kanthapura* form a 'Sevika Sangha' or women's group to fight the forces of oppression. At that time, they are not ordinary helpless women, but manifestations of Durga or Shakti, the destroyer of demons. Moorthy is Gandhi's man or the symbol of Satyagraha; Bade Khan the policeman is the symbol of oppression; Bhatta is the symbol of false orthodoxy; and Waterfall Venkamma symbolises superstition and blind tradition. Srinivasa Iyengar adds to the list of symbols:

> There is Range Gowda the symbol of sense and stolidity, a sort of Sardar Patel to Moorthy the village Mahatama. The river Himavathy is herself a Presence, and the Goddess Kenchamma of the Hill is a Presence too, the protectoress of the people, the guardian of *Kanthapura*.[8]

Though it is nowhere clearly stated in Raja Rao's novel, but Great Britain, the island beyond the seas is obviously the Kingdom of Ravana. The red colour of the British (the red-men) indicates their violence, and the Skeffington Coffee Estate is a symbol

of the impact of European industrialization on the Indian way of life. Thus, you see, how myth and symbolism are very important aspects of the structure of *Kanthapura*.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao achieves a fusion of theme, form and narration. He superimposes the Indian tradition of romance over the Western form of the novel. *Kanthapura* is structured as a *sthalapurana*, a legendary history of a particular place. The three strands of action – politics, society and religion – are woven together to form the fabric of this novel. As elements of his narrative technique, Raja Rao employs reflection, dream, flash-back, and episodes. He retains the native Indian style of telling a story in spite of opting for the foreign medium of English. His digressions help to fill the gaps in the story. The continuous monologue of the narrator is particularly suited for psychological analysis of characters. Achakka, who tells the story, in her peculiar flowing style, is a garrulous grandmother of the village, interested in all the happenings, gossip and inter-relations of characters.

Jayaramachar's *Harikatha* about the birth of Gandhi is a special device, through which religion is mingled with politics. We are told that the Mahatma is going to slay the serpent of foreign rule just as Krishna killed the serpent Kaliya. Jayaramachar's *Harikatha* is an allegory of India's freedom struggle. Apart from this, Raja Rao also uses myth and symbolism in *Kanthapura*. A significant myth is that of Goddess Kenchamma of the Hill, which is given at the very beginning of the novel. Gandhi is transformed into a mythical figure in the *Harikatha*. But the central myth in *Kanthapura* is that of equating Gandhi's slogan of striving after *Swaraj* with that of the coming of Ramarajya, the victory of good over evil. And, then, most of the characters in the novel are projected as symbols, which adds to the significance of their roles in the story.

4.8 REFERENCES

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4.9 GLOSSARY

Invocation:	Address in prayer
Avatar:	Incarnation
Dandi March:	Gandhi's famous march to the sea-shore in Gujarat t the British salt law
Calling:	Profession by which someone is known
Mannerisms:	Peculiarities of behaviour or speech
Garrulous:	Over-talkative
Omniscience:	Having all knowledge
Consummate:	Perfect of its kind

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. 'The three levels of action in *Kanthapura* – political, social and relgious – are all related to a unified concept of India. Discuss the structure of the novel in the light of this statement.

2. What are the main features of Raja Rao's narrative technique in *Kanthapura*?

3. How successful is Achakka, the narrator, in her attempt to tell the story of her village in the context of the Satyagraha Movement?

4. Explain how myth and symbolism are integral parts of Raja Rao's fictional art in *Kanthapura*.

UNIT 5 *KANTHAPURA* : CHARACTERS

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 Raja Rao's Art of Characterization in *Kanthapura*
5.3 Moorthy, the Central Figure
5.4 The Women in *Kanthapura*
5.5 Some of the Other Characters
5.6 Let Us Sum Up
5.7 References
5.8 Glossary
5.9 Questions
5.10 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Unit is to give you a brief analysis of the following:

- Raja Rao's art of characterization;
- Moorthy, the central character;
- The women characters;
- Some of the other figures in *Kanthapura*.
- We also conclude our discussion of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, and provide you with a list of suggested books that might be useful in your study.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Every novel is built round a plot, which is some action involving a number of characters. In the first four Units of this Block, we have given you information on the background, themes, structure, language and style of *Kanthapura*. What remains is an analysis of the characters involved in the action of the novel. So, in the final Unit, we shall give you a general idea of Raja Rao's art of characterization in the novel. To illustrate that art, we examine the central figure of Moorthy – his traits, strengths and weaknesses, and the impact that he has on the other characters. We shall also discuss the special significance of the women characters since the story is narrated by a woman. Some light is also thrown on three of the other important characters. With that we conclude our discussion of *Kanthapura* and its various elements.

5.2 RAJA RAO'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION IN *KANTHAPURA*

Everything in *Kanthapura* proceeds from the point of view of Achakka, the narrator of the novel, whether it be the story of the village or the political struggle in which the villagers get involved. The characters too are projected from the same point of view. Since Achakka is a respectable grandmother of the village, most of the main characters of the novel are personally known to her, and she treats them as her children and grandchildren. She loves to describe them in familiar terms, and has a

habit of giving their family and professional backgrounds when introducing them to the reader. Raja Rao himself has no opportunity to make direct comments on any of his characters as *Kanthapura* is a first person narrative. Whatever he would like to say about a person is put in the mouth of Achakka. However, there are occassions, when the characters make comments on each other, or they reveal themselves through their actions as reported by Achakka.

The characters in *Kanthapura* are villagers who have little experience of the city life. They are shown to be not highly educated, not very cunning, but mostly innocent, simple and truthful people. Prayer, worship, and religious practices sum up the way of life for them. That is the reason how their leaders find it easy to take them towards politics by the path of religion. While their blind faith is a positive point, it has a negative side in making them superstitious and reluctant to give up tradition. In the face of an appeal to give up old habits and customs, they are likely to be unreasonable and headstrong. Human nature being such a variable thing, the *Kanthapura* community has its quota of good and evil figures. To contrast the goodness and nobility of Moorthy, Rangamma, Ratna and others, there are evil characters like Bhatta and Waterfall Venkamma. The latter, in particular, has a vicious tongue, which is capable of turning against its victims like a waterfall of malicious words. But, in the ultimate analysis, she is not all that bad. As for the policeman, Bade Khan, he is evil incarnate.

K.R. Rao has this to say about Raja Rao's art of characterization in *Kanthapura* :

> In drawing his people, Raja Rao maintains the balance between their individuality and their representative nature. There is no dichotomy between people but rather a fusion of all human differentials into the steady flow of a single racial personality.[1]

Raja Rao presents his characters as sharing a common nature. Their broad acceptance is an essential element of the spirit of India. What the British writer, E.M. Forster, fails to understand about the national character of India is clear as daylight to Raja Rao, and he projects this understanding through his depiction of the characters in *Kanthapura*. He does not emphasize their individual traits, but presents them as a group with common inherited traditions and common goals. Moorthy, in spite of his revolutionary zeal, cannot totally cut himself off from tradition and common belief. Following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, he takes up the cause of the untouchables, but is still beset by doubt if he is doing the right thing by mixing with them. Similarly, Bhatta is not depicted as a person who is all bad. Some of the villagers consider him to be 'a fine fellow.' One has to consider him in the general perspective of human nature that Raja Rao presents in *Kanthapura*. He makes us look at the 'Red-man,' the master of the Skeffington Coffee Estate, not in anger, but from a humorous and ironic point of view.

Any other writer would have presented Mahatma Gandhi as a superhuman figure, unapproachable and beyond criticism. Jayaramachar, the *Harikatha* man does project him as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, but the villagers of *Kanthapura* are not overawed by this. They respect Gandhi for his teachings, leadership, and feeling for the down-trodden, but it does not prevent some of them from criticizing him and even talking ill of him. Raja Rao's villagers are practical men and women. When the repercussions of the satyagraha hurt them, they blame it on Gandhi. Moorthy's mother does not hesitate to curse Gandhi for influencing her son to mingle with the Pariahs. That is again human nature, a mother's protective instinct to see her son prospering in society and not being treated as an outcast.

In *Kanthpura*, Raja Rao presents life of a small village community in times of change and turmoil. This community shares the same traditions, values, beliefs and way of

life. Hence, their reactions to the ups and downs of life tend to be predictable. When you visualize one of them, you visualize all. Yet such is the variety of human nature that Raja Rao identifies individuals through subtle shades of difference. For instance, there is little in common between Moorthy, Range Gowda and Bhatta as individual human beings. They are contrasted with the poor and the down-trodden. Apart from distinctions of caste, Raja Rao also highlights distinctions of class. K.R. Rao rightly concludes :

> The humiliation of the poor and the outrage of the helpless are frequently contrasted with blatant vulgarity and coarseness of the proud and the indifferent. The amazing chivalry of some is set beside the disturbing cupidy of others. The beautiful valour of some women is contrasted with the banal opportunism of others.[2]

5.3 MOORTHY, THE CENTRAL FIGURE

Moorthy, the central figure of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, is introduced to the reader on a significant note. Early in the novel, the narrator is commenting on Dore, the 'University graduate,' and contrasts him with Moorthy :

> He was not like Corner-House Moorthy, who had gone
> through life like a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene,
> deferent and brahmnic, a very prince, I tell you.
> We loved him, of course, as you will see, and if only
> I had not been a daughterless widow, I should have
> offered him a grand-daughter, if I had one. (12)

This simple statement of Achakka holds the key to the figure of Moorthy in the novel. The Hindus venerate the cow and give it the status of a mother for its milk that nurtures us. For someone to be called a 'noble cow' is giving him high honour. It gives us the first clue to the personality of Moorthy. He is kind and non-violent, and cares for others. In contrast to the vicious Waterfall Venkamma, he is quiet, and, in contrast to the greedy Bhatta, he is generous. And then he is calm, respectful and brahmanic, a very prince among the ordinary people of *Kanthapura*. They think he has all the good qualities, and they have no hesitation in accepting him as their leader in the Satyagraha Movement that he launches in the village.

Moorthy is a self-sacrificing young man, who has no personal ambitions. He cares for the others – the poor villagers, the pariahs and the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Moorthy has a good organizing capability. When Rachanna's family is sent away from the Coffee Estate for raising his voice against oppression and challenging the authority of the Redman, Moorthy immediately arranges alternative shelter for him. But when he, later on, goes to visit the family in their hut, he finds it hard to avoid the hospitality of Rachanna's wife. His brahmanic consciousness and upbringing raises a doubt in his mind whether he is doing the right thing. He hesitates to cross the threshold and tries to avoid taking the glass of milk offered to him. When his mother does not let him enter her kitchen for fear of polluting it, he accepts her verdict without protest.

In his analysis of the role of Moorthy, the central character of *Kanthapura*, Paranjape writes:

> *Kanthapura* is really a novel about a village rather than about a single individual; nevertheless, Moorthy, the Brahmin protagonist of the villagers' struggle against the government, is a prototypal hero. Moorthy is the leader

> of a political uprising, but for him as for Gandhi whom he follows, politics provides a way of life indistinguishable from a spiritual quest, Action is the way to the Absolute. In Gandhi, he finds what is Right Action. Thus, for him, becoming a "Gandhi man" is a deep spiritual experience ...[3]

The people of his community refer to Moorthy as a 'Gandhiman'. This is a dubious term, since it is used by both the followers as well as the detractors of Gandhi. For the followers of Gandhi, it is a meritorious and noble term, but, in the eyes of his detractors, it is a derogatory term. It all depends on who is using it and in what context. Very early, Moorthy comes under the influence of the charismatic influence of Mahatma Gandhi, when he listens to him at a public meeting in the city. From that day onwards, he models his life on that of the Mahatma. He tries to imitate Gandhi in every respect. Whatever action Gandhi initiates in his struggle against the British **rulers**, Moorthy duplicates it at the village level. He reads the *Gita*, plies the spinning **wheel**, and even mimics Gandhi's Dandi March by leading the picketing of the toddy **shop**. When his followers suffer from police atrocities, he is once again beset by self-doubt, and goes on a fast unto death, which he is later persuaded to give up. This action of Moorthy makes him out to be a parody of Gandhi.

Rangamma, a respectable and wise woman of *Kanthapura*, speaks of Moorthy the good, Moorhty the religious, and Moorthy the noble. At the time of the convening of the Congress Committee in the village, Range Gowda equates Moorthy with Gandhi, and everybody present laughs. Range Gowda admonishes them :

> 'There is nothing to laugh at, brothers. He is our Gandhi. The state of Mysore has a Maharaja, but that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London and that one has another one in Heaven, and so everybody has his own Mahatma, and this Moorthy, who.... is now grown up and great, and he has wisdom in him and he will be our Mahatma', and they all said, 'So he is !' (109)

This is as good an interpretation of Moorthy's status in his own village community as there could possibly be.

In the ultimate analysis, Moorthy proves to be a weak Gandhian when his nationalism is transformed into Jawahar Lal Nehru's socialism. But he is a genuine son of the soil who retains his simplicity and sincerity even after all the experience that he goes through. The state of his mind may be compared to that of the common Indian before freedom. The happenings in *Kanthapura* are centred round the personality of Moorthy, and his mental growth parallels the transformation of *Kanthapura* from a sleepy village to a hotbed of active satyagraha. Following the basic Gandhian ideology, Moorhty avoids a direct confrontation with non-belief and criticism. Moorthy tries to preach the Gandhian precept of universal love, which ought to include one's enemies too. But Range Gowda, the strong man of *Kanthapura*, rejects the Gandhian ethic of love, which, according to him, is meant only for the superior human beings, not for the common people. Moorthy makes no attempt to counter Range Gowda's criticism, but, at the same time, accepts his help in spite of his lack of faith in Gandhi. One might as well conclude with Esha Dey :

> In the final criticism of Gandhi and his pact with Irwin which necessitates the withdrawal of the agitation that wipes out *Kanthapura*, Moorthy's bitterness echoes the frustration actually felt by a whole generation of Indians.[4]

Moorthy admits to as much in the letter that he writes to Ratna from prison. (256)

Kanthapura is one of the best Gandhian novels in English. Its hero, Moorthy, represents in theory and practice the Gandhian principles of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha*. Accordingly, as we said before, he is somewhat an idealized character. S.C. Harrex rightly points out

> Moorthy is a young Brahmin and former student, and is independent-minded with respect to marriage; he becomes leader of the village Congress Committee and is excommunicated from the Brahmin brotherhood for putting in practice Gandhi's untouchable policy. Moorthy befriends the local Pariahs, mixes with them, and works for their educational advancement. He treats them as equals in the political struggle and fights for their social and economic rights as human beings. The effect on his orthodox mother of his excommunication – she dies of shame and guilt – is indicative of the moral intensity with which Hindu communal mores are felt and practised by its orthodox members.[5]

With reference to Moorhty's speech on *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* that he makes to the villagers after Mahatma Gandhi's arrest. Harrex writes,

> If *Kanthapura* has a message, it is this. And in Moorthy's speech Raja Rao captures the profound spirit, the gentle firmness, the oratory of the heart in plain speech and homely understanding, which Gandhi's public person epitomised.[6]

5.4 THE WOMEN IN *KANTHAPURA*

Though Moorthy is the central figure of *Kanthapura*, among the other characters, women have an equal role to play with their male counterparts. Again, since the narrator is Achakka, we get to know the story of the various happenings in and around *Kanthapura*, more from the point of view of women than from that of men. The women take a prominent part in all the religious gatherings and prayer meetings, and also in the political activities. They take care of the households, feed the men, and look after the children. At the same time, they are the ones who are interested in maintaining the rituals and traditions. Jayaramachar's special *Harikatha* about Mahatma Ghandi fires their imagination to such an extent that they willingly become active volunteers in the Satyagraha Movement led by Moorthy.

The river bank is the regular meeting place of the village women, and they gather there every morning. Besides attending to their bathing and washing, they also get a chance to exchange gossip and news of the latest happenings. Waterfall Venkamma has a vicious tongue, and she enjoys using it against everybody else. She is particularly vociferous against Moorhty and his mother, Narsamma, for the former's mixing with the pariahs. But, in her heart of hearts, Venkamma is not so very bad. If one day she quarrels with Narsamma, the next day she makes it up :

> And when Narsamma saw her at the river the next day, Venkamma was as jolly as ever and she said she had a bad tongue and that one day she would ask Carpenter Kenchayya to saw it out, ..., and they all talked together happily and they came back home, their baskets on their heads, content. (57)

Among the nobler women of the village there are Rangamma and Ratna. Both of them fight shoulder to shoulder with Moorthy, Range Gowda and others against the British oppression. When the Congress Committee is formed in the village, Moorthy says they need a woman on the Committee because the Congress is for the weak and the lowly. Everybody's choice is Rangamma, and she accepts the responsibility reluctantly on popular demand. Later, when Moorthy is arrested and taken away, Rangamma comes to the forefront and arranges for newspapers to be delivered from the city so that the villagers remain informed about the activities of the Congress in the rest of the country. When the news comes that Moorthy has been released and will return to his village, Rangamma organizes proper welcome for him. She also forms a special group of the women volunteers, and names it 'Sevika Sangha', for their aim is to serve the community. The men of the village are not very keen for the Sevika Sangha since they feel that the women will neglect them and the household affairs by remaining too busy in their political and social activities. But this does not discourage the women led by Rangamma from continuing on their chosen path. When she too is arrested, Ratna takes over the mantle of leadership from her.

During all the encounters with the police, the women of *Kanthapura* do not stay at home, but join the men in their defiant protest marches. They get beaten up with lathis and suffer broken bones, yet they do not give up the struggle. Ultimately, most of the houses in *Kanthapura* are destroyed and the village is reduced to rubble. Some of the men perish and others leave their homes to find shelter elsewhere. The women too leave. The people of Kashipura, a neighbouring village welcome them. Achakka proudly says :

> They hung garlands on our necks, and
> called us the pilgrims of the Mahatma. (253)

5.5 SOME OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS

Apart from Moorthy and the women characters, there are a few men who bear special mention from among the main figures of *Kanthapura*. They are Range Gowda, Bhatta and Bade khan. Patel Range Gowda is a Sudra, and has a prosperous nine - beamed house in the Sudra quarter of the village. He is a big, sturdy man, a veritable tiger among the villagers. With his tongue, his hand and his brain, he has amassed solid gold in his coffers and solid gold on his arms. His three daughters live with him and his sons-in-law work with him though they own as much land as he does. His words are the law in the village. The villagers believe if the Patel says it, 'even a coconut - leaf roof will become a gold roof.' (14). Range Gowda is an honest man, and he helps poor peasants. The villagers respect him all the more since he is a terror to the authorities. It is not for nothing that he is known as the Tiger. When Bade Khan, the policeman, comes to the village for the first time, he goes to Range Gowda to ask for accomodation to live in but the Patel does not oblige him. On the other hand, he is one of the first volunteers to join Moorthy's struggle against the authorities. At the end of the novel, it is he who brings the final news of the transformation of *Kanthapura*. He tells Achakka.

> I drank three handfuls of Himavathy water, ...,
> and I turned away. But to tell you the truth,
> Mother, my heart it beat like a drum. (258)

Bhatta is a scholarly Brahmin, well-versed in the religious lore of Hinduism. Wealthy and possessing vast lands, he does not know what it is to be kind and charitable towards others. He is a money - lender, and when some poor wretch fails to repay his debt, Bhatta quietly acquires his fields to add to his own big estate. Blinded by

orthodoxy and tradition, he does not see any good in the winds of change that come to *Kanthapura* with the Gandhian revolution started by Moorthy. Bhatta conspires against Moorthy and has him excommunicated from the Brahmin community for his Pariah leanings. The villagers fear him but do not respect him as they respect Patel Range Gowda. Towards the end, Bhatta sells his lands in the village and goes to live his last days at Kashi.

Bade Khan, a typical policeman under the British regime is evil incarnate. Corrupt, cruel and ruthless, he has no human qualities. Jayaramachar is not allowed by the authorities to return to *Kanthapura* after he narrates the *Harikatha* about Mahatma Gandhi. Two days later, Bade Khan comes to live in the village. When Range Gowda declines to provide a house for him, he swears to punish him and the other villagers. He goes off to the Skeffington Coffee Estate, where he is alloted a hut to live in. From that day, he misses no opportunity to torment the villagers for rising to the call of Mahatma Gandhi. Bade Khan and his fellow policemen terrorize the people of *Kanthapura* and end up with destroying the village. But they are not able to suppress the patriotic spirit of the people, which remains burning in them wherever they go. Bade Khan is presented by Raja Rao as an example of how low a person in authority can fall once he is given unbridled power to deal with people as badly as he can. He is a virtual *rakshas* of the British (Ravana), and has no rival to the title of the chief villain in *Kanthapura*. Bade Khan is a symbol of the British tyranny over the helpless masses of India. The British colonisers willingly made use of the services of native people like him to enslave the Indians.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

The story in *Kanthapura* is narrated by Achakka, a grandmother of the village. All the characters that figure in the novel are projected from her point of view. She has her own special way of looking at men and women of the village, and if the author has any comments to make on individual characters, he puts them in Achakka's mouth. The figures in *Kanthapura* are mostly simple-minded and unsophisticated villagers who look at the new winds of change that come to their village with a sense of surprise and suspicion.

Kanthapura is all about the life of a small village community. The leader of this community is Moorthy, a shadow of Mahatma Gandhi who inspires him to teach the villagers the path of satyagraha and non-violence. Moorthy is a self-sacrificing young man with no personal ambition. Without any distinction of caste and class, he cares for all the villagers, and tries to help them in whatever ways he can. In spite of being a high caste Brahmin, he mingles with the untouchables and sympathizes with them in every way. Moorthy is good, religious - minded and noble, and the villagers regard him as their Mahatma.

Women have an equal role to play in *Kanthapura* along with their male counterparts. In actual fact, they are more active in their social and political roles while looking after the children and the households. Apart from Achakka, three other women have some prominence over the others; they are Rangamma, Ratna and Venkamma. The first two are good Gandhians and they organize the Sevika Sangha in the village, when Moorthy and some of his associates are imprisoned. They also lead the women in protest marches. Venkamma has a vicious tongue, but she is not really bad at heart. The three men of prominence after Moorthy are Range Gowda, Bhatta and Bade Khan. Range Gowda is a noble and well - to - do Sudra of the village, who acts as the Patel for collecting the taxes. He does not think well of Bhatta and Bade Khan, who are two of the bad characters in the novel. Bhatta is a learned Brahmin, possessing vast lands, and he lends money in order to grab the fields of the poor and needy. He is

opposed to the Gandhian revolution. Bade Khan is a ruthless policeman posted to the village to prevent the people from succeeding in their satyagraha.

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2. Ibid., p.64.
3. Paranjape M. *The Best of Raja Rao.* New Delhi: Katha, 1998. p.ix.
4. Dey Esha *The Novels of Raja Rao.* Prestige, 1992. p.31.
5. Harrex S.C. *The Fire and the Offering: The English-language Novel of India 1935-1970,* Vol. II. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1978. p.160.
6. Ibid., p.161.

5.8 GLOSSARY

Dichotomy: Division into two parts
Chivalry: Courtesy and bravery
Cupidity: Greed and covetousness
Banal: Commonplace, trivial
Dubious: Doubtful, undetermined
Charismatic: Graceful and attractive
Ethic: Morality; (in this case love for all)
Vociferous: Making a loud noise
Segregation: Grouping apart, separating

5.9 QUESTIONS

1. How would you assess Raja Rao's art of characterization in *Kanthapura*?
2. What are those qualities that go into the making of Moorthy, the central figure in *Kanthapura*?
3. What do you think of the women characters in *Kanthapura*, and what is their role in the action of the novel?
4. Write a short essay on some of the male characters - other than Moorthy - in *Kanthapura*.

5.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

It is not necessary to go through all the books mentioned below. But, if possible and if you have access to a well - equipped library, you would do well to have a look into some of them.

Primary Material

Raja Rao:

The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories. Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1947.

The Serpent and the Rope. New Delhi : Hind Pocket Books, 1968.

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C.D. Narasimhaiah: *Raja Rao*. Delhi : Arnold-Heinemann, 1973

Esha Dey: *The Novels of Raja Rao*. New Delhi : Prestige, 1992.

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K.R.S. Iyengar: *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi : Sterling, 1985.

Makarand Paranjape: *The Best of Raja Rao*. New Delhi: Katha, 1998.

M.K. Naik: *Raja Rao*. New York : Twayne, 1972.

Meenakshi Mukherjee: *The Twice-Born Fiction*. New Delhi : Heinemann Educational Books, 1971.

P.C. Bhattacharya: *Indo-Anglian Literature and the Works of Raja Rao*. Delhi: Atma Ram and Sons, 1983.

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Indian English Literature

Block

4

CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

It is generally believed that it is in *Clear Light of Day* that Anita Desai is fully in command of the powers she seems to harness in the service of her fictional purpose in the earlier as well as the later novels. She excels at the subjective form – personal novel of the middle and younger generation of writers. She depicts extreme situations arising out of conflicts – the conflict between reason and instinct, the will and reality, involvement and detachment. These conflicts focus on the interplay of the self with others. Amid the flux of empirical reality, the individual relentlessly struggles to attain authentic selfhood. Bipin B. Panigrahi avers that Anita Desai portrays the existential predicament of the protogonist (Bim in CLD) who "strives to recreate a reality of her own by her immanent faith in her will". And in doing so she feels that the freedom of her will is thwarted in the contingency of reality around her.

At the same time as a book rooted in the past, it is a very "literary" book: poetry, music, and art animate several of the major characters. The poetry and music enhance the quality and meaning of the novel. Indeed, time is treated as an emotional sequence of events. The story is told in the stream – of – consciousness style. For that matter the four sections of the book have recurring key images, dialogues, objects and phrases which orchestrate the meaning well. Anita Desai weaves together the public and the private events and does a sympathetic and introspective study of character and relationships. The novel also remains a triumph for her pellucid, personal style.

We have discussed *Clear Light of Day* as follows:

Unit 1 Anita Desai: Life, Works and the Language Issue
Unit 2 *Clear Light of Day*: Themes, Techniques, Time
Unit 3 Political Dimension and Major Characters
Unit 4 Music, Minor Characters
Unit 5 Anita Desai's Contribution to Indian English Fiction

It will be worth your while to read the text in its entirety before you read this Block. Please make notes as you go along and try to answer the questions that we have given you at the end of each unit.

Good luck with your work.

UNIT 1 ANITA DESAI: LIFE, WORKS AND THE LANGUAGE ISSUE

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 A Biographical Sketch of Anita Desai
1.2 Anita Desai's Major Works
1.3 Outlines of Anita Desai's Novels
1.4 Desai and the Language Issue
1.5 Let Us Sum Up
1.6 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will provide a biographical sketch of Anita Desai. Her major novels and their outlines will be discussed. The Unit will also include a detailed discussion on Desai's choice of the English language as her medium for writing.

1.1 A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ANITA DESAI



Anita Desai (1937-)

Anita Desai was born on June 24, 1937 in Mussoorie, India. Her father, Dhiren Mazumdar, was a Bengali and her mother, Antionette Nime, was a German. The Mazumdars left Germany two decades before the Nazi persecutions and settled in India. Desai has inherited a multilingual background. She is familiar with Bengali, Hindi, German and English. However, the first language that she formally learnt to read and write was English, at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School, in North Delhi. Her first piece of writing was also in English at the age of seven. She tried

her hand at short stories and made her own illustrations for them, sewing them on to covers to make them appear as books. She says:

> My family became aware of it when they became the hapless recipients of the little books I wrote, illustrated, stitched and bound into birthday gifts, and resigned themselves to my future by calling me 'The Writer in the Family' saw no alternative but to fill the role given me.[1]

These pieces were published in Children's magazines. It was in her twenties that Desai started writing novels. She admits that she prefers novels to short stories because the form of the novel gives her a "good deal of thought and time, [to] get round [the subject], see it from different angles and aspects, whereas a short story demands something quite different. You have the whole of it quite clear in your mind and you just put it down at one throw"[2].

The writers who made an impact on her mind were Emily Bronte, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Gerard Manley Hopkins. She read *Wuthering Heights* when she was nine years old. The novel, she says, struck her

> with gale force, it set my hair on end, I vibrated to it—I have never forgotten that experience and reality has never again seemed to me half as intense, significant or overwhelming as the world of books.[3]

Desai's childhood and student life was spent in Delhi. She graduated from Miranda House, Delhi University with English Honours in 1957. She worked for a year after her graduation at Max Mueller Bhawan in Calcutta. In 1958, a year after she graduated she married an executive, Ashvin Desai. She has four children. Her daughter Kiran Desai is also a writer. Her novel, '*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*' has been recently published. This work was serialized in the *New Yorker* and has been included in the '*Vintage Book of Indian Writing*'.

Regarding the autobiographical element in her novels Desai comments:

> In countless small ways the scenes and settings certainly belong to my life. Many of the minor characters and incidents are also based on real life. But the major characters and the major events are either entirely imaginary or an amalgamation of several characters and happenings. One can use the raw material of life only very selectively. It is common among writers to pick out something from real life and develop their situation around it; while there are others who start from some real experience... you use it as a base but don't confine yourself to it.[4]

Desai admits that *The Village by the Sea* tells a true story, "based entirely on fact." She recalls in her dedication the "many holidays" that she had spent in Thul.

After her mother's death in mid-seventies, the language of her childhood—German—gained a new significance. She associated it with her mother who was a German. It reminded her of the lullabies and nursery rhymes that she had learned in German as a child. Desai began to associate German with the deepest level of her consciousness. The hero of her novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay*, Hugo Baumgartner, is a German exile in India who has learnt smatterings of the local language. The novel is written in English, has long passages in German and is peppered with Hindi phrases.

Several literary awards have been given to Desai. Her novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), won the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby memorial Prize and the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award. *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *In Custody* (1984) were shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1980 and 1984 respectively. She has also had various academic honours. Desai was a visiting fellow at Girton College from 1987-1989 and is a Purington professor of English at Mt. Holyoke

College where she also teaches one semester of creative writing course. She is also a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London.

1.2 ANITA DESAI'S MAJOR WORKS

NOVELS

Cry, the Peacock. New Delhi: Orient, 1990
Voices in the City New Delhi: Orient, 1982
Bye-Bye, Blackbird. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1971.
Delhi : Orient, 1985
Where shall We Go This Summer? Delhi: Vikas, 1975.
Delhi: Orient, 1991
Fire on the Mountain London: William Heinemann, 1977
Clear Light of Day. London: William Heinemann, 1980
London: Penguin, 1980
In Custody USA: Harper and Row, 1984.
London: Heinemann, 1988
Baumgartner's Bombay. Penguin Books, 1989

SHORT STORIES

Games at Twilight London: William Heinemann, 1978
Village by the Sea: A Long Story 1982.

FOR CHILDREN

The Peacock Garden. Bombay: Indian Book House, 1974.
Cat on a Houseboat. Bombay: Orient Longman, 1976.
"Circus Cat, Alley Cat," *Thought*, 1957.
"How Gentle is the Mist," *The Illustrated Weekly of India.* 1958.
"Grand Mother," *Miscellany*, Calcutta: Writer's Workshop, 1960
"An Examination," *Miscellany*, 1960.
"To Seal a Picture," *Miscellany*, 1960.
"Tea with the Maharani, " *Envoy*, 1959.
"Ghost House," *Quest*, 1961.
"Mr. Bose's Private Bliss," *Envoy*, 1959.
"Private Tuition by Mr. Bose," *Indian Literature*, 1970.
"Descent from the Rooftop," *The Illustrated Weekly of India.*1970.
"Surface Textures," *Femina*, 1974.
"The Accompanist," *Quest*, 1975.

1.3 OUTLINES OF ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS

Cry, The Peacock (1963) her first novel, deals with Maya who is trapped in a bad marriage to Gautama who is much older. The action of the novel is set in Delhi. Almost the entire story is "remembrance of things past" by Maya herself. It is really her effort to tell the story to herself to understand and find meaning in her life. Her husband, Gautama, is a successful, middle aged lawyer. He does not understand the temperament—partly spiritual—of his young wife. The complexities of her inner life is effectively brought out through the landscape as is her resentment against her husband for his inability to communicate with her. One day during a dust storm when both husband and wife go up to the roof of their house, she pushes him off from the parapet and he dies. A few days later she too commits suicide. The peacocks are

said to fight before they mate. "living they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life." In Maya's mind reality and myth merge into a nightmarish outcome.

Voices in the City(1965) followed *Cry. The Peacock* and is set in Calcutta. the city of Kali—Goddess of Death. Desai makes the mother of Nirode and his two sisters, Monisha and Amla, also like Kali who unleashes her evil powers. Monisha kills herself because she cannot bear the strain of her marriage to Jiban. The greater part of the novel is devoted to Nirode's move from failure to failure. Amla, who has not been in Calcutta for long (and here Desai clearly shows the evil associated with the city) resists the city's influence. The narration is on behalf of the characters after whom the chapter is entitled.

Bye-Bye Blackbird (1971) deals with Indian immigrants in Britain and the emotional disturbances experienced by them. Adit Sen and Dev are friends. Adit is settled in England having married Sarah, an English woman. Dev comes to England for higher studies and finds the racism there very unpalatable. Gradually Dev adjusts to the alien country but Adit begins to get disillusioned with it. Adit decides to return to India with his pregnant wife. Desai captures the psychological and emotional disturbances in Sarah brought upon by Adit's decision. The novel is divided into three parts: a) Arrival b) Discovery and c) Recognition and Departure. Through the main characters Dev, Adit and Sarah, Desai portrays the psychological conflicts of immigrants who feel rootless and alienated from both the country of their origin and the country to which they have migrated.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975) Sita is trapped in a joyless marriage to Raman. She goes to a forsaken place Manori, an island in Marve. to escape the mundande reality of her husband and her four children. She also wants to avoid giving birth to her fifth child. She feels it is inhuman to bring another life into this cruel world. The Island brings back her childhood memories of her time spent with her selfish father. She realizes that the island is no place for her problems. Peace eludes her there and she feels alienated. Finally, she concludes that it is better to get back to reality. So she returns to her family.

Fire on the Mountain (1977) Nanda Kaul is the heroine of this novel. In order to break with her past, she retires to a haunted house "Carignano" in Kasauli. However, both the past and the present impinge on her existence depriving her of any peace. The past intrudes through the memory of her husband's infidelity. The present appears in the form of her great-granddaughter, Raka, who disturbs her cherished isolation. Things get complicated further with the presence of her classmate and friend, Ila Das who is now a welfare officer. Although she dislikes Ila, she pities her and decides to invite her over to stay with her. But she does not execute her plan. One day a police officer phones Nanda and informs her that Ila has been raped and murdered. She finds it difficult to accept the news and finally succumbs to the shock. Raka is the sole survivor. Ironically, Nanda Kaul who longed for stillness and calm attains it in a very strange way.

In Custody (1984) deals with Deven Sharma who loves Urdu but teaches Hindi to support his family. His friend, Murad, asks him to interview Nur, an old Urdu poet for a magazine that he edits. This simple project becomes very complicated as the novel progresses and instead of one interview , Deven takes on the responsibility of writing an entire biography of Nur. While implementing this project, Deven faces a series of disasters. He almost loses his job and gets used by the poet and his sychophants. But he learns from his experiences all about human limitations and gains a better understanding of life. Finally, through a series of events he becomes the custodian of Nur and his poetry.

Baumgartner's Bombay (1988) World War II is the backdrop against which the story unfolds itself. Hugo Baumgartner is the central character. He is a German refugee who comes to India before World War two to escape persecution. While in India.

Baumgartner, gradually falls into a routine life. He has no family. During his fifty years of stay in India, he barely links up with anyone. He eventually meets a young German at a café. Baumgartner nurtures this stranger and extends hospitality to him. The central irony of the novel lies in the fact the Baumgartner, who fled Germany to escape persecution, is killed by this German stranger, who is a drug addict.

1.4 DESAI AND THE LANGUAGE ISSUE

Commenting on the writing of her novels Desai says, "it is not an act of deliberation, reason and choice. It is a matter of instinct, silence.[5]"

Anita Desai grew up with German, Bengali, Hindi and English. She says: "We spoke German at home, it was the language in which I learned nursery rhymes and fairy tales. We spoke Hindi to all our friends and neighbours. I learned English when I went to school"[6]. Given her multilingual background Desai could have chosen any one of the four languages in which to write. But, she says, she found English most suitable for her works:

> My language (of the novels) is English and I find it answers all my needs. It is rich and flexible, supple and adaptable, varied and vital. I think it is even capable of reflecting the Indian character and situation.[7]

Of course, circumstances also played a role, she says, in her choice of the language:

> What were these circumstances, in my case? Like so many other Indians, I had been sent to a mission school, in my case Queen Mary's School in Old Delhi which was run by a Church of England sisterhood called the Grey Sisters. Although I had grown up speaking three languages at home—again, as most Indians do—English was the first language I learnt to read and write, and this fact affected my living and writing ever after. As soon as I learnt the English alphabet and saw how it could be transformed into fairy tales and verse, I looked on it as the key to the worlds of books, the world of the imagination, and I decided instantly that was the world in which I wanted to live, to which I belonged.[8]

Desai is quick to point out that there are problems for her as an Indian writer in choosing English as the medium for her works. This is partly to do with the fact that since English "is at best an immigrant in India," and there is little tradition to fall back on. She notes:

> It was only when I had written about half-a-dozen novels that I became aware there was a problem involved in the writing of them—I mean other than the immediate problems I worked out daily on a sheet of paper. When I began to meet other writers and hear them speak at conferences, I saw how much thought they had given the matter of translating Indian thought, modes of expression and experiences into a foreign language that often did not have the vocabulary for them. I realized I had not really been solving these problems easily and unconsciously, I had been evading them, by sticking my head, ostrich-fashion, into the sands of what critics called the psychological novel, the subjective novel, which seemingly could be written in any language and did not call for the creation of realistic characters or dialogue.[9]

Desai comments about this "language of the interior" in her works. She says:

> By writing novels that have been catalogued by critics as psychological, and that are purely subjective, I have been left free to employ, simply, the language of the interior. Even when two characters meet, they use this

particular type of language—the language of their thougnts of their interior selves—which has nothing to do with geography and can be written in any language.[10]

Desai states that while she was writing these subjective novels, Ruth Jhabvala was "reproducing Indian speech rhythms in English," in her novels. But it is to Salman Rushdie that she gives credit for bringing "the spoken language off the streets onto the printed page".[11]

In *Custody*, she says, that she finally experimented with letting "Indian accent and tone enter her speech" It was like a bilingual experiment:

> 'Sit down, Deven-bhai. [Murad] said, with a curt gesture of his betel-stained fingers. 'I have already talked this over with Jain Sahib. He knows exactly what your needs are. His nephew is bringing us the best model, secondhand, in prime condition, Jain says. Sit down till he comes, why don't you?
>
> 'What?' stuttered Deven, turning cold at the thought of this newest deception of Murad's. 'You have already fixed it up with Mr. Jain? Where is this model coming from? Why secondhand? I will not buy second-hand goods, it will only break down, it will give trouble-'
>
> 'Sahib, you are saying you want best model. I am getting you best model, at cheap rate. How can it be firsthand also? Again the dealer and Murad exchanged looks, not quite winking.
> (*In Custody*, London: Harper and Row, 1984, p.107.)

Later, during a lecture at Yale University in 1989, Desai talked about her trilingual experiment in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. She says that she wrote the book with a sense of release in using the language of her childhood, German. She says,

> It was a book I had to write if I were to clear away a pile of debris, or unload a heavy piece of baggage from my back, so that I could continue on my way.[12]

About her trilingual narrative experiment in the novel, she says:

> For years, while I wrote away in English and talked away in Hindi, I was searching for a subject that would allow me to use that part of my tongue that I had to silence for all my writing years because I could not find the key to unlock it. I could have written a biography of my mother but I flinched from that.[13]

1.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit has given you insight into the peculiar circumstances of Anita Desai's life and background to make you understand her multilingual origin and choice of the English Language as her medium for writing. Her persona comes out sharply in her self-reflective interviews. The background study of Anita Desai and her works will help you to appreciate the text under study better.

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[4]"Anita Desai. Interview by Yashodhara Dalmia." *The Times of India.* April 29, *1979.*

[5] "The Indian Writers Problems" in Ramesh K. Srivastava. Ed. *Perspectives on Anita Desai* Ghaziabad: *Vimal Prakashan. 1984. p.3*

[6]Ferrell Sarah. "A Banquet of Languages" Review of *Baumgartner's Bombay NY Times Book Review* April 9, 1989, p.3.

[7]"Anita Desai. An Interview" by Yashodhara Dalmia. *The Times of India.* April 29,1979.

[8]Anita Desai. "On the English Language in India", *Common Wealth of Letters* Vol.2 No.1 June 1990, p.3.

[9]Ibid; p.4

[10]Ramesh K. Srivastava. Ed. *Perspectives on Anita Desai*. Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1984, p.3.

[11]Anita Desai. *Deadalus* Fall 1989, p.212.

[12]Anita Desai. *Common Wealth of Letters* Vol.2 No.1, June1990, p.9.

[13]Ibid; pp 8-9.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. Briefly comment on Desai's choice of English as her medium of writing.

2. What are the titles of Desai's novels? Do you notice any pattern in them?

UNIT 2 *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY* : THEMES, TECHNIQUES, TIME

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Structure of *Clear Light of Day*
2.2 Detailed Storyline of Part I
2.3 Anita Desai's Techniques
2.4 Bim/Tara Relationship
2.5 Treatment of Time
2.6 Let Us Sum Up
2.7 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will outline the structure of the novel, *Clear Light of Day*. It will then outline the storyline of Part I of the novel. The techniques Anita Desai employs will be discussed next so that you can familiarize yourself with her style. The Bim/Tara relationship which is pivotal to the story will also be discussed keeping in mind the central issues of the novel. The unit will conclude with a set of questions which will further sensitize you to critical aspects of the novel.

2.1 STRUCTURE OF *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

Desai's *Clear Light of Day* deals with the Das family chronicle. The narrative is divided into four untitled parts: Part I is set in the present; Part II goes back to the summer of 1947; Part III is set in an even earlier period of the Das children's childhood, and Part IV returns to the present with a futuristic perspective. Each part also deals with an important phase in the life of the main characters. In an interview, Desai stated that *Clear Light of Day* was an attempt to write "a four dimensional piece on how a family's life moves backwards and forwards in a period of time" [1] The fourth dimension, Desai states, is 'time.' In fact, the four parts of the novel parallel the *Four Quartets* of T.S.Eliot whom she admired greatly. As in the 'Four Quartets', in *Clear Light of Day* too, time is the destroyer and the preserver. The very theme of the novel is to do with the paradox of change and continuity. Time is used as a structural device by Desai in her novel. The action delineates itself at:

> "three time levels -- the past, the present and the vision of the timeless in which past, present and future fuse into a homogeneous entity. About the time-structure of the novel, Briraj Singh states: The past is not at all in one lump and the present in another; the two are so interfused that we keep going back at different times in the present to the same event of the past.....but always with the knowledge that the intervening description of the present has given."[2]

The four dimensional structure of the novel allows Desai to present reality from different angles. There is no linearity to the events in the novel. Desai uses the stream of consciousness technique in her narrative which links up events imagistically rather than rationally. She is the omniscient observer. Through her third person narrative

she gives us a bird's eye view of the inner world of her characters. Asha Kanwar states that in:

> *Clear Light of Day* we have the three fold effect of time -- 'the passing of moments or hours, the voyage from youth to age, and the historical time, or time in relation to nationwide events.' ... Through the reminiscences of Tara and Bim, we are taken to their childhood and made aware of their growing up to youth and then to middle age. We are also made to see how Time affects the course of nations. Instead of celebrating the achievement of independence, Desai laments the partition, not because of its political implications, but for the bloodshed and the insane prejudice that followed in its wake.[3]

Through the four part structure of the novel, Desai effectively presents continuity and change foregrounding her theme of time as both preserver and destroyer.

2.2 DETAILED STORYLINE OF PART I

Part I begins with the present. Bim and Tara meet after a long time. Tara is the younger sister who is married to Bakul, an Indian Foreign Service officer. Bim is single, teaches history in a local college, and lives with her autistic brother, Baba. Mira Masi, who lives with Bim is already dead when the novel begins. Bim lives with Baba in their old rented home in Civil Lines in Old Delhi. Tara's visit to this home is twofold: First, her husband likes to keep in touch with his roots in India. This allows Tara to keep up with her own brothers and sister. Second, Moyna, her brother Raja's daughter, is getting married in Hyderabad and she wants to attend the wedding with her family.

Baba is introduced early in the novel through his music. "Sm-o-oke gets in your eyes," moaned an agonised voice, and Tara "sighed, and her shoulders dropped by a visible inch or two" (CLD.P. 7). Subsequent references to the Novel are from Penguin Books in association with William Heinemann Ltd. The other brother, Raja, who used to be once very close to Bim and has now drifted away, is also introduced early in the novel. Both Bim and he detested their parents' obsession with the card game. Raja used to "swear that one day he would leap up onto the table in a lion-mask, brandishing a torch, and set fire to this paper-- world of theirs, while Bim flashed her sewing scissors in the sunlight and declared she would creep in secretly at night and snip all the cards into bits" (P.22).

Raja and Bim have been very close as siblings. Their shared interest in literature and music make them seek each other's company as children. When Raja is seriously ill with T.B. it is Bim who nurses him back to health. The problem between the two begins when Raja marries Benazir, the daughter of his mentor and landlord, Hyder Ali. After Ali's death, Raja inherits all his property including the house in which Bim lives. The immediate cause of the rift between Bim and Raja is a letter that he writes to Bim after Ali's death:

> You will have got our wire with the news of Hyder Ali Sahib's death. I know you will have been as saddened by it as we are. Perhaps you are also a bit worried about the future. But you must remember that when I left you, I promised I would always look after you, Bim. When Hyder Ali Sahib was ill and making out his will, Benazir herself spoke to him about the house and asked him to allow you to keep it at the same rent we used to pay him when father and mother were alive. He agreed -- you know he never cared for money, only for friendship -- and I want to assure you that now that he is dead and has left all his property to us, you may continue to have it at the same rent, I shall never think of raising it or of selling the house as long as

you and Baba need it. If you have any womes. Bim you have only to tell- Raja.

(P. 27)

Bim shows the letter to Tara and tells her how deeply wounded she was by his arrogance and insensitivity. When Tara asks Bim to go with them to Hyderabad for Moyna's marriage, she responds:

> You say I should come to Hyderabad with you for his daughter's wedding. How can I? How can I enter his house -- my landlord's house? I, such a poor tenant? Because of me, he can't raise the rent or sell the house and make a profit - imagine that. The sacrifice!
>
> (P. 28)

Tara later asks Bim to tear up the letter which she refuses, saying it should remain as a constant reminder to her, and her family, of the cause for the drift between them.

There are two other families -- apart from the Das'-- who are introduced in Part I. These are the Mishras and the Alis. The Mishra girls, Sarla and Jaya, are childless women and abandoned wives. They act as counterfoils to the Das sisters. Bim and Tara. The Ali family is important because Raja's association with them has an impact on his life.

Part I ends with the two Das sisters, Bim and Tara, talking about their unfulfilled childhood and youth. For both the sisters the summer of nineteen forty-seven was terrible. Their resentment against their parents for neglecting them, their own inability to deal and cope with their circumstances all come to the fore when they think back on their past:

> 'Youth?' said Bim, her head sinking as if with sleep, or sorrow. 'Yes, I am glad, too, it is over -- I never wish it back. Terrible, what it does to one -- what it did to us -- and one is too young to know how to cope, how to deal with that first terrible flood of life. One just goes under -- it sweeps one along -- and how many years and years it is before one can stand up to it, make a stand against it -- 'she shook her head sleepily. 'I never wish it back. I would never be young again for anything.'
>
> (P. 43).

2.3 ANITA DESAI'S TECHNIQUES

Anita Desai has added a new dimension to Indian - English fiction by focussing on the inner world of her characters. Her preoccupation with the individual and his/her psychic complexities sets her apart from her contemporaries. In a sense she has ushered in the psychological novel in Indian - English fiction especially among women writers. Shyam A. Asnani states,

> Ruth Prawer Jhabvala chooses the social background for her comedies, tragi-comedies and farces. In Kamala Markandaya's novels the stress is as much on principal characters as on diverse contemporary problems -- economic, political, cultural, social. Nayantara Sahgal is nothing if not political or socio-political. Concerned exclusively with the personal tragedy of the individual, Desai is not interested in social or political probings, the outer-weather, the physical geography, or the visible action. Her forte is the exploration of the interior world, plunging into the limitless depths of the mind, and bringing into relief the hidden contours of the human psyche.[4]

Interestingly. Desai herself comments on the limiting padrameters of the works by Indian-English women writers.

> **with all the richness of material at hane, Indian women writers have stopped** short from a lack of imagination, courage. nerve, or gusto--of the satirical edge. the ironic tone. the inspired criticism or the lyric response that alone might have brought their novels to life ..... They seem unable to throw off the habits of reticence and acceptance of being uncritical and unobstrusive.[5]

For Desai the external world is not as important as the internal one. The outside world gains significance only in relation to the character perception of it. She tries

> to discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, then illuminating those depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world.[6]

Desai says. "only the individual, the solitary being, is of true interest. One must be alone. silent. in order to think or contemplate, or write."[7]

Preoccupation with the fragmentation of reality (started by the process of modernization) and its impact on the human psyche is of continued interest to Desai in all her major works. She tries to capture the prismatic quality of reality. This often makes her style juxtapose seemingly disparate ideas and emotions in the same character and situation. For example, Bim in *Clear Light of Day* is portrayed as melancholic. disillusioned and withdrawn. Yet simultaneously through it all we see her tolerance. self-sacrifice and courage. Her attempt is to discover and convey truth which she associates with the mind and not with the body. She distinguishes clearly between truth and reality.

> Reality is merely one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean -- art remaining nine-tenths of it that lies below the surface. That is why it is more near Truth than Reality itself. Art does not merely reflect Reality -- it enlarges it.[8]

Such a comment also explains why Desai prefers writing novels to short stories. Writing novels gives,

> a good deal of thought and time, get round it, see it from different angles and aspects. whereas a short story demands something quite different. You have the whole of it quite clear in your mind and just put it down at one throw.[9]

Desai's focus, undoubtedly, is on the inner lives of her characters. their dreams. mysteries. awareness of life's futility and other myriad impressions:

> I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated. or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against, the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out 'the great No,' who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them,.[10]

Almost all her female characters are hypersensitive, grappling with some problem or the other. "facing, single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence"[11]. All the female characters in Desai's novels grow and develop. Desai is however. quick to point out that it is not feminism that has taken her in this direction but her interest in individuals, both men and women.

Given Desai's emphasis on the inner world of her characters the techniques she finds most effective in portraying it are stream of consciousness, flashbacks and interior monologues. She captures a psychological realism which submerges the story with the consciousness of the characters. Plot acquires only secondary importance. Simple plot line leads to complex situations. A story, "imposed from the outside or a theme similarly imposed simply destroys their life, reduces them to a string of jerking puppets on a stage"[12]

> My novels don't have themes -- at least not till they are finished, published or read, do I see any theme. While writing, I follow my instinct, I follow flashes of insight, I veer away from or even fight anything that threatens to distort or destroy this insight, and somehow come to the end and look back to see the pattern of footprints on the sand.[13]

In Desai's novels by and large, whatever action the characters engage in has a psychological impulse behind it. In *Clear Light of Day* when the sisters evoke the past their unconscious is brought to the fore intersecting behavioural patterns then and now. In a sense the structure of *Clear Light of Day* parallels the psychic unravelling of the characters. Multiple perspectives of the past are offered in which realism and psychic factors meet formulating a new past. Towards the end of Part I of the novel Bim tells her sister Tara:

> Isn't it strange how life won't flow, like a river, but moves in jumps, as if it were held back by locks that are opened now and then to let it jump forwards in a kind of flood? There are these long still stretches -- nothing happens -- each day is exactly like the other -- plodding, uneventful -- and then suddenly there is a crash -- mighty deeds take place -- momentous events -- even if one doesn't know it at the time -- and then life subsides again into the backwaters till the next push, the next flood? That summer was certainly one of them -- the summer of '47--'.
>
> (PP. 42-43).

Desai uses the partition backdrop in this novel but unlike other writers she does not appropriate it to forward her own political argument. On the contrary, she presents its significance entirely from the perspective of her character. In *Clear Light of Day* the childhood experiences form the core of the characters. The impact of these experiences on the psyche of the characters is what the story is all about. Since memory and recall play an important role in the novel, there is a lot of going back and forth almost like the oral tradition of the great Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Desai does not attempt to create a linear movement in her novel with a beginning, a middle and an end but she portrays things as they are. There is no exploration, conflict and resolution.

Perhaps it is due to Desai's flashback technique that she uses time from multiple dimensions: temporal, eternal and mythical. In *Clear Light of Day* for instance, time is seen in relation to youth and age, also in relation to national events and at times Desai depicts the significance of time contained in a minute. Time is both the destroyer and the preserver. The last episode in the novel when Bim and Baba go to listen to Mulk Mishra and his guru best exemplifies it:

> The contrast between Mulk's voice and [the Guru's] was great: whereas Mulk's voice had been almost like a child's so sweet and clear, or a young man's full and ripe and with a touch of sweetness to it, the old man's was sharp, even a little cracked, inclined to break, although not merely with age but with the bitterness of his experiences, the sadness and passion and frustration.
>
> (PP. 181-182).

Imagery is vital to Desai's works. Her use of it in *Clear Light of Day* is discussed in Unit 5:2.

"My novels " Desai states,

> are no reflection of Indian society, politics or character. They are part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life -- its shapelessness, its meaninglessness.[14]

Summing up Desai's Techniques

-- Emphasis on the inner world of character.
-- Use of flashbacks, stream of consciousness and interior monologues.
-- Depiction of fragmented reality through multiple perspectives.
-- Effect of the above mentioned technique on the structure of the novel.
-- Desai's treatment of time.
-- The importance of imagery.

2.4 BIM/TARA RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between the two Das sisters, Bim and Tara, forms the core of Desai's novel, *Clear Light of Day*. Everything that happens in the novel is reflected on this relationship. Bim and Tara may naturally bond as siblings but their different personalities make their relationship a problematic one. This duality in their relationship is best encaptured in the remark one of the Misra sisters, Jaya, makes to Tara:

> 'Bim has her own mind,' she said. 'Bim always did. You were always so different, you two sisters.'.... But Tara would not accept that. 'We're not really,' she said. 'We may seem to be--but we have everything in common. That makes us one. No one else knows all we share, Bim and I.'
>
> (P. 162)

These two aspects of the Bim / Tara relationship -- their bonding and their differences-- remain an undercurrent throughout the novel. Interestingly, it is Tara's holiday visit to her sister Bim, that sets up the events in the novel.

Bim, short for Bimla, is the older of the two Das sisters. She is unmarried and teaches history in a local college. Desai describes her as "grey and heavy now and not so unlike their mother in appearance" (P. 2). Interestingly, after Mira Masi falls ill, Bim takes on the role as a surrogate mother to her siblings. Tara, the younger sister, is portrayed as a "languid little girl, listless, a dawdler" (P. 10). Tara is married to an IFS officer and has two daughters. Desai subtly reveals the different personalities of the two sisters by describing the way they dress:

> Tara [was] in her elegant pale blue nylon nightgown and elegant silver slippers and Bim in curious shapeless handmade garment that Tara could see she had fashioned out of an old cotton sari by sewing it up on both sides, leaving enough room for her arms to come through and cutting out a wide scoop for her neck (P. 3).

In a sense the two sisters present different notions of Indian womanhood. Bim, the unmarried sister, is taken for granted by her siblings. Dr. Biswas comments on the situation during one of his visits to the Das household:

> 'I see, I see it all,' Dr. Biswas hurried on, staring hard at his shoes, making the most of this unusual burst of courage while it lasted. 'There are great

problems. Your father-the house-the family-Raja's illness-it is all too much for a young lady. Raja must recover, he must take his father's place-.'

(P. 68)

Tara, the married sister, who is totally dependent on her husband, represents the typical Indian married woman. She has no ambitions of her own. Among the post Independent Indian-English writers, Desai is unique in portraying a wide gamut of Indian women. In *Clear Light of Day* we also have Mira Masi, the helpless widow; and there are the Misra sisters -- Sarla and Jaya--, both abandoned by their husbands.

During Tara's visit to Bim and Baba, both sisters are aware of the changes in them, brought about by time. In fact, early in the novel, Desai introduces us to the tensions between the two sisters. Tara is surprised by the fact that things have not changed at all in her old Delhi home, "it is all exactly the same" (P. 4). Bim teasingly asks her, "would you like to come back to find it changed?" (P. 4)

Interestingly, Tara assesses her growth in relation to her responses to the house:

> She stared sullenly, without lifting her head, at a water-colour above the plaster mantelpiece-red cannas painted with some watery fluid that had trickled weakly down the brown paper: who could have painted that? Why was it hung here? How could Bim bear to look at it for all of her life? Had she developed no taste of her own, no linings: that made her wish to sweep the old house of all its rubbish and place in it things of her own choice? Tara thought with longing of the neat, china-white flat in Washington, its cleanliness, its floweriness.
>
> (P. 21)

Bim views her past differently. She tells Tara ... "After you married, and Raja went to Hyderabad, and Mira-masi died, I still had Baba. And that summer I got my job at the college and felt so pleased to be earning my living-" (P. 42).

Ironically, when we compare the childhood dreams of the two sisters -- Bim, who always wanted to be a heroine, a Joan of Arc or a Florence Nightingale, and Tara, who wanted to be a mother and just "knit" for her babies, --we notice that Tara's dream materialises. She becomes a mother of two girls. Bim, although heroic in her ability to deal with her circumstances, never achieves the heights she desires. Santosh Gupta says,

> The different goals of life of the two sisters are an outcome of their tendency to live either by reason or by emotion/imagination, reflected in their reading. Tara's craving for the warm, half-sleepy, non-challenging atmosphere of their home, and aunt Mira's closeness is reflected to some extent in her enjoyment of the fairy-tales narrated by Aunt Mira. Tara is an incurable romantic who believes firmly in the possibility of coming upon a treasure, or at least a pearl in the snails she picks up in their garden. As she grows up she reads 'Lorna Doone' and the well-known 'Gone with the Wind' . . . . The elder sister's sharp mind did not give in easily to romance or romantic readings, and she wonders "what does she want?" The answer is "facts, history, and chronology".[15]

In the context of the conversation between the two Das sisters we discover that marriage is viewed as an escape route. Tara by marrying Bakul went out of the Das household in to the world, to something bigger and brighter. Bakul reinforces this idea. When he proposes to Tara he sees himself as rescuing her. He tells her: "This place is bad for you-so much sickness, so many worries. You are too young for all this. I must take you away" (P. 71). Tara's inertia when she visits her old Delhi home is to do with her feelings of guilt in leaving Bim to cope with all the problems.

At an earlier point in the novel, Tara tells Bim, how she always wanted to escape from the Das household:

> The kind of atmosphere that used to fill it when father and mother were alive. Always ill or playing cards or at the club, always away, always leaving us out, leaving us behind- and then Mira-Masi becoming so-strange, and Raja so ill-till it seemed that the house was ill, illness passing from one generation to the other so that anyone who lived in it was bound to become ill and the only thing to do was to get away from it, escape . . . 'she stuttered to a halt, quite pale with the passion she had allowed into her words, and aghast at it.
>
> Bim's eyes narrowed as she sat listening to her sister's outburst. 'Did you feel that way? She asked, coolly curious. 'I didn't know. I think I was so occupied with Raja and Mira-Masi that I didn't notice what effect it had on you. Why didn't I? She mused, swinging her leg casually. 'And that is why you married Bakul instead of going to college?
>
> (P. 156)

Both Bim and Tara share an unfulfilled childhood and youth. Tara tells Bim about her youth: "I was glad when it was over." To which Bim responds, "Yes, I am glad, too, it is over--I never wish it back" (P. 43). The main reason for their bored and unhappy childhood was parental neglect:

> Parents had sat, day after day and year after year till their deaths, playing bridge with friends like themselves, mostly silent, heads bent so that the knobs in their necks protruded, soft stained hands shuffling the cards, now and then speaking those names and numbers that remained a mystery to the children who were not allowed within the room while a game was in progress, who had sometimes folded themselves into the dusty curtains and stood peeping out, wondering at this strange, all-absorbing occupation that kept their parents sucked down into the silent centre of a deep, shadowy vortex while they floated on the surface, staring down into the underworld, their eyes popping with incomprehension.
>
> (P. 22)

In the Das Household we notice Tara as an outsider:

> Throughout her childhood, she had always stood on the outside of that enclosed world of love and admiration in which Bim and Raja moved, watching them, sucking her finger, excluded.
>
> (P. 26)

Even at school Bim is the all rounder, a born leader. The teachers would admonish Tara in reproachful tones: "Look at your sister Bimla. You should try to be more like your sister Bimla. She plays games, she takes part in all activities, she is a monitor, the head girl. And you . . ." (P. 123). Bim's confident ways invariably overshadow Tara's diffident manner. There are two episodes that demosntrate this. The first one is when Bim cuts Tara's hair promising her curls which she knows she may not be able to do achieve:

> "Come on, come on, "Bim hurried her roughly, snipping the air with the big heavy sewing scissors and, making Tara crouch down behind the cast-iron water-tank on the roof, she cut through her hair at the ears with great sure crunches of the steel blades.
>
> (P. 119)

The second episode is when Bim and Tara steal Raja's cigarettes and hide behind a bougainvillea bush to smoke:

'Oh, Bim, no-o! cried Tara in fright. Her sister was driving her, forcing her through fear again, as usual. She tried to resist, hopelessly. This was why she distrusted Bim so: Bim never knew when to stop.

(P. 133)

Tara sums up the effect her sister Bim has on her when she says that she:

> felt Bim's hold on her again-that rough, strong, sure grasp-dragging her own, down into a well of oppression, of lethargy, of ennui. She felt the waters of her childhood closing over her head again-black and scummy as in the well at the back.
>
> (P. 149)

Being the weaker of the two sisters, Tara's tendency is to escape from ugliness. Wher the boredom of the Das household descends and engulfs her, her thoughts are of her home in 'Vashington. Even as children when Bim and Raja would express their anger against their parents' obsessive card games by saying that they would tear and burn the cards, Tara would simply run to Mira-Masi for protection.



Lodhi Garden

One of the most striking examples of Tara's escapist tendencies is seen in the bee episode in Lodi Gardens. The Das sisters had gone on a picnic with the Misras to Lodi Gardens. The Misra sisters--Sarla and Jaya-- had invited two young possible suitors for themselves. Bim and Tara were invited by them to lend an informality to the atmosphere. But of course the atmosphere was anything but informal. Bim and Tara decided to go off on their own to look at the tombs. While they were in a tomb a boy threw a pebble which probably hit a bee hive. The bees attacked Bim holding her their prisoner. Tara ran away in desperation. At the time of the episode Tara did not have the courage to apologize to Bim. Much later in their lives Tara discusses the episode with her sister asking her for forgiveness. Bim's generosity is revealed when she tells Tara: "You couldn't help it-if you'd stayed, you'd have been stung, like me-you had to run" (P. 136).

Bim is the more giving of the two sisters. Even as a child her role models were Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc. As a student she used to help out in a clinic for women in Kingsway Camp for refugees. Bim's selflessness extends to all her siblings and Mira Masi. She looks after their autistic brother Baba. She is his caretaker. Tara, on the contrary, does not view herself in this light. She is happy at Baba's dependence on Bim. It is Bim again who nurses both Raja, while he was suffering from T.B. and Mira-Masi. Tara, disliked any form of social work. In school she had to do some social work but she resented doing it. Once during a visit to a hospital she "saw the rice and dal being ladled out of pails onto aluminium platters in slopping piles, she was obliged to run out behind a hedge to be sick. After that, charity always had, for her, the sour reek of vomit" (P. 126).

Interestingly, despite Tara's self-centredness, it is she who acts as a mediator in bringing Bim and Raja together after-the misunderstanding over Raja's letter. Raja had written a letter to Bim after his father-in-law Hyder Ali's death. In this letter he had stated that since he had inherited all the property as the only son-in-law, he had also acquired the home in which Bim lived. He reassured her that he would not increase the rent and would allow her to live in it as long as she wanted to. The patronizing tone of the letter infuriated Bim and she cut all ties with him. It is Tara who tells Bim to tear up the letter and forgive Raja. Eventually when Bim does tear up the letter it is because of her own compulsions. However, Tara is instrumental in making this happen. Similarly, it is Tara who notices the fact that Bim is very over strained and is dangerously close to neurosis. She tells Bakul that Bim talks to herself. Her concern over Bim is expressed when she tells Jaya that Bim is in a strange mood and that she is worried about her:

> 'Oh,' said Tara. 'Bim is-is in a strange mood these days,' she explained, trying to bring in her own anxieties for Jaya's attention. 'I'm worried about her, Jaya.'
>
> 'About Bim?' Jaya was scornful. Indignation still burnt in her. How burnt and blackened her skin was, Tara noted, staring at their feet in slippers, making their way through the heavy white dust of the driveway. Jaya's feet were like the claws of an old crook, twisted and charred. Her voice, too, sounded like a burnt twig breaking, brittle and dry. 'No need to worry about Bim-she's always looked after herself. She can take care of herself.'
>
> 'For how long?' worried, Tara, holding her white cotton sari like a veil across her face against the blinding light. 'Bim's not young. And Baba's not young either. And here they are, just the two of them, while we are all away.' There seemed no way of conveying her anxiety to Jaya.
>
> (P. 161)

Like most of Desai's women characters, Bim and Tara also grow and are not what they are at the beginning of the novel.

2.5 TREATMENT OF TIME

The Central motif of the novel has to do with the paradox of change and continuity. This notion is beautifully captured by Desai in the last scene of the novel when Bim goes with Baba to hear Mulk Misra and his guru sing:

> She saw before her eyes how one ancient school of music contained both Mulk, still an immature disciple, and his aged, exhausted guru with all the disillusionments and defeats of his long experience.
>
> (P. 182)

Such an understanding of time gives her clearer insight into her own life:

> With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences-not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her.
>
> (P. 182)

About Desai's non-linear treatment of time Alamgir Hashmi says:

> Indeed, time is an emotional sequence of events rather than a serial imitation of chronological perception. Since the story is told in the stream-of-consciousness style, the linearity of the actual event is not imitated by the writing; the nature of the event is 'emotional' as recollected by the characters, through whose eyes the reader sees and assesses the situation. With a shifting point of view, and the frequent time lapse, the narrative is realised gradually and gathered skilfully.[16]

The notion of non-linear time used by Desai is also reflected in Bim's appraoch to life. She tells Tara:

> 'There are these long still stretches--nothing happens--each day is exactly like the other--plodding, uneventful--and then suddenly there is a crash--mighty deeds take place--momentous events--even if one doesn't know it at the time--and then life subsides again into the backwaters till the next push, the next flood? That summer was certainly one of them--the summer of '47--.'
>
> (PP. 42-43)

The country's partition parallels the partition of the Das family.

Time deals with the several characters in *Clear Light of Day*, differently. Among the childhood ambitions of the Das children, only Tara's materialises. She had always wanted to get married become a mother and "knit" for her babies. Her husband, Bakul, and her two daughters, fulfill this dream. Bim and Raja who had wanted to become a heroine and a hero respectively, are trapped by circumstances and fail to fulfill their dreams.

Childhood experiences are recalled in adulthood and through these intersections, characters grow. The Bee episode at Lodi gardens is an example in point. Tara remembers this episode when she left Bim who was attacked by the bees and ran to escape the attack herself. She feels guilty about her response then and recalls the event to apologize to Bim for her selfishness. In short, this moving backwards and forwards makes the events in *Clear Light of Day* more than just a conventional trip down memory lane. Desai is more interested in a final pattern that gives a perspective to the meaninglessness around. Her shifts between the past and the present is done smoothly. The novel reads like a well orchestrated musical composition.

Interestingly, the Das house in old Delhi also becomes a central motif of the structure. The characters, thoughts are inextricably tied to the memories of this house:

> it was the sound of the house, as much as the contended muttering of the pigeons in the verandah. It gave time a continuity and regularity that the ticking of a clock in the hall might convey in other houses.
>
> (P. 102)

In fact, the Das home, as Sudhakar R. Jamkhandi says,

> has seen many a childhood drama, and it is these that are conjured up in the collective memory of Tara and Bim until, upon their completion, Bim and Tara realize a sense of the worth of their sibling relationship. Tara seeks continuity from her frequent trips home and achieves a sense of permanence only when Bim too realizes the reason for her return home: the house. Bim realizes, is "solid ground. That was what the house had been -- the lawn, the rose walk, the guava trees, the veranda." (153) And all of this is Bim's domain, the domain from which she is inseparable.[17]

2.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have unfolded the structure of the novel giving you a detailed storyline of Part I of the novel. Then, the techniques Anita Desai employs have been discussed so also the Bim/Tara relationship and the thematic issues the relationship raises. We will continue with the storyline of the rest of the novel and the issues raised in the coming units.

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2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Critically comment on the structure of the novel.

2. Outline the story line of Part I of *Clear Light of Day*.

3. What are the chief techniques used by Desai in *Clear Light of Day*?

4. Discuss the personalities of Bim and Tara as depicted through their relationship in the novel.

UNIT 3 POLITICAL DIMENSION, MAJOR CHARACTERS

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Detailed Storyline of Part II
3.2 The Political Dimension of *Clear Light of Day*
3.3 The Importance of Raja in the novel
3.4 Baba's presence in *Clear Light of Day*
3.5 Let Us Sum Up
3.6 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit you will be given a detailed storyline of Part II of *Clear Light of Day*. This will be followed by a discussion on the political dimension of the novel. The presence of Raja and Baba in the novel will also be discussed in some detail to acquaint you with their significance. The concluding unit will raise questions to enable you to give a focused reading to the text.

3.1 DETAILED STORYLINE OF PART II

Part II is set in the past. It begins with the violence of the partition and quickly moves onto Raja's illness with T.B. The Alis have left their neighbourhood amidst all the partition violence. Raja, who had got very close to Hyder Ali, is unset that he did not inform him before leaving. At times he wonders whether Hyder Ali and his family were taken forcibly away. He feels frustrated that he cannot help them in their time of need. Raja's concern for the Alis makes Bim see the heroic side of her brother. She "could not help admiring what she saw as his heroism, his independent thinking and courage. Raja was truly the stuff of which heroes are made" (P. 45). All summer Bim nurses her brother and reads his favourite poets to him: Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne.

In this section we get some more details about Raja. His admiration for Hyder Ali – his neighbour and landlord—is reciprocated by Ali. He encourages Raja to use his library at home. Gradually he begins to take part in the social life of HyderAli. It is at one of the social evenings at Ali's place that Raja first meets a poet from Hyderabad. He is very impressed by him and feels encouraged to become an Urdu poet himself.

Some details about the Das parents also emerge in this section. We come to know that it was Raja's father—keeping the partition context in mind—who insisted that he should not join Jamia Millia Islamia to study Urdu. Raja, joins Hindu College for a course in English Honours. His father had also been a student of the same college. While doing his undergraduate degree, Raja gets drawn into college politics. Later, he withdraws when he discovers the fundamentalist and terrorist nature of his friends' agenda and their hatred for the Muslims.

Raja's mother is described in this section as someone who was not too well:

> Their mother, for the first time in twenty years, missed an evening at the club, said she did not feel well and would stay in bed. That night she passed

quietly into a coma so that when her husband returned from the club after an unsatisfactory game with an unaccustomed partner, he found her lying still and flaccid on her bed, quite beyond questioning him on his game.

The ambulance came. The children stumbled out of their beds to watch her being carried out like a parcel containing some dangerous material that had to be carefully handled...

Their mother died without seeing any of them again. If she ever, for a minute, regained consciousness, it was only to murmur the name of familiar cards that seemed to drift through her mind with a dying rustle.

(PP .53-54)

In Part II of the novel we are further told about Mira Masi's addiction to brandy and Tara's friendship with the Misra sisters. It is through them that she meets Bakul at the Roshanara Club. A new relationship between Bim and Dr. Biswas also develops in this section. Dr. Biswas takes her to a music concert and for tea with his mother.

Two important episodes are mentioned in this section which have a lasting impact on the characters in the novel. The first is the drowning of the cow episode. (This episode will be dealt with in Unit 5:2 of this Block). The second is to do with Raja's decision to leave Delhi and settle in Hyderabad (see Unit 3:3 of this Block for a lengthier discussion). At the end of the section Bim and Baba are left together. Bim, who has been left behind by Raja, with all the family responsibilities tells Baba:

'So now there are just you and I left, Baba,' she muttered. 'Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone's gone, except you and I. They won't come back. We'll be alone now. But we don't have to worry about anyone now—Tara or Raja or Mira-Masi. We needn't worry now that they're all gone. We're just by ourselves and there's nothing to worry about. You're not afraid, are you?'

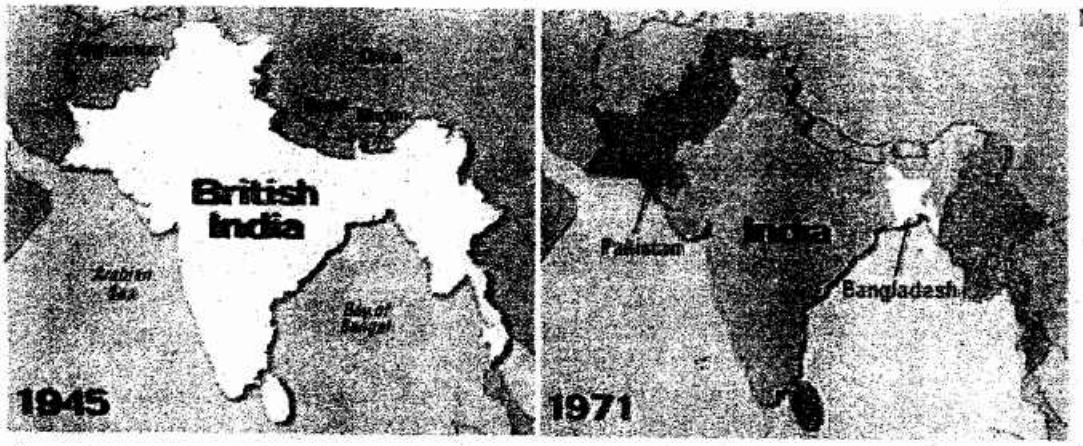
(P. 101).

3.2 THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

In a very broad sense, the growth of India's freedom struggle and the development of Indian-English fiction are interconnected. We have several novels in Indian-English which deal with the politics of India's struggle for independence. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, for example, is set in the 1930s and deals with the impact of Gandhian ideology of non-violence in a little south Indian village. Kushwant Singh's, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, depicts the reactions of many of his characters to the Quit India movement of 1942.

Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, although mentions the late 30s and a few days in the 70s, is set in the summer of 1947. But, unlike, other writers dealing with this period, she does not foreground the political happenings of 1947 as the main theme of her novel, instead, she highlights the Das family history as it emerges through the turbulent happenings of national history. Personal emotions in the novel parallel national storms. When Bim worked,

She felt a sharp, fiery pining for college to re-open and her ordinary working life to be resumed. Then she would be able to end all this storm of emotion in which she had been dragged back and forth all summer as in a vast, warm ocean, and return to what she did best, most efficiently, with least expense of spirit – the keeping to schedule, the following of a time-table, the application of the mind to facts, figures, rules and analyses. (P. 169)



The partition of India, symbolizes the break up of the Das family. Like post-independent India, which was looking for a new direction with its new identity, the Das children also face a crisis relating to their past. They have all grown differently with different goals and interests. Bim's relation to her past particularly parallels the crisis in modern India – of finding a new role for herself in relation to the past. Ironically, when Bim does realize her usefulness with her siblings, she locates herself not in the immediate history of the nation but to a past history when there was harmony between Hindus and Muslims and "a whole, a perfect pattern" existed.

Salman Rushdie in "Midnight's Children" also combines family history with national politics but both writers differ in the way they deal with it:

> While Anita Desai works through her characters' interaction, especially through dialogue and reminiscence, thus building up a concept of history in an indirect and implicit manner, Rushdie's narrator Saleem is a very self-conscious individual who uses different means: he conceptualises and verbalises the term 'recollection' in phrases such as '[there] is no escape from past acquaintance. What you were is forever who you are' (P.368); or, towards the end of his story, when he sums up his insight: 'Who what am I, My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. (p.383).
>
> Another difference in narrative procedure is the intricate relationship between historical events and personal experiences in the Sinai family.. which enables Rushdie to build up a myth of history which is as provocative as it is questionable. *Clear Light of Day* does not lack parrallels between the historical process and individual experiences, especially in the second part of the book where the times are marked by departure and death not only in the Das family but also in the life of the Indian nation—the years 1947-48 with the partition of the subcontinent, the enforced exodus of millions from their homes, violence, death and, finally, Gandhi's assassination, have profound meaning for the Das children—but still, it appears that history and the individuals are linked by coincidence rather than by the intrinsic logic we encounter in 'Midnight's Children'.[1]

In *Clear Light of Day* the happenings of 1947 are viewed from the perspective of the Das sisters:

> 'Yes, what a summer,' Tara murmured.Isn't it strange how life won't flow, like a river, but moves in jumps, as if it were held back by locks that are opened now and then to let it jump forwards in a kind of flood? There are these long still stretches – nothing happens – each day is exactly like the other – plodding, uneventful—and then suddenly there is a crash—mighty

> deeds take place—momentous events—even if one doesn't know it at the time—and then life subsisdes again into the backwaters till the next push, the next flood? That summer was certainly one of them-the summer of '47—'
>
> (PP. 42-43)

The fires of 1947 burn on the horizon and the politics of the period is only glimpsed at by the Das sisters who live secluded in the Civil Lines area of Old Delhi:

> The city was in flames that summer. Every night fires lit up the horizon beyond the city walls so that the sky was luridly tinted with festive flames of orange and pink, and now and then a column of white smoke would rise and stand solid as an obelisk in the dark. Bim, pacing up and down on the rooftop, would imagine she could hear the sound of shots and of cries and screams; but they lived so far outside the city, out in the Civil Lines where the gardens and bungalows were quiet and sheltered behind their hedges, that it was really rather improbable and she told herself she only imagined it. All she really heard was the ceaseless rattling of frogs in the mud of the Jumna and occasionally a tonga horse nervously dashing down the road.
>
> (P. 44)

Desai's skill as a novelist lies in the subtle way that she weaves in national history with the personal lives of her characters. We are told that the Das parents:

> spent their lives playing bridge at the club, intently conning their hands, unaware of the movement of history that was bringing their way of life to an end. Their children were educated in English, in Christian schools, educated into a culture that in 1947 packed its bags and left, condemning them to life their lives as a futile exercise in nostalgia, dreaming like Bing Crosby on Baba's record of a white Christmas. Bim is offered no magic release. Even when she listens to the old man's song, what it brings to her mind is a line from *Four Quartets*.[2]

What we see emerge here is a neocolonial attitude. In the post-independent Indian context, this neocolonial attitude transfers itself into an upper middle class phenomenon, a form of snobbery. This is seen very clearly when Bim goes to Dr. Biswas' home for tea with his mother:

> The tea party was of course a mistake and Bim scowled and cursed herself for having softened and let herself in for what was a humiliation and a disaster for everyone concerned.
>
> Had Mrs. Biswas dressed for it? Bim had never seen anyone so dressed. So bathed, so powdered. She seemed to be dusted all over with flour. Perhaps she had fallen into a flour bin, like a large bun. But she smelt so powerfully of synthetic flowers, it must be powder after all. And her white sari crackled with starch, like a biscuit. And her hair gleamed with coconut oil, and flecks of gold glinted at the lobes of her ears and in the ringed folds of her neck. Altogether a piece of confectionery, thought Bim.
>
> She was given a platter with all the goodies already heaped on it—neatly counted out, so many biscuits, so many pieces of mithai, so many firtters and a spoonful of chutney. Similar plates with exactly the same number of goodies were handed to Dr. Biswas, one kept by her. They ate.
>
> A China cabinet against the wall them. It stood on four legs and housed little plaster figures from Germany—a miniature beer mug, Hansel and Gretel skipping in a meadow, a squirrel dressed in a daisy chain. There were Indian dolls, less travelled but more worn, tinself garlands flaking off onto red organdie saris and gold turbans. There were clay toys in cane baskets—

> yellow bananas, green chillies. A parrot. A cow. A plastic baby. And they all stared at Bim munching her way through the goodies. Dr. Biswas stared at his brown shoes, so highly polished. He ate nothing
>
> (PP. 90-91)

Interestingly, in *Clear Light of Day*, all great names of the partition period are mentioned: Jinnah, Nehru, Gandhi, Churchill and Mountbatten. Gandhi's murder for example, is told by a cobbler to Dr. Biswas. Again, almost all the characters refer to the Hindu/Muslim problem including minor characters like Mira Masi and Bakul (see P. 56 & PP. 70-71 respectively).

It is through Raja's interaction with the Alis and their Muslim friends that Desai subtly demonstrates to us the need for the formation of Pakistan. When Mira Masi admonishes Raja about his frequent trips to the Alis and that it was not safe to be with Muslims, he goes nevertheless. He listens to the conversations between Ali and his Muslim friends and "began to see Pakistan as they did—as a possibility, very close to them, palpable and real" (P. 57).

During the partition riots in the country, Raja was ill with T.B. and felt frustrated that he could not help the Alis. When Bim assuages his fears by saying that he must be safe, Raja explodes, "safe"? For Muslims? Here in India? It will be safe after every Muslim has had his throat slit" (P. 45).

Raja is secular in his approach to the Hindu/Muslim problem in the country. Bim wonders at his ways of thinking and feeling which are so different from the others. When Raja's father dissuades him from joining Jamia Millia Islamia for a course in Urdu, he is surprised by the reasons offered by his father: "If you, a Hindu boy, are caught in Jamia Millia, the centre of Islamic studies—as you call it—you will be torn to bits, you will be burnt alive—" (P. 52). While in Hindu college, Raja experiences Hindu fundamentalism, and decides to withdraw from political activities in college.

Later, after Raja's father's death, when his sister Bim asks him to help out with their father's business, he sharply retorts:

> 'Oh Bim, Bim,' he said, dramatically gesturing towards the door that opened out into the thick, dusty twilight. 'Look there-look,' he said, 'the city's burning down. Delhi is being destroyed. The whole country is split up and everyone's become a refugee. Our friends have been driven away, perhaps killed. And you ask me to worry about a few cheques and files in father's office.
>
> (PP. 66-67)

Raja is one character in the novel who forsees the political violence that follows India's independence. He tells Bim:

> 'Don't you see—there is going to be fighting in the streets, people like Hyder Ali Sahib are going to be driven out, their property will be burnt and looted, the government is helpless, they're not preventing—preventing—'but now tears of weakness rose in his throat, flooding it, and he closed his mouth and turned his head from side to side like a dog tied to a tight leash.
>
> (PP. 59-60)

As predicted by Raja, we come to know in the course of the narrative, that during the partition riots of 1947, the Alis who owned half the houses in the area had to sell them and when they "left Delhi during the partition riots of 1947, they sold most of these houses to their Hindu tenants for a song—all except for Bim's house which she did not try to buy and which he continued to let to her at the same rent as before" (P.

28). It was Raja, again, who anticipated the violence following Gandhi's death (PP. 93-94).

Ali's leaving Delhi indicates the changed political atmosphere of the nation. The locked house symbolizes the Das childhood and past, a past of pre-partition harmony deliberately referred to by Desai in *Clear Light of Day* when she talks about the status of Urdu then and now:

> Raja had studied Urdu in school in those days before the Partition when students had a choice between Hindi and Urdu. It was a natural enough choice to make for the son of a Delhi family: Urdu had been the court language in the days of the Muslim and Moghul rulers and had persisted as the language of the learned and the cultivated. Hindi was then considered a language of great pedigree; it had little to show for itself in its modern, clipped, workaday form, and its literature was all in ancient, extinct dialects. Raja, who read much and had a good ear, was aware of such differences.
>
> (P. 47)

Alamgir Hashmi says of *Clear Light of Day:*

> For weaving together the public and the private, for a balanced treatment of the historical elements in the book, for a sympathetic and introspective study of character and personal relationships, and for a pellucid, personal style, this novel remains a triumph. In twenty-five years of story-telling, *Clear Light of Days* is the best of Anita Desai, a novel which will continue to command attention and respect.[3]

3.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF RAJA IN *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

Raja is a very important character in *Clear Light of Day*. Desai uses him for several reasons in the novel. Since the first part of the novel is set in the present, Raja is physically absent from it. When the novel begins he is already married to Benazir, the daughter of his neighbour and landlord, Hyder Ali, and is settled in Hyderabad.

The Raja/Ali relationship is important in the novel. Through the nurturing manner in which Ali treats Raja and the trusting way in which Raja responds to him, Desai demonstrates to us the harmony that existed between Hindus and Muslims in India before partition.

Very early in the novel we come to know of the fact that even as a child Raja admired Hyder Ali and considered him as his hero. He was overawed by the sight of Hyder Ali riding on his white horse, while he was playing on the banks of the river, "Jumna" with his sister, Bim. Bim tells Tara:

> 'We stood up to watch them go past and he wouldn't even look at us. The peon shouted to us to get out of the way. I think Hyder Ali Sahib used to think of himself as some kind of prince, a nawab. And Raja loved that.' Her eyes gleamed as much with malice as with remembrance. 'Raja stood up straight and stared and stared and I'm sure he longed to ride on a white horse with a dog to run behind him just as older Hyder Ali did. Hyder Ali Sahib was always Raja's ideal, wasn't he?' she ended up.
>
> (P. 25)

When Ali comes to hear of Raja's interest in Urdu poetry he encourages him and allows him to use his personal library at home.

As Raja grows older he begins to participate in Ali's family parties:

In the evening, tired of his own noisy sisters and peculiar old aunt and still more peculiar little brother, he would wander across to the Hyder Ali's garden where there was always a gathering in a circle on the lawn, drinks and ice and betel leaves served on silver trays, and gentlemen discussing politics and quoting poetry.

(P. 49)

Desai, through these social evenings, points to a decadent life style that existed in pre-partitioned India.

Again, it is through Ali's parties which Raja attends, that Desai gives us a Muslim perspective on the need for India's partition. At these parties glasses,

> of whisky were passed around, some poetry quoted, and soon they forgot Raja, or Raja's Hindu presence, and picked up the subject they had dropped on seeing him—Pakistan, as ever Pakistan. Raja listened silently as they spoke of Jinnah, of Gandhi and Nehru, of Mountbatten and Attlee and Churchill, because he knew this was not a matter in which he should express an opinion, but he listened and he began to see Pakistan as they did—as a possibility, very close to them, palpable and real
>
> (P. 57)

When Raja joins Hindu College as desired by his father, he gets involved in political activities. But when he discovers the bigotry of his friends and their hatred for Muslims and their anger against the creation of Pakistan, he withdraws. When he spoke to them of Pakistan,

> as something he quite accepted, they turned on him openly, called him a traitor, drowned out his piping efforts at reasonableness with the powerful arguments of fanatics. Some of them, his two or three closest friends, disclosed to him that they were members of terrorist societies; they told him they were not giving in cravenly to the partitioning of the country no matter what Gandhi said or Nehru did—they were going to fight to defend their country, their society, their religion.
>
> (P. 57)

Through Raja's interactions both with his college friends and with his father—who dissuades him from joining Jamia Millia to study Urdu because it was unsafe for Hindus to be with Muslims in the partition context--, we come to know of the mounting tensions between Hindus and Muslims in 1947.

Raja's concern for Hyder Ali's family during the partition riots is further used by Desai to expose to us the fundamentalist atmosphere in India during that period. Through the conversations between Bim and Tara we come to know that during the partition riots of 1947, Raja was very ill with T.B. and feeling helpless. When Bim who had been nursing Raja through his illness tells him not to worry about the Alis and that they must be safe, he explodes:

> 'Safe? For Muslims? Here in India? It will be safe after every Muslim has had his throat slit,' Raja said with great viciousness. He half-lifted himself from the bed and then threw himself violently back again.' 'And here I am – too ill to even get up and help. And the only time in my life that I've ever been ill,' he added bitterly.
>
> (P. 45)

Again, it is Raja who warns us of the chaos and violence that is to follow the death of Gandhi. He is relieved when he hears over the radio that it was a Hindu and not a Muslim who had killed Gandhi.

In a very broad sense, Raja's way of thinking and feeling is quite like Desai's, very cosmopolitan. Bim is bewildered by

> Raja's ways of thinking and feeling, so different from anyone else's at that time or day. She could not help admiring what she saw as his heroism, his independent thinking and courage. Raja was truly the stuff of which heroes are made, she was convinced, and yet here he lay, ironically, too ill to play the hero he longed to and, she half-believed, was meant to be.
>
> (P. 45)

The central irony in the novel, of course, is that Raja grows up to be anything but a hero. He ends up as a contented, rich local landlord with no dreams and ambitions Bim tells Tara of the one time he visited her after her marriage:

> They did visit me once... After their marriage, after their first baby was born, they did come to visit us. And Benazir was already so plump, and Raja—Raja looked like a pasha, he was so fat.
>
> (P. 144)

Raja contributes very significantly to the political dimension of the novel. (For a detailed discussion on the political aspect of the novel see Unit 3:2 of this Block). But he also is central to the story line of *Clear Light of Day*. The Bim Raja relationship is integral to the novel and it is the breakdown in this relatonship that affects the characters in different ways.

Through the reminiscing of the Das sisters we come to know that as children, Bim and Raja were very close. They shared an interest in literature and played with boats on the banks of the river, "Jumna." The first mention of Raja is made in the novel in relation to his anger against his parents' excessive card games:

> Raja used to swear that one day he would leap up onto the table in a lion-mask, brandishing a torch, and set fire to this paper-world of theirs, while Bim flashed her sewing scissors in the sunlight and declared she would creep in secretly at night and snip all the cards into bits. But Tara simply sucked her finger and retreated down the veranda to Aunt Mira's room where she could always tuck herself up in the plum-coloured quilt that smelt so comfortingly of the aged relation and her ginger cat, lay her head down beside that purring creature and feel such a warmth, such a softness of comfort and protection as not to feel the need to wreck her parents' occupation or divert their attention. It would have frightened her a bit if they had come, away, followed her and tried to communicate with her.
>
> (P. 22)

However, when the novel begins the relationship between Bim and Raja "is ended," as Bim informs Tara when she asks her to join them in attending Moyna, Raja's daughter's wedding in Hyderabad:

> 'I have ended it already,' Bim said stubbornly, 'by not going to see them and not having them here either. It is ended. But I don't forget, no.'
>
> (P. 28)

The immediate cause of the breakdown in the relationship between Bim and Raja is a letter that he had written to her after the death of his father-in-law, Hyder Ali. As Benazir's husband, Raja inherited all of Ali's property which included the house in which Bim and Baba now lived. In his letter, Raja wrote:

> You will have got our wire with the news of Hyder Ali Sahib's death. I know you will have been as saddened by it as we are. Perhaps you are also a

bit worried about the future. But you must remember that when I left you, I promised I would always look after you, Bim. When Hyder Ali was ill and making out his will, Benazir herself spoke to him about the house and asked him to allow you to keep it at the same rent we used to pay him when father and mother were alive. He agreed—you know he never cared for money, only for friendship—and I want to assure you that now that he is dead and has left all his property to us, you may continue to have it at the same rent, I shall never think of raising it or of selling the house as long as you and Baba need it. If you have any worries, Bim you have only to tell—Raja.

(P. 27)

Bim is humiliated by the patronising tone of this letter. She feels that Raja, by projecting his "generosity" in not increasing the house rent was expecting her to be obliged to him. This is particularly offensive to her because she had relied upon Raja to take control of the business and the family after their father's death. In a sense, this is his second betrayal. The first was when he walked out on the family:

'I—I will—go today—today I will catch the train—I won't stop here, with you, another day. It's enough—enough—' and he let go the chair and spread out his arms as if to push everything out of his way.

(P. 95)

Raja's rebellion begins with his desire to study Urdu and become a poet. This rebellion later becomes a shirking off of his family responsibilities and family business.

Interestingly, the chasm between Bim and Raja had begun to appear much earlier as Santosh Gupta notes. Differences were there over,

> their reading had revealed certain important differences in temperament, only they had not acknowledged them. Raja's quest for the distant world, different cultures, more colourful and sophisticated than his own, had first led him to Urdu poetry and then to the house-hold of Hyder Ali. Bim had begun to ask for a rational, non-emotional, understanding of the world, through facts and chronology, rather than through imagination. In her anger she picks on Raja's juvenelia as the target of bitter criticism—she calls them 'terrible,' and 'nauseating.' Shocking Tara, on her visit to Bim and Baba in their house in Old Delhi.[4]

Tara plays a crucial role in bringing Bim and Raja together again. She tries to persuade Bim to tear up Raja's letter and to forgive him. She also pleads with Bim to attend Raja's daughter, Moyna's wedding in Hyderabad. When Bim makes up with her brother, it is due to her own compulsions, but Tara is also important in this reconciliation. Bim tells Tara:

Tell him we couldn't come—but he should come. Bring him back with you, Tara—or tell him to come in the winter. All of them.

(P. 175)

Bim's desire to make up with Raja is important because it makes her realize how different parts make the whole. Harmony, comes from an integration of the old and the new. She realizes there were:

great rents torn in the net that the knife of love had made. Stains of blood that the arrow of love had left. Stains that darkened the light that afternoon. She laid her hands across her eyes again.

(P. 166)

She knew that she had to forgive Raja, beg forgiveness from Baba for her displaced anger against him. Tara, Raja, Baba are all affected by the breakdown of the Bim/Raja relationship. They are all brought back to the fold. The central theme of the novel, time as a preserver and destoryer, is linked specifically with the re-uniting of Bim with Raja. Alamgir Hashmi says,

> The *Clear Light of Day* is to be seen not only by Bim who, after reading a passage in *Life of Aurangzeb* and tearing up the last officious letter of Raja's that she has kept for years and never answered, appears amendable and forgiving; but also by others. Bim and Tara, whose 'difference' is emphasized throughout, are actually very much like each other; at least Tara says so to Jaya, the common friend-neighbour. Bim recognises, like Tara earlier, how really dark and silent their own house is. Baba begins to respond to affection and spends jolly hours with Tara's two young daughters... he once again enjoys listening to his monotonous forties records on an old HMV.[5]

3.4 BABA'S PRESENCE IN THE NOVEL

Baba and Bim are the two people who continue to live in their childhood home in Old Delhi around which the novel unfolds itself. He is described by Desai in the novel as:

> a finely composed piece of sculpture in white. Marble, or milk. Or less: a spider's web, faint and shadowy, or just some moonlight spilt across the bed. There was something unsubstantial about his long slimness in the light white clothes, such a total absence of being, of character, of clamouring traits and characteristics.
>
> (P. 40)

There may be a "total absence of being," in Baba, but he plays a significant role in the novel.

Baba's presence in the novel is heralded by music of the forties. The numbers he plays, "Sm-o-ke gets in your eyes," Don't Fence Me In" and "Donkey's Seranade" are significant. They pick up the lack of clarity, wisdom, and the trapped situation of the central characters in the novel. Most of the characters in the novel are trapped: Baba is trapped by his autism, Bim is trapped by her circumstances, Tara by her guilt and Raja finds the Das household itself a trap. Mira Masi is trapped by her poverty and later, her alcoholism, and the Alis, by the partition riots. The lack of direction and the need for wisdom in the Das household, parallels the situation of independent India. This is further picked up by Desai's description of Baba in the novel as a person whose face "was blanched, like a plant grown underground or in deepest shade" (P. 8). Both the inexperience of the Das children in dealing with life after the departure of their parents, and the rawness of the nation in coping with its postcolonial situation are symbolised here.

The political dimension of the novel is also picked up by Baba's song numbers. His music of the forties sets the background for the novel which deals with events of that period.

Baba's music serves another important purpose in *Clear Light of Day*. In fact, the structure of the novel is indeed like a well orchestrated musical piece. Music is indeed integral to the novel in that it contrasts to the discordance repressed in the various characters. (For a detailed discussion on the significance of music in the novel see Unit 4:2).

Baba plays a very important functional role in the novel. It is because of him that Mira Masi, an important character, is brought into the novel. We are told by the narrator that Baba was conceived in his parents' old age. It was:

as if his parents, too aged, had given birth to a child without vitality or will—all that had gone into the other, earlier children and there had been none left for this last, late one.

(P. 103)

Although the new baby was the prettiest of all, people could not help but notice how slow he was in everything. The mother, who was "severely diabetic," got restless and Baba was entrusted to an ayah. When the ayah could not cope, Mira Masi was sent for (the significance of Mira Masi's role is discussed separately in Unit 4).

Baba has another functional role to play in the novel. It is with him that Bim goes to check out Ali's locked house. And it is from this house that Baba takes Benazir's abandoned gramaphone on which he plays his music. The lock in Ali's house points to a chapter in Hindu/Muslim relations in India that has been closed after partition.

Much of the pathos in the novel emerges from Baba's presence in it. The episode when he goes out of the house because both Bim and Tara had wanted him to visit the office is truly pathetic:

> His knees trembled in anticipation, knowing he would be forced down, or flung down if he continued down the road. But it was if Tara had given him a push down a steep incline. She had said that he was to go. Bim had said he was to go. Bim and Tara, both of them, wanted him to go. He was going.
>
> His feet in their unfastened sandals scuffed through the dust of Bela Road. Sharp gravel kept slipping into them, prodding him. His arms swung wildly, propelling him along. His head bobbed, his white hair flopped. His eyes strained and saw black instead of white. Was he going to faint? Would he fall? Should he stop? Could he? Or would they drive him on? 'Hato! Hato!' Then he heard the crash he knew would come.
>
> (P. 16)

Baba's most significant role in the novel is his relationship with Bim. He is dependent on her. She acts like his caretaker but Bim too needs him. She tells Tara that after everyone left Baba was still with her. Their mutual dependency is best articulated by Jaya to Tara when the latter expresses concern for Bim. Jaya says:

> There are two of them—they have each other, 'Jaya's voice angrily smouldered. 'Bim has Baba to look after-she has always liked to rule others—and he needs her. Bim's all right.'
>
> (P. 161)

It is again Baba who is with Bim at the musical evening at the Misras place, when she listens to the songs of Mulk Misra and his guru, and gets a perspective on her own life (for details see Unit 4:2 of the Block). The turning point in Bim's life comes a little earlier when she expresses her anger against Raja at Baba. Reviewing her limited finances, she advises Baba to go and live with Raja:

> She was hitting the target now—hitting and hitting it. 'Are you willing to go and live with Raja in Hyderabad?'
>
> She had not known she was going to say that till she had said it. She had only walked in to walk to Baba—cut down his defence and demand some kind of a response from him, some kind of justification from him for herself, her own life, her ways and attitudes, like a blessing from Baba. She had not known she wuld be led into making such a threat, or blackmailing Baba. She was still hardly aware of what she had said, only something seemed to slam inside her head, painfully, when she looked at Baba.
>
> He did not say anything. He only sat on the edge of his bed as he always did, his long hands dangling loosly over his knees, but he seemed to draw back from her, as far as he could, and his mouth was drawn awry as if he had been

'I mean', she cried, leaning out of her chair towards him, 'I mean—it's just an idea—I've been wondering—I wanted to ask you, Baba—what you thought.'

But Baba never told what he thought. No one knew if he thought.

'I didn't mean,' she said hoarsely, 'Baba, I didn't mean—'

Then Bim's rage was spent at last. It had reached its peak, its acme, like a great glittering wave that had hovered over everyone and that now collapsed, fell on the sand and seeped away, leaving nothing but a soggy shadow in the shape of Baba's silence.

(PP. 163-164)

Desai's greatness as a novelist lies in her ability to make even apparently insignificant characters play an integral role in the novel. Baba, In *Clear Light of Day* clearly illustrates this skill in the author.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have further worked on the storyline of Part II of the novel. The political dimension of the novel has been brought out. The significance of Raja and Baba has been highlighted with a view to keep you focussed on the study of the text.

References

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[2]Richard Cronin. *Imagining India*. Macmillan: 1989.p.54

[3]A Hashmi. "*Clear Light of Day* between India and Pakistan," Ed. Viney Kirpal, *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s*. Delhi: Allied, 1990.p.70.

[4]Bridging the Polarities of Imagination and Reason in *Clear Light of Day*," ed. R.K. Dhawan. *The Fiction of Anita Desai*. New Delhi: Babri Publications, 1989.pp.121-122.

[5]"*Clear Light of Day* between India and Pakistan," ed. Vinay Kirpal, *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s*. Delhi: Allied, 1990.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. Highlight the important episodes in Part II of *Clear Light of Day*.
2. Critically comment on the way in which Desai weaves in the political elements in *Clear Light of Day*.
3. Raja is a pivotal character in the happenings of *Clear Light of Day*. Discuss
4. Critically comment on Baba's presence in the novel.

UNIT 4 MUSIC, MINOR CHARACTERS

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Detailed Storyline of Part III
4.2 Importance of Music in *Clear Light of Day*
4.3 Minor characters: Mira Masi, Bakul & Dr. Biswas
4.4 Let Us Sum Up
4.5 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will first give a detailed outline of the storyline of Part III. It will then deal with the importance of music in the novel. A range of minor characters will also be discussed to point out their significance. The unit will conclude with Questions which will enable you to get a perspective on the section.

4.1 DETAILED STORYLINE OF PART III

Part III of *Clear Light of Day* is set in an even further past of the Das family life. In this part we come to know of Baba's birth. His parents had conceived him in their old age. The mother was "severely diabetic" when she was expecting him. The new baby though "the prettiest of all" was born autistic. The mother got tired of his slow ways and decided to hire an ayah to look after his needs. When the ayah too couldn't cope with Baba, Mira Masi or Aunt Mira, a poor widowed relative was asked to look after him and the other three Das children: Bim, Raja and Tara. The mother told them:

> 'She is coming to look after you children, .. You have become too much for me---you are all so noisy and naughty. She will discipline you. And look after your brother. I don't know what is wrong with him –he should be walking by now and doing things for himself. She will keep him in her room and look after him. And you will have to learn to be quiet'.
>
> (P. 104)

Mira Masi has an important role to play in the novel. Part III provides us with details of Mira Masi's background. (For details concerning Mira Masi see, Unit 4:3 of this Block)

It is through this part of the novel that we come to know in greater detail about the childhood of Bim and Tara. The two sisters have very different personalities. In school Bim was the leader and well loved by her teachers. Tara, on the other hand, was always told to be like her sister. Where Bim loved social work, Tara, abhorred it. Tara emerges as the timid one in the childhood scenes evoked in this section. (For details about the Bim/Tara relationship, see Unit 1:4)

There are two episodes that are mentioned in Part III which are significant. The first episode deals with time when Bim cuts Tara's hair against her will. The second, is the Bee episode at Lodi Gardens. The first one gives us an insight into Bim's dominating and bullying ways and Tara's diffident personality. The second, demonstrates Tara's instinct to escape whenever confronted with a problem. (For details of the Bee episode, see Unit 5:2 of this Block).

It is in this section that we get information about the background of the Misras. They are the neighbours of the Das'. (For a detailed note on the Misras, see Unit 5:3 of this Block). The Misras are contrasted to the Das. The former are portrayed as very Indian in their ways and the latter, are delineated as more Western:

> What attracted Tara was the contrast their home provided to hers. Even externally there were such obvious differences—at the Misra's no attempt was made, as at Tara's house, to 'keep up appearances.'
>
> At the Misras, string beds might be carried into the drawing room for visiting relations, or else mats spread on the veranda floor when an influx of visitors grew so large that it overflowed.
>
> (P. 137)

This section closes with an engagement party for the Misra sisters to which the Das sisters are invited. The noise and din of the party makes Bim ask Tara to go to the roof where it would be quieter. It is on the terrace that the two sisters discuss education and women. Bim says:

> 'I don't know how those two girls are going to study and pass their finals with all this going on,' she said.
> 'I don't think it matters to them' said Tara, picking at flakes of blackened lichen on the balustrade sulkily. 'They' re getting married,' she said. 'Why don't they go to college instead?.
> Bim gave a snort of disgust. 'I don't know why they're in such a hurry to get married,' she said. 'Why don't they go to college instead?'
> 'Their mother wanted them to be married soon. She said she married when she was twelve and Jaya and Sarala are already sixteen and seventeen years old.'
> 'But they're not educated yet, 'Bim said sharply. 'They haven't any degrees They should go to college,' she insisted.
>
> (PP. 139-140)

The section concludes with Bim's declaration that she will never get married adding, "I shall never leave Baba and Raja and MiraMasi" (p.140).

4.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC IN *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, is dominated by sound. The novel begins with the koels singing:

> The koels began to call before daylight. Their voices rang out from the dark trees like an arrangement of bells, calling and echoing each others' calls, mocking and enticing each other into ever higher and shriller calls. More and more joined in as the sun rose.....
>
> (P. 1)

Interestingly, the novel also ends with Mulk's guru singing the poetry of Iqbal. Desai uses music to foreground the theme of the novel. Syed Amanuddin notes that between the singing of the koels and the musical rendering of Iqbal's poetry, "we have the scratches and squeaks of old records".[1] These "scratches and squeaks" are the tensions and problems of a nation breaking up, a family getting fragmented:

> The Partition brought barriers between people who had lived together for centuries in an atmosphere of mutual social and cultural understanding. T'

> division into two individual units causes each group a crisis of identity for there is a forced uprooting and deviation from the fundamental principles of the common Indian culture that had prevailed over the country, where individual units had followed their diverse ways of living, remaining one whole entity. In a similar manner Tara, Bim and Raja also face a crisis of relating their present to the past – their adulthood to childhood. The period that lies in between—the growing consciousness and search for individuality of adolescence—fails to provide a continuity from the early period of childhood to the later stage of adulthood, causing deep psychological trauma and stress.[2]

Music becomes a panacea for deeper disturbances in the novel. Most of the characters in *Clear Light of Day* are associated with music in some way or the other. It depicts their emotional strains. Because of the psychological nature of her novel, Desai often uses music to project thoughts, emotions and feelings in her characters. Baba, the autistic character in the novel is delineated through music. He is introduced through music of the forties evoking the period in which the novel is set. The numbers he plays are significant "sm-o-ke get in your eyes" and "Don't Fence Me In." They point to a trap that he is enmeshed in due to his disability. Syed Amanuddin says:

> Blunt needles, old records with scratches, the mysterious silence of the listener, and his ghastly long arms fit the atmosphere of the decaying old Delhi.[3]

Baba refuses to change his old HMV gramaphone with the latest Hi-Fi system that Raja gets him as a gift. When Tara tells Bim that she tried looking for new records for Baba while she was abroad but was unable to find "78s any more" (P. 7), Bim says, "Oh he doesn't want any new records,....He wouldn't play them. He loves his old ones" (P. 7).

As an autistic person, Baba is pushed to the margins of society. The HMV gramaphone becomes a weapon of some sorts in his hands. Although he is silent, he controls sounds through music. This is effectively brought out by Desai in the opening scene of the novel. The cacophany that heralds Baba's entrance takes over the atmosphere of the house: "The noise beat and thrummed in one of the curtained rooms behind him" (P. 7). Tara even wonders, "why did he spend his days and years listening to this appalling noise?" (P. 12).

The music coming out of the old HMV gramaphone which belonged to Ali's daughter, Benazir, becomes a voice from the past. When Raja is asked by Ali—who shifted to Hyderabad during the partition riots—to look into his house, he requests Bim to do him the favour since he was not well. Bim agrees and takes Baba with her. Inside the house, Baba is very quiet, but once he spots the gramaphone he begins to respond differently:

> Baba had been silent all through this ghostly tour, keeping close to her except when she made some small, nervous comment, when he gave start and jumped away from her. Now he pointed his finger and made a little desperate sound like a bell that won't ring when pressed. Bim looked. 'What?' she asked, 'that?' Baba nodded, and she went with him to a corner where an old-fashioned His Master's Voice gramaphone stood on a small three-legged table, on the lower shelf of which were stacked the records Benazir and her friends had listened to . . .
> 'Come, let's go,' said Bim, turning away. 'Let's go and look in the servants' quarters—there may be someone there.' But Baba would not go. He stood there fingering the smooth shining metal gadgetry in the green box, his long fingers closing about the curved silver horn, Admiringly, lovingly. 'come Baba, come,' Bim said several times, more and more impatiently, but he was

> smiling to himself, quite deaf and unresponsive in the enclosed bubble of his dream, till she said angrily 'Then I'm going alone,' whereupon he reluctantly let down the lid, closing the box with a gentle creak, and followed her, dragging his foot and looking whipped so that she said in exasperation 'If you want it, I suppose there's nothing to stop you taking it. But first let's go and see if there's anyone outside, at the back, whom we can ask.' He raised his chin and gave her a shy, fearful look of hope then and followed her more willingly.
>
> (P. 74)

In this episode we notice Baba communicating with Bim. Otherwise, throughout the novel he is engrossed in his own world and does not communicate with anyone. Baba's routine life is represented through the circular movement of the gramaphone.

Dr. Biswas is also defined by the music he loves. He is the doctor that Mr. Das' firm sends to treat Raja, and later, Mira Masi. Dr. Biswas was initiated into Western classical music in Germany. He learnt the violin there. He tells Bim during a concert that he takes her to:

> 'When I first heard Mozart, Miss Das, I closed my eyes, and it was as if my hole past vanished, just rolled away from me—the country of my birth, my ancestors, my family, everything—and I arrived in a new world. It was a new world, a shining new world. 'I felt that when I heard Mozart for the first time-'
>
> (P. 83)

But when he returns to India he can't relate to his violin. He tells Bim:

> 'I had so much there, I was so rich then! Now I feel very poor, useless. I touch my violin and try to make sounds to remind me of that time. I take lessons from the first violinist of the Delhi Music Society orchestra, and I play to myself and inflict my playing on my mother who is an old-fashioned Bengali lady and likes only Tagore's songs and suffers in silence because she loves me. I am her only son.'
>
> (P. 84)

Desai, weaves in the strain of neocolonialism which runs as a reality in post-independent India. The East /West encounter brought by colonialism, is beautifully depicted by her through music. Biswas loves Western classical music and his mother loves Rabindra sangeet. Similarly, in the Das household, we hear Western songs and in their neighbours—Alis and Misras—we hear Indian classical music.

For the Misras too, Music is important. It is, for them, both a source of entertainment and livelihood. The two Misra sisters, Sarla and Jaya—after being abandoned by their husbands—earn their living by teaching singing and dancing to little girls. To the Misra boys—who have also been abandoned by their wives—music becomes a hobby and an interest. When Mulk comes to know of the fact that his sisters prevented the tabla-player, harmonium player, and his accompanists from coming for a musical evening because of the expense involved, he is furious:

> 'Food! It wasn't food they wanted. You are insulting them. You are insulting my guru. He does not want food, or money. He wants respect. Regard,. That is what we must pay to guru. But you have no respect, no regard. You think only of money—money—money. That is what you think about, you two—'
> 'Mulk, Mulk.'
> 'They have minds full of money, dirty minds. They don't understand the artist, how the artist lives for his art. They don't know how it is only music-

here he clasped his chest with a moist, sweating paw—' only music that keeps me alive. Not food. Not money.'

(P. 38)

The main theme of the novel is brought out most effectively in the last scene when Mulk Misra and his ageing guru sing "at a soiree." The Das' are invited to the evening. However, only Bim and Baba attend it because Tara and her family have gone to Hyderabad to attend the wedding of Moyna, Raja's daughter. At the musical evening, Bim notices the fact that though Mulk and his guru both hail from the same school of singing.

> the contrast between Mulk's voice and his was great: whereas Mulk's voice had been almost like a child's , so sweet and clear, or a young man's full and ripe and with a touch of sweetness to it, the old man's was sharp, even a little cracked, inclined to break, although not merely with age but with the bitterness of his experiences, the sadness and passion and frustration.
>
> (PP. 181-182)

Bim realises that between the young and the old, the past and the present, the audience and the singers all form an integrated whole. As Santosh Gupta observes:

> Music becomes symbolic of the intuitive understanding of oneself, and of the reality that lies submerged under appearances. With her "inner eyes" Bim perceives a continuity in history, hers, her family' s and in time, ' not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to hand down their roots ... reach out to new lines, but always drawing from the same soil, the secret soil, the same secret darkness." (P. 182). Bim percieves this hidden source of her being: "It was where her deepest self lived, and the deeper selves of her sister and brothers.".
>
> The harmonious relationship between the old Guru and Mulk also establishes the possibility of a meaningful interaction between past and present, old age and youth.
>
> The song brings also a synthesis of poetry and melody, verbal and non-verbal, rational and emotional modes of artistic expression. The guru sings a verse of Iqbal to which both Bim and Baba respond, feeling closer to each other.
>
> The last scene becomes the image of Bim's reintegration with her family, society and culture, and her perception of a unity between divergent elements within herself and in the world.[4]

4.3 MINOR CHARACTERS: MIRA MASI, BAKUL AND DR. BISWAS

MIRA MASI

When the novel starts, Mira-Masi or Aunt Mira—as she is called—is already dead but she is a very important character in the novel. She comes into the Das household initially to look after the youngest Das child, Baba, who is autistic, but she eventually ends up looking after the other Das children as well. She becomes like a surrogate mother to them. Among her other tasks in the Das household are quilt making, story telling, pickle making and knitting.

Among the four Das children: Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba, Tara is the one who instantly bonds with Mira Masi. She "could wrap herself up in (Mira Masi) as in an old soft shawl. . . breathing in her aunt's smell, finding in it a deep, musty comfort" (P. 109). Whenever, Bim and Raja would team up Tara would simply suck her

fingers and retreat to Mira Masi. Baba, is the other Das child on whom we see the influence of Mira Masi's affection:

> To begin with, she stopped feeding him those milky sops from the tip of a silver spoon. Instead, she cut up small pieces of bread and let him pick them up and put them in his mouth himself. His sisters and his brother, who had not seen him perform this skill before, stood by, entranced, applauding him. Then she showed him how to slip a button into a buttonhole. They got great deal of amusement out of that, too. Eventually he could do up his buttons himself and then would stand basking in their congratulations like a duck in a shower of rain. Visitors could hardly believe their eyes when they saw him sitting on the veranda and playing a game of marbles with Aunt Mira—how his fingers got round the rolling globes of glass, how he manipulated them and rolled them back to her: it was a miracle.
>
> (P. 106)

The other two Das children, Bim and Raja, also gradually get used to Mira-Masi. During the first summer of her stay at the Das home, it was she who nursed both Bim and Raja who were suffering from typhoid. The children neglected by their own parents need her "she was the tree that grew in the centre of their lives and in whose shade they lived" (P. 110). Mira-Masi, too, needed them. Abused by her relatives for being a widow she felt unwanted.

In Part III of the novel we get some details about Mira-Masi's background. We learn about the fact that she was barely "twelve years old when she was married and was a virgin when she was widowed" (P. 108). Her husband who had gone for higher studies to England, had died of a cold there. After this:

> She was left stranded with his family and they blamed her bitterly for his death: it was her unfortunate horoscope that had brought it about, they said. She should be made to pay for her guilt. Guiltily, she scrubbed and washed and cooked for them. At night she massaged her mother-in-law's legs and nursed wakeful babies and stitched trousseaux for her sisters-in-law. Of course she aged. Not only was her hair white but she was nearly bald. At least that saved her from being used by her brothers-in-law who would have put the widow to a different use had she been more appetising. Since she was not, they eyed her unpleasing person sullenly and made jokes loudly enough for her to overhear. There was laughter, till they grew bored. She stayed with them so long that she became boring. They suspected her of being a parasite. It was time she was turned out. She was turned out. Another household could find some use for her: cracked pot, torn rag, picked bone.
>
> (P. 108)

Through this description Desai tells us about the status of women in India. She is one of the first post-independent women writers who portrays a wide range of women: Abandoned ones, single and widowed women—in her novels. In *Clear Light of Day* although Mira-masi is a surrogate mother to the Das children, she can never be treated as a mother or wife. Even the Das children felt this way:

> She really had not the qualities required by a mother or a wife. Even the children did not believe she had. Looking at her, they could not blame the husband for going away to England and dying. Aunt Mira would not have made a wife. What does make a wife? Why, they felt, a wife is someone like their mother who raised her eyes when the father rose from the table and dropped them when he sat down; who spent long hours at a dressing-table before a mirror, amongst jars and bottles that smelt sweet and into which she dipped questing fingers and drew out the ingredients of a wife—sweet-smelling but soon rancid; who commanded servants and chastised children and was obeyed like a queen. Aunt Mira had none of these attributes.

> Sticklike, she whipped her sari about her, jammed a few long steel pins into the little knot of hair on her head, and was dressed in an instant, ready to fly. She neither commanded nor chastised, and was certainly never obeyed. She was not soft or scented or sensual. She was bony and angular, wrinkled and desiccated—like a stick, or an ancient tree to which they adhered.
>
> (PP. 110-111)

Traditional Indian values are brought out cleverly and subtly by Desai through the treatment Mira-Masi gets from her family. When the Das children ask their mother why Mira-Masi always wore white, she explains, "that white was the widow's colour" (P. 108).

Alamgir Hashmi says that there is a "pallid light which hangs over the holy Indian matrimony" in *Clear Light of Day.*

> Jaya and Sarla do not live with their husbands and are probably divorced, though it cannot be said openly; their two brothers cannot keep their wives with them because the wives cannot stand them and would rather stay in the brighter lights of New Delhi; Tara's mother and father seemed no great success as a married couple and they spent most of their time at the club, playing cards or bridge; Aunt Mira was maltreated by her husband's relatives after his death, so marriage is no partner-indemnity insurance either; Bim vows never to marry because marriage seems to deter or replace all normal and healthy pursuits such as study and active life (for Jaya and Sarla); Tara's marriage, ostensibly happy, remains an "instrument of escape" rather than a positive, desirable achievement. Bim says in Section III that "(Jaya and Sarla) might find marriage isn't enough to last them the whole of their lives." True enough, it turns out to be inadequate even for a short time, as the two sisters now live at their father's house.[5]

As early as Part II of the novel, we come to know that Mira-Masi is gradually becoming an alcoholic, she gets addicted to Brandi which was initially recommended to her for medicinal purposes. The mental derangement that has slowly set into Mira-Masi is clearly revealed in the episode when Bim and Baba go over to check out Hyder Ali's locked house. When they return home, Raja tells them that Mira-Masi is in a bad state:

> Raja had bolted the door on the outside. Drawing back the bolt, Bim threw open the door, then quickly shut it behind her so that no one should come in, for aunt Mira was in a disgraceful state, a state no one should see her in. She had clawed off her clothes from her body so that her blouse hung in strips from the little shrivelled flaps of her blue-veined breasts and her sari trailed behind her on the floor as she lurched about the room in a kind of halting dance, her feet getting tangled in the torn muslin that lay everywhere, her one hand jerking at her side while the other held onto a glass of what smelt unmistakably like raw, undiluted liquor. Yes, there was the brandy bottle, nearly empty, on the floor by her bed.
>
> (P. 77)

There is another episode where Mira-Masi runs naked whipping herself saying, "Oh God—the rats, the rats! Rats, lizards, snakes—they are eating me –oh, they are eating me-" (P. 96). Dr. Biswas is called for help and it is during this visit that he notices the responsibilities that Bim has to deal with alone. (For details on the Bim/Biswas relationship see note on Dr. Biswas in Unit 4:3 of this Block).

The alcoholic condition of Mira-Masi was the beginning of her death. The bird imagery—so central to the novel—is picked up in Mira-Masi's description while she was dying:

> She lay quite still now, shrinking and shrivelling, till she almost ceased to be human, became bird instead, an old bird with its feathers plucked, its bones jutting out from under the blue-tinged skin, too antique, too crushed to move.
>
> (P. 98)

Later, we are told that she screamed "like an owl, or a night jar starting out of the silence" (P. 99). (For the significance of bird imagery, see Unit 5:2 of this Block).

Mira-masi feels that she will drown in the well near the house. This fear is created in her by the episode of the drowning cow in the novel. It was Mira-Masi who suggested to Mrs. Das the notion of keeping a cow for fresh milk for the children. One day it drowned in the well. Mira-Masi felt guilty about it. She used to say, "she would drown herself" (P. 41). The image of the drowning cow shows her lack of control over herself. The cow coalesces with the white horse in the novel lending a richness to the imagery (see section on imagery, Unit 5:2).

The personalities of Bim and Tara are brought into sharper focus in relation to their treatment of Mira-Masi; although Tara was more attached to her, it is Bim who nurtures her through her illness. Tara's guilt in not nursing her is brought out when towards the end of the novel she tells Bim:

> She had not even thought of Aunt Mira, had not once worried about her. Not till after her death. And of that she heard only after the funeral. 'I didn't even come to the funeral,' she wailed.
>
> (P. 174)

Mira-Masi's spirit haunts Bim as well. For a very long time Bim

> continued to see her, was certain that she saw her: the shrunken little body naked, triling a torn shred of a nightie, a wisp of pubic hair, as she sliped surreptitiously along the hedge, head bent low as if she hoped no one would notice her as she hurried towards the well..
>
> (P. 100)

Bim connects what she had read in Raja's copy of *The Waste Land* "Who is the third who walks always beside you?" with "(Mira-masi') small shadow thrown by a subliminal ghost that existed in the corner of the eye" (P. 100).

After Mira-Masi' death it is Bim and Raja who go to cremate her. References are made to Mira Masi at the end of the novel. When Tara's daughters come Bim tells Tara that she needs time with her nieces. Tara says, "You can have all the time you want with them...and influence them as much as you like. In our family, aunts have that prerogative. Like Mira-Masi had" (P. 174). We are also told that Baba shifts into Mira-masi's room (P. 12) and about her ashes been thrown into the "Jumna" (P. 24).

BAKUL

Bakul is married to Tara, the younger Das sister. He had met her at the Roshanara Club while he was still a trainee for the Indian Foreign Service. When the novel begins Bakul is visiting Delhi with his wife. Their two daughters are said to join them later.

Bakul, though a minor character, makes important contributions to the novel. It is through him that Desai gives us an outsider's perspective on the Das family. We first meet him in the Das house having morning tea with Bim, Tara and Baba. He appears withdrawn:

> While the two women sat upright and tense and seethed with unspoken speech, the two men seemed dehydrated, emptied out, with not a word to say about anything.
>
> (P. 9)

He gets bored and restless and gets irritated with his wife for wanting to sit with her brother and sister "doing nothing" (P. 11). In fact, through Bakul, Desai throws light on the personalities of the Das sisters. He is surprised by his wife's behaviour the moment she is with her own family. He tells her: "So, I only have to bring you home for a day, Tara, and you go back to being the hopeless person you were before I married you" (P. 17). Unlike Tara who gives in to apathy easily, Bakul fights it:

> Bakul said one could rise above the climate, that one could ignore it if one filled one's mind with so many thoughts and activities that there was no room for it. "Look at me,' he had said the winter that they froze in Moscow. 'I don't let the cold immobilize me, do I?'
>
> (P. 21)

Over a period of time, Bakul, has made Tara into an:

> active, organized woman who looked up her engagement book every morning, made plans and programmes for the day ahead and then walked her way through them to retire to her room at night, tired with the triumphant tiredness of the virtuous and the dutiful.
>
> (P. 21)

That Bakul and their daughters have influenced Tara is evident from her observation when Baba refuses to respond to her question whether he would go to office:

> He kept his head lowered, smiling slightly, sadly.
> 'Never?'
> The room rang with her voice, then with silence...She herself had been taught, by her husband and by her daughters, to answer questions, to make statements, to be frank and to be precise. They would have none of these silences and shadows. Here things were left unsaid and undone. It was what they called 'Old Delhi decadence.'
>
> (P. 13)

Bakul's reason for visiting Delhi is to keep up with his Indian roots,. He tells Bim, during one of the evenings at their neighbour, Misra's place, " part of me lives here, the deepest part of me, always" (P. 36). When the older Misra son asks Bakul as to how he explains the poverty and corruption in India to foreigners, Bakul responds, "why talk of local politics, party disputes, election malpractices?' (P. 35). Hashmi notes:

> Bakul, though a representative of India abroad, distrusts Indian travel-agency arrangements and grumbles about the Old Delhi decadence.
> Bakul is a flat character, a member of the Indian Foreign Service, a type that is practical, alert, and competent, but unimaginative and insipid; one that **believes in projecting** India abroad as "The Taj Mahal, the Bhagavad Gita, **Indian philosphy**, music, art, the great, immortal values of ancient India." He **asks, "But why talk** of local politics, party disputes, election malpractices, **Nehru, his duaghter, his grandson**--such matters as will soon pass into **oblivion?**' (P. 35).
> **Official hypoerisy and shallow** idealism which obstruct a realistic appraisal **of things as they are, say, for Bim, thus** become part of the Old Delhi decadebce. although Bakul likes to thinki of himeslf as one belonging to the mor aware and advance world of New Delhi.

Through this conversation about India, **Desai subtly tells us about the " reality" that is** India and its "imagined reality" packaged abroad **by non-resident Indians. In the** post-colonial context this juxtaposition serves several purposes. For one, it shows the crucial juncture in which the country is situated, India-stripped of its colonial ties. floundering to find a direction. For another, Desai points out to us that neo-colonialism is a new reality in post-independent India:

> The Misra brothers and sisters were not interested in the subtleties underlying such exchanges. One brother wanted to know 'what is the price of good whisky in Washington? Not that terrible thing called bourbon but scotch—can you get scotch?' and the sisters asked Tara where she had bought her chiffon sari and her leather bag, and for how much.
>
> (P. 37)

This thread of neo-colonialism runs through the novel (for details see Unit 3:2 of this Block).

Bakul's most significant role in the novel is his request to Tara to arrange for Bim and Raja to meet in order to sort out their misunderstandings over the letter that Raja had written to her after he had inherited Hyder Ali's property:

> 'What is the matter with her?' asked Bakul, realizing Tara had to talk. He had his own suspicions about Bim but thought better of telling them to Tara. 'Is it that business with Sharma you told me about? Surely it can't be –she's been dealing with him for years.'
>
> 'It can't be that then,' Tara agreed. 'It seems to be Raja again, as far as I can see.'
>
> 'What, haven't they made up that quarrel yet? Bakul asked in a bored voice. Really, the house had an atmosphere—a chilling one, like a cementery. I can't even remember what it was about – it was so long ago'. It wasn't really a quarrel-it was a letter-; it's just that Bim can't forget old grudges. They make her so miserable—I wish I could end them for her.'
>
> Bakul paid her some attention now. He could always find a solution to any problem he liked to think. He rather relished problems. He relished solving them for anyone as easily impressed as Tara. He thought how nice it would be to have Tara stop looking so preoccupied and concerned and be impressed by him instead. Really, it was a night of Persian glamour and beauty. They should be sitting together in the moonlight, looking together the moon that hung over the garden like some great priceless pearl, flawed and blemished with gray shadowy ridges as only a very great beauty can risk being. Why were they worrying instead about Bim, and Raja? He came and stood close to Tara, his large solid thighs in their white pyjamas just before her eyes like two solid pillars, and his cigar glowing between two fingers. ' You must arrange for them to meet and speak,' he said in a thick, rich voice.
>
> (P. 159)

As the novel progresses, one event leads to another and Bim "with her inner eye" sees how "her known house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences" (P. 182)

DR. BISWAS

Dr. Biswas has a functional role to play in the novel. He is the doctor sent by Mr. Das' firm to treat Raja's tuberculosis. Later, he also treats Mira-Masi's alcoholism. He gradually becomes like a family doctor to the Das'. The first mention of a doctor is made in Part II of *Clear Light of Day*, when he comes to examine Raja who had

fallen ill. He diagnoses Raja as suffering from T.B. A more detailed description of the doctor is given when he makes his next visit to the Das'. We learn that he was a "soft-spoken and awkward young Bengali, sent by their father's partner" (P. 67).

Dr. Biswas, though a minor character in the novel, his sporadic presence is used very effectively by Desai. For one he gives us an outsider's viewpoint of Bim. During one of his visits to the Das home, when Bim asks him about Raja's recovery period, he says:

> 'I see, I see it all,' Dr. Biswas hurried on, staring hard at his shoes, making the most of this unusual burst of courage while it lasted. 'There are great problems. Your father—the house—the family—Raja's illness—it is all too much for a young lady. Raja must recover, he must take his father's place—'.
>
> (P. 68)

This throws light on Bim and the circumstances within which she is situated. For another, it is to him that Bim unfolds her future plans. When he asks her to consider nursing as a profession, she says:

> 'It's all I do,'...
> Of Course, of course,' he stammered, flushing. ' I meant-....have you considered it as a profession? You do it so –so excellently.'
> 'No,' she assured him. 'What I think I shall do—I mean when Raja is well again and I have the time—I think I'll go back to college and finish my history course that I dropped when my aunt too fell ill, and when I get my degree—I might teach,' she ended up in a rush, the idea having just come to her as in a natural sequence of affairs.
>
> (P. 85-86)

The importance of music in the novel has been already dealt within this unit. Dr. Biswas contributes immensely to it. (See Unit 4:2 of this unit). At one level, Dr. Biswas is used by Desai to demonstrate the neocolonial strain that emerges in post independent India (see Unit 3:2 of this Block).

Interestingly, Desai plays upon the Bim/Biswas relationship in the novel. She makes the readers believe that something may develop between them. That Dr. Biswas is interested in Bim is evident from the way he responds to her. He feels shy and nervous in her presence as is evident when Bim asks him to play the violin. It

> embarrassed him so much that he became quite agitated. Dropping his bag, spilling his stethoscope, he fumbled about on the floor, picked them up, mumbling 'Oh no. impossible. You won't – I can't – you don't really—it won't –no, no, no. I can't play. Miss Das, instead—I will be so honoured—will you come—can you—a concert-you will hear—it will be—I would like—'
>
> (P. 83)

When he takes her to the concert by the Delhi Music Society, he reveals details about his background. His mother, he says, was an "old-fashioned Bengali lady" who loved "Tagore songs" (P.84). both mother and son lived in a flat in Daryaganj. Dr. Biswas' sister was married and settled in Calcutta. We also come to know of his stint in Germany for higher studies and; how "the whole world of music unfolded" to him there (P. 83). Along with medicine he also learns the violin there.

Aithough Dr. Biswas sees himself as a rescuer vis-à-vis Bim, she doesn't view him the same way. She gets increasingly bored by him. When they go to Davico's restaurant after the concert, she says, "Now we must go,... I've never left Raja alone

for so long on Mira-Masi'" (P. 85). But Dr. Biswas is **all admidration for her.** He **thanks her profusely for going out with him for the evening;**

> 'You don't know—you can't possibly know what it has meant to me. Only please do come with me again—
>
> 'Oh, I don't know,' cried Bim in a panic, and pushed at the gate so that he had to let go of the catch to save his fingers. Hurrying through, she shut the gate between them. 'It's really not right for me to have been out for so long—with Raja ill—and my aunt—you know my aunt-'
>
> 'Yes, yes, but you can't be a slave to them. I can't be a slave to my mother. We must be ourselves. We must go out, have a little rest, some refreshment. Miss Das' he gulped, ' come and meet my mother, please.'
>
> (P. 87)

In the last part of the novel when Tara is feeling very upset for Bim because she sees her as being caught in a trap in the Das household, she asks Bim, "Oh, and Bim, do you ever see Dr.-Dr.—what was his name?" and Bim tells her flatly, "Dr. Biswas—No, I haven't seen him since Mira Masi died" (P. 152).

The relationship between Dr. Biswas and Bim may not develop in the novel, but he does, have an impact on her. She acts on a hint thrown by him about helping in a clinic for women in Kingsway camp for refugees (P. 88). It is again through Dr. Biswas that we hear of Gandhi's murder. The reference to this period in India. It adds to the political dimension of the novel. (See, Unit 3:2 of this Block).

4.4 LET US SUM UP

Having highlighted the story line of Part III of the novel, we have dealt with themes and issues which have been intricately webbed in the story line. Music for one has an important role to play in *Clear Light of Day*. We have also discussed the roles of Mira Masi, Bakul and Dr. Biswas who lend support to the storyline.

4.5 QUESTIONS

1. Highlight the important events in the storyline of Part III of the novel.
2. Music plays an important role in *Clear Light of Day*, comment.
3. Critically comment on the roles of Mira-Masi, Bakul, and Dr. Biswas.

References

[1]Syed Amanuddin. "Bridging the Polarities of Imagination And Reason in *Clear Light of Day*," *The Fiction of Anita Desai Indian women Novelists set I*: Vol II. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. P.218.

[2]Ibid; p.221.

[3]Ibid; p.221.

[4]Ibid; pp. 128-129.

[5]A. Hashmi. "*Clear Light of Day* Between India and Pakistan," ed. Viney Kirpal. *The New Indian Novel in English*. Delhi: Allied, 1990. P.70.

[6]Ibid; p. 69.

UNIT 5 ANITA DESAI'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Detailed storyline of Part IV
5.2 Imagery in *Clear Light of Day*
5.3 The Das Neighbours: Alis and Misras
5.4 Anita Desai's contribution to Indian-English Fiction
5.5 Let Us Sum Up
5.6 Questions
5.7 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will begin with a detailed storyline of Part-IV of *Clear Light of Day*. It will then discuss the imagery in the novel in some detail and move on to a discussion of the Das neighbours: the Alis and the Misras. Unit 5: 4 will highlight Anita Desai's contribution to Indian English fiction. The Unit will conclude with a select bibliography and questions.

5.1 DETAILED STORYLINE OF PART IV OF *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

Part IV begins with a dust storm "raging outside" which is symbolic of the storm in the Das family and in the nation. The two sisters are busy. Tara was trying to write a letter to her daughters before their arrival in India. Bim was concentrating on her college work. Tara wanted Bim and her to "put their papers aside and sit in a companionable dusk" (P. 142). She was keen that Bim accompany her husband and children to Raja's daughter's wedding in Hyderabad. Bim refuses but Tara persists saying that she should attend the wedding.

In this section we get details about Raja's married life. He has four daughters and a son, Aijaz. Reference is also made in this section about a visit Raja had made with his family to Bim and Baba. The Bee episode which was mentioned earlier, is raked up again by Tara. She feels guilty for having abondoned her sister when the Bees attacked her. Tara wanted to ask Bim for "forgiveness and understanding , not simply forgetfulness and incomprehension" (P. 150).

Bim's feeling of rejection by her family surfaces in this section:

> All these years she had felt herself to be the centre-- she had watched them all circling in the air, then returning, landing like birds, folding up their wings and letting down their legs till they touched solid ground. Solid ground. That was what the house had been-- the lawn, the rose walk, the guava trees, the veranda: Bim's domain... They had needed her as much as they had needed the sound of the pigeons in the veranda and the ritual of the family gathering on the lawn in the evening.
>
> (P. 153)

It is in this section that a letter arrives from one Mr. Sharma who works in the Das office, requesting one of the Das children to attend an important meeting which will determine the future of the firm. Bim feels helpless and expresses a desire to sell the family shares. Tara asks her to consult the other family members before taking any hasty step. Bim gets furious that Raja has abandoned his family responsibilities and left her to cope with all the problems. She eventually takes out her anger against Baba:

> All afternoon her anger swelled and spread, acquiring demonic proportions. It was like the summer itself, rising to its peak, or like the mercury in the barometer that hung on the veranda wall, swelling and bulging and glinting.
>
> Then Baba, shaded and sequestered in his own room, played 'Don't Fence Me In' once too often. It was what Bim needed to break her in two, decapitate her with anger. Clutching at her throat, she strode into his room and jerked the needle-head off the record and twisted back the arm. In the silence that gaped like a wound left by a tooth that has been pulled, she said in a loud, loose voice, 'I want to have a talk with you, Baba. You'll have to leave that off and listen to me, and sitting down in a canvas chair by his bed, she rattled down a straight line aimed at Baba, shocked and confused before her, like a train racing down a line, driven by a mad driver. She could not look at Baba's widening eyes, more white than black, as she rattled on, straight at him, for he was the target she had chosen to hit --and hit and hit. She was telling him of her idea of selling their shares of the firm to Sharma, using that as a line on which to run. 'If I sell, it'll mean the end of that part of our income. It was too small to count anyway, but it did cover some of the expenses. With my salary, I'll be able to pay the rent, keep on the house, I'll manage--but I might have to send you to live with Raja. I came to ask you--what would you think of that?' She was hitting the target now--hitting and hitting it. 'Are you willing to go and live with Raja in Hyderabad?'
>
> Then Bim's rage was spent at last. It had reached its peak, its acme, like a great glittering wave that had hovered over everyone and that now collapsed, fell on the sand and seeped away, leaving nothing but a soggy shadow in the shape of Baba's silence.
>
> (PP. 163-164)

It is after this episode that Bim realizes that it is her own inadequacy which makes her attack the innocent and defenseless. She admits that, "I myself haven't been able to manage on my own" (P. 191). This realisation makes her achieve a spiritual wholeness by accepting and loving people for what they are. In *Clear Light of Day* she sees that the "soil contained all time, past and future in it. It was where her deepest self lived, and the selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her" (P. 182). It is this realisation that also makes her find her own social relevance.

5.2 IMAGERY IN *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

What lends a richness to Desai's novels is her powerful use of imagery. Nature, which includes animals, plants and birds, has a strong presence in almost all her works. Known in Indian-English fiction for ushering in the psychological novel, Desai uses external landscapes to portray interior states of mind. In *Cry, the Peacock*, the complexities of Maya's inner life is effectively brought out through the landscape as is her resentment against her husband for his inability to communicate with her. Baba, the autistic son, in *Clear Light of Day* is described as a "harmless garden spider" (P. 40). In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* The island people are described as goats ("neighed the goats" P.11) as they listen to Moses. Moses himself

is described as having "eyes like porpoises" (P. 139). In *Fire on the Mountain* the recurrent image of the "hen" accretes meaning in the feminine world of Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. Desai's very first novel uses peacock in its title--*Cry, the Peacock*. She uses peacocks, who are said to fight before they mate--"Living they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life" --to demonstrate the merging of myth and reality in the central character, Maya's mind.

Desai's *Clear Light of Day* abounds in all sorts of imagery. The novel begins with the koels singing: "Their voices rang out from the dark trees like an arrangement of bells, calling and echoing each others' calls. More and more joined in as the sun rose..." (P. 1) and ends with Mulk's guru singing the poetry of Iqbal. Syed Amanuddin notes that between the singing of the koels and the musical rendering of Iqbal's poetry, "we have the scratches and squeaks of old records (P.218). These scratches and squeaks are the tensions and problems of a family and a nation breaking up. (For a detailed essay on the importance of Music imagery in the novel see Unit 4:2). The sandstorm raging at the opening of Part IV is emblematic of the ensuing emotional storm in the Das sisters. (For details of personal storms paralleling national storms see Unit 3:2).

In *Clear Light of Day*, through memory and recall, Desai brings out the inner repressions of her characters. She lays their feelings and emotions bare to us. The animal imagery in her novel is suggestive of the core of her characters. For example, people listening to Mulk's songs are like cooing "pigeons" (38). When Baba ventures out to the main road and returns soon after, he is described as a "thirsty dog" (P. 15). As Jasbir Jain Says:

> There are other images and sounds and levels--the coppersmiths in the garden, of the crickets keeping Bim and Baba company after Raja's departure, of a dog pouncing on a flea, of the bees attacking Bim, of mynahs quarrelling, and 'pigeons beginning to mutter comfortably to each other in the verandah' (P. 146). The world of the novels is a world which is quite comfortable with the world of nature, and interacts with it with a fair amount of ease.[1]

The two most significant episodes in the novel--the drowning of the cow and the attack by the bees--have to do with animals and nature. The well and the cow drowning in it occurs in both *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and *Clear Light of Day*. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita's father had got the well dry for the islanders but later a cow fell and died in it. In *Clear Light of Day*,it was Mira Masi who suggested to Mrs. Das the notion of keeping a cow so that the children could have fresh milk. One day it drowned in the well and Mira Masi felt very guilty about it. The memory of this cow lingers on in the minds of the Das children. The drowning of the cow symbolizes Mira Masi's own loss of control over herself as it also signifies a new phase in the lives of the Das children, because its drowning is simultaneous with the deaths of their parents and the disintegration of the family. As J.P. Tripathi says,

> Most haunting among the images in the novel is that of the well which becomes the symbol of death and a blind alley. The cow was drowned in it and never taken out so it becomes the symbol of nausea also. The symbolical meaning is brought out in the following words: 'The novel of the world it was, secret and hidden in thick folds of grass, from which they all emerged and to which they must return, crawling on their hands and knees.' It is thus associated with the cosmic system of death and destruction. The image is often involved and is associated with bottomless darkness and stench. It is also associated with ghosts and spirits.[2]

Interestingly, Desai coalesces the white horse on which Ali is first glimpsed at with the cow. The white horse represents the glamour of India's mogul past. It is this

image that inspires Raja to become like Ali. Later, we are told, that Raja's son gets a "white pony" as a gift from him.

The Bee episode--when Bim was attacked by the bees--and Tara abandoned her and escaped, is recalled by Tara several times in the novel. Her escape from the attack of bees is a prelude to her escape through marriage to Bakul from family responsibilities.

Light/shade imagery is important in *Clear Light of Day*. Light is associated with going out and freedom. When Bim teases Tara for saying that nothing had changed in the Das household she says:

> 'But you wouldn't want to return to life as it used to be, would you?'
>
> Still frowning, Tara murmured meaninglessly 'Prefer to what?'
>
> 'Oh, to going on -to growing up-leaving-going away-into the world-something wider, freer-brighter, 'Bim laughed.
>
> (P. 4)

Light is also associated with affection. It is in *Clear Light of Day* that Bim realises how she could make her alienated self connected again: "The bright light of day cut into her temples, leaving a wake of pain" (P. 172). She opens herself to the light of affection: "There was nothing left in the way of a barrier or a shadow, only the clear light pouring down from the sun. They might be floating in the light" (P. 177). (For imagery associated with music and politics in the novel see Unit 3:2 and Unit 4:3)

5.3 THE DAS NEIGHBOURS : ALIS AND MISRAS

ALIS

Hyder Ali, the neighbour and landlord of the Das', is one of the most important minor characters in the novel. The first mention of him is made in Part I when Bim and Tara recall their childhood. Tara reminds Bim of the times when Raja and she played on the banks of the 'Jumna." Bim reminisces saying,

> and the white horse riding by, Hyder Ali Sahib up on it, high above us, and his peon running in front of him, shouting, and his dog behind him, barking?' She laughed quite excitedly, seeing it again, this half-remembered picture. 'We stood up to watch them go past and he wouldn't even look at us. the peon shouted to us to get out of the way. I think Hyder Ali Sahib used to think of himself as some kind of prince, a nawab. And Raja loved that.'
>
> (P. 25)

In Part III of the novel another reference is made to Ali on his horse on the banks of the "Jumna." When Raja and Bim would slowly trudge back home, they would hear the shouts of a man in khaki uniform:

> 'Hato! Hato!' shouted a man in a khaki uniform and a scarlet turban, and pounded past them on urgent heels, making way for a white horse that loomed up out of the dunes and floated by with a dimmed roar of hoof beats on the sand, followed by a slim golden dog with a happy plume of a tail waving in the purple air. The papas grass bent and parted for this procession and then rustled silkily upright into place again.
>
> (P. 122)

These vignettes of Ali on his horse are significant. Throgh Ali, Desai shows us the more aristoeratic, decadent form of life in old Delhi in pre-partition times. We are told by Desai that Ali was " either out on business or in his office room adjoining the library, going through his letters and files with a pair of clerks, for he was the owner of much property in Old Delhi and this seemed to entail an endless amount of paper work (P 48).



Partition

Ali has a tremendous impact on Raja. Bim tells us that "Hyder Ali Sahib was always Raja's ideal, " (P. 25). Raja's first actual meeting with Hyder Ali mentioned in Part II of *Clear Light of Day*. When Ali hears of Raja's interest in Urdu poetry, he invites him to his "substantial library housed in a curious tower-like protruberance built at one corner of his bungalow" (P. 47). It is through Raja's visits to the Alis that his interest in Islamic studies is nurtured. His visits also make him part of their social circle. Most importantly, he meets Benazir, Ali's daughter and his future wife, during one of his library visits to the Ali home.

That Raja is interested in Benazir is clear from a flashback conversation between Bim and Raja in Part II of the novel. Raja, who is bedridden from T.B. tells Bim, " I wish I could go and see her" (P. 59). In fact, it is after his marriage to Benazir and he inherits Ali's property, that the final drift between Bim and him takes place. (For details see Unit 3 note on Raja). Of course, Ali had already started having an impact on Raja. This is expressed most dramatically in his abandoning his family responsibilities and leaving for Hyderabad to be with Ali. (For details, see Unit 3 note on Raja).

Details about Raja and his family are given to us in Part IV of the novel. He has four daughters and a son and it is to Raja and Benazir's daughter, Moyna's wedding, that Tara and her family have come to India. In this sense, Ali's grandchild is the structural reason for the meeting of Bim and Tara--the two central characters of *Clear Light of Day*. The story in the novel unfolds itself through their conversations and reminiscences. The HMV gramaphone that Baba constantly plays also belongs to Benazir. (See Unit 3 Note on Music)

Desai tells us about Ali's death very early in the novel through a letter Raja sends to Bim. Through Tara's response to the letter, Desai skillfully tells us about Ali's background:

> It took Tara some minutes to think out all the implications of this letter. To begin with, she studied the date and tried to recall when Hyder Ali had died. Instead a series of pictures of the Hyder Ali family flickered in the half-dark

> of the room. There was Hyder Ali, once their neighbour and their landlord, as handsome and stately as a commissioned oil painting hung over a mantelpiece, all in silver and grey and scarlet as he had been on the white horse on which he rode along the river bank in the evenings while the children stood and watched. He had cultivated the best roses in Old Delhi and given parties to which poets and musicians came. Their parents were not amongst his friends. Then there was his daughter Benazir, a very young girl, plump and pretty, a veil thrown over her head as she hurried into the closed carriage that took her to school, and the Begum whom they seldom say, she lived in the closed quarters of the house, but at Id sent them, and their other tenant-neighbours, rich sweets covered with fine silver foil on a tray decked with embroidered napkins. They had lived in the tall stucco house across the road, distinguished from all the others by its wealth of decorative touches like the coloured fanlight above the front door, the china tiles along the veranda walls and the coloured glass chandeliers and lamps. They had owned half the houses on that road. When they left Delhi during the partition riots of 1947, they sold most of these houses to their Hindu tenants for a song--all except for Bim's house which she did not try to buy and which she continued to let to her at the same rent as before. It was to this that Raja, his only son-in-law and inheritor of his considerable property, referred in his letter. It was a very old letter.
>
> (PP. 27-28)

Through this background, Desai cleverly weaves in the political backdrop of her novel, viz. The partition riots of 1947. (For details , see Unit 3:2 of this workbook).

THE MISRAS

The Misras, like the Alis, are the neighbours of the Das'. But friendship between the two families was "formal and never close" (P. 136). They are introduced through music in the novel: "Walking up the Misra's driveway, they could hear... the sounds of the music and dance lessons that the Misra sisters gave in the evenings after their little nursery school had closed for the day" (P. 30). The importance of music in the novel is discussed in detail in Unit 4:2 of this workbook.

The Misras contribute to the novel in important ways. The Misra sisters, Jaya and Sarla, act as foils to the Das sisters, Bim and Tara. They are described as, "two grey-haired, spectacled, middle aged women" (P. 30). The Misra sisters are a few years older than the Das girls. They all went to the same school and would occasionally do their homework together. Yet, "they had always regarded--or at least Bim had--the Misra girls as too boring to be cultivated" (P. 62). Tara, unlike Bim, gets drawn to the hustle and the bustle of the Misra home. Like her brother, Raja, who loved visiting Hyder Ali's home, Tara gets happiness from the Misra home. Theirs was a large family with people in and out of the house:

> What attracted Tara was the contrast their home provided to hers. Even externally there were such obvious differences--at the Misras' no attempt was made, as at Tara's house, to 'keep up appearances.' They were so sure of their solid, middle-class bourgeos position that it never occurred to them to prove it or substantiate it by curtains at the windows, carpets on the floors, solid pieces of furniture placed at regular intervals, plates that matched each other on the table, white uniforms for the house servants and other such appurtenances considered indispensable by Tara's parents.
>
> (P. 137)

It is through the Misra sisters and their various visits to the Roshanara Club, that Tara meets Bakul, her future husband. When she introduces him to Bim for the first time she says, "This is Bakul.... 'The Misras--the Misras--' she stammered. 'took us to the Roshonara Club. There was a dance' (P. 63).

Unlike the Das sisters, the Misra sisters are very conservative. They get engaged and married very early, even before they could go to college for a degree. When Bim hears from Tara about their future plans, she says "I don't know why the're in such a hurry to get married,... why don't they go to college instead?"(P. 140) Soon after marriage, Jaya and Sarla are abandoned by their husbands and they return to live with their old father and brothers who have also been abandoned by their wives. To earn a living, Jaya and Sarla run a nursery school by day and teach dance and music to children in the evenings. Through them, Desai portrays yet another notion of Indian womanhood; women, abandoned and exploited by their own families. The older Misra tells Bim that in a way she reminds him of his own daughters who selflessly work for others.

Jaya Misra is particularly important because she gives an insight into Bim's personality. During one of Jaya's little visits to Tara, the latter conveys her worries about Bim. She says, "Bim is--is in a strange mood these days, ...I'm worried about her, Jaya" (P. 161). Jaya immediately retorts that she should not worry because "Bim has her own mind. Bim always did. You were always so different, you two sisters" (P. 162). This little conversation depics the problematic aspect in the central relationship of the novel viz. The Bim/Tara relationship. This relationship is discussed separately in Unit 2:4 of this workbook.

The Misra brothers sit idle. Their father describes them as "fat, lazy slobs" (P. 32). Brij Misra could not be successful as a manager of a firm because he did not want to associate with Punjabis from Pakistan as they did not hail from old families in prestigious Old Delhi. Mulk Misra wanted to pursue his hobby as a singer. His father tells Bim about him:

> 'And look at Mulk--our great musician--all he does is wave his hand in the air and look at the stars in the daytime sky, and sing. Sing!He only wants to sing. Why? For whom? Who asked him to sing? Nobody. He just wants to, that is all. He doesn't think anyone should ask him to work or earn money--they should only ask him to sing.'
>
> (P. 33)

Mulk's idealistic and pleasure loving manner is brought out beautifully when Desai describes Mulk's reactions to the absence of the harmonium and the tabla players at one of the social evenings at their place. (For details see discussion on Music in Unit 4:2 of this Block). In a sense the Misra family becomes symbolic of the decadent values of Old Delhi.

The Misras are also associated with two major episodes in the novel. The first episode is the Bee episode at Lodi gardens and the second, is the musical evening at the Misras which Bim and Baba attend at the end of the novel. Both these episodes are central to the novel in that, they throw a flood of light on both its characters and its theme.

The Bee episode at Lodi gardens started with a picnic. Jaya and Sarla Misra had invited Bim and Tara for a picnic. Two young men had also been invited as "possible suitors" for the Misra sisters. The picnic "had been arrranged to give their first meeting an air of informality" (P. 134). Bim and Tara felt uncomfortable with the group and decided to go for a walk to one of the tombs. While in one of the smaller tombs they were attacked by bees. Tara ran out leaving Bim behind. When she turned back she saw Bim had "her head bent and her arms crossed over her face... She seemed locked into the hive, as if she were the chosen queen, made prisoner" (P.135). Tara, later, feels guilty about this incident. She feels that she should have not left her sister and escaped from the ugly scene. Desai uses this episode in the novel to show Tara's escapist tendencies and also to throw light on the subtle undercurrents in the Bim/Tara relationship.

The other important episode associated with the Misras is at the end of the novel. Bim, who has drifted away from her brother Raja, over a letter that he had sent her from Hyderabad, after he inherited Hyder Ali's property is feeling increasingly alienated and alone. Tara and her family have just left for Hyderabad to attend the wedding of Moyna, Raja's daughter. When the Misras invite her to attend a musical evening at their place, she takes Baba and goes for it. There she hears Mulk Misra and his guru sing and realizes with her:

> inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences--not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same secret darkness.
>
> (P. 182)

Her own past falls into a pattern for her. The central theme of the novel of change and continuity is brought out effectively through this episode at the Misras place. (for details see Unit 2.1 of this Block)

5.4 ANITA DESAI'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN-ENGLISH FICTION

Anita Desai is one of the major voices in modern Indian-English fiction. In his selection of women writers, K.R. Shrinivasa Iyengar included a critique of Desai's fiction and stated that her first two novels, *Cry the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* have" added a new dimension to the achievement of the Indian women writers in India". This dimension takes multiple forms:

1. In Desai's novels there is a shift from the collective to the personal, from the communal to the individual. Unlike Jhabvala's novels where the social dimension is more important than the characters, and Markandaya's novels where the stress is on the economic and social background, Desai's novels highlight individual characters: their inner worlds and sensibilities. Her first two novels: *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the city* are said to have ushered in the psychological novel in Indian-English fiction.

2. Desai's heroines represent the "creative release of feminine sensibility" which began to emerge after World War II. Her women characters are not ordinary, mainstream women but are mostly from affluent families and do not have to worry about daily subsistence. They are more concerned with their emotional needs. Desai explores the inner world of her heroines and reveals the deeper forces at work in creating the feminine sensibility.

3. The journey to selfhood and freedom are important contributions made by Desai to Indian-English fiction. The motif of self exploration runs through all her novels (See Unit 1:2 for the list of her novels). This self exploration was new, especially for women characters, in the fiction of the sixties.

4. Since Desai's emphasis is on the inner world of her characters rather than the outer world of action, she uses the stream of consciousness technique to delineate her characters. The subtle nuances of the emotional world of her characters are reflected in syntax and imagery. (For details about Desai's techniques see Unit 2:3for Note on imagery see Unit 5:2 of this Block)

5. The new emergent woman of the seventies is demonstrated best in the heroines of Desai's novels. The self sacrificing and patient Rukmini of Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is displaced by intelligent, rebellious women who search for fulfillment and are willing to face the challenges of life. Maya, the heroine of *Cry, the Peacock,* is unique in resisting patriarchally defined notions of ideal womanhood. Maya is neurotic, sensitive and imaginative. The story of Maya as seen through her consciousness was new in the fiction of the late sixties.

Desai's mother characters are also not traditional, self effacing women. Sita, in *Where shall We Go this Summer?* for example, revolutionizes the concept of motherhood by refusing to give birth to her child in a hostile world. Monisha's mother in *Voices in the City* by having an extramarital affair goes against conventions and Bim's mother in *Clear Light of Day* is totally selfish and self absorbed.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

The concluding Unit in our discussion on *Clear Light of Day* began highlighting the main events in Part IV. This way the storyline which was gradually being unfolded in the earlier Unit was completed. We also discussed the use of imagery in the novel and moved on to the discussion of Das neighbours: Alis & Misras. The concluding segment of the Unit highlights Anita Desai's contribution to Indian-English fiction followed by a select bibliography. We have given you a long and comprehensive reading list here. Even if you don't go through all the books, some of these are easily available in libraries and you will find them very useful for understanding this fascinating novelist Anita Desai.

References

[1] J.P. Tripathi. *Stairs to the Attic.* Jaipur: Printwell Publishers, 1987. p. 139.

[2] J.P. Tripath. *The Mind and Art of Anita Desai.* Bareilly: Prakash Book, (1986. p.114).

[3] J.P. Tripathi. *The New Woman In Indian English: Women Writers since 1970's.* Delhi: B.R. Publishing House, 1995, p. 50.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Highlight the main events in Part IV of *Clear Light of Day.*
2. Critically comment on Desai's use of Imagery in *Clear Light of Day.*
3. Write short notes on the Das neighbours: Alis & Misras.
4. Anita Desai has contributed immensely to Indian-English fiction. Comment.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

Afzal-Khan, Fawzia. *Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel.* Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1993.

This book seeks to provide and analysis of "how binary categories of cultural classification such as Us/Them and East/West have worked in the production of knowledge and counter-knowledge within what has been a largely dominant Orientalist framework of literature and cultural study." The book studies the works of R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Salman Rushdie.

Usha Bande. *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Study in the Character and Conflict* New Delhi: Prestige, 1988.

Using the concepts of Karen Horney and Abraham Maslow, Bande gives a psychoanalytic reading of Desai's novels.

Cronin, Richard. *Imagining India.* London: Macmillan Press, 1989.

This work is a collection of writers from Kipling to Salman Rushdie and from Gandhi to Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, novelists and autobiographers: who share a single ambition--to create India by imagining it.

Jain, Jasbir. *Stairs to The Attic:* The Novels of Anita Desai. Jaipur: Printwell Publishers, 1987.

"Stairs to the Attic" is a phrase borrowed from Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* The book "focuses attention not only on Desai's thematic concerns, but also on her narrative techniques and more significantly on the lesser explored and felt psychological overtones of her works.

Meerabai, K. *Women's Vocies: The Novels of Indian Woman Writers* . Delhi: Prestige, 1996.

The book aims at a study of women characters as presented in the novels of women writers of Indian-English fiction. The book also highlights the narrative techniques used by them.

Prasad, Rajendra. *The Self, the Family and Society in Five Indian Novelists.* Prestige: Delhi, 1990.

This book studies the notion of the self, family and society in the works of Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Arun Joshi and Anita Desai.

Seshadar, Vijayalakshmi. *The New Woman in Indian-English Women Writers since the 1970s.* Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1995.

"The book addresses itself to certain socio-literary aspects and presents a case for what can be termed woman-centred class oriented Indian-English fiction by women."

Shirwadkar, Meera. *Images of Women in the Indo-AnglianNovel.* Delhi: Sterling, 1979.

The book gives a feminist approach to Indian writing in English. In her ambitious attempt to trace the evolutionary chart of the feminine experience from "girlhood to old age, from the "dark room" of the tradition Indian household to the arena of modern political and social activity, Shirwadkar has covered an astonishingly large number of novels form *Padmini* (1990) to *Two Virgins* (1975)."

Singh, Sushila. *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English.* Delhi: Prestige, 1991.

The essays discuss recent Indian-English, British, American (including Black American), and Canadian fiction under the feminsit perspective. Broadly, the essays fall into two categories--conceptual and analytical.

Walsh, William. *Indian Literature in English.* London and N.Y.: Longman, 1990

This book covers a period of over two hundred years. The book while examining the founding fathers of Indian-English literature and tracing it up to Salman Rushdie, also touches upon Indian history and culture.

Williams, Haydn Morre. *Galaxy of Indian Writings in English* Delhi: Akshat Publications, 1987.

The essays in this book talk about the part played by Indian literature in English towards social change and Indian inwardness during colonial and post colonial period.

Other Works

Dash, Sandhayrani. *Form and Vision in the Novels of Anita Desai.* Delhi: Prestige, 1996.

Lal, Malashri. *The Law of the Threshold.* Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study. 1995.

Kirpal, Viney. *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of 1980's* Delhi: Allied publishers, 1990.

Rao, Visweswara. Ed. *Indian Writing Today.* Delhi; Indian Association for English Studies, 1996.

NOTES

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MAEN-117
Indian English Literature

Block

5

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

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When Rushdie first published *Midnight's Children* in 1981, no one could have imagined what a turning point it would prove to be for the Indian English Novel.

The sheer energy, the innovations in the English language, form, theme and range of this big novel had a stunning impact. It surprised every reader across the world both in India and the West. When it won the Booker Prize, it became a bestseller anyway.

Today this novel is regarded as a trendsetter because of the influence it has had on the Indian English novels written ever since. Not only has it influenced novelists but it has also transformed the way fiction is being written in India now.

If for example you were to compare the post 1980 writers such as Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh with writers in the pre-1980's – Raja Rao or R. K. Narayan or Anita Desai or Arun Joshi - you would immediately mark the difference. And the work that has clearly been responsible for the change is *Midnight's Children* . So, today it is regarded as a very important novel. So important that every course on Indian writing in English has to include it. It may be interesting to know that soon after *Midnight's Children* was published and it had been seen by some critics as very influential book, there were a large number of scholars who still doubted its lasting value. They felt it was like a shining meteor that had blazed across the sky and would in time, die. But that was disproved when Rushdie won the *Booker of Booker's* prize for *Midnight's Children* in 1994.

So, you who are students of literature must be wondering on two counts. First, how does one judge the value of a book that has just been published. How does one evaluate a new writer? Can one or should one wait for the evaluation to come from others? Is there anything special about a new writer that set him apart and above the others? If so, what could that be? What I mean is, once a novelist is established, it is easy to say so but for any writer to get established it could take a lifetime, or happen after a writer's death as in the case of Henry James, the American novelist. Are there no parameters which can help us determine the worth of a just-arrived writer? And second, how does one decide whether a book is of lasting value? Is it the number of prizes it wins? Shakespeare's plays never won any prizes. What are readers looking for in writers they begin to admire and appreciate so much? Since the 1980s , a number of new Indian English novelists have published interesting novels and quite a few have even won national and international awards. Are we sure that these novelists are important and will last? Can all be considered as major authors? Some might say that awards are a measure of a novelist's impact. But is that the only criterion? Can't awards be manipulated, as some allege? Or, is there something else, something more fundamental that helps us decide these matters? So, are there any criteria which would help to assess texts of lasting value?

I will answer the second question first by drawing upon the example of Shakespeare since all of you would have studied some work of his. When you study Shakespearean criticism, you begin to realize that the way Shakespeare was read in his own times was very different from the way he was read in the 18th century or the way he is read today. Today, it is even possible to read him from a feminist or a post-modern perspective (though neither was available in Shakespeare's times) and yet draw substantial meaning and value from his works.

In other words, Shakespeare's plays are those works that can offer new meanings to readers of different centuries. They possess what Rene Wellek in the *Theory of literature (1976)* has called "multivalence", i.e., despite a changing readership, they have a special value for everyone. This then is the criterion for judging a well-established work.

But what about a criterion for evaluating a new work? Here, I am going to borrow from Victor Shlovsky's concept of "defamiliarization" as discussed in his essay "Art as Technique"(1917).

According to Shlovsky, great new books make unfamiliar what is familiar to readers; by using techniques which "obstruct" rather than help understanding; they force the reader to redouble her efforts to perceive its value. Such works draw attention to their strangeness through different literary devices such as word-play, syntax, metaphor, its etc.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* was just such a work and those of you who have read *Midnight's Children,* will have noticed that it has all the characteristics of "defamiliarization". It conveys the familiar through the unfamiliar, it defies comprehension, it has innovated daringly and it is certainly not an easy book to read. Its highly imaginative quality, its unconventional word-play, the disarranged syntax and spirited metaphors, its stunning fusion of oral narrative, history, fiction, non-fiction, journalism, Hindi film songs, fantasy, realism, the stream-of-consciousness make you work hard to understand what the novel is about. So, this rich, multi-layered, complex, episodic, loose and meandering novel well qualifies as a great new work of art.

Midnight's Children made a great impact when it was published. It still continues to surprise. But whether it is the greatest Indian English novel ever published, will be proven in time to come; I've given you the criterion for that already.

So get set to study this challenging and unusual novel and make up your own mind about its worth. For your help, we've provided you a detailed discussion of its major aspects through six units in this Block.

Unit One introduces you the life of Rushdie, his works and the critical reception of *Midnight's Children*. Unit Two discusses the use of English in *Midnight's Children*. Unit Three focuses on its themes. Unit Four examines the technique in *Midnight's Children*. Unit Five throws light on characterization, and Unit Six discusses this novel as a literary event and its influence on the Indian English Novelists of the 1980s and after.

Through the different Units we have tried to provide you an overview as well as to give you the guidelines on how to read the novel closely. If you complete the exercises, answer the questions set at the end of each unit and do the essential prescribed reading, you will enjoy your study of *Midnight's Children* very much. On this note let me wish you the very best and hope you enjoy reading the units and the book.

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Biographical Sketch
1.3 The Other Works of Rushdie
1.4 The title *Midnight's Children*
1.5 The Booker and *Midnight's Children*
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, the attempt is to make you feel excited about studying *Midnight's Children*. I will, therefore, give you a brief background about its author, his other works, and the critical reception of this novel.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Until the year 1980, no critic had dreamt of the magnitude of the great turnaround that the Indian English Novel would make with the publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981. There was a comparative creative quietness in the 1970s after some of the best works had been published in the 1960s. Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* with its East-West encounter as a theme became a much-discussed book, soon after its publication in 1960. Western and Indian critics wrote about it in national and international journals. The 1960s also saw the rise of a major Indian woman writer, Anita Desai. However, the 1970s gave no major writers and while a steady output kept flowing, there was nothing spectacular happening.

Midnight's Children was published in 1981 and it took readers all over the world, by storm. As the novel went on to be read in different quarters, it was clear that a very different and original talent had indeed arrived. The novel not only made an impact as a presence but it also influenced a number of writers who followed Rushdie. Consequently, it has proved to be a seminal work which has changed the very way in which Indian English novels had been written before its advent. What was so special about this novel, or so unique about its author, is what you should be able to recognize at the end of the different units that constitute this Block.

It is a well-recognized fact today that words mean different things to different people. So it is with texts be they novels or films. Everyone who reads a text, becomes its "author", as one of the contemporary critical theories goes i.e., each reader interprets a text from his own world view, value system, beliefs and perceptions so that the book is read very differently from the book wirtten by the author himself! Thus, it was with *Midnight's Children*.

The West which first celebrated its arrival and impact, admired *Midnight's Children* for very different reasons than did the readers on the Indian subcontinent. The West saw in *Midnight's Children* the influence of writers such as Gunter Grass, Milan Kundera and Gabriel Marques – writers that it had appropriated for its own. The West noted it for being the first book to come from a "Commonwealth" writer (Rushdie

hates that label) that was written in style, English and sensibility that the West wanted.

Rushdie himself has categorically denied the literary influences mentioned above and has been at pains to explain the difference. For him, "books are about the world" whereas in western postmodern writing, "the world outside the text does not exist." He has also been saying so ever since, that his book is not the product of only western (or written) literature but also of the oral narrative traditions of the east.

In the West, *Midnight's Children* was read by the lay person for being a novel that was cosmpolitan in its outlook; in India, the focus was on the veracity of the historical, politcal realities that Rushdie had presented. So much so that Rushdie had to face a court case from Mrs. Indira Gandhi for defamation and was asked to expunge an entire chapter from the novel.

Some Indian readers also contested Rushdie's use of mythological references and found fault with his novel till he clarified that the "errors" were deliberate, and a part of his technique. At the same time, there has been a large number of readers who have loved the book, loved it for the Bombay it depicts, loved it for its liveliness, creativity, innovations, and its uniqueness.

The point that I want to make here is that this novel has held an appeal for different segments of readers in different parts of the world, albeit for different reasons for the last 20 years.

What you must try to answer at the end of these Units is the question: "Do I like *Midnight's Children?*" and if the answer is "yes" than ask yourself whether or not the book has spoken to you in a certain special way and how that is different from the way it has been read before.

Having provoked you to think, I will give you some biographical details about Rushdie so that you begin understanding the making of *Midnight's Children*. However, you know why I'm asking you to give me these answers, it is ncessary that you read the book quickly at one go. My teacher for my M.A; , Professor S. Nagarajan, Head of the Department of English at Poona University, used to always say, "Before you go to any critic, first read the text." Most students do it the other way around but I found, when I followed my teachers advice, that my understanding of the text was far superior than had I depended only on critics. That's how I learnt to read a text independently of critics and their views. I would like you to do so too because you are M.A students, by which I mean you are students preparing for a career as a teacher or as researcher and for both these fields, you need to read deeply and read widely. Throughout my discussion on a *Midnight's Children* I have referred to the Picador edittion of the novel.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF SALMAN RUSHDIE



Salman Rushdie (1947-)

Here's a picture of Rushdie. As you can see, like the author who began the practice of using autobiography openly in his fiction, I am going to begin this section with a personal anecdote.

I met Salman Rushdie on 22 February 1984 in Bombay soon after he had won the annual award of India's long-lasting magazine *Gentleman* and had been invited to deliver the *Gentleman's* Annual Lecture. The award had been shared between Rushdie and Michael Fererira, the Billiards world champion. Rushdie had been invited to speak by *Gentleman* in Bombay and Delhi and this talk was organized in Bombay's Hotel President. The hall was packed to capacity. Everybody had come to see and hear the young handsome novelist of the Booker Prize fame.

Rushdie began his speech characterestically by drawing parallels between himself and his own character Saleem (*Midnight's Children*). He said that very much like Saleem who had shared the hour of his birth (with Shiva, another character in the book), so had Rushdie shared the *Gentleman's* award with Michael Fereira. Thus on a light note, Rushdie set the magic of his hard-hitting one hour talk rolling before a spell-bound audience. Rushdie spoke on "Politics and the Novel." In this lecture, he mercilessly criticized the position of passive acceptance for writers propagated by George Orwell in his famous essay "Inside a Whale". Orwell felt that it was useless for a writer to try to fight oppression and that it was wiser to "simply accept it, endure it, record it."

Rushdie was angry at the quietism proposed. He felt that as a writer, though one is not obliged to write about (his) politics but he also could not ignore it " we are radioactive with history and politics is history's present tense," he asserted. No writer worth his salt should tolerate political injustice. A writer need not write about his own political views but he could certainly criticize the politics of his times as the Russian novelist Solzenhytsin had done.

Of *Midnight's Children* he observed that though he had not planned it that way he could not keep away from the influence of contemporary history from its making (*Indian Express* 24 February 1984). Repeatedly he emphasized the role of the writer as an activist. The talk was excellent. Rushdie was clear and thought provoking, his words had been chosen with great care. After the talk and the question and answers session came to an end everybody began walking swiftly out of the hall and towards the lift, as is the Bombay manner. Rushdie stood alone in the foyer. No one was with him (Unthinkable today because of the heavy security around him). Just then I looked up and found myself face to face with him. I was delighted. I introduced myself and spoke to him for a couple of minutes. I don't quite remember what we spoke of but he replied pleasantly and then it was time for me to move on.

I have begun with a personal note to bring you close to Rushdie, the man and not just the famous writer around whom a lot of mystery and aura has been built up in the last decade because of his works and especially because of the fatwa imposed on him by Iran. Many of you will recall his surprise visit to India after an interval of twelve years on 14th April 2000 to attend Commonwealth Writers' Prize ceremony. Rushdie had won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best Book (Eurasia Region) for his novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and nobody knew till the end whether or not he would attend the function. What was later reported was the stunning fact that he had been in India since a week ago. He had been travelling in India in disguise and even made a visit to the Taj Mahal accompanied by his strapping young son, Zafar, to fulfil an old promise to him! So, no one knew where he was and whether or not he was coming to the ceremony.

But the moment he entered the lounge of Hotel Oberoi In New Delhi :

> "..it was as if a tidal wave had hit the 150 odd assembled glitterati. A battalion of TV and press cameramen and reporters surged forward towards Rushdie,....everyone rubbernecked to catch a glimpse of Rushdie's bald pale pate gleaming with perspiration and his thin-lipped face suffused with a huge smile" (Trivedi, "In Conversation" TBF)

If I were to draw a parallel between the effect Rushdie has on the audience it would not be wrong to compare it to the effect on the audience were Shakespeare to walk into the room. In other words, Rushdie, like Shakespeare, is now a writer, whose reputation precedes him wherever he goes. After this personalized account, I would like to tell you some more factual details about Rushdie's life so that you can relate them to the impact he has made on the post 1980s on the Indian English Novel in 1980s and after.

Salman Rushdie was born – no, not on 15th August 1947 (The birth date of his protagonist Saleem) but on 19 June 1947. He was born and educated in Bombay in St. Cathedral until the age of fourteen. He has described the city of Bombay as "the most cosmopolitan, most hybrid, most hotch potch of Indian cities." Its influence on him has been so deep that he made it the major setting of *Midnight's Children*. Indeed *Midnight's Children*, becomes the first of the Bombay novels, which have become quite common now, the novel having started a new trend in Indian English Fiction since the 1980s. A number of other Indian English novels since then are Bombay novels.

Not only did Rushdie begin the trend of writing the Bombay novels but writers after him have been quick to write the metro-centric novel, with Delhi, Calcutta and Toronto as their setting. This has been a major departure from the earlier Indian English novels that were usually set in small towns or villages. You will recall the fictitious Malgudi of R. K. Narayan's novels. Interestingly though Malgudi very closely resembles Mysore where Narayan has lived all along, he took pains to conceal its name. Rushdie takes pride in locating the familiar landmarks of Bombay by name, thus striking on immediate and autobiographical sense of identification with the reader, especially the one who knows Bombay well.

Now, why do you think Rushdie wrote about Bombay and not about a village or small town? Wouldn't it have been easier to write about something everybody was writing about? One explanation is that he was brought up in Bombay. But that alone would not suffice. Bombay, for Rushdie is something special. It is his metaphor for a cosmopolitan Indian city where people of all religions live and mingle together freely. It is the city that according to him represents the multicultural, multi-religious Indian society. He was reacting to the rising strains of fundamentalism in India around that period. Bombay for him is representative of the truly hybrid and mixed nature of the Indian civilization.

Born to Muslim parents, Rushdie did not create a pure Muslim character who reads the Koran daily or visits the mosque. His main character Saleem, is partly Hindu, partly Goan, partly Kashmiri, partly Muslim, partly British, suggesting thereby the intermingling of the different races which constitute the India that Rushdie adores.

What Rushdie did, therefore, with *Midnight's Children*, was to make a clean break from the metaphysical Hindu worldview of Indian English fiction. This paradigm shift that he executed, makes him a seminal writer at a time when nothing new was expected from the Indian novel, since it had last attracted attention in the 1960s. His influence on the writing that has followed since has been tremendous. It has opened the ways to novels about protagonists who belong to the minority communities –

Now, to come back to his life story, Rushdie left Bombay at the age of fourteen to study at Rugby in England. It was here that he tasted his first bitter experience of racism when one of the boys with whom he shared his study, wrote "Wogs go home" on the wall over his chair (Glendenning 38). So, hurt was Rushdie that he never wanted to return to England after that. But in 1967 his parents migrated to Pakistan. So, he spent some time there after the completion of his school education. His parents finally persuaded him to join King's College in Cambridge and he returned to England to study for his graduate degree with History as the subject of his specialization. After graduation, he worked for a while in England as a stage actor and then as a copywriter in an advertising firm. Meanwhile, he was also very seriously working at becoming a writer.

Rushdie had wanted to become a writer since childhood. His parents and his family say that it was from about the age of ten that he began to say that he would be a writer. Rushdie says that the first writer he knew was Faiz Ahmed Faiz a friend of his parents, "a kind of extra uncle" to him. As Rushdie read Faiz, he admired him for combining public and social awareness and responsibility with intense lyricism and he decided he would be a writer like him (Trivedi 12).

However, Rushdie's first novel was not *Midnight's Children* but *Grimus* a work of science fiction. It was written for a contest organized by Gollancz a publishing house. Liz Calder, an editor at Gollancz and a tenant in Rushdie's home in England, encouraged Rushdie to enter the contest. Rushdie did not win the contest but Calder persuaded Rushdie to publish the book. The novel was ripped apart by critics and Rushdie felt deeply hurt by the rejection.

However, he soon recovered and decided to write an " epic" novel about India, embodying its past, present and future. He undertook an extended trip to India along with his wife in preparation. This was his first visit to India in ten years. He says in an interview that although he wrote the actual novel in England, he could not have written it just sitting out there. So, he visited India and Pakistan and spent a considerable time visiting a lot of places that he had been to before and knew he would want to use. He also visited some places such as Benaras which he had never visited before but would want to use in his novel (Interview, Kunappi 18). In his essay "The Indian writer in England", Rushdie recalls how on revisiting his house in Bombay, he was "gripped by the conviction that I, too, had a city and a history to reclaim". It was in that moment of realization that, *Midnight's Children* was really born".

When it was published in 1981, the novel was an immediate success. It struck a familiar chord in readers in India as well as England. It came to be described as "one of the most important novels to come out of the English – speaking world in this generation", (*New York Times*). It was compared with the novels of Gabriel Marquez, Gunter Grass and Milan Kundera – all established names in the western world. In the same year, he won the prestigious Booker McConnell prize. It made him a celebrity overnight. The 10,000 pounds award (it is 20,000 pounds now) gave him the freedom to write without worrying about earning a livelihood. He was lionized by the media in England, and then in India, where huge crowds turned out to hear his readings and lectures.

As *Midnight's Children* become a household name, a book to own and discuss, it transformed the internal economy of the print market for Indian English fiction. It opened up the way for the pre-publication purchase of the exclusive rights of books by Indian English novelists. Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Pankaj Mishra all have since won huge advance royalties from their publishers in the west. It was almost as if this one novel had triggered off a new market for Indian English

writing and the Indian English novel had been transported from the periphery to the centre of the world .

Until Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* came on the scene, most writers including R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand had had great difficulties with getting their works published. The market wasn't just ready to accept them. Anand has put on record his dejection at not being able to publish his first novel, *Untouchable* , so much so that he even contemplated committing suicide! Until E.M Forster the author of *Passage to India* took the initiative to recommend the novel for publication. That this novel which was published in 1936 has gone on to be translated in over twenty world languages is another matter.

Similar was Narayan's sad experience as no publisher wanted to buy his book *Swami and Friends*. Graham Greene the novelist helped him to publish it at last. But the experience repeated itself with Narayan's next novel, *The English Teacher*. Disgusted ,Narayan decided to set up his own publishing house, *Indian Thought Publications* and himself began to publish every single book of his.

As a contrast, the publishing success of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and that of his successors have been a phenomena difficult to understand. And to think that Rushdie had to write his second novel to be able to experience this glory, his first *Grimus* having been totally rejected.

Rushdie's third novel was Shame. It was published in 1983. It is set in and about Pakistan. This novel was also short-listed for the Booker though it didn't make it. It was much acclaimed critically but was banned in Pakistan. Yet smuggled copies were read in large numbers by members of the intelligentsia. However, the book that got him into deep trouble was *The Satanic Verses* his fourth novel. It was published in 1988. It became his most controversial work. Even before the book hit the market, Rushdie caused a stir in the publishing world by receiving a very huge advance. While the book was well-received in the UK and the USA, it was banned in India since it hurt the religious sentiments of the Muslims and led to riots and killings in Bombay's Bhendi Bazaar.

Soon it was banned in Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, South Africa and countries with large Muslim populations. Rushdie's fate was sealed finally when on 14 February 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini announced his "fatwa" against Rushdie, exhorting "zealous Muslims" to execute him quickly. Rushdie went into hiding and lived so for over a decade, changing houses very often. He was living in England then. The world was outraged at the imposition of the fatwa. World leaders and writers came out with public statements denouncing Iran and Rushdie was catapulted into unprecedented fame. To give you a feel of the times when this happened I shall quote a few newspaper headlines in those months soon after the fatwa. With the world's leaders and writers behind him, Rushdie's fortunes seemed very similar to Saleem's in *Midnight's Children*.

- "US WRITERS COME OUT IN RUSHDIE'S SUPPORT"
  - Indian Post, 24 February 1989

- "MITTERRAND, THATCHER JOIN HANDS ON RUSHDIE ISSUE"
  - Indian Post, 1 March 1989

- "THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF SALMAN RUSHDIE AND HIS PUBLISHERS"
  - World Statement, a page length advertisement in Indian Express Bombay, 2 March 1989 signed by thousands of literary figures across the world .

These included writers, publishers, booksellers, agents and literary organizations. But none of this worked, nor did Rushdie's public apology to the Muslims. He won his freedom only recently in the year 2000 when the "fatwa" was officially called off by Iran. That's how he was able to travel to India in April 2000 and enjoy the pleasurable experience of revisiting the country he was pining to return to again. After the lifting of the fatwa, he also decided to migrate to the U.S., feeling quite bitter at the way the British government, he felt, had failed to stand up to Iran and get the fatwa annulled.

The most amazing fact about Rushdie and his courageous spirit is that even in captivity he continued to make secret appearances and write books.



Salman Rushdie, a death sentence put on him by Iranian leaders in 1989, takes his seat on Phil Donahue's set yesterday. He said his top-secret but very public book tour was a way to fight back at bullies who would silence him.

Salman Rushdie, a death sentence put on him by Iranian leaders in 1989 takes his sea on Phil Donahue's set to promote *The Moor's Last Sigh* in the U.S in January 1996. He said his top secret but very public book tour was a way to fight back at bullies who would silence him.

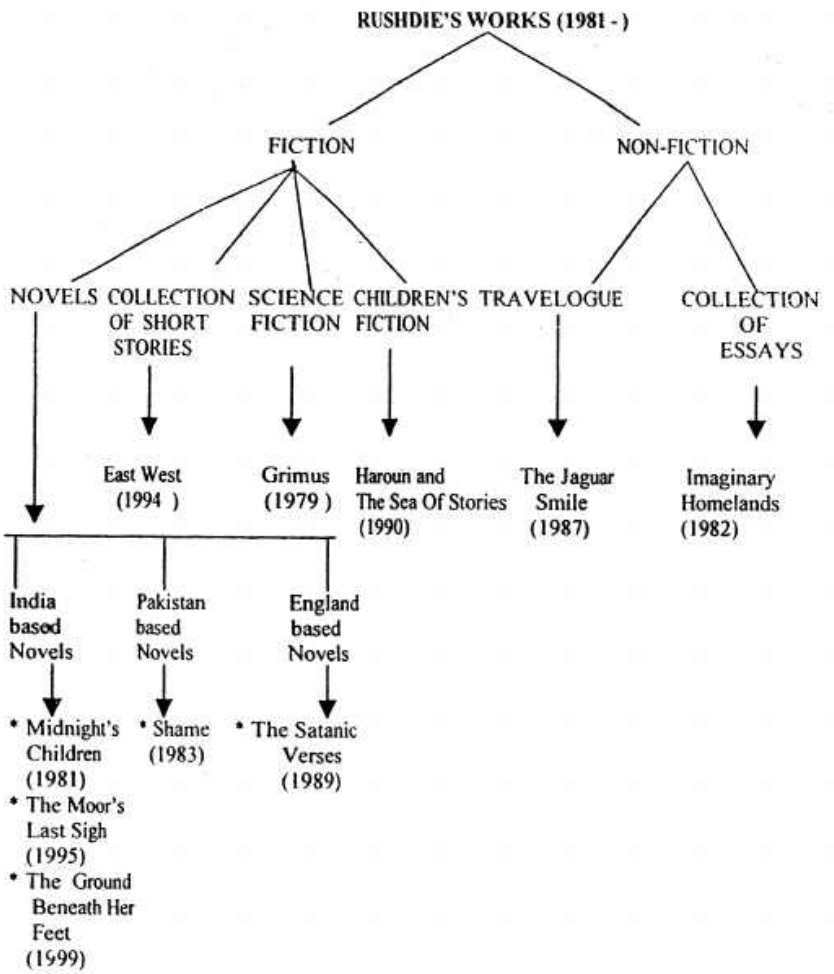
The book which he first wrote in hiding was *Haroun and the sea of Stories* (1990), a delightful "children's" book written for his son, Zafar, but which also fictionalizes his attack on the Ayatollah in the figure of Khatum Shud. The second book he wrote was *Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). This book was banned first in India and then released from the ban a couple of months later. The cause of the ban was Rushdie's open attack on Bal Thakeray a well known politician and leader of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. His fictional character wanted to convert India into a fascist Hindu state and Rushdie wanted to resist the rise of such a leader.

His last book to date, also written in captivity, is *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). The book was short listed for the Booker but it did not make it. It also won the Eurasian Region Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best Book but lost the overall prize.

However, the novel that has made real history by winning the Booker Prize not once, but twice, is *Midnight's Children*. The prize was first awarded to *Midnight's Children* in 1981, and again for being selected in 1994 as the best book among all the Booker winners in the 25 years of the Booker Prize, since the institution of the Booker Prize in 1969. *Midnight's Children* easily remains his best work. Doesn't that make you very eager to study it in detail?

THE OTHER WORKS OF RUSHDIE

In this section I am going to give you some more information about Rushdie's entire literary output. This will help you to place *Midnight's Children* in its midst as many of his themes recur. For the discussion, I shall focus only on his fiction here.



Since he published *Midnight's Children* in 1981 and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* in 1999 , Rushdie has written ten works . These include five novels, one work of science fiction, one work of children's fiction , one a collection of short stories , a travelogue and one collection of essays. He has given a number of interviews, written numerous articles, and made a documentary on Kashmir. Indeed his career has been a very prolific one.

Now the interesting thing about his work – like that perhaps of all major writers – is that despite the variation in form and subject matter, certain ideas, literary and thematic concerns appear repeatedly in his works. His essays and interviews are of great help because they explicitly affirm some of these ideas As in the case of T.S. Eliot whose essays help to understand his poetry, Rushdie's serve to explain his fiction. Although one may not trust the "teller" as essayist or the interviewee completely but the essays and the interviews certainly provide important insights. From his entire body of work, it is clear that the most recurrent ideas or themes are that of migrancy and the writer's freedom to challenge authority which appear hauntingly in all his works.

His view about his location as an expatriate or migrant writer is that he belongs to two cultures while being distanced from both. In " The Indian Writer in England" he rejects the idea of assimilation to the values of the host country, as also their absolute rejection (at the cost of idealizing the home country) which is typical he feels of most expatriates . For him , it is important that the modern day migrant must negotiate or choose selectively from the values of both cultures – the "native" and the "adopted" – and try to create a "new", " hybrid" identity (81).

However, despite his emphasis on the hybrid identity, almost all of his fiction keeps returning to Bombay in a nostalgic look backwards. His own migration has certainly made him think a lot about the subject and right from *Grimus*, his first novel, the theme has been repeated in every single work of his.

Grimus, published in 1979, is as I told you earlier a failed novel. Yet it is valuable for it contains the seeds of the competing claims of "native home" and " adopted home" for the migrant. The hero is Flapping Eagle, an American Indian in search of his lost sister, whom he finds on a Mediterranean island under the control of Grimus, a European magician.

Flapping Eagle leaves home because he has to. He is an outcast from his birth because his mother dies while bearing him and his community known for its religious fundamentals, shun him and his sister for seeking contact with the outside world. The novel speaks of Flapping Eagle "stripped of his past, forsaking the language of his ancestor for the language of the archipelagoes of the world" (36) very much like all the other novels speak about the choices made by his other protagonists.

Shame published in 1983, followed *Midnight's Children*. It is his second major book about the Indian subcontinent. It is based in Pakistan. The narrator in *Shame* is an expatriate who returns to Pakistan for an extended visit. As an outsider, who is also a cultural insider, the perspective he gives is a portrait of corruption and shamelessness among the ruling elite. The novel captures the abstract concept of shame on two levels – the national and the domestic. On the national level the main characters are thinly veiled caricatures of Zia ul Haq and Zulfikar Bhutto. On the marital plane, the men exhibit lack of sharam (Shame) in their oppression of the womenfolk. Both aspects are conveyed through the narration of the migrant visitor who describes himself as, a "translated man", standing between two cultures.

The Satanic Verses (1988) was meant to give voice and fictional flesh to the immigrant culture . It was also an attempt to explore the nature of divine relvelation (the Koran), from the point of view of a secular person. The novel deals with the life of immigrants from the formerly colonized third world countries, now living in

Britain. Expected to adapt, even re-make themselves, the immigrants respond in different ways including absolute refusal to get transformed. On the other hand, others like Saladin, Chamcha (one of the two heroes in the book) who come to England with contempt for Indians and with a keen desire to embrace English ways receive a severe beating in racist England. Chamcha"s attempt to become just a human being leads him to Bombay where he is reunited with his dying, until then estranged father / Fatherland.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) is Rushdie's answer to Imam Khomeini and his other tormentors. He may have in reality apologized to the Muslims for hurting their feelings but in his heart of hearts one can see him feeling that he had every right to write what he did. The book is a delightful children's story on one level but on the other it is the story of his forced imprisonment in an unknown place and the silence imposed on him by the sentence of death passed on him by Ayatollah Khomeini. In the book, Khomeini is King Khattam Shud who is the arch enemy of all stories and the Foe of Speech.

East, West (1994) is a collection of short stories most of which have been published earlier in different magazines. The book communicates through the classification of stories, Rushdie's ideas of East and West coming together ultimately in a hybrid identity. The first section runs the India stories, the second section carries the stories located in the West, and the third carries a mixed set and is subtitled "East, West."

The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) sees Moraes Zogoiby exiled twice. Once, when his mother turns him out of her house in Bombay and next when the forces of oppression seek him and he escapes to Spain. It's the story of a character on the run. The escape, the flight, the unending journey is an image that repeatedly occurs in all expatriate fiction (Kirpal 1988). One of the most poignant descriptions in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the one in which Moraes fears he will lose his sanity in the imprisonment imposed on him by his tormentor. The scene recalls the theme of the loss of a writer's freedom earlier explored in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999) is once again about exile, love, and loss . Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara meet when she comes from New York as a refugee. They fall in love and marry. But one day Vina vanishes from Bombay, from Ormus. Ormus, like Orpheus is doomed to search her. Symbolically, the search is for the nostalgic past, typical of expatriate writing:

1.4 THE TITLE : *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Midnight's Children draws its title from the hour of India's Independence, 15th August 1947. All the children born together at that momentous hour become in Rushdie's novel the children of the time : "Fathered, you understand, by history"(118). They represent "the highest of talents of which men have ever dreamed (199)".

Saleem's narrative tells of the joyous discovery of the midnight children through his protagonist Saleem's private "All India Radio" , his own miraculous telepathic gift which provides the communications centre for all the children, in all 1001 of them. But the promise of their potential is not fulfilled . "If there is a third principle, its name is childhood. But it dies, or rather it is murdered" (25)

The destruction of the *Midnight's Children* which Saleem believes is the deepest motive behind the declaration of a state of Emergency in India, is the heart of his black story. Their magical powers are completely destroyed by the widow, Mrs. Gandhi as they are all "test-and-hysterectomies" (438).This is Rushdie's way of saying that the imposition of Emergency emasculated, castrated the country.

Rushdie's wit shines through his interview of 1985 in which he speaks of how the idea of midnight children came about. Initially he says he began with one child. These then became two as he thought of swapping them.

> Then I thought that you can't have just two children in a country like India. It must be more and if it's more than two, why these two? I did a mathematical calculation about the birthrate of India, with calculators, and worked out that in fact, a thousand and one children is accurate" (Interview 18).

In writing a novel about the Indian subcontinent, Rushdie in one sense belongs with the novelists who came before him, novelists such as Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan and yet he is very distinct.

Rao's *Kanthapura* is the sthalapurana (or place legend) par excellence of India during its freedom movement. Gandhi is his real hero. Narayan's . *Waiting for the Mahatma*- different from Rao's novel is a mild satire on the average Indian's incomplete understanding of the Gandhi - led freedom struggle but still reverential of the Mahatma . Gandhi figures in *Midnight's Children* too but so faint is the historical memory of independent India that even the date of his assassination is incorrectly recorded by Saleem. The lapse only reminds the reader of the distance between the modern day Indian and Gandhian ideals.

The title *Midnight's Children* is both to be read for the promise that the 1001 children symbolized , and the failure of the post-independent generation to carry the mantle of creating an ideal society. In an act of real life imitating fiction, most English language newspapers in India felicitated the *Midnight children* born on India's fiftieth anniversary !

The number of midnight children is 1001. This figure might puzzle you. You might wonder why Rushdie chose to have 1001 children and not 1000, which is a round figure. Infact, Rushdie also says in that interview that the figure 1001 is on the low side and that probably there are twelve or thirteen hundred children being born every hour (Interview 18)! So, then why did Rushdie choose 1001? For the reason that the number recalls the 1001 stories that Scheherzade told every night in the Arabian Nights to save her life, and Rushdie's novel is about telling stories. You will find this trait of making connections between dissimilar facts and suggesting new ways of looking at things, very typical of Rushdie. That is why there is always an element of surprise that makes you think every time: "Oh yes, it is so. Now why didn't it occur to me earlier?"

1.5 THE BOOKER AND *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Since the first page of this Block, I have been mentioning that Rushdie won the Booker Prize for *Midnight's Children*. As a few other Indian English novelists including Arundhati Roy have also won it recently, the idea may not thrill us very much until we understand what winning the Booker Prize means and how it is awarded. So, in this section I'm going to give you this information.

The Booker Prize (or The Booker McConnell Prize, as should be called) was founded in 1969 by Booker McConnell, a multinational group of companies. Administered by Book Trust in the United Kingdom, this prestigious award is awarded to the best full-length novel written in English by a citizen of the UK, the Commonwealth, Eire, Pakistan or South Africa. This literary prize is sponsored by Booker McConnell Ltd. and looked after by the National Book League in the United Kingdom.

The way it is awarded is in two phases. In the first, publishers are invited to submit entries with scheduled publication dates between January and November of the award year. Earlier they could submit any number of entries. This has changed in the past few years; a publisher can now submit not more than three entries for judging. The time frame has changed as well, with the prize shortlist now announced in late September or early October and the deadline for entries being moved back to June 30. The prize itself (currently valued at 20,000 pounds Sterling) is awarded in late October Since 1999, shortlisted novelists also receive 1000 pounds Sterling.

In the second phase, the judges read all the entries submitted by the publishers. It appears that the judges in 1995 were asked to read 140 novels, and decided that was too much of a good thing and limited the number of entries to two a publisher. The publishers are not too happy it seems, claiming that their third entry was usually a long-shot. Perhaps a radical shake-up is in order to bring the whole thing back into perspective because while critics speak of the politics of the "Booker", others from the Commonwealth countries have charged it for discriminating against their Literature.

Anyway whether or not these beliefs are supported by facts, what is a fact however is that the author who gets selected for the Prize, becomes a celebrity overnight. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was awarded the Booker in 1981; and again the "Booker of Booker Prize" in 1994 . Now can you imagine a parallel achievement in recent times?

Question : Can you name the winner of the Booker Prize 2000?

Answer : It is The Blind Assassin by Margaret Atwood.

1.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as I've said earlier put the Indian-English novel on the world map in an unprecedented way "No other novel about India has had such an impact" (Ali 95). It also made Rushdie, at the young age of thirty-four into a major literary figure. Critical praise was showered lavishly on the work which was characterized variously as "an outstanding achievement" (Nazareth), "a novel of international importance" (Chaudhuri), a work that "sounds like a continent finding its voice"(Blaise), enormously creative in its "fecundity, extravagance, and scope" (Towers).

Rushdie's exuberant humour, brilliant wit, imaginative boldness, enormous talent, prodigious powers of storytelling, debt to Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gunter Grass, Laurence Sterne all became part of the vocabulary of critical acclaim that greeted *Midnight's Children*. It was not as if such praise was offered by reviewers in the West alone. Anita Desai, herself a leading Indian English novelist described the novel as being "of major interest to Indian readers," and went on to characterize it as a "great tour de force, a dazzling exhibition of the gifts of a new writer with courage, impressive strength, the power of both imagination and control, and sheer stylistic brilliance".

In the Indian subcontinent, the book gathered numerous favourable reviews as well. Its impact, in the subcontinent and the West, can perhaps be best gauged through the fact that the novel marks among other things the coming of age of a generation of subcontinental writers for whom English was their first language. The success of *Midnight's Children* led to a flood of novels by Indian English novelists and like this novel they too won numerous awards – national and international. When *Midnight's*

Children was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize, its critical reception more than made up for Rushdie's disappointment over his first novel *Grimus*.

With regard to more extended commentaries on his works and on Rushdie himself, you will enjoy reading the full-length critical study on Rushdie by Timothy Brennan: *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. It offers very insightful readings of each of Rushdie's fictional works including *Midnight's Children*, Brennan's terms for discussing Rushdie ("cosmopolitan writer" versus "frontline fighter"; "anti- colonial liberalism" versus "nationalism," to name some) provide an interesting context within which Rushdie's works can be read and understood. Brennan's analysis is especially useful for studying Rushdie's expatriate sensibility

Among the essays on Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* one of the most interesting, theoretically informed pieces worth mentioning are Rustom Bharucha's "Rushdie's Whale," which looks closely at Rushdie's linguistic innovations and wordplay to make the point that "Rushdie has added a new dimension to English by being idosyncratically true to the sounds of his birth and youth"(222). Other pieces to read are Makarand Paranjape's "Inside and Outside the Whale : Politics and the New Indian English Novel" and Arun Mukherjee's "Characterization in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*.

Mukherjee critiques the novel from a feminist perspective and argues that Rushdie's attitudes are distinctly patriarchal. Kum Kum Sangari's "The Politics of the Possible," is a comparative analysis of Garcia Marquez and Rushdie which examines how Western readers classify the "magical realist" narratives (i.e., narratives that combine realism with fiction) of the two writers under the term of postmodernism and conveniently ignore the political activism in the works of these writers.

These are just a few examples. The total number of essays written on *Midnight's Children* is indeed mind-boggling. They reflect a great variety of perspective and interpretations suggesting thereby that *Midnight's Children* is that kind of work which can offer different meanings to different people all the time. Such is its universality.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In Unit 1, I have introduced you to some of the important biographical details about the novelist, given you a brief summary of Rushdie's other works to highlight his pet themes and concerns. I have also discussed the significance of the book's title and the Booker Prize that it won. The unit also describes the nature of reception that the book received in critical circles and shares with you a certain approach of reading the book which may make you relate to *Midnight's Children* better.

1.8 GLOSSARY

advent: arrival

expatriate: a person living in a foreign country

quietism: passivity

seminal: influencing others in a new way, original

postmodernism: historically the phase in Western civilization that follows modernity but has also been interpreted as a concept that emphasizes indeterminacy, wordplay, hybridity, fragmentation and so on.

1.9 QUESTIONS

1. Name five Bombay-centric Indian English novels published in the 1980s. Give the names of their authors and their dates of publication?

2. What characteristics of Rushdie do you gather from the way he describes his having created 1001 midnight children in the novel?

3. Remember the question I had posed to you in 1.1? Let me repeat it. How can we judge the impact of a just published novel on which there is no criticism available yet? Any suggestions and ideas?

1.10 SUGGESTED READING

Brennan, Timothy *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*

Dingwaney Anuradha. "Salman Rushdie" in Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson, *Writers of the Indian Diaspora.* Westport : Greenwood Press, 1993 : 363 - 85

Glendenning Victoria. "A Novelist in the Country of the Mind." *Sunday Times* (Oct 25, 1981) : 38

Kirpal Viney. *The New Indian Novel in English : A Study of the 1980s* New Delhi : Allied Publishers, 1990.

UNIT 2 *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*: THE DE-DOXIFIED ENGLISH

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 The Beginnings
2.3 Problems and Challenges Faced by the Post 1930s Novelists
2.4 Rushdie on English and Englishes
2.5 Rushdie and the use of Hybridized English
2.6 Is Rushdie an Indian English Novelist?
2.7 English "De-doxified"
2.8 Rushdie's use of English in Descriptive Scenes
2.9 Let Us Sum Up
2.10 Glossary
2.11 Questions
2.12 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will first look at the challenges and difficulties experienced by Indian English novelists to forge an English which was distinctive from British English and American English. Then we will examine how far Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* has carried on with, or broken away from the tradition created by these writers. I shall conclude the unit by discussing Rushdie's experiments with the English language in *Midnight's Children*.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Till this day, the most recurring and the most passionate debate in any seminar on Indian English writing is about the use of English by Indian writers. Don't be surprised if this should happen to you. Very typically, what happens is that first a seminar on Indian writing in English is organized. Then the papers and proceedings continue in English for a while until suddenly someone among those present will get up and launch an emotional attack (in English) on Indian writers for writing in English. The charge usually is that authentic Indian writing exists and can be written only in the regional languages.

Though no one offers to explain what 'authentic' means, a few knowing heads bob up and down in agreement. At the same time, the other half of the participants now get ready to uphold the use of English by Indian writers. The debate then turns quite bitter until the Chairperson of the Seminar intervenes to put a halt to it. Why does this happen. Why does this continue to happen? Perhaps because ever since Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhiji pronounced (during the Nationalist Freedom movement) that the use of English is an unpatriotic act and its users lacking in creativity, Indian intellectuals have seen writing in English as an un-Indian act, and so possibly the critical debate in post-Independence has remained inconclusive.

Now, what critics think is one thing but what writers do may be another. It is therefore, important for you to understand why Indian English novelists have

continued to write in English without experiencing the dilemma that some of the critics do.

2.2 THE BEGINNINGS

Indian English novelists have had two kinds of predecessors. The first set of novelists were those who began writing in the pre 1930s. They were those who wrote English with stiff correctness, always conscious that it was a foreign language. Their works and their English were imitative of the British novelists of the times. Sir Walter Scott and W.W. Reynolds were very popular with them as models.

The other group comprised novelists such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Michael Madhusudan Dutt who began writing in English but who, influenced by the rising feeling of nationalism, later switched to writing in their mother tongue, Bengali.

However, the novelists who rose in the 1930s, novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao were those who made a conscious decision to write in English as if it were an Indian language. Perhaps, they did not regard it as a foreign language since it had been domiciled in India for over a hundred years. However, where they were different from their predecessors was in their objective of re-making British English very much like American and Irish writers such as, James Baldwin and J.M. Synge had already done before them. Their self-assurance that they were using an Indian and not a foreign language gave them "the confidence to bend the language to their will" (Mukherjee, 167). Perhaps, the use of English by these writers was their way of asserting their right to write in English by giving it a new and distinct identity.

The first major novelist to experiment with English for writing fiction was Mulk Raj Anand with his novel *Untouchable,* a work that you are studying in this course. Then came G. V. Desani, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Bhabani Bhatacharya. Experimentation with the English language has continued without a stop since their days.

What Anand did was to experiment with the diction, dialogue and the syntax of the English spoken by his characters. While he did not alter the English he used for his remarks as a narrator, in the dialogues uttered by his Punjabi characters he literally translated from Hindi and Punjabi words and idioms even at the cost of disrupting the grammatical conventions of British English. For example in *Untouchable* you will have noticed a generous use of expressions and phrases such as "eating the air" (to take a stroll), "breaking the vessel" (to expose a secret) or "black in the pulse"(something fishy) which are very common in Hindi or Punjabi but which when rendered in English appear odd and unusual. While reading the novel, you must have wondered why Anand had done this, what does he achieve with such usage, and does he succeed?

Those of you who have read *Untouchable* will agree that he succeeds in spite of the oddity of such expressions because he was trying to capture the vigorous speech of Punjabi peasants. He conveys the Punjabi farmer's sensibility without a doubt though you may also feel disturbed at the violence he does to the grammar of English. This brings us to the question whether this approach is recommended. The next section which discusses the problems experienced by writers including Anand, Narayan and Rao who were trying consciously to forge a new English for Indian creative writing will perhaps answer the question for you.

2.3 PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE POST 1930s NOVELISTS

Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan are regarded as the three major writers of Indian English Fiction because they set the operative sensibility which has more or less continued to the present. The leads that they set in the use of English will be discussed in this unit before I analyse Rushdie's innovations.

This exercise is necessary so that you understand the creation of the literary tradition inherited by Rushdie, and the unique contributions made by him in *Midnight's Children*. In fact, it is difficult to appreciate *Midnight's Children* without being able to place it in the literary history of the Indian English Novel. Hence let us try first to understand what it meant to be an Anand, Rao or Narayan writing in English about Indian society and characters. So, for this I'm going to request you to do the following exercise.

For a moment, place yourself in a time machine and go back to the 1930s. Imagine you are an aspiring writer who has been educated in English and has studied British Literature. You too want to write a novel but your awakened nationalist feelings do not allow you to imitate British novelists. You wish to innovate with the themes, the English language and the narrative technique which would help you to write about a distinct Indian society but you do not have an Indian model to follow. So what would you do.

It is important to ask yourself this question because what we today take for granted was the result of great creativity, industry and personal struggle for the writers of the times. India was still a slave country. The aura of the British as superior in everything including ideas, systems, culture was yet strong among the majority of the English-educated Indians and these were the people who would read novels written in English.

However, these writers were equally eager not to write novels that were imitations. They felt inspired to show their countrymen and to the rest of the world that they too were writing novels that were important literature in its own right. But they were also aware of the close connection between the language they were using and the cultural baggage that went with it. So, each writer sought to re-define English and make it 'Indian' enough so that it could be used to communicate the Indian cultural and social values to English-speaking readers worldwide.

Try out this exercise. Describe in English any interesting custom or belief among your regional or linguistic community. You must take care to convey the flavour of 'Indianness'.

I'm sure you enjoyed doing that exercise. But I did also realize how challenging, if not impossible, the task was? And remember you find it difficult when you have scores of models before you while these writers had none. So, now do you see how difficult and challenging the task must have been for these Indian novelists and the many problems they must have faced to be able to write fiction using English in a decolonized way. Luckily, these novelists being an expressive lot, they have documented extensively their efforts of how they tried to re-shape the colonizer's language and use it for writing about a non-white society. Thanks to their essays, we understand their experiments and struggles better.

Perhaps, the most important statement among these writers on the attempt to Indianize English for writing the Indian novel has come from Raja Rao in his Foreword to Kanthapura which was published in 1938. Can you recall what Rao had written ? He had written:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own ....(*English*) *is the language of our intellectual make up ... but not of our emotional make up.*
> (v; emphasis added)

The magnitude of Rao's achievement in changing the filter of English to accommodate the emotions, the culture, the values and belief systems of his characters and their society is understood only if we compare the following statements, only one of which is from the novel. The other is what the statement might have been had Rao not re-fashioned English. Please read them and list the difference that you observe between the two:

i. Kenchamma is a great Indian goddess who according to ancient lore is reported to have killed the demon that was preying upon the people of Kanthapura. So the people worship her till today.

ii. **Kencha**mma is our goddess. Great and beauteous is she. She killed a demon ages **ago**, a demon that had come to ask for our young sons as food and our **young women** as wives.

(Kanthapura 2)

Did you notice that the first is an example of English used as an intellectual language but not as the language of emotions while the second with its oral rhythms, inverted syntactical structures and alliteration invokes a speaking voice and suggests a live audience? More important, did you observe the way in which the lines evoke the narrator's reverence and love for Kenchamma? Don't they foreground a typically traditional Indian cultural value system where one's neighbours are like one's family, and where different members share deep emotional bonds? The lines also evoke the felt horror at the demon's act on its transgressing into the lives, the self respect and honour of their big family("our young sons", "our young women"). The allegoric allusion also recalls the eternal battle between Good/the goddess and Evil/the demon that has always formed the core of traditional Indian thought and literature and which continues to live in the collective unconscious of the Indian people as an archetype. Even our films follow that pattern if you observe closely.

In the movie the good man (played by the hero)and the bad man (played by the villain) are locked in a conflict throughout the three hours. Only in the end does the good man defeat and win over the evil villain. Very much like the familiar pattern of our epics and other traditional literary works.

Kenchamma an imaginary construction of the writer is real and active. But she appears in the powerful imaginations of the people of *Kanthapura*. That thirty five words can achieve so much by clever alterations made in the linguistic and cultural structures of a foreign language and made to carry so much meaning is truly remarkable. Isn't it? Well that's what Rao has achieved. Do you know why?

Well, because English in India, as you know, is learnt by the rules of grammar. It is the language we use to study, read books, write exams, carry on intellectual debates. But it is not our mother tongue. It is not the language that comes to us when we cry out in pain. When in pain or grief an Indian might call out for his mother ("Ma") or for his God ("Hai Bhagwan"). Expressions of pain and grief are emotions. Most Indians won't use English to express their deepest emotions. So to use "English" for

expressing the emotions of Indian characters was a major challenge. And you've just seen how that was overcome by Raja Rao and his contemporaries.

The second challenge was that English is not the language you encounter on the streets. Your milkman or maid servant won't speak English nor will your rickshawwalla or your grandparents. The difficulty that Rao and Anand were experiencing was very real. How were they to write in English about people who do not normally speak English? The problem was accentuated when the novelist had to write dialogues or report the conversation among Indian characters belonging to different classes or castes of society.

Therefore, these three novelists – Rao, Anand and Narayan - experimented vigorously and tried to modify and invent new words and proverbs in English and make them "Indian" to represent the speech of their characters.

Rao successfully created in English the feeling that the characters were speaking Kannada. Indeed, he does it so effectively that even those who are not familiar with the rigid social structure of a South Indian village, will have observed in *Kanthapura* how a man's caste can be judged from his speech. He has tried to create this feeling in his novel. Similarly Anand tried to create punjabi-speaking characters in English by giving a literal translation of their dialogues.

R. K. Narayan does it in his own way. He tries to convey Tamilian society and characters in English in an almost unobtrusive way. He embeds Tamilian proverbs in translation or creates them so skillfully that you may hardly notice his experiments with English.

In *the Bachelor of Arts,* the typical Indian father tells Chandran that "rupees do not grow on trees" which is modification of the English idiom "money does not grow on trees", only it sounds more Indian. In another instance, he changes the idiom "it's no use crying over split milk" into "it's no use crying over split milk", and both these modifications are done so subtly that you may hardly notice them though the feeling remains that this is how Indian characters would speak. Of course, in Narayan there are present other cultural markers too - Tamilian customs, religious fasts and ceremonies that help the reader to grasp the regional origin of his characters.

In this context, let me share a funny episode with you. The year was 1977 and I was teaching the "Indian English Novel" to the First year engineering students at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. We had begun discussing *The Bachelor of Arts* and were well on to the fifth lecture. At the end of the class, a Tamilian girl student came to me and complained about the novel. She said "Narayan has brought in the Tamilian customs, beliefs, and proverbs that I see and practise in my own home everyday. How can this be a novel? What the young girl was saying was that the novel was too real to be called fiction! You see, therefore, what I mean by Narayan being very subtle with his experiments with English and using other markers to portray Indian society and people.

Thus, Narayan too bends the English language but he does it very cleverly. Rao and Anand do it more obtrusively, more consciously. Rao, like Anand, uses transliterations from the Kannada such as describing the family next door as the "That-House people". He constantly re-works his syntax to convey the speaking voice in *Kanthapura.*

However, what is common to these novelists and most of the others such as Bhabani Bhattacharya or G. V. Desani (whom I haven't discussed here) is that they use English to convey a small geographical area or regional reality.

They translate from Punjabi, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada or Bengali depending on the region from which they come. This had to happen since India is a large country and

the writers while writing their novels had chosen to write about the regions they were most familiar with. This may be seen as a limitation today since the advent of the pan – Indian English novels of the 1980s and after. However the efforts of the novelists to use their regional language to forge a new English were remarkable and represented an important landmark in the development of Indian English Fiction. The magnitude of the post 1930s Indian novelists' achievement in creating characters, their emotions, values, beliefs and caste and class relationships has to be appreciated before we can appreciate Rushdie's considerable contributions to the re-making of English in *Midnight's Children*. I hope this section has made their achievements and efforts quite clear to you.

2.3 RUSHDIE ON ENGLISH AND *englishes*

Ever since Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* won him the Booker Prize, Rushdie has been a popular speaker at seminars and press conferences. This has given him the advantage of speaking explicitly about what shapes his writing. From each of his talks the impression I gather is that he is a rather thoughtful writer who has reflected deeply on the way he would like to use the language to structure his fiction. This means that as his readers and critics we get a lot of information that enables us to apply it to his works and evaluate how far they mirror his artistic, literary objectives and philosophy.

Rushdie is the most articulate and important Indian English writer , after Raja Rao to have spoken about his aesthetics at such length. That is what makes one see parallels between them. Even though Rushdie has always denied Rao as a literary ancestor, both have been path-breaking novelists in what they have done to their use of English and in their technique. But more about techniqe in another unit. Here I'll be focussing on Rushdie's use of English and how successful he has been with what he has done with the language.

In 1984, in his lecture "Describing Reality as a Political Act", Rushdie described his views on English in a way that recalls Rao's views though he may have arrived at them independently. He stated that

> One of the changes has to do with attitudes towards the use of English, the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we cannot use it simply the way the British did that it needs re-making for our purpose ....

Rushdie spoke of the English used by the British as the English written with a capital "E" and of the different englishes (that were now being used in different parts of the world where once the British had ruled) as being written with the small letter 'e'. These 'englishes' were re-makings of the English inherited in the former colonial countries and societies by writers who aimed to use them for the purpose of writing about their own people and struggles in the aftermath of colonisation.

He describes this as the phenomenon of the "Empire hitting back" with a vengeance and says he finds these englishes to be more vibrant than English. He observes that the formerly colonised had re-fashioned English in a way that had decolonised the english language they had inherited from the British. Now, isn't this very close to what Raja Rao had said in 1938 in his Foreword? Although, Rushdie does not acknowledge his debt to Rao, the fact remains, as I said earlier, that changing the cultural baggage of the English language to represent their own societies has been the paradigm of Indian novelists (including Rushdie) writing in English. There is no other way to do it too perhaps because the novel as a literary form is the most society-centric of all literary genres. Poetry, drama can do without going into details

about a society but not the novel. It is so sociological in nature and people-contric that a reference to the culture, to the way that different peoples think, is inevitable. Hence the Indian novelist who chooses to write about Indian themes is forced to re-shape and modify the English language and make it a suitable medium to represent Indian society and characters. His precurssors did it and Rushdie has done it. The questions that we then have to discuss now are: What is the contribution of Rushdie to English? What is the difference between his use of English and the use of English by Rao, Narayan and Anand? I shall discuss these questions in the section that follows.

2.4 RUSHDIE AND THE HYBRIDIZED ENGLISH

Well, the one major difference that I can readily observe and I did point it out in an earlier section is that Rao, Narayan and Anand draw upon their mother tongues – Kannada, Tamil and Punjabi to create the English they need in their novels. They bring into their novels the regional flavour that places their characters geographically, culturally and linguistically. Rushdie entering the scene of the Indian English novel with his *Midnight's Children*, which is a book not about any one region but the whole subcontinent, uses English as a pan-Indian language and not as a regional language.

How does he do it? He does it by using "Hinglish" in place of any one regional language. "Hinglish" is a mixture of Hindi the national language and English. Did you know "Hinglish" is an artificially created language? No, it wasn't created by Rushdie, but by the famous Hindi film gossip magazine *Stardust*! The late Devyani Chaubal its spunky editor in the early 1970s first began using an English that befitted Bollywood gossip so well – "Actress X pataoes actor Y". This usage has become so common that many of you must have grown up using it in school, college and home. It is, like many things in India, hybrid in nature – Bhangra pop, for example. So it seems so natural today to use a hybrid English or "Hinglish" as it is called, for our daily conversations. "Come let's go for *chai* (tea) or "I've told her *hajaar* (a thousand) times to come on time" are all instances of Hinglish. Now, the beauty of "Hinglish" is that it is spoken and understood in different parts of the country. For one thing, the English-educated generations have overcome their colonial hang-up about using Hindi. For another, while people in the villages are trying to learn English those in the southern Indian states have picked up Hindi, possibly from TV serials! So, "Hinglish" is commonly used in the country today. It creates a sense of its being a pan-Indian language cutting across regional, religious and class barriers.

Rushdie, unlike the novelists who preceded him, uses the hybrid, pan-Indian "Hinglish" to communicate the worldview and emotions of his characters. It is very effective because it is easily recognizable as the speaking voice of the common man or woman in India. This was not so in the novels of Narayan, Rao and Anand. In their novels, you always had to consciously suspend your belief that the tongawalla or the sweeper were speaking in English. But look at this example from *Midnight's Children* :

> She (Padma) attempts to cajole me from my desk : "Eat, na, food is spoiling." I remained stubbornly hunched on paper .... Padma snorts. Wrist smacks across forehead. "Okay, starve, starve, who cares two pice."

Before I give you my interpretation, will you please write down in the space provided below what Rushdie has achieved in this passage through his use of English and how?

The first thing you must have observed is that Rushdie uses British English for the educated male narrator Saleem, and "Hinglish" for Padma (Saleem's uneducated beloved)so that gives us the knowledge that these characters belong to different-social classes. While the British English highlights the stubborn moody character of Saleem, as Padma tries to "cajole" him and persuade him to eat much like an Indian wife is likely to do, her "snorts", and wrist smacks across forehead reveal his and her frustration and his inflexibility. The Hinglish used here also suggests a number of things, First, the effect of both the sentences, - "eat na, food is spoiling" and "okay, starve, starve who cares two pice" implies that Padma is not speaking English. The reason is the use of the word "na" in the first sentence and the grammatical "error" ("food is spoiling" rather than "the food is getting cold") which are more likely to be used in the vernacular. Again, in the second sentence, the use of "starve" twice for emphasis definitely communicates that it is not an English utterance. In English, one never uses a word twice for emphasis. For example "I sang while I worked." This usage of the same word twice in succession is more common in the vernacular – "*Maine gaate gaate kaam kiya.*"

This, in a few sentences using some British English and some "Hinglish", Rushdie is able to convey a great deal about his character, their close relationship, personalities, emotions, social class, educational level and culture .

2.6 IS RUSHDIE AN INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELIST?

Rather intriguingly, in an interview he gave in 1982, Rushdie stated that there is no such thing as Indian-British fiction! He felt that writers like Narayan and Anand have "more affinities to Indian writers in the Indian languages than they do to a writer like me who just happens to be writing in English" (Interview 1982).

Now while the distinctive way in which Rushdie uses English is quite obvious but what is controversial here is his view that the Indian English novel, is not separate from British fiction. Does this means that Rushdie regards all literature written in English as an offshoot of the British novel while he considers those novelists like Rao, Narayan and Anand who borrow their regional languages as belonging to the vernacular Indian writers.

But interestingly in each of his novels, especially *Midnight's Children* he has used "Indian English" and not British English to represent the speech of his Indian characters. Indeed, if there is a difference between his forerunners and him, then it is this that while Narayan, Rao, Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya invariably were at pains not to use a single vernacular word, phrase or idiom untranslated into English, Rushdie often refuses to make such concessions for the western reader. Although he occasionally uses a Hindi or Urdu word in the original - the meaning of these unfamiliar Indianisms has to be derived largely from the context. The western reader has to work hard to decipher their significance which an Indian reader would recognize instantly because of a mutually shared cultural and sociological heritage. This method of embedding the English language with select Indianisms is a clear advancement in the Indian writer's attempt to use Hinglish as a decolonized form of English. In using it, Rushdie can be considered a pioneer in Indian English Fiction. Examine these two exchanges between Tai, the hoary boatman and the child Aziz Aadam :

> 'No, tell, Taiji, how old (you are) truly?... And now
> a brandy bottle, materializes from nowhere : cheap
> liquor from the folds of the great warm chugha coat.
> Then a shudder, a belch... 'How old? You ask how
> Old, you little wet-head, you nosey .... So, old nakkoo!' (16)

The inquisitive child wanting the white bearded Tai to tell him his age, and Tai not wanting to disclose it is a scene typically enacted between all children and their elders with the former ready to believe that any one older than them must be ancient, and the latter too ashamed to acknowledge the passage of age. The exchange reveals the offence taken by the old man and returned in the pejorative "you nosey" and "old nakoo", at the impudence of the disrespectful young boy towards an elder. The other Indianisms here include "*chuga*" coat and the ungrammatical use of the verb (to 'tell') without the subject ('me') and the use of the complement ('how old') without the subject and predicate ('you are'); they read like utterances in the regional languages.

That Rushdie wants to use English not merely as an intellectual's language but also to communicate emotions is clear from the opening of Chapter 6 titled " A Public Announcement":

> There followed an illusionist January, a time so still on its surface that 1947 seemed not to have begun at all ... (while, of course, in fact....) In which the Cabinet Mission – old Patrick Lawrence, clever Cripps, military A. V. Alexander – saw their scheme for the transfer of power fail. (But of course, in fact, it would only be six months until ...) In which the viceroy Wavell understood that *he was finished, washed up, or in our own expressive word, funtoosh* (64, italics added)

A slightly longer quotation but I want to use it to make two separate points. For the first point, please pay attention only to the italicized words. They communicate the emotional drain that the loss of India as a colony had meant to the departing English government. The words 'finished' and 'washed up' are not enough, Rushdie clarifies; such powerful feelings can only be communicated through our own expressive (vernacular) word 'funtoosh'.

My second point is to draw your attention to the use of dots and dashes in *Midnight's Children* which Rushdie admits he learnt from G. V. Desani in his novel *All About H Hatterr* (1948) Desani first showed him that it was possible to break up the English language and put it back together in a different way . He says in his interview:

> I found I had to punctuate it (*Midnight's Children*) in a very peculiar way,... I had to use dashes too much, keep exclaiming, putting in three dots, sometimes three dots followed by semi-colons followed by three dashes...That sort of thing just seemed to help to dislocate the English and let other things into it. Desani does that all the time in *Hatter*... (1982)

If you reflect on this carefully, you will observe that that's what all the Indian English novelists have really been doing with British English. They too have been dislocating it, breaking up its existing linguistic cultural patterns, introducing new cultural patterns into it and localizing it for creative use. Rushdie has been doing that too. So, doesn't it then make Rushdie belong as much to the Indian English literary tradition as the other novelists – Narayan, Rao and Anand? Clearly like them, Rushdie is not writing British fiction, but very much an Indian English fiction.

2.7 ENGLISH "DE-DOXIFIED"

Since the late 1960s, a major revolution has been underway to question the very way in which we perceive inherited ways of thinking about reality. It began in Paris in France with Ferdinand Saussure and Ronald Barthes and has since developed into a

full fledged school of Post Structural criticism and intellectual thought. Its influence has been felt in almost every area and discipline of study.

According to this school some ideas are actually formulated by society to preserve the position and power of society's politically, socially, economically dominant groups but these ideas are passed off as 'natural' or cultural in origin. In reality these ideologies have been created to justify the presence of inequalities so that the minority or marginalized sections may not challenge the dominance of the majority or the privileged groups.

For example, the Indian belief that one is born a *sudra* or a woman because of one's *karma*, is an ideology which reasons that we are where we are because of our past actions. Because this ideology seems incontestable, once we believe in the *Karma* theory, then the power groups continue to exercise their dominance while the powerless passively accept their dominance over themselves. What makes ideologies so difficult to dislodge is the conditioning since birth of the 'naturalness' of those unequal situations in societies.

When Barthes defined Poststructualist thought he was instrumental in challenging all such 'natural' constructions and exposing the political intentions of the powerful who were interested in keeping these ideologies and beliefs alive. He described these as the 'Doxa' or public opinion or the 'Voice of Nature' (Barthes 1977b) and questioned if in truth they were natural or were they man made.

Closely following Post structuralist thinking is Postmodernism in art and architecture which has given expression to upturning given traditional, cultural public opinion or 'doxa' by consciously re-writing the same script in reverse. The effect is sensational as it pulls down the powerful from their habitual position and places the powerless in their place. Let's consider Anand's novel *Untouchable* as an example to see how this works.

In *Untouchable* the well-built low caste Bakha is spat upon, abused and slapped by the short and thin high caste Hindu merely because he accidently touches him. Since you've studied that book, I want you to notice the special mention made in that scene of the fact that the strong Bakha could easily have beaten and overpowered the small and puny Hindu. And can you recall what run's through Bakha's mind at that time? That despite the inner rage he cannot retaliate because of his conditioning that his station in life does not allow him to beat up a high caste. Mulk Raj Anand by depicting an untouchable as the hero of his novel and by providing the narratorial comment about Bakha's conditioned state was creating history. But that is not revolutionary enough for postmodern writers.

What a postmodern work would do would be to represent the low caste as militant rather than meek. In a postmodern novel, Anand would have written the scene twice, once as he has scripted it in his novel and then again with the reverse script, wherein, he would have shown Bakha as returning the caste Hindu's slap with powerful blows that would have made the caste Hindu tremble in fear or run for his life.

This would mean rewriting a given socio cultural-script in reverse. Such rewritten reverse scripts create new realities that are as equally valid as the existing ones in which the superior group is privileged. Along these lines, an entire range of ideologies can be challenged. For example, one may challenge the superiority of man or over woman, sanity versus madness, white over black and so on.

Now when the writer re-scripts given assumptions, he needs to frame language in a certain way which is called 'de-doxification'. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* there is ample evidence of the use of 'de-doxification'. Consider this description of Jesus Christ by Tai the boat man where Jesus is spoken of not as a revered prophet

> "Nakoo, listen, listen. I have seen plenty
> Yara, you should've seen Isa (Jesus) when
> he came, beard down to his balls, bald as
> an egg on his head.... And what an
> appetite!.... Saint or devil, I swear he could
> eat a whole kid in one go.... I told him eat,
> fill your hole....He just came here to live it
> up a little " (16)

Obviously a cooked-up tale. Yet, Coming from the lips of the bawdy, crude boatman, his irreverence seems very much in character. At the same time Rushdie achieves his poststructural purpose ; he challenges the usual practice of privileging prophets over ordinary men. Here he does it unobtrusively but in *The Satanic Verses*, he did it so openly that it got him into severe trouble as you all know.

2.8 RUSHDIE'S USE OF ENGLISH IN DESCRIPTIVE SCENES

Rushdie uses the English language to describe landscapes or actions so that these acquire a three dimensional cinematic quality. He draws on the visual, auditory, kinesthetic senses and conveys images, feelings and sounds in a way that render them immediate and experienceable . In the passage quoted below Saleem tries to show off to Evie that he has learnt how to ride a bike. Evie is his neighbour on whom he has a crush while Evie is soft towards Sonny.

> Roundandroundand... finally, to please her (Evie) , I stammered,
> 'Okay... I think I'm ... let me ', and instantly I was on my own,
> she had given a farewell shove .... I heard her shouting. The
> brake ! Use the goddamn brake ya dummy !'- but my hands couldn't
> move, I had gone rigid as a plank, and there LOOK OUT in front of
> me was the blue two – wheeler of Sonny Ibrahim, collision course,
> OUTA THE WAY YA CRAZY .... (186-87)

Did you notice the use of capital letters to convey Saleem's inner dialogue and thoughts, and Rushdie's practice of joining three to four words without a hyphen (roundandroundand) to communicate uninterrupted motion? This use of language is present **in many** passages of the book. Can you find a few others?

Again look at the following description of the arrival of spring in Kashmir after a long snow-laden winter. The metaphor used is that of a newborn chick emerging out of its eggshell , bringing with itself a sense of something new, young, fresh, just born:

> The world was new again. After a winter's gestation in its eggshell of ice,
> the valley had beaked its way out into the open, moist and yellow (10).

The third scene that I share with you reflects Saleem's great sense of loss and pain at realizing that his parents don't want him back because they have just discovered that he is not their son but someone (born to a poor singer) had been exchanged at birth in Narlikar's Hospital by their ayah Mary Pereira :

> This, then, was the beginning of my first exile ...
> I bore it uncomplainingly.... I had been loaned out,
> like a comic-book from the Scandal Point Second

Hand Library for some indefinite period; and that when my parents wanted me back, they would send for me. When, or even if ...(240)

Descriptions such as these are not culture specific but universal in their reach to re-create basic human experience. Beyond the writer of Indian English themes, Rushdie is also a humanist in the best sense of the word.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, I have highlighted the different ways in which Indian English novelists have tried to the use the English language so that it could be different from the colonizer's (British) English.

I have also shown you how Rushdie , despite his disclaimer, belongs very much to the Indian English literary tradition, and have shared with you his numerous experiments and contributions to the re-making of Indian English in fiction.

Further, I have emphasized the difference between him and his forerunners in his use of 'de-doxified' English and showed him to be equally skilled in penning descriptive scenes and human experiences that belong to no particular time frame or culture.

2.10 GLOSSARY

articulate: to express clearly and effectively

embed: to fix something firmly and deeply (in a mass of surrounding matter)

forge: shape

genres: class of works of art or literature

ideology: a set of ideas

intriguing: interesting, provoking thought

irreverence: lack of respect

pan-indian: common across the regions and cultures of India

perjorative: word or phrase that suggests that somebody is worthless

predecessor: person who has come before someone else

privilege: special right or advantage given to a few

syntactical: by the rules of grammar used for ordering or connecting words in sentence

transliteration: to translate literally

unobtrusive: not seen or noticed easily

2.11 QUESTIONS

1 Attempt a detailed analysis of any two passages from the novel (other than those discussed here) so as to highlight Rushdie's particular talents with the use of English.

2. How far do you agree or disagree with my views on Rushdie's use of English in *Midnight's Children*? Discuss with illustrations of your own.

2.12 SUGGESTED READING

Kirpal, Viney. *The Postmodern Indian English Novel: A Study of the 1980s and 1990s* (Allied, 1996).

Parameswaran, Uma. Salman Rushdie in Indo-English Literature in *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 12:2 (July 1984).

Roy, Anjali. *Making New Words/Worlds: Options for the Indian Novelist in English* in (ed) C.D. Narasimhaiah's *Makers of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Pencraft, 2000.

UNIT 3 THEMES IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 History and the Individual
3.3 Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism in India
3.4 Fragmentation, Migrancy and Memory
3.5 Let Us Sum Up
3.6 Glossary
3.7 Questions
3.8 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective is to help you understand what are Rushdie's main themes in *Midnight's Children* and how Rushdie has developed certain themes in ways which make him belong among other migrant Indian English novelists.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Whenever someone suggests that you read such and such a work or novel, probably the first question you are likely to ask is : "What is it about?" Of course the book may be about a certain philosophy or world view or may be stylistically or technically memorable but what every prospective reader (and I repeat *every* reader) is interested in, is the central theme, or loosely the story of the book.

E.M. Foster in *Aspects of the Novel* (Have you read it? If not, do read it) rightly says that it is human nature to be interested in a story. The moment someone says "I am going to tell you a story," no human being can resist gathering around the teller. What makes a story irresistible to the listeners is the element of suspense that the writer, especially a novelist, builds in his work with the help of what-happened-next and what-happened-next.

Thus, any novel that we take up for reading will have a series of events and situations and characters involved in those situations, so much so that the larger the novel, the more numerous will be the events and the people with their anxieties or joys. The story is made even more confusing with not only those characters speaking about themselves or to others, but also (unknown to them) there are others too who express their opinions about them and their actions and of how they feel affected by them. Over and above all this, there is the novelist himself who through narratorial comments or asides, or certain characters, is offering additional insights.

In the end, the most difficult question to answer about a book is "What is it about?" But if we are careful readers, as I believe you are, being postgraduate students, then the method is to very briefly summarize every chapter of the novel as you finish reading it. By the time you have finished reading the novel, you will discover that a few basic themes seem to emerge in the novel. This is because, at the foundation of every novel with its numerous events and happenings, lie just a handful of themes. If you can develop the art of recognizing the major themes in a novel, you will enjoy reading it so much more, besides actually feeling a sense of control over what you read. Does that make sense?

At the beginning of Unit 1, I had requested you to read the novel once through quickly. Did you do that? Do you think you can list some of its themes? Why not give it a try in the space provided below?

_____

_____

_____

_____

You will get my response soon enough but before that let me suggest one more aspect of the themes that appear in *Midnight's Children* or in any novel for that matter. Whenever we examine the total output of any novelist, we normally find that a limited number of themes seem to be repeated in his or her different works.

For example, in Raja Rao's novels the usual theme is the superiority of vedantic, spiritual India over the materialistic west. In R. K. Narayan's novels, the clash is between the traditional Indian values and the values from the west, and the choice of the protagonist to modernize Indian values by borrowing eclectically from the west. In the novels of Anita Desai - the novelist who hit the Indian writing scene in the 1960s - the definition of a person's identity as an individual (not as an Indian) prevails. Now why do you think that this happens?

I grant that the difference in the thematic concerns of Rao, Narayan and Desai originates in their distinct personalities. That does seem like a fairly natural answer, doesn't it? Since all of us are different, we choose to write about different matters. But I want you to consider this matter from another perspective. If two novelists had absolutely identical personalities would they choose to write of the same themes? Or, would the age, the period, the environment in which the writer was born or raised also influence her choice and interpretation of her themes? Further is it also possible that though a number of writers may have preceded or followed a particular writer, it is this writer's representation of themes that seems to touch and affect his readers more than that of the other writers? If so, what is it that makes for the difference?

Keep thinking about this question and try to find an answer. You will indeed, if you try. On this note, I'm going to leave you to reflect awhile, and then take you to the next section where I will discuss the first the major theme of *Midnight's Children*, which is "History and the Individual." Check out if you were able to locate it as a result of the exercise I set you in the beginning of this section.

3.2 HISTORY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Do you find it strange that in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie establishes a strong connection between the history of India and the life of Saleem, his protagonist as if the two were Siamese twins? I did, when I first read this novel and I am sure so did many other readers. Right from the moment of his birth, Saleem is described as being "mysteriously hand-cuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was no escape." (9) Thus, Rushdie sets the scene for us to believe a strange tale, if true, that Saleem Sinai by being born in Bombay on 15th August 1947 at the stroke of midnight, becomes the first child born in independent India, and that his story is the history of free India.

What makes it interesting is that though many Indians must have been born on 15th August 1947 at 12 midnight (one of my own cousins was, and you too may recall a friend or member of the family) but no one ever thought that such people carried within them the history of free India!

The connection that Rushdie establishes between every personal event in Saleem's life and that of his family, and the political and historical events that unfold in independent India is carefully maintained throughout the novel, even though sometimes it can sound a bit forced as in the latter part of the novel.

When *Midnight's Children* first appeared, this kind of connection seemed too far-fetched to many readers but you can understand how such connections are quite possible in contemporary times because of the reach of the media. You may recall a disturbing happening that occurred a few months ago. Riots broke out in Nepal after it was rumoured that the well-known Indian film star Hrithik Roshan had said in a TV interview that he disliked the Nepalese. Going by such incidents, it is no longer impossible to believe the connection between the individual and historical events nor is there any need to exercise "a willing suspension of disbelief," as we had to while reading fiction until a few decades ago.

Thus, as we read through Saleem's account, we see, among other things that Saleem was responsible for the language riots of the 1950s, that he played a pivotal role in the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 and that when in 1975 Indira Gandhi imprisoned political opponents and suspended the democratic rights of the people during the "Emergency" that she had proclaimed to save herself from going to prison over proven charges of corruption during the elections, he feels drained out and close to death.

Likewise, not only in free India but even before, a number of events are given an individual as well as a historical importance. For example, Saleem's grandparents Aziz and Naseem Sinai on their way from Kashmir to Agra, stop over in Amritsar, where Aziz experiences at first hand, the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre. I shall now quote a passage from *Midnight's Children* mainly to demonstrate to you the manner in which Rushdie captures one of the worst moments in India's colonial history - the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre - through the mock heroic description of the chilling effects it has on the individual, Aadam Aziz - who has lived through it all.

> As the fifty one men march down the alley way (to the Jallianwallah Bagh) a tickle replaces the itch in my Grandfather's nose. The fifty one men enter the compound and take up positions, twenty-five to Dyer's right and twenty-five to his left... As Brigadier Dyer issues a command the sneeze hits my grandfather full in the face. `Yaaaahh-thooo! he sneezes and falls forward ... thereby saving his life .... Red stuff stains his shirt. There are screams now and sobs and the strange chattering continues. More and more people seem to have stumbled and fallen on top of my grandfather." (36)

Thus, while General Dyer is firing and shooting ruthlessly at unarmed Indians, Aziz sneezes and falls forward. And when thousands of trapped Indians are shot dead, "red stuff" stains his shirt. The massacre itself is heralded by an itch in his nose. The events are tragic and serious but the effect is described in a comic and non serious absurd way. This is how Rushdie keeps drawing the parallels between the life of an ordinary individual and major historical events through the 31 chapters of the novel. The day Saleem is born, his parents acquire the house of the Englishman, Mr. Methwold, (whose parents had established British rule in India and India gains independence). His parents, grandparents and an aunt are killed on 23 September 1965, the day India's Airforce bombs Rawalpindi. Shiva his powerful and violent enemy moves in to live with Parvati-the-witch in May 1974 on the very day that India explodes its first nuclear test bomb; their son Aadam is born on 25 June 1975, the day Emergency is declared for the first time in India. The book is full of examples that demonstrate Saleem's belief that he is linked to history "both literally and metaphorically" (238).

This method is very different from the way history books are written. If I were to quote a passage from the book of Indian history on the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre then the narration would focus on dates and facts such as the number of people dead, the impact of the massacre on British rule in India and so on. Or, if it were a passage on the Emergency in India, it would focus on the reasons – real and imaginary for its imposition, and on its consequences for India and Indira Gandhi. The way Rushdie does it is to treat history as fiction, that is not to take it seriously. So, nowhere does he retell history as fact. Indeed, the history that he narrates is full of mistakes in dates, and this Saleem argues is because it is derived from recollection and memory In other words, Saleem Rushdie seems to be writing history as Saleem's autobiography.

Rushdie would like to show us that the history in *Midnight's Children* is as much fiction as any other and that it should not be seen as an objective chronicle of the times that form the backdrop of his novel. Unlike history which is usually linear and chronological, his narration is cyclical and he obviously shows a desire to so shape his material that the reader will be forced to accept its non-objective nature. The central rule is that the small errors in the text such as the wrong dates of important events including the date of Gandhi's assassination are clues indicating that Saleem is capable of consciously distorting facts.

Rushdie has bemoaned the fact that his book is often read as history rather than as fiction. But to read it as pure fiction would be to miss the point too. Saleem's absurd story linking the history of a nation with that of an ordinary family chosen at random, is meant at one level, to expose the absurdity of history and to challenge the confidence and pride of a historian and historiographer's attempt to explain to us what really happened in the past. Yet on the other hand, it is meant to capture the most difficult period in independent India's history namely the period of the Emergency . But more of that later.

In the novel Saleem cuts up seemingly important political newspaper articles at random and then rearranges them to constitute a new view of reality . He shows the power of re-made reality when he pieces together randomly cut out newspaper items, words, syllables and letters to form a message to Commander Sabarmati that his wife is unfaithful to him; the message leads the husband into murdering his wife's paramou. and being jailed. His absurd action reflects the absurdity of the historian's claim of presenting history as an objective truth and to show that history can be bent to serve dangerous and individual designs.

As I mentioned earlier, this book also represents Rushdie's great grief and sorrow at the turn of the events in Indian politics that lead to the imposition of the Emergency at the recommendation of the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975 to save herself from going to prison. The Emergency which lasted from 1975 – 1977 had spelt the gravest threat to Indian democracy since Independence, especially because of the version that Mrs. Gandhi had given to the nation for its imposition. The Emergency, she had persuaded the President of India, was necessary to save the country from external threat, while there was none. The years of the Emergency will therefore remain etched in Indian memory as the darkest period in the history of free India. Characterized by repressions, the censorship of the press, the imprisonment of the leaders of the opposition, the torture of activists including artists, dismissals from jobs, forced retirements and untold brutalities on the people of India, it was a time when the India had become a totalitarian state. No wonder it was a period marked by an overriding feeling of impotence and crippling despair for having lost to very powerful forces. By creating a non-heroic character and a family through which Rushdie gives us the history of India, especially the dark period of the Emergency, he is trying to dramatically re-create the close brush with dictatorship and the complete helplessness that almost every average (and hence powerless) Indian of the times had experienced. The book which ends with the imposition of the Emergency is

appropriately despair-ridden because no one at that time knew that Mrs. Gandhi would lift the Emergency and call for the elections, or that the angry people of India would vote her out and replace her with the opposition . This kind of personalization of history makes the events of the times live in the psyche of the reader, an achievement that is not possible in an ordinary book of history. Saleem's life from his birth to his near death-like condition, is meant to parallel the journey of free India from an optimistic nation to a comatose, submissive one.

It may interest you to know that many West Indian writers too (Have you read any?) have created the character of a child who grows up from childhood into adulthood and established a connection between the growing child and the new nation. For example George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* shows the child gaining adulthood even as West Indian society is alongside evolving a political consciousness of its own. The grown up young man represents hope , joy, optimism and opportunity as he sets out to build a new future for himself and his country. This motif of a growing and evolving child fits in beautifully with the fiction written about the "historyless", "traditionless" West Indies.

As you know the colonizers – the British, the French and the Spaniards--had destroyed the Caribs, the original inhabitants of the West Indies and transported slaves from Central Africa to populate these islands as cheap labour for their sugar plantations. Since the slaves were not allowed to stay together in families they experienced total disconnection from the groups they had once belonged to. Over a period of a century or two, the people who lived in the West Indies had lost all sense of history and tradition. So when the English-educated West Indian novelists began writing in the 1950s, they created the character of a growing child to suggest the growth of the West Indian consciousness of its own identity.

Unlike the happy, optimistic child of West Indian literature , Rushdie's growing child Saleem only grows older; he does not evolve. And as he grows older he gets more and more misshapen and ugly and closer to death. . He is emasculated and castrated during the Emergency, and he passively waits for death. He seems to have become a person who has lost all control over his life because of political circumstances and lack of will. Through this character Rushdie is trying to represent not a nation full of hope but a nation whose voice has been muzzled and which is in a hopeless state because of the historical-political events.

At the end of the novel you feel like asking : What is Rushdie really doing to history in creating a character like Saleem? Has any other Indian English writer before Rushdie used history as a theme? How is Rushdie different? Let us reflect a little on these questions.

The use of historical material in creative writing dates back to the times of the epics themselves. History was also used in the novels by Indian English writers such as Raja Rao, Khuswant Singh, Chamal Nahal, and Manohar Malgaonkar. While Singh, Nahal and Malgaonkar wrote about Indian independence and the Partition, they wrote from a perspective that suggested that there is such a thing as a history. Rushdie by contrast, is trying to suggest that history is a lie. Raja Rao, too was re-writing the history of the village *Kanthapura* , a counter history, and not just a history as narrated in history books written by British historians.

With *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao became the first Indian English novelist to write about the history of colonialized India in a way which subverted and undermined the colonizers' view of India. He wrote a history which was not chronological. It was without a proper beginning, middle and end and it talked about the oppression and exploitation of the common Indian in the 1930s. His history was far from British history which projected the colonizer as someone who had come to civilize India at great sacrifice and cost. Rao's "oral" narrative was a "narrative of resistance" to the British written history of colonization.

Frantz Fanon, the author of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) has described the three phases through which writers in the former colonies gradually mature. In the first phase, their works are imitative of the colonizer's literature. In the second phase, they attack the colonizer for the wrongs they have done to their country (Rao's *Kanthapura* belongs to this phase). In the third phase, the writers address and attack the political events and politicians in the newly freed country. (Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* mainly belongs to this stage, though he also makes forays into the second stage as well).

Together, Rao and Rushdie have in their own ways challenged received versions of history, though Rushdie has attempted the theme in a more complex way. His aim is to go beyond a mere attack of the British and the Indian governments to highlight the way in which history can be changed and manipulated by those in power. The difference also lies in Rao's perception of Indian society as a homogenous one, existing within a well-defined Hindu mythical religious frame work. By contrast, Rushdie's world view is secular, plural and modern. In *Midnight's Children* we are not reading about a Muslim character but about a character who is an Indian i.e., a product of mixed traditions and many races.

The individual since the 20th century has become a very small and powerless being because governments have become very, very oppressive and powerful. This postmodern insight is clearly seen in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem, is the centre of attention at the time of his birth – the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru writes to his parents; newspapers carry his pictures, celebrate his arrival and award him for being India's first midnight child. But as he grows older, he begins to lose his position, first in the Sinai household and then in the country itself. So much so that at 31, Saleem feels completely drained out and impotent having been forcibly castrated during the Emergency. Rushdie's treatment of the theme of the individual and history highlights the tragedy of being an individual in contemporary times.

To sum up what Rushdie has done is not easy because it is obvious that he is writing this novel where the life of the individual is fused with that of the nation, not as a fictional gimmick but as an attempt to create an emotional spot in the reader about the most sad and disturbing event in the history of free India. Interestingly and (and perhaps inadvertently), Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* triggered off a new mode of fiction writing amongst Indian English novelists. There have been over 20 novels since the publication of *Midnight's Children*, wherein the life of the individual runs parallel with the life of the nation. The new trend highlights the contribution of Rushdie to the Indian novel in English.

To conclude, Rushdie is the first Indian English novelist who consciously uses history in fiction to show its subjective, untruthful nature and its easy manipulation by modern day governments. He describes historical events through the emotions of his characters. To reveal the trivial role played by the individual in countering powerful modern day governments, he does it in a mock heroic, absurd way.

3.3 COLONIALISM AND NEO-COLONIALISM IN INDIA

What has set apart writers from former colonies has been among other things a desire to set right the record of their country's history, traditions and civilizations through their work. This has been specially so in the case of migrant writers. Most Indian migrant writers - and Rushdie is one of them – are what I would like to call activist writers. They carry their political challenges to authority into their books and simultaneously connect the books with the world outside.

Perhaps the distance in years from their mother country gives them the detachment necessary for writing about it as a theme. Moreover, their negative experiences with racism in the white host country have often triggered off in them a desire to offpit the strengths of their own country against those of the new country. In the process, these writers Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Kamala Markandaya have particularly attacked the phenomenon of colonization in India with a lucidity and directness that has not been available in the writings of the stay-at-home in the novelists, perhaps because of the closeness of the latter to local events.

Thus, most migrant writers tend to write books which are political acts and constitute , in my view, true postcolonial works, if by postcolonialism one means the "decolonisation of the mind". That's what freedom is and not just political independence – (which could be merely a physical gesture of handing over power to the original natives of that country).

The works of these writers challenge the ideologically-determined paradigms of historical relationships and try to free the non-white formerly colonized person from the awe in which he or she holds the colonizer. It is not surprising therefore, that these novelists have re-invented the English language and , the fictional form, and tried to re-write their colonial history in their fiction from the perspective of the colonies.

Rushdie is carrying on from where the precursors like Raja Rao left off *Kanthapura.* In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie attacks British colonialism and its representatives symbolised in characters such as Methwold with a ruthless clarity and makes every attempt to link up many of the ills in independent India to the mischief played by the British during their reign. The moral of his representation is that had the foreigner never come here to plunder and colonize, India would have been a beautiful country. This is the typical migrant writer's standpoint.

In chapter 7 titled "Methwold" , Bombay (or microcosm India) is represented in its pristine beauty and populated by the fisherfolk called the Kolis – its earliest inhabitants. Rushdie describes how this primeval world was overrun by different invaders beginning with the Portuguese who used the harbour to shelter there the merchant ships and their men-of-war. This was followed by the East India Company led by an officer named William Methwold who successfully realized a vision of a British Bombay when in 1668 the East India Company did get its hands on the island. The worst sufferers were the fisherfolk as the invaders changed the very character of the city (Read the country) they had begun to rule (92). Regret and nostalgia marks Rushdie's narration in this chapter, as if he would like to put the clock back physically.

The nostalgia turns to anger as his narrative challenges the myth created by the British of having come here to civilize India. Haven't we all grown up sincerely believing that British rule was a good thing for India? Our educational system, our books, our syllabus have been written from a Eurocentric perspective. So we have been subtly and gradually conditioned into accepting the superiority of the British, and appreciate their efforts to civilize us.

Rushdie's Methwold is a caricature, a symbol of evil and moral degeneration rather than a fully fleshed out character. Rushdie uses him to convey his views about colonialism. Methwold in the *Midnight's Children* is a descendant of the Methwold who was the first officer of the East India Company, and he is the last European to rule India before India got its freedom. This first and last Englishman thus becomes the direct object of Rushdie's anger as he symbolizes for him the entire colonial adventure of exploitation and demoralization. (Read Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* to understand the violent nature of the colonizing process).

Right from the beginning when Methwold or "Myth world" is described as" a six foot titan with a centre-parting in his hair, [His]face the pink of roses and eternal youth" (95), you get the message clear from Rushdie – " Here's a man not to be trusted. So, the centre-parting itself becomes a defining characteristic of the British, now only too well-known for their 'Divide & Rule' policy which was very much responsible for the cutting up of British India into an independent Pakistan and an independent India - one piece for the Muslims and the other for the Non-Muslims.

The myth of the Britain's civilizational mission is easily exposed when having identified Methwold as a liar, the reader edits every statement of Methwold's from the new perspective of mistrust. When Methwold describes to Ahmed Sinai (Saleem's father) how much the Indians owe to the British, the reader sees it as yet another fiction written by a ruler :

> "you will admit we weren't all bad; built your roads, schools, railway trains, parliamentary system, all worthwhile things ..."(109-110).

Methwold's, "we" is necessarily restricted to the British; he views his people as the men who were the civilizing influence on the Indian subcontinent and would like to remind the Indians about it on the eve of his departure. He is simply unable to acknowledge the existence of any culture other than his own. There is nothing on the Estate where he lives that would suggest anything other than European culture . The architecture used in the buildings resembles medieval England's "durable mansions with red roofs and turret towers in each corner, ivory white corner towers wearing pointy red tiled hats" (94) .

William Methwold had named the four mansions after the famous places of Europe—Versailles, Buckingham Villa, Escorial Villa and Sansouci Villa (108) – thus denying the existence of local architectural traditions. The act also exposes the colonizer's desire to superimpose historical European paradigms on the Indian landscape and consciousness and make the colonized pliant.

Methwold, like India's last Governor General, Lord Mountbatten insists that India should retain the economic and, political framework of the British. When the inhabitants are compelled to retain the estate and the four mansions with every piece of junk within them, what do you think they are being forced to do? "Lock, Stock and Barrel" Methwold said, "those are my terms. A whim, Mr. Sinai...you will permit a departing colonial his little game? We do not have much left to do, we British, except to play our games" (95).

This may seem unbelievable but it is a fact that those colonies were given independence earlier where Britain was certain that the new government would remain within its economic and political orbit. It is also a fact that the most lasting and intense warfare (For example, in South Africa) occurred where the freedom struggle was both nationalist as well as revolutionary, and where de-colonization would mean confiscation of foreign investments and severance of economic ties with the colonizing country. The politics of colonialism is well-documented today and you may want to read more on the subject.

Through the character and conditions set by Methwold, Rushdie is drawing our attention to this politics with a sharpness that has been common to most migrant writers from the former colonies. I want you to understand this point because Rushdie's choice of themes is very much influenced by his having lived in the former colonizer's country.

Rushdie makes us aware that the game that Methwold plays concerns not only names but objects as well. The names of the houses on his Estate are of course the names of famous European palaces which were either built at the height of absolute

monarchism in Europe or as an expression of a nostalgia of that kind of absolute power. Now, these names carry a history, an entire tradition of centralized authority and the rights of Kings. Thus, when Methwold seeks to preserve the traditions of the British Raj through the objects in his estate, his hope is that the objects will affect and influence the consciousness of the new occupants in such a way that the superiority of the traditions of the British will be permanently etched on the Indian psyche.

He also tells Ahmed Sinai that he wants to select a few suitable persons and "hand everything over absolutely : in tip top working order" (111) to them. The suitable persons he has in mind are obviously members of the Indian educated middle class whose consciousness he hopes to permanently imprint with the British value system and political, economic structures and life styles.

Rushdie is brutal in his attack through his exaggerated portrayal and caricature of Methwold. He not only exposes the myth of the so-called superiority of the British, but also the colonial games that the British had played specially since Macaulay's time to create Indians who were English in spirit and mental dependants on the British. It is too big a price to buy a house to live in but as Rushdie shows it was the price that the country paid for getting its freedom. The Estate symbolizes India, earlier possessed by the British, now being handed over to Indian owners (rulers), intact with the colonizers political and economic systems.

Methwold (The British) was not off the mark in his vision of colonizing the Indian mind because as Saleem admits "Methwold's estate is changing them". As Methwold joins them at the cocktail hour, his very presence elicits the imitative Oxford drawl among Ahmed Sinai and his friends (113). The departing British had through planned psychological conditioning ensured the continued slavery of the Indian. This is the meaning of the puzzling transfer of the Estate and the houses with everything intact in them that may have bothered you as you read through (chapter 7) of the novel. You might have wondered why a rich and polished Englishman like Methwold would want to sell his Estate on such strange conditions, You may also have wondered if Methwold wasn't a very nice and amiable Englishman who despite being the last ruler was mingling so freely among the Indian buyers of his houses. I hope it is clear through explanation that the amiability is only meant as a cover-up for deeper designs that Rushdie takes such pains to expose.

If you have read carefully, you will also recall Amina Sinai (Saleem's mother) expressing her surprise and horror at the strange conditions that Methwold was imposing on the new "tenants." " Everything ?" Amina Sinai asked. "I can't even throw away a spoon? Allah, that lampshade...I can't get rid of one comb?" (95). Rushdie has built into the text the questioning of Methwold's motives by a woman of good native commonsense, such as Amina but he also wants to suggest how she is effectively silenced by men like her husband Ahmed who had obviously decided to become the new Englishmen and benefit from their new role and position in society as neo-colonials.

Rushdie's Saleem notes in his narrative how Ahmed Sinai begins to grow fairer in complexion day by day. Indeed, there is this funny scene – Can you recall it ? - where a large numbers of Indian businessman including Ahmed get up one morning and find they have turned white! Rushdie has said in an interview (1983) that this is an imagery he had used to show that "They [Indians] were stepping into British shoes, their clubs, their drinks, etc.... "

Thus very much like other migrant Indian English writers, Rushdie consciously sets out to expose British colonialism and its longer lasting impact called "neocolonialism".In this section, I haven't asked you too many questions. So try to answer this one. What is the significance of the scene of Vanita's seduction by

Methwold in Chapter 7? What do you think Rushdie is trying to convey in that scene? Give it a try before reading my answer.

This novel, like many novels by Indian English migrant writers is an allegory. An allegory is an extended metaphor where a sustained parallel is drawn from the story, character, actions and scenery to suggest a spiritual, political or psychological confrontation.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is an allegory where the individual's life and history are offered in a sustained parallel. Methwold, the Englishman is an extended metaphor for British colonization. His seduction of Vanita in the absence of her husband the street accordionist , Wee Willie Winkee, is a metaphor for appropriating and exploiting what rightfully belongs to another; which is also the meaning of colonialism. In every colony the ruling British officers had seduced and raped the wives of poor natives and left behind them the mixed products of their irresponsible union. Saleem is the son of Methwold and Vanita a child born of just such a union and raised by the Sinai family because of his having been exchanged at birth. Otherwise, he too would have been left to be raised in extreme poverty, like his "twin", Shiva . We have been conditioned to think of how fair and honorable the British were. Rushdie rips off the mask without remorse. Beneath the brilliantined black hair with its centre – parting, Methwold was " shiny – pated! Revealed : the deception which had tricked an accordionist's wife" (114).

To conclude this section. Rushdie is very much preoccupied with the theme of India's colonization and its lasting impact on the Indian mind as neocolonialism. He has used symbols and allegory to convey his strong feelings against this overwhelming phenomenon. His being a migrant has certainly heightened his feelings – even though he will always deny it.

3.4 FRAGMENTATION, MIGRANCY AND MEMORY

It is not surprising that Rushdie has concerned himself with the themes of colonialism and neo colonialism and Independent India's political history in *Midnight's Children.* A thematic examination of this sort is typical of all migrant novelists from the Third World You may want to know why . So first, I'll spend a few minutes elaborating this point because it has direct relevance to the three main themes in *Midnight's Children*, specially the theme of fragmentation, migrancy and memory which is the subject of this section and the underlying motivation of this novel.

In the 20th century began the largest -ever migration of peoples from the non-white to the white countries. It was around the 1950s that these migrations began – for economic reasons (i.e., for jobs etc). The trend has continued in the 21st century mainly because of the IT boom in the West.

However, that was not all. Third World writers have been migrating to the metropolitan capitals of London, Paris and New York to find a market for their works because readers in the Third World – would not support them. Thanks to the impact of colonization on their psyche, most educated people in the non-white former colonies felt that the great traditions of "culture" and "civilization" (Many of us still think so even today!) existed only in the West and that its literatures were superior to our own. The writers similarly looked for intellectual stimulation and encouragement

in the "ideal" environments of the West. While some writers actually migrated from the Third World, others like Raja Rao and Rushdie went to study in western universities and then stayed on for the same reason. Migration is not a simple phenomenon. Every migrant who stays away from his mother country, begins to experience an acute sense of homelessness and anxiety after the initial pleasures of being in the new land begin to fade away. This is the normal pattern of behaviour because the migrant suddenly begins to miss the familiar frame of references and relationships back home. In the case of migrants from the non-white colonies (such as India, W. Africa, E.Africa, the West Indies etc), these experiences have often been compounded by rejection in the host countries (usually white) on the basis of colour and race. Race riots keep erupting every now and then, even now, perhaps because members in the host countries feel threatened that they will be overrun and overtaken by former slaves, in their own country.

George Lamming, the famous Barbadian writer of the masterpiece *In the Castle of My Skin* (you remember I mentioned this book earlier too), has written an equally famous non-fictional work. It is called *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). It highlights, with sensitivity, the terrible dilemma and the divided feelings that a migrant (especially a writer) from the Third World experiences in the West. The dilemma is : it is painful to stay but it is as difficult to return. The migrant belongs to both worlds and at the same time to none. You recall how Rushdie expresses similar views in his novel *Shame* (Do read it if you haven't) and in the character of Aadam Aziz in *Midnight's Children.* But more of that later.

Interestingly, most migrants (including writers) try to cope with this sense of homelessness and rejection and their own inability to return, by over-idealization of home, or by the use of satire. Thus, they either tend to praise their mother country in superlatives or they satirize it and poke fun at its flaws to justify why they can't return.Rushdie belongs to the category of typical migrants.

Despite protestations to the contrary, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is as much a self-conscious expression of the expatriate writer's sensibility as any other, including Raja Rao's . All his novels, beginning with *The Serpent and the Rope* are self-conscious expressions of migrancy. Rushdie, if you recall, had attacked Rao for his nativist view of India.

Rushdie has always regarded himself as different from earlier migrant writers in the sense of being free from the idealization of nostalgia. But the fact is that beginning with *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has made Bombay or Kashmir the location of virtually all his novels. He also has chosen the method of satire to write about the political history of India and about colonialism, the two themes of *Midnight's Children* already discussed in this unit.

Fragmentation, migrancy and memory his third theme can perhaps be called the central theme of not just *Midnight's Children* but all his novels. Rushdie who is aware of its centrality in his life, his written extensively on this subject, some of which I am going to draw your attention to now since it will help us understand his treatment of the theme better.

In his article "Reclaiming a City and a History" (1984), he has said that while it is natural for a migrant writer to throw a backward nostalgic glance at his mother country and to imagine that he will be able to recover the country of his past fully, he can never do it. Because of his physical alienation from that country, the migrant writer can only "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind."

This means that when a migrant writer tries to unlock the gates of the past, as he has tried to do in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie found himself writing "a novel of memory and about memory," which is why perhaps, he made Saleem into an unreliable narrator. Saleem makes mistakes of memory, and his vision, which is affected by his(personality and)circumstances is fragmentary. In other words what

Rushdie was saying was that no matter how hard an Indian writer tries to write about India "authentically", he can't because he lives outside, and he is dealing with a reality "whose fragments have been irretrievably lost." However, on the positive side he feels it is exciting for the migrant writer as she tries to reconstruct the past from the "broken pots of antiquity" because it is very much like what archaeologists try to do, that is, an act of imagination and creativity. As expatriate, Rushdie's concern is with "damaged reality" and the reconstruction of a whole reality which has been lost. Saleem laments the loss of his clairvoyant powers, and the loss of his security in childhood as the child of his parents. He laments the "disintegration" of his family in India and Pakistan after Partition, and "every thing which can sanely be called real." Saleem grows up viewing reality through a "perforated sheet," one bit at a time and the piecing together of a suppressed reality is his mission. Denied information, Saleem resigns himself to an alternative method – cognition or knowing through "memory's truth" : "Well then I must content myself with shreds and scraps : as I wrote centuries ago, the trick is to fill in the gaps guided by the few clues one is given.... by the other remaining shards of the past lingering in my ransacked memory – vaults ... (*Midnight's Children*., 507). Now it's time for a question. Did you notice that as Saleem writes his "novel of memory," he makes a liberal use of the images of fragmentation? Can you list some?

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How many did you find besides "the perforated sheet"? Did you list at least three to four? Good! Now it's my turn. Here goes my list.(i) Saleem refers to his "fragmented being" (ii) Aadam Aziz, his grandfather confesses to having a permanent "hole the size of a melon inside me " (22) because he can never completely rid himself of his alienness. (iii) He describes himself as " a half-and-halfer" (18). The images of fragmentation ("hole; "half") highlight his predicament as a person who has fallen between two stools having been exposed to two very different cultures – the Indian and the Western. In deference to his past (his mother; Tai the boatman) he tries to be a good Muslim but he only hurts himself and the "hole" persists; he feels oppressed by narrow thinking and religious bigotry. It is the cause later, of his estrangement from his wife, Naseem, also called Reverend Mother in the novel. (iv) India is partitioned into Pakistan (v) Pakistan is further partitioned into Bangla Desh and Pakistan (vi) Saleem has several parts of his body lopped off from a finger, to his sexual organs. (vii) Families fragment, (viii) marriages break up (ix) Fragmented parentage makes it possible for Saleem to claim: "Child of an unknown union, I have had more mothers than most mothers have children; giving birth to parents has been one of my stronger talents," (291). Emotionally insecure, Saleem labours under the "fear" of losing his parents' love except under certain conditions of acceptable behaviour : "the idea that his parents' outrage might lead to a withdrawl of their love (198).

Saleem's obsession with the tracing of an ancestry is attempt to come to terms with the problems of a "divided identity", intellectually, he is drawn to the West while his emotional being looks for moorings in the mother-country. Saleem is apparently descended from the ancestral line of Aadam Aziz, himself an alienated "half-and halfer" Kashmiri Muslim. His being the child of William Methwold, the last Britisher in India, and Vanita, compounds the Kashmiri alienation with the colonial's. Being a bastard is Saleem's literal situation. Metaphorically, it echoes the typical migrant condition of a lack of belonging. Exile undoubtedly shapes and colours Saleem's perspective on life. Repeatedly confronted with conditions of exile, Saleem begins to ponder its shocks and dents upon his personality.

As Saleem becomes a homeless wanderer; his sadness and gloom echo the expatriate's. His first exile (of which he is unaware) is in losing the home of Vanita and Wee-Willie-Winkle from his very birth. The discovery that his blood group belongs to neither his father Ahmed nor his mother is responsible for another exile

his being sent away to his Uncle Hanif and Aunt Pia's home. This displacement inexplicable to the boy- gives him a shock he never recovers from.

Again when the family moves from Bombay to Karachi, Saleem is exiled from Bombay, the place he dearly loves: "I never forgive Karachi for not being Bombay." Forcibly exiled from home and place, Saleem ponders over another exile. He loses the voices of the *Midnight's Children* after a nasal operation he is tricked into undergoing by his own parents, under the pretext of being taken out on a picnic. Saleem's exile is forced and compounded with the dishonesty of others. It is not difficult to see how it leads to his disintegration. Expatriate concerns figure importantly in the novel. Memory is his guarantee against the loss of a valued childhood being. It is the expatriate's guarantee against fragmentation and loss of touch with self and reality.

"Memory's truth" teaches Saleem who he was and is. In the absence of any other trustworthy member in the family, Saleem arrives at a position where memory though "it select, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes glorifies and villifies also," is more dependable than "someone else-s version (253).

Saleem says he narrates his story because he fears absurdity : " I admit it" above all things, I fear absurdity" (9). He fears the meaninglessness of not belonging to family or country, and that is terrifying. Like an angst-ridden modern writer Saleem / Rushdie tries to impose order and meaning on a meaningless existence through his writing. Memory helps him put together the fragments from the past, that migrancy had taken away from him. Fragmentation, migrancy and memory figure in *Midnight's Children* in a significant way.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

Thus, in this unit we have examined the manner in which the three recurring themes of the History and the Individual, Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism in India, and Fragmentation, Migrancy and Memory have been dealt with. The discussion has also established the connection between the themes and the migrant sensibility of Rushdie, the writer and the circumstances of his having lived away from India.

3.6 GLOSSARY

Absolute:	having limitless power
Angst:	anxiety caused by considering the sad state of the human condition
Appropriate:	steal
Castrate:	sterlized
Clairvoyant:	one who has the power to see and understand objects and Events not directly present to the senses.
Comatose:	deeply unconscious
Countering:	opposing
Elicits:	draws out
Gimmick:	a trick object used to attract attention
Ideology:	a set of ideas, especially if typical of a social or political Group

Inadvertently:	by accident
Impotent:	(of a man) unable to perform the sex act.
Imprint:	leave a mark on something
Lament:	strong expression of grief
Monarchism:	ruled by kings and queens rather than elected leaders
Nostalgia:	fondness for something formerly known
Oppression:	the condition of being treated in a hard and cruel way
Paradigm:	pattern or framework
Pliant:	yielding to the wishes and commands of others
Plunder:	loot
Primeval:	of the earliest period of the earth's existence
Pristine:	pure, unchanged from the condition when first created
Repression:	the state of being put down by force
Subvert:	to try to destroy the power and influence of especially a governing body
Totalitarian:	system where a single person or political party controls all thought and does not allow opposition parties to exist
Undermine:	to weaken by stages

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the theme of History and the Individual in *Midnight's Children*?

3.8 SUGGESTED READING

E.M. Foster. *Aspects of a Novel*, 1923.

Dieter Rimenschneider "History and the Individual in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" in Ed. Viney Kirpal. *The New Indian Novel in English* : A Study of the 1980s. Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1990.

Viney Kirpal. *The Third World Novel of Expatriation*. Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 198.

UNIT 4 TECHNIQUE IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 The Structure of *Midnight's Children*
4.3 Endings Without Beginnings: *Midnight's Children* & Epic Structure
4.4 Sutradhar and Nati: Saleem and Padma
4.5 Saleem, Unreliable Narrator
4.6 The Interplay of Fantasy & Realism
4.7 Myth in *Midnight's Children*
4.8 Let Us Sum Up
4.9 Glossary
4.10 Questions
4.11 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will take a close look at the narrative technique that Rushdie has used in *Mtdnight's Children* and how it is a subtle fusion of western postmodern devices and Indian oral narratological methods.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Midnight's Children is classified in a category of fiction that goes by the name of magic realism. *El realismo magical*, or magic realism, was born in Latin America and has followers all over the world. Today, whenever one thinks of magic realism, Salman Rushdie's name first comes to mind. Rushdie himself defines the term, in his essay on Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He describes it as a development out of Surrealism that "expresses a genuinely 'Third World' consciousness". Rushdie's novels may equally be traced back to a home grown magic realism, as we will see as we move along. Yet there is a lot in common between societies that Naipaul has called "half-made societies", which nurture a particular brand of realism. What Rushdie says about Marquez's novel is true of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and the novels that follow: "in the world he[Marquez] describes, impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under the midday sun".

Midnight's Children follows a technique that resembles Gabriel Garcia Marquez's style in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Many had speculated whether Rushdie was influenced by Marquez in the writing of his best known novel. But Rushdie claims to have come upon Marquez's fiction only after having sent *Midnight's Children* off for publication. Perhaps Rushdie came upon the same style following a different route, which we shall trace in a while.

The first thing one notes about magic realist novels in the west is that they move away from the world we know as the real. They are set in an unreal world that might have nothing in common with the real world we inhabit. This genre is a reaction against 19th century realism. Different people at different times and places have debated on the place of real and unreal in art. For example, Plato wanted art to be banished from his Republic because he believed that art was thrice removed from reality. But, in India, art has often involved an element of the magical and the fantastic.

Literary realism in the west began to have a value to be cherished in the 18th century. It coincided with the development of a rational and scientific outlook and resulted in the death of Romance. Realism reached a peak in the 19th century, particularly in the writing of fiction. Over the years, its birth in response to the particular socio-cultural conditions came to be forgotten and realism became the main criterion for judging the worth of fiction. Magic realists question the demand that fiction must always imitate reality. While acknowledging the value of 19th century realism, they wish to show that fiction can mimic forms of reality other than the empirical. In fact, they try to challenge our notion of the real and the unreal. In this, they are influenced to a large extent by new paradigms in science. As some of you might be aware, new paradigms in western science have turned the notions of the real and the unreal topsy turvy. This has set off a large scale crisis about the nature of reality in the western world. Fiction's turn away from reality reflects this crisis. Fiction becomes the form for investigating the nature of truth. Fiction mocks at 19th century conventions to show that truth is always made up. *Midnight's Children* takes up each of the conventions for fiction writing and turns them inside out. Why does Rushdie do this? Do you agree that Rushdie's novel is cast in the magic realist form? If so, how is it different from western novels in the same genre?

4.2 THE STRUCTURE OF *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

What do you think of *Midnight's Children's* structure? Does it remind you of anything you have read, or heard, before? Let me share my first impressions of *Midnight's Children* when I first read it as a Master's student. I was hard put to slot it into a fixed category as it seemed to be a real pot pouri. The analogy that came to my mind, and has been used quite often by others, was that of the Chinese box. Stories within stories. Does it ring a bell? Stories within stories are nothing new to us who have grown up listening to similar stories on our mother's knees. Isn't this how the *Panchtantra* tales are strung together? I hear you ask. You are absolutely right. Not only the *Panchtantra*, but all famous collections such as *Kathasaritsagar*, *Arabian Nights* or epics are welded into a whole through a frame tale. The frame tale is usually about how the various stories came to be written, or rather, told. For example, the frame tale of the *Panchtantra* is about how the 80 year old Brahmin Visnu Sarma took up the challenge of educating three daft sons of King Amarshakti by telling them these tales. *Midnight's Children* also has a frame tale in which other stories are embedded. This is the story of Saleem Sinai's travails as he puts his novel together. How is Rushdie's structure different from that of ancient Indian narratives?

Midnight's Children is difficult to classify because it recalls another fictional genre – of metafiction. Metafiction is a form of fiction in which the process of writing fiction is the theme. This form developed to question the reality premise of 19th century fiction. It has largely been used to investigate the relation between art and life. Salman Rushdie weds the two separate genres by filtering ancient narrative structures through the postmodern. This brings us to another important question. Where does Rushdie belong? To the postcolonial or to the postmodern? Rushdie has conveniently planted one foot in each tradition. Some allege that he exoticizes India for the West's consumption. They say that his is, at best, a tourist vision of India. Others have been more charitable in including him among Indian writers while decrying his appropriation by postmodernism. Rushdie is happy to play along with postmodern theorists, which adds to the problem.

4.3 BEGINNINGS WITHOUT ENDINGS: *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* & EPIC STRUCTURE

Novels, they say, must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But they don't always begin at the beginning. *Midnight's Children* meticulously follows the rules for writing novels by announcing the hero's birth. Does this beginning remind you of any novel you have read before? Rushdie has borrowed this trick from the 18th century English novelist Lawrence Sterne whose *Tristram Shandy* begins in an almost identical manner. While you wait breathlessly to meet the hero Saleem Sinai born on the midnight of 15th August 1947, the garrulous narrator(Saleem Sinai himself) leads you astray - into a maze of stories.

Is Rushdie's novel about the problem of writing fiction or about telling a story? Or is it about writing a novel about the problems of telling a story? Rushdie has the narrator, Saleem Sinai, complaining about not having a listener to whom he can narrate his story or a scribe who can copy down a story. You also hear Scheherezade in the background. What is Rushdie up to? Is he writing the epic tale of the *kaliyuga*? Saleem has a grand illusion about writing a magnum opus equal to that of Valmiki. But he has his facts all mixed up. For it was Ved Vyas not Valmiki who dictated the epic *Mahabharata* to Ganesha. Rushdie came in for a lot a flak for his near fatal error. But he came up with a smart way of covering up by blaming the narrator. He cited this error as an example of why we must not take the narrator at face value or the novel as the definitive history of India. Like his narrator, Rushdie is well versed with Hindu traditions though he was born a Muslim. In constructing *Midnight's Children*, he claimed to have been influenced by the *Panchtantra*. But his careless error in having Valmiki dictate the Ramayana to Ganesha set off a volley of objections. Rushdie's borrowings cut across linguistic and sectarian divisions for us to trace back his novel to a particular source. But they all add to a structure that is typical of ancient Indian narratives. All these tales have a teller who narrates his story to a listener. This is also true of the dramatic mode, which uses a *sutradhar* to narrate his story to a *nati*. Since well known Indian tale collections are reductions of different retellings, it is natural that they retain oral features. But why should Rushdie carry over the conventions governed by the contingencies of the spoken medium. As Walter Ong has explained, the spoken word can be retained only in its transmission to another person. The writer, however, composes in isolation. He addresses an imaginary reader with whom he has no face to face contact. While Rushdie creates the illusion of a warm speaking voice, he cannot be a storyteller in the same way that Valmiki or the unknown author of the *Panchtantra* could be. For one, he has to resort to the written word, which means the death of sound. Secondly, his literate, cosmopolitan background cannot transport him to the mind set of a culture that relies entirely on speech. Rushdie, the writer, has travelled too far into the West to come back home completely. He filters the epic tales of his Indian childhood through his postmodern frames. His adoption of Indian oral narrative structure is, therefore, self-conscious. Slightly tongue in cheek. And put along side a totally different metafictional tradition from another time and place. Why do you think Rushdie turns back to ancient Indian storytelling techniques? What effect does the mixing of these techniques with metafiction have on you?

At the very outset, Saleem Sinai creates an *Arabian Nights* ambience. He insists that he has many "stories" to "tell". These stories, as Saleem Sinai explains to Padma, have a way of "leaking" into one another. The 19th century novel has clearly defined beginnings, middles and endings. Like Sterne, Rushdie parodies the convention of beginnings by beginning with the birth of the hero. But before the hero can be born, the narrator strays into countless digressions, asides, interruptions. You are made to listen to many tales, placed under chapter headings such as the "Perforated Sheet", "Mercurochrome", "Hit-the-Spittoon", "Under the carpet", "A public Announcement", "Many-Headed Monsters" and "Methwold", before the narrator gets back to the original story of Saleem's birth. This takes roughly 100

pages. With Padma you complain, "you better get a move on or you'll die before you get yourself born"(38). But you, too, take an unmistakable delight in the embedded tales. This is how storytellers get you to listen to stories you did not set out to hear.

Oral narratives delight in love of detail and the joy of telling. This is very different from the novel's tight structure with each bit fitting tightly into the other. Saleem proves himself to be a master storyteller like Scheherezade by getting Padma "hooked" to his story. Like Scheherezade, he knows when to "leave the narrative hanging in mid-air" and when to speed it up, when to build suspense and when to linger on the details to expand the narrative. The story works on the simple principle of "what-happened-nextism" that E.M. Forester has talked of in *Aspects of the Novel*. At the same time, it is bound by the novel's tight structuring. Rushdie adheres to 19th century novelistic conventions with a loyalty that borders on the ridiculous as he also keeps digressing to break those conventions.

Besides digressing and breaking up the tight structure, Saleem also has the habit of jumbling up the sequence of events. Endings often precede beginnings. Given that he spills the beans years in advance, is there any point in continuing with the story? This is again a feature that Rushdie has borrowed from oral narratives. Since oral narratives often narrate an already known story, they need not worry either about sustaining suspense or maintaining sequence Rushdie's motive in following this methods to make a mockery of the logic of causality favoured by 19th century realism. He wants to show that the pattern in art is the creation of the artist. As usual, Rushdie brings out the ridiculousness of the cause and effect logic by exaggerating it.

For instance, the perforated sheet forms the link between Saleem's and his grandfather's story. Just as Hummingbird is seen as the thread that would lead to the ghetto of the magicians. Later, his teacher Mr Zagallo's pulling out his hair leads to Homi Catrack's murder and his uncle Hanif's death and culminating in his grandfather's retreat to Kashmir. Salim even has the cheek to claim that the purpose of the 1971 war was to "re-unite me with an old life, to bring me back together with my old friends"(373) Rushdie's aim is to show that fiction is not reality. Because it can be shaped the way its author wants it to be. This fact is ignored in the adherence to the logic of causality.

Repetition is the favourite device of the storyteller. Rushdie is equally fond of using the "once upon a time" formulae. But his use of repetition is not dictated by the need for an on the spot composition and retention of subject matter. Rushdie uses these formulae and repetitive structures to place his novel in ancient Indian storytelling traditions. Thus , he breaks with the obsessive fixation with clock time in western fiction. Rushdie juxtaposes the two temporal schemes – the chronological and the cyclical to show the conventions of Western fiction to be rooted in Western linear time. Ancient Indian storytelling structures use a repetitive pattern, which echoes the cyclic time of Indian thought.

Midnight's Children uses formulaic constructions such as repetition, invocation to the deity, allusion to omens and portents, call and response tactics. But its parodic tone alerts the reader to the novel's distance from oral structures. There are several other hints that the novel cannot be a story. Salim is writing his story , we are often reminded, which he reads aloud to Padma because she is illiterate. Though Salim often uses phrases, ("in those years, you see", "I intone earnestly", I don't want to listen") which indicate that the story is being told , he feels compelled to "confide in paper, before I forget" (37);
"Nevertheless, whether [Padma] is listening or not, I have things to record. (118);
"Condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments," I wrote and read aloud (121).

4.4 SUTRADHAR AND NATI: SALEEM AND PADMA

What is Padma's role in the novel? Is Saleem using Padma merely as the mandatory listener to imitate the telling style of the epics? No doubt, Padma is the *nati* to whom the *sutradhaar* Salim narrates his story. Having Saleem tell Padma helps Rushdie simulate the storytelling situation he wishes to create. At the same time, it is very clear that Saleem is writing down the story, which Padma cannot read. The use of Padma is an excellent strategy.

Padma does several things at once. First of all, she is still rooted in the storytelling tradition from which Saleem has been uprooted. She naturally expects Saleem's story to follow the rules of all other stories she has heard before. However, she has no clue as to how novels are written. This gives Saleem the perfect opening for giving her a lecture on how novels should be written. More important, Saleem is as much a babalog as Rushdie or the readers. The story Saleem is writing "in an Anglopoised pool of light" might stretch the credibility of his anglicized readers. Padma, however, fits totally in the miracle laden universe. Saleem as well as Rushdie are always a bit hesitant in the presence of the incredible. Padma's love of superstitions, however, co-exists with "a down-to-earthery". Padma stands for the view of the ordinary uneducated Indian people who do not question the marvellous the same way as anglicized Indians do. Rushdie and Saleem both need a Padma character to make the marvelous events in the novel credible. The gap between the Saleem consciousness and the Padma consciousness also shows how Saleem is distanced from the knowledge system of his people. Saleem valiantly attempts to enter Padma's world, which he almost does by marrying her in the end.

4.5 SALEEM, UNRELIABLE NARRATOR

Saleem and his creator Rushdie have so much in common that they have been confused with one another. Both are *Midnight's Children*, having been born in the year of India's independence. Both share a Kashmiri ancestory and an upper class anglicized upbringing. Saleem follows Rushdie's route from Peddar Road to Pakistan though the circumstances might have varied.

Most First novels are autobiographical. Other first novels like George Eliot's *Silas Mariner*, D H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and closer home Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* have too much of the author. Even though the authors go to great lengths to deny the overlaps between fiction and fact, critics manage to explain events in the novel in the light of similar happenings in the author's life.

Something similar has happened to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children.* Unfortunately, the confusion of fiction with fact has continued to plague him. The use of the first person narrator often makes the author vulnerable to the criticism that is really directed at the narrator. Rushdie was blamed for all Saleem's mistakes and opinions. Particularly glaring was the mistake about the Valmiki/Vyasa confusion on the very first page. "If you're going to use Hindu traditions in your story, Mr Rushdie", he was asked by a reader, "don't you think you could take the trouble to look them up?" His readers displayed a particular pleasure in catching the writer out. They were particularly incensed by what they perceived was an irreverent use of Hindu traditions.

Rushdie's readers had to wait for the publication of his next few novels to know that Rushdie's "malice for all" is not reserved for any particular religion or tradition. Most of these objections came from their looking at the novel as a definitive history of

India. At that point, very few realized that the use of a first person narrator was also part of Rushdie's narrative strategy. Authors often create a persona who is their mouthpiece. But this is not so with Saleem. Saleem's magniloquence and delusions are as much subject to the author's irony as the reader's ridicule. Rushdie came to the reader's rescue in "'Errata': Or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*". He made a detailed reference to all the errors he is said to have made including getting his dates and statistics wrong. While he owned up to some of the unintentional errors he made in the novel, he warned the reader that "Saleem Sinai is an unreliable narrator". And that *Midnight's Children* is far from being an authoritative guide to the history of post-independence India."

Rushdie went on to explain his method. He began by feeling embarrassed and annoyed by *his* mistakes. But gradually he found that "the mistake feels more and more like Saleem's; its wrongness feels *right*." Rushdie goes on to explain that he went to the trouble of introducing mistakes in originally error free passages. Why?

Because during its writing the novel turned out to be very different from what Rushdie had set out to write. Rushdie wanted to write a novel of memory, as I have mentioned in Unit 3. But somewhere along the way he got interested in the process of filtration. The role that filters play in remembering. "So my subject changed, was no longer a search for lost time, had become the way in which we re-make the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool," he explained. Rushdie called attention to Saleem's filters that played a large role in the design of the novel. He links the pattern of the novel to Saleem's need to *write himself*, to imbue his life with some meaning. Saleem shapes the material, according to the author, to give himself a central role. There are several examples of Saleem "cutting history to suit himself". Every significant event in post independence Indian history coincides with the life of the protagonist, the most important being his birth. His grandfather Aadam Aziz accidentally loses his way into the Jalianwallah Bagh tragedy in Amritsar. In Delhi, his father is held to ransom by the Hindu arsonists while his mother holds centrestage in a communal riot. The hero is born as Nehru is announcing the birth of the nation. Saleem is around to plan the strategy for the 1965 war; he is also packed off to take an active part in the Bangladesh war. He is held up during the slum clearance campaign during the Emergency and forced to undergo sterilization. One notes several. These are designed "as clues, as indications that Saleem is capable of distortions both great and small."

Rushdie points out that all these errors are strewn about as a warning to the reader that Saleem is not to be taken at his word. The Ganesha error, for example, is calculated to deflate his pomposity. Considering that Saleem is boasting about his knowledge of Hindu systems, his monumental error shows that he is not to be trusted. Rushdie wants to tell us that Saleem is not a detached or dispassionate observer. He has a vested interest in projecting events in a certain manner which is to make himself appear as the hero of the story.

Saleem gets quite a few facts wrong. Here too Rushdie has an explanation . He says he wants to distinguish between truth and remembered truth. With this Rushdie takes us into some of the currently raging debates in historiography. What is the place of truth in history? What value does memory have in the telling of history? Historians like Hayden White show that the particular development of scientific history shuts out all other ways of writing history. Western history has placed an undue emphasis on verifiable truth since the 19th century in its attempt to make history writing closer to science. Other histories, however, have given as much importance to what is believed to be true as what is recorded as true. We have been led into thinking that historical documentation based on observation is the most unbiased method for presenting facts. This hides the fact that the selection and interpretation of facts is not objective. Saleem's method provides us with an inkling of how facts may not only be selected to fit a certain theory but also distorted to promote certain interests. Saleem's mistakes unmask the design of written history to

us. How certain facts favourable to certain groups are selected and passed off as the history of the entire community. Rushdie shows that unlike his novel which clearly reveals how history is made, official histories hide the fact that they are also stories.

"History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of being given many meanings." He concludes.

This is equally true with respect to the way human beings organize their lives. Like Saleem, they use the logic of memory to reconstruct their pasts. Naturally, in remembering things they screen out the unpleasant while retaining their happy memories. This causes a some amount of distortion. Rushdie is trying to say that remembered truth is as valid as literate truth and that every one has the right to their own version of truth. If you read this section with reference to the earlier unit, the point becomes very clear.

4.6 INTERPLAY OF FANTASY AND REALISM

In the past, fantasy was often dismissed as being fit only for children. After centuries of oblivion, fantasy is suddenly centrestage in the Western world. Why? The new status of fantasy has to do with the present crisis about the nature of reality. The crisis is set off by new discoveries that show that reality cannot exist independent of the observer. The West, it looks like, is having second thoughts about the solidity of the factual universe it earlier swore by. What appeared to be facts are also shown to be stories. In the new thinking that goes by the name of constructivism, science is also proved to be a story. This has obviously sent the stock of the unreal soaring. Along with it has come the recognition that our understanding of what can *be* is not universal. It depends on the world we inhabit.

Eric Rabkin tried to define fantasy. He called it a genre in which the protagonist displays a hesitation in the presence of the supernatural. He cited *Alice in Wonderland* as one of the best examples of fantasy. He categorically left out tales like Arabian Nights because they did not display the mandatory hesitation in the presence of the marvellous. Instead, they took the marvellous for granted. What do you think of *Midnight's Children*? Does it take the marvellous for granted? You'll find your answer in the section describing magicians ghetto and the seer's predictions about Saleem's birth to Amina Community.

Going back to what Rushdie said about Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can help us understand Rushdie's novel. In Marquez's novel, the arrival of a train is greeted with utter incredulity. Whereas the ascension of a character called Remedios the Beauty to Heaven is not. Rushdie named this the "village" world view. Now in Rushdie's novel you might have come across several characters who share this world view. You couldn't have missed the reference to Padma's response to the Reverend Mother's ability to enter her daughters' mind.

> Padma accepts this without blinking; but what others will swallow as effortlessly as a laddoo, Padma may just as easily reject. *No audience is without its idiosyncrasies of belief.* (italics mine)

Later, when he speaks of "the fog of guilt" hanging around his mother's head, he is certain that "Padma would believe it, Padma would know what I mean."(158) We need a Padma to make the marvellous real. The birth of prodigious children, blue skinned Tubriwallahs and half snake-half human doctors, strange prophecies, the central fantasy of Salim's gift for hearing voices are seen by Padma or Mary Pereira. What is true according to Mary includes fortune tellers prophesying the birth of a two-headed son, sadhus awaiting the arrival of the Blessed One, little girls speaking

in the language of birds and cats. This does not necessarily have to correspond with truth written in an "Anglopoised pool of light". One could dismiss these beliefs as the superstitions of the illiterate. The problem comes when a Prime Minister is spotted soliciting the help of astrologers in drafting the country's first Five Year Plan, or when a young woman with a consciously secular upbringing succumbs to the prophecy of a Ramram Seth with the cobrawallah, monkeyman, bone-setter surrounding him. Instead of hesitation, one finds a belief in the supernatural that cuts across class, caste and gender lines. As Saleem puts it, even a "literate person in this India of ours" is not "immune from the type of information I am in the process of unveiling". (197)

In the Western idea of fantasy, the supernatural is explained as a projection of human fears. Saleem insists that he is "not speaking metaphorically; what I have just written and (read aloud to stunned Padma) is nothing less than the literal, by-the-hairs-of-my-mother's head truth"(200). Saleem might be a sceptic like his creator Rushdie, but this does not make him immune to the uncanny mysteries of the marvellous. Along with Rushdie, Saleem holds out for the "village" world over the urban like Marquez is alleged to have done. The difference lies in that where a Padma or Mary might swallow marvellous happenings without the slightest hesitation, Saleem might require to justify his position through philosophical argument. But the entire thrust of Saleem's arguments is to uphold and accentuate the existence of other perspectives on what *is*, which might violate secular notions of truth, "Reality can have metaphorical content, that does not make it less real".(200)

Unlike the original tellers and listeners of tales like *Arabian Nights*, Rushdie cannot take the marvellous for granted. Saleem uses a technique replete with "matter of fact descriptions of the bizarre, and its reverse, "namely heightened, stylized versions of the everyday" to show a difference in "attitudes of mind"(218) - a technique and attitude that he confesses to have borrowed from Shiva his twin midnight's child. While he allows Padma and Mary to participate completely in the marvellous, Saleem/Rushdie remains at a distance.

In Rushdie's novel, postmodern scepticism is carefully counterpoised against pre-modern belief through the brilliant use of the working class interlocutor Padma. Her credulous responses to Saleem's sophisticated self-consciousness give evidence of the "miracle-seeking consciousness" of the Indian masses. Though Rushdie parodies the pre-modern, he does not cease to have affection for it. He combines the condition of fantasy - "the reader's hesitation in the presence of the supernatural" with a supernatural explanation of events as in pure marvellous. Against Saleem's cynicism is Padma's faith in all things miraculous, like new moons strange happenings, prophecies, strange coincidences.

The use of fantasy by magic realists is as I said earlier, intended to question the place of reality in art. Considering that three fourths of the world's literature does not satisfy the reality requirement of 19th century fiction, it can only be a period concept that needs to be discarded. Rushdie's magic realist mode is, by his own admission, a strategy to overcome the limitations of the historical testimony of a young boy's unreliable memory. But his strange "commingling of the improbable and the mundane" can also be seen as an attempt to give us a glimpse into other aesthetics in which art does not need to imitate life. Oriental narratives grow out of a semi-mythical universe. Here the strange and the improbable is not only the natural subject matter of fiction but the bizarre and uncanny is also accepted as the 'real'. Miracles and improbabilities, of the kind *Midnight's Children* abounds with are accepted, at certain levels, without scepticism.

However, the novel places the two perspectives side-by-side suggesting that it is not possible to translate one in terms of the other. This is different from fantasy where a delicate tension is maintained between a natural and supernatural explanation of events. Rushdie's solution is to juxtapose the two perspectives through Saleem and

Padma to uphold the supernatural as an equally valid perspective even though some might not be able to access it.

4.7 MYTH IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

By now Rushdie's readers are familiar with his carefree manner, which spares no one. At the time of the novel's publication, however, his particular brand of irreverence irked many, particularly those who hold tradition in great awe. Rushdie's allusion to Hindu myths became a serious point of debate. Could a Muslim draw on Hindu tradition? If he did, wasn't it his moral duty to educate himself and use them accurately? What is the difference in the use of myth and tradition by the earlier generation of writers and Rushdie and his children? For example, as Viney Kirpal has pointed out, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura's* uses the language of myth and folktale to write a modern day *sthalapurana or place legend, the way there is a place legend about Ayodhya, the birthplace of Ram.*. Writers of Raja Rao's generation share the mythic consciousness that Professor C D Narasimhaiah saw as characteristic of India – habit of perceiving the presentness in the light of the past. As mythological archetypes have a "meaningful presence" in Indian social life, the novel might rightfully be structured around a well known myth. Writers such as Rao could structure *Kanthapura* around the *Ramayana* myth with Sita (India) being rescued from Ravana (The British) by Rama (Moorthy). They could do so because the Ram-Sita Ravana myth was a living presence in Indian society. It helped Rushdie to explain the natural freedom movement in the light of the ancient past which has great meaning for the people in India.

However, writers of Rushdie's generation have adopted a parodic stance towards their mythic material, perhaps for the reasons I have discussed above. It is not possible for Rushdie, like Saleem Sinai, to participate in the "myth-laden universe" without hesitation. Rushdie's irreverent use of myth has earned him the reputation of a trickster. Something of an imposter. Do you agree? Actually, he is not as I have explained in the previous units.

But let us here examine his use of the Ganesha myth and see for ourselves. As we found out earlier, the howler about Ganesha was Saleem's not Rushdie's and was intended to deflate Saleem's belief in his erudition. Saleem uses other Indian allusions with the same rebellious careless nonchalance. His play on Padma's name, for instance irritates her. For he chooses to interpret her name not through its mythological associations but through its everyday, scatological meaning. The central myth holding the novel together is the myth of Shiva. Rushdie evokes Shiva in his destructive avatar, born to banish evil from the world. In Rushdie's novel, Shiva gradually evolves into an evil force whose sole motive is to destroy the hero Saleem for robbing him of his real parents. Only through some far fetched association can one link Shiva's actions as revenge for the evils of emergency. Rushdie reinterprets the Shiva myth like all others as it suits him: eternally playing on the meaning of words; referring to the original association of the myth; and turning it upside down.

This has a nagging connection to postmodern irony and play. Salman Rushdie has become the darling of the postmoderns for his playful treatment of all he touches. And the *bete noire* of the postcolonials for the same reason. Rushdie has protested against the uniqueness of "Indianness" in terms of tradition in "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist". He felt that to describe a work as authentic or inauthentic in relation to its faithfulness to Indian tradition was to succumb to an essentialist definition.

But more important, Rushdie's treatment of myth in *Midnight's Children* questions the realism premise of fiction. Is fiction bound by the rules of accuracy as life? What is the relationship between fiction and fact?

As Linda Hutcheon has pointed out parody need not necessarily rule out affection. The postmodern writer cannot participate in the world of tradition in an unqualified manner. He needs the distancing of parody. Yet the objective might not be to mock at tradition. Like Kirpal puts it, he can destabilize tradition to reinstall it. It is not fair that Rushdie should be singled out for his ironic attitude. Therefore, the writers that follow have also adopted the same route. Look at Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* where he subjects the Mahabharata myth to the same ironic treatment.

4.8 LET'S SUM UP

Now you know that the structure of *Midnight's Children* is not merely a gimmick. The novel's form is inseparable from the theme. The novelist employs a particular manner of telling a story because he wants to show how stories are made, and that history too is a fiction, a story. We have found out why and how Rushdie uses the epic structure. We learn that Rushdie's errors are the unreliable narrator's. We also discover how magic and realism have been blended by the author, to merge the postmodern's faith with the oral narrator's "village" world view.

4.9 GLOSSARY

Bete noir:	sworn enemy
Bizarre:	strange happenings
Delusion:	holding a false belief
Enfant terrible:	incorrigible person
Erudition:	great learning
Filters:	to remove
Historography:	writing of history
Irony:	use of words or course of events which are clearly opposite to one's meaning.
Incense:	very angry
Magnum opus:	masterpiece
Magniloquence:	in a grand sounding manner
Meticulous:	very careful with attention to detail
Persona:	a character playing the role of the author
Pomposity:	foolishly self-important
Replete:	completely full

Scepticism: habit of not believing a claim

Uncanny: mysterious

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. How do you respond to Rushdie's "strange commingling of the real and the probable"?

2. What is the role of the epic structure in the novel?

3. Does Rushdie have the right to use Hindu myths? Why does he use them in the particular way that he does?

4.11 SUGGESTED READING

Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91*, Delhi: Granta. 1991.

Mark Currie(Ed and Intro) *Metafiction* London: Longman. 1995.

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Viney Kirpal, "An Overview of Indian English Fiction: 1920-1990s", *Mapping Cultural Spaces :Postcolonial Indian Literature in English*(Ed) Nilufer E Bharucha and Vrinda Nabar New Delhi : Vision Books. 1998.

Anjali Roy, "Fantasy and Fiction, Myth and History: The Real/Unreal Dichotomy in "*Midnight's Children*" *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 2 July-Oct 2000.

UNIT 5 CHARACTERIZATION IN MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 Saleem as India & India as Saleem
5.3 Padma : Beloved Nati
5.4 Children of the Midnight : Shiva , Parvati and Saleem
5.5 Family as Character
5.6 Common Indian People as Characters
5.7 Let Us Sum Up
5.8 Questions
5.9 Glossary
5.10 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, I first plan to discuss the critical concept of characters and characterization in Western fiction. Then I shall discuss the different characters in *Midnight's Children* and show how Rushdie's characterization borrows also from oral narratives.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Whenever we discuss a novel, we focus mainly on its characters, obviously because they are the main players in the story. So normal and routine is to discuss these 'people' in the novel, that we rarely ever pause to even ask ourselves : What is a Character? Of course, we all have a rough idea about what we mean by "Character" but a short discussion on this subject will help to clarify our ideas and enable us to read literary works better. So let me begin by requesting you to write down your definition of Character as a literary term :

Was that easy? Well, here is how literacy critics would define a Character; you may want to compare it with your effort.

Characters are described as the persons presented in narrative or dramatic works that are interpreted by the reader as possessing certain moral, personality and emotional qualities that get communicated through what they speak (i.e. the dialogues) or what they do (i.e. their actions)or what other characters tell us about them. The reasons for the character's temperament, aspirations and moral values reflected in speech and actions lie in what is called *motivation.*

Some characters such as Mr. Micawber in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* , or Gafoor, the taxi driver in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* may remain unchanged in outlook and nature. Others may undergo a radical change because of a gradual

process of development and motivation. For example, Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations* changes because of his desire to become a gentleman worthy of Estella's love. One simple expectation of a character whether in a realistic work or in a fantasy is that the character is "consistent". That is to say, the character should not break off suddenly or act in a way which is not convincingly founded in his or her nature or temperament as we have already come to know it.

For example, if Raju in *The Guide* were to change suddenly from jailbird into the wise sage that he becomes at the end of the novel we would not find him a consistent or convincing character. However, by introducing the *motivation* for the change in him, Narayan very ably persuades us to accept Raju's gradual transformation. Can you think of some other fictional characters you've come across in your reading recently whom you would call 'consistent' in their development ?

Do you think Saleem is a consistent character ?

You remember I mentioned Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* in Unit 3? Did you get to read it ? Do so, at the earliest if you haven't so far. It gives a good insight into the craft of the Novel. Forster in this book has developed the distinction between *Flat* and *Round* characters. And what he says is very interesting. A *Flat* character or a "type" is a "two – dimensional" or "cardboard" character, built around "a single idea or quality". It has no depth. It is presented without much individualizing detail and therefore such a character can be adequately described in a single phrase or sentence. For example, the accordionist Wee Willie Winkie or his wife, Vanita in *Midnight's Children* is a flat character ; he is just an accordionist – we have no idea how he thinks and feels, or what makes him act. Can you mention a few others?

A Round character is complex in temperament and motivation. It is presented with subtle particularity. Such a character is therefore as difficult to describe with any adequacy as a person in real life. Like real persons, they also have the capacity to spring surprises on us. Saleem, for instance, is a Round character. What is Padma : *Round* or *Flat*?

Almost all novels have some characters who are *Flat* and serve merely as functionaries, and some who are *Round* and are well characterized. It will be interesting to see how Rushdie handles his characters and their characterization in *Midnight Children*. Are the *Flat* characters only flat or are they given some individualities as well? Similarly, are the *Round characters* really "three – dimensional" or do they also share some traits with Flat characters ? What is your opinion? Interestingly, characters in Indian English fiction are often neither just Flat or Round. They could be described as metaphorical representatives or symbols, frequently of ancient *ideals*. Moorthy in *Kanthapura* is an ideal character, very much as Rama in the *Ramayana* was an ideal (ideal son, ideal king).

Do you think Saleem and Shiva are realistic human beings or symbolic representations? You'll find your answer in the appropriate section of this unit.

5.2 SALEEM AS INDIA AND INDIA AS SALEEM

It is very interesting to study the character of Saleem in *Midnight's Children* . For, right in the beginning of the novel, he identifies himself with India, its histories and its destinies. Indeed he is at pains to tell us that by being a midnight child, a special responsibility had been thrust upon him. So close is the bond between him and India that he clearly hints to the reader that there is a resemblance between his face and the map of India. Look at that passage from *Midnight's Children* to see how he does this by using words such as "region", "eastern", and "western" used for cartography and not for describing human features:

> Baby-snaps reveal that my large moon-face was too large; too perfectly round. Something lacking in the region of the chin. Fair skin curved across my features – but birthmarks disfigured it; dark stains spread down my western hairline; a dark patch covered my eastern ear .... Baby Saleem's nose : it was monstrous; and it ran. (124)

In an interview, Rushdie explains the reason for Saleem's big nose.

> One day I was looking at the map of India, and all of a sudden for me [it] resembled a large nose hanging into the sea, with a drip off the end of it, which was [Sri Lanka]. Then I thought, well, you know, if Saleem is going to be the twin of the country, he may as well be the identical twin and so he sprouted this enormous nose. (1985)

If you compare Saleem's description of his own face with Rushdie's comment, you'll note a big difference. While Saleem is very serious and intent on promoting his greatness, Rushdie's tone seems lighthearted. Why do you think this is so? You needn't answer just now as there are many other similarly "awe-inspiring" descriptions that Saleem gives of himself.

Consider the manner in which he pays attention to the process of birth – his own birth, the birth of Independent India and the birth of the midnight children. Even the description of his mother's pregnancy and the growth of the foetus in her womb is as strange a description as any other in the book, perhaps even more so because the embryo is described as having two heads and other rather abnormal features. Further, did you notice that the cluster of metaphors Rushdie uses to describe this process of growth and development of the child is metaphorically the development of a literary text or the whole language. I'll quote it for your recall :

> What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia even a whole language. (115)

Is Saleem a country, a character, a paragraph, a chapter, the novel or just a narrator? These questions keep cropping up in the mind and add to the existing list. A few pages later, are details of his diverse "inheritance" (126). These details mention a number of factors responsible for his temperament but not all of them originate in his genetic make-up. Rather their cause lies in a whole range of social and political events. He establishes the belief that the history of his life is the history of the country and that he is India and India is Saleem.

Going further, some of the events which Saleem narrates have only a sensationalistic value; they are less important for their meaning than their dramatic appeal. Saleem makes great claims for the interconnection between people and events, even though the connection between some events and some people in his life is not clear. For example, his assertion that Homi Catrack was "the second human being to be murdered by mushrooming Saleem" (244). This is no more than sensationalism. This naming of himself in his own narration as "Saleem" and not as "me" is another. He also tells you that the first person he murdered was Jimmy Kapadia simply because he had dreamed Jimmy's death. Such a serious matter as two murders are mentioned and resolved very quickly by Saleem in his narration thus suggesting that he is prone to exaggerating his claims to fame and notriety.

Though Rushdie makes Ganesh his mythological ancestor(Ganesh's parents were Shiva and Parvati) , Saleem experiences a grave sense of loss when he discovers that his family are not his family and he is sent off to Uncle Hanif and Aunt Pia's home while Amina (mythological Parvati) tries to assure Ahmed Sinai (mythological Shiva) that Saleem is indeed "her"son Ganesh.

The discovery that he is not his parents' son is a turning point in Saleem's life and he feels shattered.. Again when these "parents" die in Pakistan he is really left on his own. Rushdie says he did it deliberately. He was poking fun at Saleem who believes he is India, that he is incharge of her history and destiny when in reality he is its victim ("he is castrated") and when he makes this discovery towards the end of the book, he just can't recover from this knowledge. This contradiction is hinted at quite clearly in the Chapter titled "The Kolynos Kid" which follows the description of his exile to his uncle and aunt's home :

> " From ayah to Widow, I've been the sort of person to whom things have been done; but Saleem Sinai, perennial victim, persists in seeing himself as protagonist" ...(237)

Far from being India or its history or destiny, Saleem is therefore a passive and weak character and this is brought home to us through the aside provided in the passage quoted above. Saleem can't outgrow the habit of seeing himself as the centre of the world, a stage which every child goes through and must outgrow in order to be taken seriously.

Saleem is very well aware of his role in the novel : he knows there are two Indias, the actual India and his own personalized India which he refers to as 'my India' (198), or the India discovered within his mind. He knows that he has placed himself at the centre of his story, and that his story is coloured accordingly. He also knows that his role is that of a storyteller and entertainer and no more. He wants us to believe that he is in control when in reality he is a non-entity. He is both a storyteller and a parody of one. And most certainly he is not a historian nor the great character destined to play a special role in India's destiny. He is just a person suffering from self-delusion, having lost his "family" moorings and roots. One of the lowest points in Saleem's life is reached when he becomes a sniffer (man-) dog in the Pakistani army's officially non-existent Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities.

So the question comes up : Why does Saleem exaggerate his importance and assume a mantle of responsibility which no one has given him? Have you thought up the answer by now? I'll give you a critic's explanation below.

Nancy E. Batty in her essay "Rushdie's Art of Suspense in *Midnight's Children*" has a very convincing explanation. She argues that Saleem's dilemma is that of any autobiographer; who has to "accomplish a circular journey from himself to himself". Since Saleem's life is so insignificant, he has to make it seem to be "either very important or very interesting" or he will lose his reader's interest. Saleem is not a known figure in history or in any other sphere. He is only a fictional autobiographer having no claim to fame in "real life." So he tries to accomplish this fame in his narrative by linking events of his own life with those of his country's history and sensationalizing his own role in these events and in the lives of the people he knows. Only Padma, his friend and confidante keeps on repeatedly undermining his claims to importance and drama and we get the hint that Saleem is not to be taken too seriously because he is not an objective autobiographer.

Saleem's self-delusions of being India parallels that of an actual Prime Minister of India. Saleem cites the slogan that had become quite famous during the Emergency – *Indira is India and India is Indira* (427) and wonders how Mrs. Gandhi could have even tried to snatch away from him the position her own father, Jawaharlal Nehru, had reserved for him. Had she :

"not read her own father's letter to a midnight child, in which her own sloganized centrality was denied; in which the role of mirror– of -the-nation was bestowed upon me?" (427)

As Saleem questions the broken promise it becomes clear what Rushdie has been attempting in the character of Saleem. He has been trying to convey that if Saleem believes he is India and that India is Saleem then this is the mere delusion on the part of a pathetic and unimportant fellow. The belief of a political leader (Mrs. Gandhi) that she is the nation, was similarly also a delusion.

Mrs. Gandhi was as much sensationalizing her role and importance in India's history as the protagonist Saleem, and Rushdie has sympathy for none.

5.3 PADMA : BELOVED NATI

Although the previous section (5.2) was entirely devoted to a discussion of Saleem's Characterization, and in this section , I have discussed the character of Padma who is both his friend and his narratee, it will be difficult to talk of her exclusively without reference to Saleem. Her companionship completes Saleem's life as a man and her role as his narratee completes his narration.

Padma is the narratee or audience for Saleem as well as his beloved. As a beloved, she is assertive and demanding and coming from the working class, her liaison with Saleem symbolically represents the ideal of "marriage" of the classes. As one who comes from the working class, Padma has few inhibitions and speaks openly on all matters with Saleem, including taunting him about his "useless other pencil." Saleem is attracted to her in spite of her emotional outbursts against his ineffectiveness as a lover, and narrator. As Saleem's narratee she is an index for the way the reader is responding to his story, much like King Shahryar in *A Thousand and One Nights* to Scherherazade's tales . Both the teller and these tales are explicitly mentioned in *Midnight's Children* so as to recall them as a reference point for the reader.

Padma's scepticism undermines Saleem's autobiography as he makes big claims for his importance and centrality in the country's events. Padma who has a mind of her own is not just a narratee. She not only shows up Saleem's successes and failures as an autobiorgrapher but also plays an important role in the deflation of his character and the creation of his story. Do you agree?

Saleem himself recognizes this when he accepts inability to dispense with Padma though she is (according to the upper class and anglicized Saleem) superstitious and ignorant. Her relationship with Saleem is complex and complementary; she cannot be reduced to the status of the chorus in Greek drama, or just a narratee who can be replaced by another member or narratee.

Despite their uneasy relationship, she and Saleem have great personal chemistry. One can't do without the other. Padma briefly disappears from Saleem's life (but not his narrative because he keeps talking of her) over a disagreement regarding Saleem's use of the word "love" to describe her feelings towards him. Saleem's pronouncement – " I know now that [Padma] is ...hooked.... My story has her by the throat "(38) is borne out when Padma does return to his side to fulfil her role as his narratee and confidante. This should not surprise you because if you read the narrative closely, you find that Saleem is constantly tailoring his narrative to retain Padma's interest. As Nancy Batty points out , his efforts are very much "like a lover engaged in a sexual conquest" He doesn't want her to desert him. So, he keeps her "hooked" to his story by adjusting his narrative strategies so that he keeps getting the

right response from her. Thus, he keeps playing this victim-seducer game with her very much like the traditional storyteller did with his audience.

A question comes to my mind here. What would *Midnight's Children* be without Padma? Perhaps, a lot less lively. Don't you think so ? Padma represents a lively and spirited woman, a loyal friend with a carefree, untamed nature. She adds depth to the narrative by her queries and responses in a way which is very different from the way characters in western fiction do. Padma is indispensable to the novel because she is his *nati*, the live interactive audience of an oral narrative who both listens and creates a traditional storyteller's tale.

5.4 THE MIDNIGHT CHILDREN – SHIVA, PARVATI AND SALEEM

The story proper begins with Saleem becoming aware of his ability to read the minds of other people and of the existence of the midnight children who are also uncommonly gifted. Three of them prove to be outstanding. They are triplets and a discussion of Shiva and Parvati almost inevitably turns towards mention of Saleem.

Most critics have discussed Saleem as if he were a realistic character for whom the readers are expected to feel tragic emotions. But, actually he is allegorized so extensively, as Arun Mukherjee has stated that he becomes just a device in the narration of the story. Thus, though Saleem describes himself as the greatest talent of all the midnight children, he is replicated and multiplied in other midnight children, without whom he is also incomplete.

Saleem is "the greatest talent of all" ; he had been endowed with "the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men" (200). Then there is Parvati-the-witch who is the most powerful female midnight child, next only to Saleem and Shiva because she was "born a mere seven seconds after midnight on August 15th, [and] had been given the powers of the adept, the illuminatus, the genuine gifts of configuration and sorcery ..." (200). The third is Shiva, who like Saleem was "born on the stroke of midnight" and had been "given the gifts of war." He is Saleem's alter ego. Shiva is also his adversary. The reason for Shiva's resentment and enemity with Saleem originates in his having been exchanged at birth with Saleem without the knowledge of his parents. Though he was actually the son of Amina and Ahmed Sinai (while Saleem's parents were Vanita, a poor musician's wife and Methwold) he was condemned to a life of poverty and crime. These three children are closely linked to each other. Saleem's power to communicate with all the midnight children makes his head "a kind of forum in which they could talk to one another" through Saleem (227). Only Shiva can close off from me any part of his thoughts he chose to keep to himself (226).

Saleem with the help of Parvati becomes the leader of the midnight children, against Shiva's wishes.

Saleem is convinced that the midnight children must be there for a special purpose since each had been bestowed with supernatural or superhuman gift .But in the end they are all destroyed and contribute to India's fragmentation. The children symbolizing India's potentiality to build her future for each of its citizens, to build "the noble mansion of free India, where all her children may dwell", as Nehru had once declared (118). They not only differ in their ideas, but they also through jealousy, strife, narrow-mindedness, regionalism and communalism cause India's disintegration into small linguistic states, mirrored in the disintegration of the *Midnight's Children*'s Conference (MCC). Shiva had scoffed at the idea of the MCC, "the club- shub stuff ... for you rich boys (228). He also has no patience for Saleem's search for the purpose and meaning of their lives because poverty leaves no

room for idealistic philosophizing : Rich kid, "Shiva yelled," you don't know one damned thing! What *purpose* , man? What thing in the whole sister – sleeping world got *reason* , yara ? Where's the reason in starving, man?" (220). Saleem unable to retort to Shiva's cynical analysis of the world, takes refuge in the idea that "if there is a third principle its name is childhood. But it – dies; or rather, it is murdered"(256). His rationalization hardly helps him find an answer to his search for meaning. His and the children's downfall is brought about in Benaras, symbolically one of the most holy places of Shiva worship in India, where all of them are castrated and thus, disconnected from their linkage with the country's history.

Saleem withdraws into a private shell. His downfall sees the rise of Shiva who incidentally creates a new race of children who are bastard products of his illegitimate relations with numerous "society ladies."

The story of the midnight children is really about "broken promises."The lost opportunity of these children occurred because Mrs. Gandhi, tried to project herself as the greatest Indian leader, a Durga, and thus maintain and strengthen her hold on power. Rushdie in an interview (1985) admitted that if *Midnight's Children* had any purpose ... "it was an attempt to say that the thirty-two years between independence and the end of the book didn't add up to very much, that a kind of betrayal had taken place, and that the book was dealing with the nature of that betrayal."

Saleem is left to ponder on the concept of history as perceived in Hindu cosmology. History, he says, "in [his] version" is inextricably "bound to the age of Darkness, Kali-Yuga". He consoles himself that by Hindu cosmological law, this is "a period of decay resulting in the perversion of all values and virtues." The history of man or a nation are a meaningless fraction of the moments in Brahma's life and hence constitute only an illusion. Thus, Saleem resigns himself to the reality -illusion philosophical concept. According to Vedantic thought, to believe that man or the world around him is real, is a human being's *avidya* or ignorance.

Mrs. Gandhi was instrumental, to a large extent, in destroying the democratic institutions of independent India. She reinforced it by using the Hindu notion of the repetitive cycle of destruction and regeneration, for explaining modern political processes.

That is why in the novel, the generation that follows Saleem's children of midnight, the generation represented by Aadam Sinai, is symbolically born of the traditional gods, Shiva and Parvati – the great figures of the past who are part of the cycle of destruction and regeneration as expressed by the mother goddess.

This also explains why Kali and Parvati, two names for the same goddess are seen to engage in two distinct activities in the novel. While Kali the Widow (Mrs. Gandhi) castrates the midnight children and drains them of their hope, Parvati gives birth to the next generation. Thus, the mythical cycle of destruction and regeneration continues in the present when the same traditions are called upon to justify contemporary actions. Shiva and Parvati are modelled after traditional Hindu "ideals" rather than the *Flat* or *Real* characters of Western fiction.

Saleem refers to the dangers of nostalgically reminding "a new-born, secular state" of its religio-mythical traditions. It results in a nation which is divided along linguistic, regional, communal lives. It is a nation :

> .... in which democracy and votes for women were irrelevant...
> so that people were seized with atavistic longings, and forgetting
> the new myth of freedom [revert] to their old ways, their old regionalist
> loyalties and prejudices (294)

The evil Shiva and children like him were responsible for the disintegration of India which you see being physically enacted in Saleem who is seen "cracking up." These were the children who under Mrs. Gandhi's revivalism of the traditional past, lost their real potential and betrayed the idea of the unified , plural , hybrid India with their growing parochialism.

5.5 FAMILY AS CHARACTER

In an interview given four years after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie made a very significant observation. He said that "because family is so central to life in India" it was impossible to write an epic novel on a monumental scale and not place the family "near the centre" (1985). He also noted that one could write a novel about Western society and not give the family a central place, and it wouldn't seem strange. But in an Indian novel this was almost a necessity. What do you think? Those of you who have been seeing the family serials *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki* and *Kabhi Saas Bhi Bahu Thi* on Star TV will agree that family centred stories do pull us as a nation. Indeed, the high TV viewer ratings that these family stories have been fetching have proved threatening to many other, perhaps more slickly produced shows and serials. Almost every home in India switches on the TV for these two serials and identifies with the joys and troubles of the two joint families.

The centrality of the family is therefore, reflected in a number of Indian English novels even those written much before Rushdie and stories woven around a family hold the reader even till this day. Rushdie was quick to seize this fact and play around a bit because his book is supposed to be "a comic epic." The epic dimensions are reflected in the stories of the different generations. Yet while wanting to involve the family in his story in a central way, he didn't want it to be a mere tale of different generations as is *The Forsythe Saga* or the family serials that I mentioned above.. His intention was "to undermine this convention." So he wrote about families in almost a mock heroic and comic way.

For this, he introduced certain surprise elements in his story. First there is the Bollywood style baby swop where the reader is shocked to discover after one hundred and fifty pages of reading about a family, that the family he had been reading about is not the family of the child, whose life history he had been engaged with, but somebody else's family . The other lies in Rushdie killing off Saleem's "family" when there were still one hundred and fifty pages left to go. If you recall, just about every member of the family dies in the bomb that falls on their house in Pakistan. The third is to bring in the Nehru-Gandhi family as characters in the book – a very daring act in itself, because they were very much around and in power.

This is something very interesting because he wanted to show how Indira Gandhi, the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, (India's first Prime Minister), and herself a Prime Minister and mother of two sons –Sanjay ("the second most powerful figure in India") and Rajiv (a future Prime Minister) sought to project herself and her family as being larger than life. He wanted to expose her attempts at "self-mythification."

In an introduction to Tariq Ali's *An Indian Dynasty : The Story of the Nehru – Gandhi Family* (1985), Rushdie describes how in a planned way the first family of India had set about "self-mythification" (xiii). This attempt at myth-making reached its height in 1975 when an Assamese minister sychophantly coined the campaign slogan, "India is Indira and Indira is India." This "historical" fact is included in *Midnight's Children*. Its inclusion clearly exposes Indira Gandhi's political manoeuvres as part of a major strategy to aggrandise herself and her family as the family of India's greatest leaders. This attempt at self-mythification reached its peak during the Emergency.

As I have said earlier, "the Emergency" was independent India's most shameful hour. You, who were probably not even born then may wonder why such a "fuss" is made about its imposition. Indeed when I was teaching *Midnight's Children*, in IIT Bombay, a final year B.Tech student of mine, asked me just this question. In answer, let me share, with you, what I told him, having lived through the period of the "Emergency" myself that too on a university campus. Let me share an incident with you . The CBI once visited my department to check on the antecedents of a wellknown history professor simply because someone had complained about her anonymously . How would you react if the present Indian Government were to suspend our fundamental rights overnight and impose censorship on the press, TV and radio? With horror and fear? Well something like this happened on 26 June 1975 when for the first time in free India's history, the fundamental rights of her citizens were suspended and 140,000 Indians were detained without trial : what became a common phrase then was the dreaded "midnight knock" that every right-thinking Indian feared.

The police was known to come suddenly to anyone's home and take away the person to prison. And because the citizen had not rights, he could not appeal before a court of law. Many intellectuals including university professors and activists were thus thrown into jail and tortured. In the words of *The Shah Commission Report on the Emergency*, "[T]housands were detained and a series of totally illegal and unwarranted actions followed involving untold human misery and suffering" (in Ali 186).

These were the facts of history that were swept away by Mrs. Gandhi's attempts to aggrandise herself and retain power. The illegal detentions and the enormous human suffering that she caused are precisely those details that were suppressed as she pursued her ambition to re-write India's history with herself at its centre.

Rushdie's despair and rage become very clear in his characterization of Mrs. Indira Gandhi as the murderous Widow. Let's look at the descriptions that he offers of her in Saleem's narration. The widow first appears in a terrifying dream that Saleem has during a bout with fever. Here she takes the form of a huge, voracious monster who gathers children in her hands, rips them apart, and rolls them into little green balls that she hurls into the night. Saleem also describes her as having green and black hair; her "arm is long as death, its skin is green the fingernails are long and sharp and black"; and the "children torn in two in Widow hands which rolling rolling halves of children roll them into little balls" (249).

The Widow, in this guise, most closely resembles the goddess Kali , who represents "Death and the Destroyer." In pictures, Kali is shown standing with protruding tongue, garland of skulls and hands holding weapons and severed hands. Rushdie through his narrator Saleem, clearly indicates that the Widow, Indira Gandhi, had conflated her own image with that of the traditional mother goddess. At the same time, however, Rushdie wants to show the consequences of performing such acts. The Widow, Saleem declares, "was not only Prime Minister of India but also aspired to be Devi, the Mother goddess in her most terrible aspect, possessor of the shakti of the gods."

Rushdie's characterization might at first seem extreme; surely Indira Gandhi did not conceive of herself literally as a mother goddess. However, it is clear that she was perceived in this fashion by many Indians during this period. The famous Indian artist M. F. Husain did paint a triology of her during the Emergency that depicts her as Durga or Kali. The point to be made here is not that Indira Gandhi went about proclaiming herself as Devi the mother goddess, but rather that her swift and cruel actions during the Emergency were perceived to be similar to the actions of Durga or Kali, and this was a role that "Mother Indira" did not repudiate.

The characterization of Mrs. Gandhi is the most scathing of all characters in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie's novel is in part, an examination of the "betrayal" of India by the independent Indian government beginning with Nehru.

The Nehru-Gandhi family as a character in *Midnight's Children* acquires a special meaning. By creating Saleem, Rushdie places the artist in opposition to all historians including politicians who re-write history to suit their own ambitions. The writer has to speak up and protest and Rushdie's protest rang out loud throughout the world.

As a critical historian of India, Saleem upholds three principles. First, he acknowledges the importance of the traditions of democratic and representative forms of government. Second, he acknowledges the teeming millions of the Indian populace that are forgotten in most histories of India which tend to focus on the great figures of history(as will become clear in section 5.6).

Third, he believes in the power of the writer's imagination that helps him construct suppressed "realities" and "truths". He calls this "the chutnification of history", the power to produce counter-histories, to protest against the powerful governments of the day. To protest is a writer's duty as he said in his lecture "Inside the Whale" that I shared with you in Unit 1.

To conclude this section, the characterization of the family in *Midnight's Children* goes beyond domestic space into the space of manipulative history and politics. It is the most difficult to understand and also the most complex. I have for obvious reasons, therefore, spent more time on discussing the Family as dynasty than the family of Saleem .

5.6 COMMON PEOPLE AS CHARACTERS

In most novels and plays there are a number of faceless people who also populate the world in which the main characters live. For example, in a Shakespearean play such as *Julius Ceasar*, besides the protagonist, Ceasar, Brutus, Cassius and Mark Anthony, there are the huge crowds of commoners whose comments constitute the spirit of the times, the belief systems that prevailed and the world in which the former lived. So, through the remarks of some unknown persons we know so much more about the society in which these Shakespearean heroes live. The times in which Shakespeare lived were marked by a strong belief in astrology and the people were superstitious. His common people have no names, no distinct personalities or identities; they are *types*. In technical jargon they are called the *rhubbarb;* they represent the "masses" in the novel or in a play as in real life. This has also been the case with all the Indian English novels until the advent of *Midnight's Children*.

In *Midnight's Children*, for the first time, Rushdie acknowledges the millions of common people and diverse groups that make up India's population. He does this by recording the many voices and perspectives that are almost never mentioned in most narratives, and history books. As Saleem says, "To understand just one life, you have to swallow the whole world"(126).

Rushdie avoids the typical historical and fictional approach of placing the primary emphasis on the "great" figures. For example, one would expect to find Mahatma Gandhi figuring prominently in a novel about the making of modern India – the way it happens in *Kanthapura* , but in *Midnight's Children*, the Mahatma hardly appears. Instead, Saleem records the daily activities of different "common" people and reproduces their wonderful language and unique qualities.

One of the most fascinating commoners is Tai, the boatman. Do you like him? He chatters non-stop, spins grand and fantastic stories for the child Aziz and has a

wonderful relationship with him until the adult Aziz returns from Germany – as a fully qualified doctor. Aziz and he initially revive the childhood friendship but Aziz gradually distances himself from the old boatman for his orthodox views, especially his views on Aziz's meetings with Naseem whom Aziz visits regularly in Tai's boat much against Tai's wishes. Tai feels protective and wants to save Aziz from getting trapped in Landowner Ghani's designs. Tai's fantastic ideas, his abusive language and temper, his unwashed coat and stink, his coarse repartee – all make him an unforgettable character. Lifafa Das is the second unusual common character who as the peepshow man in Delhi becomes a victim of religious fanaticism . A hardworking imaginative young man who is described as "invisible until he smiled, when he became beautiful" (75).

Lifafa Das keeps on adding postcards to his peepshow so that the children can really see the whole world. A symbol of plurality and cosmopolitanism, his chance visit to a Muslim Mohalla on a tension filled day just before Independence becomes nearly fatal for him. A small girl reminiscent of children in Hitler's days – incites the crowd by identifying him as Hindu. Through wild rumour he is seen as a rapist of Muslim women. He is chased by a mad crowd and would have been lynched, but for timely intervention by Saleem's mother, Amina. If you recall, as Lifafa Das knocks at her door for refuge, she lets him in and stands defyingly between him and the angry crowd. When her reasoning fails to convince the crowd, she challenges them to touch a woman who is about to become a mother. Responding to the traditional respect for an Indian mother-to-be, the crowd melts away and Lifafa Das's life is saved.

Lifafa Das, Tai, even Mary Pereira, Saleem's ayah the one who swops Saleem for Shiva to ensure a good life for a poor child – are all memorable commoners who share significant space with the main characters because of recurring references made to them in the novel and because of their unique qualities and unusual stances.

This is an important contribution because for the first time an attempt has been made in Indian fiction to bring a large number of socially marginalized people to the centre. Can you recall another earlier novel where the writer tried to level all of them with the hero of his book? Yes, it is Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* where Bakha a low caste became the hero of the book much to the surprise of the reading public in the West. Perhaps the origin of these revolutionary steps in Indian fiction by Anand and Rushdie, lies in their marxist thinking. In addition, with Rushdie it could also be the influence of post-structuralism and postmodernism. Such characterization is an attempt to try to overturn existing inequalities by making a large number of the low borns share space with the upper class – or almost.

In fact, the many characters in the magician's ghetto (where Lifafa Das later takes Saleem's mother Amina to a soothsayer who prophesizes Saleem's birth and destiny) tend to give the city of Delhi a carnivalesque atmosphere and point towards the intermingling of languages and social practices that both include "high" (upperclass) and "low" culture. Again, during the war in Bangladesh which filters through the experiences of Ayooba, Saheed, Farooq and Saleem – common soldiers who witness the atrocities committed by the Pakistani forces -- the focus is on the common everyday experiences of average people. It is their experience in Rushdie's estimation, that comprises a more accurate history of India. Thus in creating common people as memorable characters in his novel, Rushdie has set off a new trend in Indian fiction writing. In subsequent novels that have been written by other novelists, it is fairly common now to foreground the role played by the average common person. Thus in this section, I have tried to highlight the important contribution made by Rushdie of bringing common people as characters in fiction, rather than as the rhubbarb.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen how Rushdie draws upon the methods of oral narratives to create characters. All his characters from Saleem to Tai are allegorized or are symbols. They are modelled more after characters in oral narratives than on those in western fiction and have a peculiarity to their characterization that defies the simplistic distinction between *Flat* and *Round* characters offered by western fictional literary criticism.

5.8 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the main features of Rushdie's characterization in *Midnight's Children.*

2. Analyze, with examples, Rushdie's characterization of the Family in *Midnight's Children.*

3. Discuss the characterization of three commoners other than those examined in this unit.

4. Examine Saleem's role in the novel as autobiographer.

5.9 GLOSSARY

Alterego: very close and trusted friend; literally, the other self.

Adversary: opponent or enemy

Aggrandise: power or rank

Cartography: the science or art of making maps

Conflate: to combine

Conceive: to think of; consider

Inextricably: which cannot be united or separated

Mythification: the act of creating an invented person, not a real person.

Ponder: to spend time in considering

Parody: a weak and unsuccessful copy of somebody or something

Retort: a quick, rather angry, and often amusing answer

Repuditate: to refuse to accept

Rationalization: to find reasons

Scepticism:	doubt
Scoff:	to speak or act disrespectfully; ridicule
Sycophant:	flatterer
Triology:	a group of three related books, plays, paintings etc.
Voracious:	eating or desiring large quantities of food.

5.10 SUGGESTED READING

Nancy E. Batty "Rushdie's Art of Suspense"in *Midnight's Children*, *Ariel* 18: 3, July 1987

Arun P. Mukherjee "Characterization in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" in ed Kirpal (1990).

David Price "Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" *Ariel* 25:2, April 1994

Dieter Riemenschneider "History and the Individual . Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Salman Rushdie's is *Midnight's Children* in Ed. Kirpal (1990)

Ed. Viney Kirpal *The New Indian Novel in English*, New Delhi : Allied Publishers, 1990.

UNIT 6 MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN AS A LITERARY EVENT

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 *Midnight's Children* as a Postmodern Novel
6.3 *Midnight's Children* as a Postcolonial Novel
6.4 *Midnight's Children* as Historical Fiction
6.5 The Novel of the 1980s
6.6 Children of *Midnight's Children*
6.7 Let Us Sum Up
6.8 Glossary
6.9 Questions
6.10 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

My objectives in this Unit are to help you assess the contribution of Rushdie's novel to the body of English fiction. Does it signal a new moment in the history of fiction in English? In what ways has it altered our understanding of writing fiction? Do Rushdie's experiments set the trend for a new genre in fiction? What impact did it have on the novels that followed in its wake? What does the novel's enthusiastic reception bode for Indians writing in English?

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981 was hailed as a major literary event for reasons other than its winning the Booker for that year. You are aware that the earlier generation of novelists like Rao, Narayan, Anand, Desai or Sehgal had done their bit to put Indian fiction in English on the world map. But *Midnight's Children* blazed a different sort of trail. For the first time, a novel by a writer of Indian origin was seen as best reflecting the spirit of the contemporary West. The astounding reception of the novel in the West was both a sign and anticipation of the new prestige of the margin at the center. Though the space for a novel like *Midnight's Children* was created by a West willing to forfeit its claims to mastery, the novel played a crucial role in making voices from the margin heard. The novel and the writer have subsequently become the nodes for contemporary debates on multiculturalism, postmodernism, migrancy and hybridity raging in the Western world today.

Midnight's Children broke new grounds in many ways. A truly border-crossing work, its challenge to fiction, literature, history and reality called for new classifications. Its blend of fact and fiction, myth and history, storytelling and novelistic conventions defied all rules for writing fiction and to find a new genre. Linda Hutcheon has coined the term historiographic metafiction to classify Rushdie's peculiar concoction of history and metafiction. What is historiographic metafiction? As the name suggests, it is a kind of fiction that has elements of both history and metafiction. The novel is generically differentiated from history through its dealing with events that are probable but not true. Historiographic metafiction violates this distinction by straying into traditional historical territory. If fiction can be history can

history be fiction? While fiction is distinguished from historical facts, the probability premise of fiction steers fiction in the direction of verisimilitude. Can fiction be life? How is fictional truth different from truth? How about metafiction? Metafiction is defined as the kind of fiction that is concerned with the process of its own making. Metafiction, unlike other fiction, that labours to establish the veracity of its referents, unmasks the "machinery" of fiction to show its referents to be made up. In this manner, metafiction challenges the notion of mimetic realism that was often projected as the only mode of writing fiction. Metafiction shows that mimetic realism is only one mode of creating fiction. As fictional referents can never be real, it least matters which conventions it employs.

Rushdie's name figures prominently in Hutcheon's list of practitioners of historiographic metafiction that she sees as exemplifying the condition of postmodernism. This poses a problem because Rushdie is also seen as the paradigmatic figure of post-colonialism. Postcolonial critics claim that the strong political nature of Rushdie's writing underlines his participation in the oppositional counterdiscourse of post-colonialism. Rushdie professes to carry on the *Panchatantra* and *Arabian Nights* legacy in his writings that would make him something of an oriental storyteller. But he seems equally happy basking in postmodern glory. This fencesitting attitude has made Aijaz Ahmed see him as being complicit with both postmodernism and postcolonialism. To complicate things further postmodernism and post-colonialism overlap in so many ways that it is difficult to decide whose allegiances lie where. What do you think?

6.2 *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AS A POSTMODERN NOVEL

As Rushdie's novel shows a concern with the process of how it came to be written, we can perhaps classify his novel as metafiction. Like all metafiction, the telling of the story becomes a theme in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie's narrator begins by sharing with his reader the problem of beginning the novel, introduces the theme of the kind of stories considered appropriate for storytelling and the role of the narrator. Have you read any novels similar to this?

When you read a novel you are so carried away by the story that you think it really occurred. You scarcely pay attention to how it was created. What effect does Rushdie's calling your attention to the behind the scenes activity of his novel have on you? Does it spoil your fun? Rushdie not only destroys the illusion of reality that you normally expect of fiction or film but also kills the suspense by spilling the beans much ahead. What do you make of this? Like Padma, you would like to know what happened next. Similarly, when Saleem keeps referring to events that happen much later, your curiosity is sufficiently aroused to make you request him to go on. At the same time, as you already know the ending, all that leads up to it seems merely an explanation. You feel cheated out of the story. Gradually, you begin to realize that your interest in the story takes a back seat to the story making and its telling. The narrator lets you in one by one into the tricks used by storytellers to tell stories. He tells you about beginnings, middles and endings proper to a novel. He tells you about Sheherezade's eternally delayed endings. He lets you in the art of building up to a climax. You also learn about the chain through which events are linked to one another.

Having exposed the machinery, does Rushdie stick to the rules he has outlined for you? Yes. In fact, he does so in such an exaggerated fashion that you begin to wonder what's up. He appears to follow each of the novel's conventions to the letter, which gives you the feeling that he is being tongue in cheek. Remember how he reduced the notion of fiction beginning with the birth of the hero to absurdity.

Remember the middles and endings that preceded the beginning? Remember the absurd explanation for events? Why does Rushdie do this?

Rushdie does this to mock at the conventions of nineteenth century realism. In turn, he makes us examine the question of fictional realism. The debate about whether art can depict life accurately has been going on since the beginning, though the status of mimetic realism keeps changing. Mimetic realism rests on a belief in the ability of art to imitate reality accurately. Now this had become a value to be cherished, above all in 19th century fiction. Rushdie takes up this aspect for close examination. Let us go back to the definition of the novel to understand the point better .

The novel is defined as a narrative of certain length that depicts events that could probably have occurred. Realist fiction takes this aspect very seriously. Very often, you have admired a piece of fiction because it seemed so lifelike. It is exactly like it might have happened in your own life. Compare this with Rushdie's story. Saleem warns you that he is going to tell a tale that is "a strange commingling of the real and the improbable", which turns the real unreal dichotomy topsy turvy to question the probability criterion of fiction. Rushdie talks of events that are unlikely to have occurred in a Western reader's life. Unlike 19th century realism, which goes to great lengths to convince us that the events depicted there really happened, this novel highlights the bizarre and the uncanny. Magic and the supernatural are quite common in Romance but seem like an unlike setting for fiction. But 19th century fiction that developed as a reaction to romance worked hard at producing verisimilitude. For some reason this quality of 19th century fiction that goes by the name of mimetic realism came to be the standard by which other novels were judged. The undue emphasis on realism overlooked the fact that art can never be likelife. The conventions of 19th century, therefore, are another set of conventions that might be substituted by any other. Metafiction bares the tricks used by writers to show that novels are all made up. It shows that fiction forms its own autotelic universe that does not correspond to anything in the real world. Unlike the writer of realist fiction, metafiction does not pretend to create an illusion of truth.

This exposure of the made up nature of fiction has unraveled other truths that were unshakeable. Take the truth of history. History is presented as an objective document of observed facts. One is not made aware of the biases that the selection and interpretation of facts is highly subjective and that facts may be distorted to serve the interests of certain people. Which means that the truth of history that we have held sacrosanct is also a made up thing. It was easier for you to accept that fiction is made up. But to think that history, too, could be made up?

Rushdie and other practitioners of historiographic metafiction parody how writers make up their stories to show how history could also be a made up story. Their crossing into the territory of history in their fictional works is intended to close the division between the two. *Midnight's Children's* strange juxtaposition of history and fiction where historical facts coincide with the life of the protagonist Saleem Sinai creates a unique combination. We shall return to *Midnight's Children* as historical fiction in another section in detail. For the moment, let us look at how the novel fits into the mode of historiographic metafiction that Hutcheon celebrates as the true postmodern genre. Rushdie plays with historical incidents and conventions to show them to be as "unreal", as fictive as things that fiction refers to.

Now let us move on to the postmodern crisis of reality. Having found out that both fiction and history are different kinds of stories, it is not difficult to grasp that reality also could be a made up thing. This idea of reality as being made up by the observer is called the "constructivist" view of the universe. The problem of postmodern fiction is not merely to challenge the view that art can accurately depict reality. Or that while selecting facts, the historian chooses to tell the stories that appeal to him or promote his interests. One is talking about a different understanding of reality that throws what we take to be the real world into doubt. Postmodern fiction, by calling

attention to the made up nature of fiction and history, shows us that reality itself is of our own making. We too arrange our lives and construct our own reality in the way Saleem constructs the novel by selecting and arranging events that make him the hero. Rushdie keeps harping on the fact that the India he portrays is Saleem/Rushdie's vision of India and might be an India of the imagination but none the less true. He also shows that he is not interested in writing a history of post independence India. Rather he is keen to understand how humans "filter" reality. We all remember things that we choose to remember. Memory works by playing up all that is pleasant and pushing unpleasant happenings into the background.

Now we must recognize that postmodernism is not a global but uniquely Western phenomenon. It is either a reaction or a development of Western modernity. As a critique of modernism, postmodern concerns often spill over to post-colonial anxieties that make them appear similar. But postmodernism is a deep reaction against Western modernism, and the crisis of reality experienced by the West today. Crisis in the nature of reality has also brought down the stock of realism in literature. When reality itself is shown to be a made up thing, what can fiction possibly imitate? Postmodern Western fiction reflects and is shaped by the postmodernist crisis in the West. Postmodern fiction no longer has a story to tell. Instead, it unmasks the process of its making constantly calling attention to its made up status.

This contrasts with 19th century fiction's obsession with verisimilitude that made a religion out of mimetic realism. On first sight, it appears that Rushdie is working in the metafiction tradition. But then one thinks of several Indian collections of stories in which the writing of the stories is a theme. The occasion and the travails of telling and making the story have always formed the central story in most Indian narrative collections. True, in *Midnight's Children*, the theme of the problem of writing a novel runs through the length of the novel. And Rushdie parodies 19th century fictional expectations to expose them to be mere conventions.

But Rushdie's narrative does not stop at showing fiction as forming its own reality that need not have a one to one correspondence with what we take to be reality. As in other metafiction, the emphasis on the artifice in storytelling opens our eyes to the fact that fiction can never be life as realist conventions might lull us into believing. Art has its own truth and its own reality. The uncertainty about what we take to be real has certainly changed our ideas about fictional realism. The understanding that fiction is "an infinite play of signs" that do not stand for anything outside is strengthened by the role that language is increasingly given in shaping reality. One is happy to note that unlike other postmodern novels, Rushdie's novel is not an empty play of signs. Rather it is rooted in a very real history and is grounded in the particular problems and dilemmas of a particular society.

6.3 *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AS A POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL

For a writer who has one foot in the postmodern and the other in the postcolonial world, it is difficult to separate the different strands. More so, because postmodern and postcolonial agendas collide in different respects. In what ways is post-colonialism similar to or different from postmodernism?

Postcolonialism, like postmodernism, is a critique of modernism. But unlike postmodernism, it attacks modernism from a post-colonial angle. While postmodernism is a reaction against modernism, post-colonialism is an attempt to show the irrelevance of the western division of pre-modern, modern and postmodern to non-Western societies. In every field, postmodernism attempts to reverse , extend or project the movement of modernism. This could be seen in the postmodern return to history, in its ethic of indeterminacy, or in the rediscovery of intuition and

imagination in preference to modernity's technorationalism. But the most important aspect of postmodernism is the collapse of universalizing claims of modernism. This opens a space view other than the western. This postmodern space has been liberating for postcolonialism for the simple reason that postcolonialism has been particularly concerned with revealing that what the West passes off as universal. Thus post modern dictums are actually its own models. For example, to be modern was to move in the direction of the West. This has been rejected by postcolonialism, which shows that different people can become modern in different ways. Postmodern fiction is a natural extension of modern Western fiction just as postmodernism is a growth out of modernism. Both reflect ,and are shaped by the trends of their times. Just as it is believed that non-Western societies should trace the Western route towards modernity, non Western fiction is expected to follow the movements in Western fiction.

While postcolonial fiction is bound to have some Western influences, it has grown in response to very different socio-political currents. Helen Tiffin made a very important distinction between postmodernism and post-colonialism when she pointed out that unlike postmodernist fiction, post-colonial works have a strong political content. Postcolonial fiction is deeply embedded in the history and politics of its society. Though the postmodern and the postcolonial might have a lot in common, the postcolonial works in an oppositional manner. The Postcolonial can be seen as a "counterdiscourse" to postmodernism.

In postcolonial fiction, the opposition to Western norms comes through rejecting the norms of writing fiction as specific to the West of a certain period. Rushdie subverts 19th century realist conventions even as he challenges mimetic realism to root them in the Western tradition. You may recall that Rushdie juxtaposes the conventions of 19th century realism with the formulae of oriental storytelling. Each fictional convention is placed against a fairytale formula to show storytelling to be governed by very different standards from fiction. For instance, stories have a way of beginning afresh after every ending; they "leak" into other stories before they are completed; the links between them might be very tenuous. These formulae stand out when incorporated in fiction and have the effect of introducing the fiction reader to the norms of storytelling. At the same time, this strategy also heightens his awareness of fictional convention. Rushdie places fairytale conventions against those of fiction to show that while in the case of the fairytale we are aware of them being conventions we don't realize that fiction is also artificial. While the artificiality of the one has become apparent due to the fact that we are far removed from it, that of the other seems natural to us.

In addition to this, Rushdie confronts Western fiction with eastern storytelling to show that Western literary structures are not universal. He apprises the Western reader of other narrative modes that might differ from those of the West. The difference in the style of Western and non-Western narratives, according to Rushdie, might be due to their emerging from particular knowledge systems. Look at the linear movement of the novel and the cyclic pattern of eastern narratives. They parallel the Western linear and Indian cyclic time respectively. Similarly, while fiction belongs to the scriptural tradition, that is, writing, storytelling is part of the spoken tradition or orature. The convention of a narrator telling his story to an interlocutor that Saleem borrows from Indian epics tales also arises from the specific needs of speech.

Rushdie, therefore, contrasts one set of conventions with another set of conventions to show them both to be artificial. Rushdie does not merely confront Western literature with Indian storytelling. He contrasts one set of conventions with another to reveal 19th century realism to be another convention. Saleem claims to be following in the steps of Indian epic creators like Valmiki. Is Rushdie writing a modern day *Ramayana*? You may note that Rushdie adopts an equally parodic stance towards his Indian materials. He is too strongly grounded in the literate tradition to return unselfconsciously to pure storytelling. Rushdie cannot be an ancient storyteller. His novels filter the pre-modern through the postmodern. At the same

time, Rushdie's inability to participate fully in the storytelling tradition does not imply disrespect towards them. Rushdie's in-between status, as that of a postcoloniality is reflected in his attempt to challenge eurocentric traditions with indigenous traditions while being aware that they are lost to him.

This brings us to another problem postcolonialism is plagued with. Does post-colonial opposition draw on a pure tradition to confront postmodernism or should it be an opposition from within? Rushdie reiterates Western fiction's conventions in an ironic fashion to show their inappropriateness to the reality he wishes to depict. But he also seems to suggest through his irreverent treatment of his traditional materials, that the solution is not in a return to an autochthonous essence. Rushdie seems to follow the strategy that Stephen Slemon noted in postcolonial resistance. He repeats the givens of Western discourse to work them outwards. Saleem's exaggerated attention to the rules of creating fiction achieves this purpose. While he builds in the Indian storytelling parallel, he does not propose them as an indigenous alternative. For a return to a pre-colonial essence is an impossibility for many like Rushdie. The compromise lies in turning both the pre-colonial and the Western inside out.

Take the much celebrated play with reality that goes under the name of magic realism. Magic realism is the most exciting thing that has happened to Western literature since the days of the Romance. But that is because of the West looking at realism as the only relationship between life and literature. Like someone said, if this were so, we would have to leave out three fourths of world's literature. *Midnight's Children* draws on one such literature - of Indian epics, tales and legends, which don't take the realist premise of Western fiction as axiomatic. Unlike realist fiction, these narratives consistently transgress into the unreal. Most of these have magical settings and characters with magical powers.

Midnight's Children also shuttles between the real and the unreal. Strange and bizarre things happen and characters engage in improbable actions. Why does Rushdie juxtapose the stories with unreal settings and the real world of novels? For two reasons. First, he wishes to show that as fiction is always made up, it does not matter whether you abandon all pretense at realism as in fairytales or labour at accuracy. Novels can't do more than tell stories. Secondly, he wants to challenge the notion of reality itself. Here we are treading a more dangerous territory. For societies differ in what they believe to be real. There is a world of difference between *secularized* societies view of the real and *non-secularized* societies view of the unreal. The difference between the two is captured in the way of thinking of Padma and that of Saleem. "Real" and "true" are different, according to Saleem. Common Indian folk like Padma and Mary are embedded in the "miracle laden" universe of India. Saleem and his maker Salman merely dream of it but cannot see it in their "Anglopoised pool of light."

While an English speaking reader might find it difficult to accept the miraculous happenings in the novel, Rushdie shows you that these appear as perfectly natural to Padma or Mary. As with other differences, Rushdie contrast Western and non-Western perspectives on reality to expand the outlines of what the West takes to be the real. While Rushdie, like his anglicized narrator Saleem, might hesitate in the presence of the supernatural, he admits persons who greet the supernatural with total belief. What do you make of this? Like everything else, Rushdie challenges the universalism of West's understanding of the unreal by giving us a glimpse into belief systems that have a different relationship with the unreal.

6.4 *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AS A HISTORICAL NOVEL

Now let us return to the novel's relationship with history. As we discussed earlier, history deals with facts while novels deal with fiction. But historical fiction is a

genre that uses historical events and figures as a backdrop for a fictionalized story. Can we classify *Midnight's Children* as historical fiction popularized by its practitioners like Sir Walter Scott? Rushdie does not merely employ a historical setting; he turns to history as a theme. Rushdie takes up the history of postindependence India ending in the Emergency as his main theme. The history of India runs parallel to the life of the narrator Saleem resulting in a unique coupling of the private with the public. Readers of *Midnight's Children* have pointed out discrepancies and anachronisms in Rushdie's account. Rushdie, on his part, claims that he never intended to write the definitive history of India. When apprised of the "errors" in his rendering of history, he sought refuge in the device of the unreliable narrator. Why does Rushdie introduce errors intentionally? Is it merely to show that fiction cannot be confined to history? This is partly so. Rushdie is more concerned with the process of history making than showing the difference between fiction and history.

The "reclaiming" of history in postcolonial fiction has a specific political agenda. The post-colonial writer's concern with the restoration of his people's history grows from the imperialist projection of postcolonial people a people without history.

The myth of the lack of "historical consciousness" among "natives" was based on two presuppositions1) the natives had no written records 2) they had no way of systematically studying the past. Now writers like Rushdie are trying to disprove the lie. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie juxtaposes the "remembered" truth against recorded truth and establishes the validity of the former. Oral history proceeds by the logic of memory, which works by selecting, distorting , adding. This would seem a very imprecise manner of recording events compared to scientific history. But Rushdie tries to show that even the so-called objective history involves a selection and representation of events in a manner that distorts and alters them. This is not made obvious as history is written. Rushdie takes us through the process of history making.

As we follow Saleem fitting historical events to suit his thesis, we realize how objective histories too impose a pattern on related facts. You might have noted the "errors" in *Midnight's Children*. You might have noticed how Saleem provides a certain motivation to events to write himself into a central role. A similar process occurs during the process of interpretation of events in recorded histories. By showing how histories are made up, Rushdie closes the gap between Western and *Puranic* histories. He tries to show that the perceived absence of history in nations like India is due to the difference in the historiography that lingers on the status of facts. *Puranaitihasa* accords value not only to what happened but what is believed to have occurred. Rushdie holds up the truth of the imagination when he argues for his version of India based on memory or has Saleem make a case for the truth of memory.

While the role of memory and imagination in oral histories is known, we are not aware of the "imagined" nature of historical communities. Rushdie takes us back to the moment when the Indian nation was imagined. His use of the words "myth" and "dream" underlines the imagined nature of the national community. The fact that the nation is imagined into being, does not make it any less real for those who live in it. Rushdie uses this comparison to show that mythic history and scientific history are not different as they are made out to be. Both are, to a certain extent, made up. But while one enjoys the status of truth, the other is dismissed as a fantasy. This is so because one conceals its made up status while the other does not. Rushdie himself adopts *puranic* historiography to call his reader's attention to other historiographical methods that were not deemed worthy of serious study. Writers like Rushdie use these methods to restore the history of India. You might have noticed that Saleem prefers to attribute a divine motivation- the method of *Puranic* histories - to the causality of scientific history. And places *Puranic* truth along with historical calendar time to show that there are two alternative methods of preserving memory.

6.5 THE NOVEL OF THE 80'S

Viney Kirpal, in *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s*, notes that the Indian English novel since the 1980s is different from its precursors both in technique and sensibility. Do you agree with her?

The most traumatic event in post independence India was the imposition of Emergency in 1975, which left an indelible mark on the novels after this event. Apart from *Midnight's Children, The Great Indian Novel* and *Such a Long Journey also* place the Emergency as a climatic event in their plot.

Kirpal links the historical obsession of the 1980s novel to this political event. Vrinda Nabar in *Three Indian English Novels* of the 1980s traces it to a global rediscovery of history, which began in the 1960s. The debate on the status and methods of history, the universalistic claims of Western history has culminated in the revisionist project of the Subaltern Studies group in India. This project deconstructs Western historiography from a postcolonial perspective and suggests alternate perspectives. The fiction of the 1980s reflects the novelists' engagement with similar concerns. As Kirpal puts it, "official versions of history, patriarchal versions of womanhood, institutionalized versions of the subaltern are the discourses that are being contested and undermined by the post 1980s Indian English novelists"

In terms of technique, the 1980s novel demonstrates the destabilization associated with postmodernism. Kirpal believes that "writing of tradition and destabilizing it, turning it on its head and installing an alternative has given a new freedom to the Indian novelist's technique and style". Many of the features typical of 1980s' fiction are epitomized by *Midnight's Children*. The novel has become so strongly reflective of the temper of the times that it is difficult to disentangle the two. Kirpal warns that the superficial resemblances between this fiction with postmodern fiction should not lead us to equate the two. This is very important because the novel of the 1980's is still rooted in the Indian material reality. Rushdie himself made this distinction when he asserted that "books are about the world". Postmodern fiction, on the other hand, is a linguistic construct with a precarious relationship with the world outside.

6.6 THE CHILDREN OF *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Whether one believes that Rushdie "labeled a generation and liberated a literature" with Shashi Tharoor or dismisses the novel as "one great, big confused bluff", Rushdie's influence on the novels that followed cannot be wished away. Not only has the novel been used to benchmark others, younger writers appear to find it difficult to step out of the Rushdiesque mode. It is difficult to think of novels that do not carry the unmistakable Rushdie stamp. From *The Great Indian Novel* to *The God of Small Things*, the *Midnight's Children* factor is never absent. One notices the same irreverent play with words and conventions, the retreat into the bizarre and the uncanny, the epic sweep, the historical ambitions, the blend of private and public that Rushdie began. Many of these novelists are too talented to blindly ape their distinguished compatriot. But few have been able to resist the Rushdie magic and attempt, at times unsuccessfully to replicate it. Do you think that the similarities in the 1980s' fiction spring from the temper of an era or do you attribute them to the overpowering presence of Salman Rushdie? One could conclude that Rushdie invented a new genre of fiction that has been carried forward with varying degrees of success by the younger Indian writers. But it could also prove to be limiting for those who want to break free of the Rushdie mould. Some talented writers have not

received their due because Indian writing in English is expected to be the exotic masala khichdi that Rushdie patented.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

You are now in a position to understand how *Midnight's Children* set up a new genre in fiction writing. Rushdie's novel has been appropriated by both postmodernism and post-colonialism because it articulates their intersecting concerns. Whether one likes the novel or not, one is forced to concede that *Midnight's Children* has been the most significant publishing event of the last decades of the 20th century. Do you think it deserved the Booker of Booker?

6.8 GLOSSARY

Appropriate:	to set aside for some purpose / suitable
Agendas:	subjects to be considered at a meeting
Apprises:	to inform
Axiomatic:	self-evident
Anachronisms:	person or thing that appears to be in the wrong period of time
Allegiances:	loyalty
Artifice:	clever skill
Bizarre:	strange, peculiar
Collide:	to meet and strike violently
Complicit:	to be a partner in a crime
Culminated:	reach the highest point
Constructivism:	the view that reality is always constructed artificially
Discrepancies:	difference
Disentangle:	to free from confusion
Exotic:	strange and unusual
Eurocentric:	European literary practices
Epitomized:	a person or thing who has the essence of a certain quality
Harping on:	to talk a lot about something
Historiographic Metafiction:	Fiction that blends history with metafiction
Intersecting:	a point where roads, lines, cross

Interlocutor:	The person who is talking to someone
Indeterminancy:	not fixed
Indigenous:	native
Indelible:	which cannot be rubbed out
Metafiction:	Fiction concerned with the process of its own making
Patent:	invention
Precarious:	unsaved
***Postmodernism*:**	Historically the phase in Western civilization that follows modernism but has also been interpreted as a concept that emphasizes indeterminacy, play, hybridity, fragmentation and so on.
Postcolonialism:	Has been interpreted as the period following colonialism, as decolonization or a state of being pervaded in the world today shaped by the colonial encounter.
Revisionist:	derogatory reference to an existing Marxist political system
Referent:	that which is referred to
Stance:	a way of standing
Scriptural:	according to a holy writing
Subverts:	to try to destroy the power and influence
Sacrosanct:	sacred
Secularized:	secular
Technorationalism:	the elevation of rationality in a technocratic age
Tenuous:	very thin
Transgress:	to go beyond
Tongue in cheek:	saying or doing something one does not seriously mean
Travails:	ıs of giving birth to a child
Unraveled:	ıke clear
Verismilitude:	ality of seeming to be true
Wished away:	want the absence of something

6.9 QUESTIONS

1. What is historiographic metafiction? Does *Midnight's Children* belong to this kind of fiction?

2. Do you consider *Midnight's Children* a postcolonial or a postmodern novel?

3. Do you think Rushdie has set the trend for a new genre of fiction? If so, how?

4. How has Rushdie's novel influenced the novel of the 80s and the 90s?

6.10 SUGGESTED READING

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MAEN-117 Indian English Literature

Block

6

THE SHORT STORY

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Have you ever thought that in order to really live, we make up stories about ourselves and others and about the personal as well as social past. This way we are turning our lives into stories. Barbara Hardy, Louis M. Rosenbalt, Wolfgang Isex, Frank Smith and Norman Holland have premised that a narrative is constructed or performed through a series of interactions at any given moment with self-accumulated and self-correcting impressions which get snowballed upto a point. Barbara Hardy has gone to the extent of saying that narrative is a 'primary act of mind' through which human consciousness operates.

Children are the first recipients of stories. These help them to reckon the world-mother's, granny's, folk-tales, radio and television, car stereos and later on teachers, comics, printed books and even advertisements. All these contribute to the conventions of fiction in terms of a constructed whole with a beginning and an end. We become used to repetitive patterns called Story Grammars (Bower, 76) Stein and Glenn have experimented with children who were familiar with the story grammar of their respective cultures. They not only made sense of New Stories from different cultures but also added 'missing conventional elements' when they re-told these stories.

Psychologists believe that one holds on to stories to make sense of an otherwise confusing world. We not only learn through stories but also see our way through to maturity with their help. Therefore, storytelling, story making are integrative in nature and help unite disparate bits of information into a whole which helps sustain the reader's/listener's interest.

It is, hard to find a common thread which appeals to us most while reading a story. Of course, we shall discuss issues like content, form, meaning or stylistic devices, but it is the effect that the stories produce on us which is what is important. Anton Chekhov said that reading a short story is like swallowing a glass of vodka. It hits you in the guts. It changes the way the reader looks at the world (Casterton, 86). Novels, poems and plays too have an impact but in the short story everything is subordinate to the change.

What is crucial for you, therefore, to understand is the developing response of the reader/interlocutor or the responder in the holistic sense. The effect of stories on us is comprehensive. The response stories trigger off is not just cognitive, but affective and psychometric at the sametime. The mind invokes previous experiences, relates and responds to new experiences to shape a universally verifiable world,. This process broadens horizons, cultivates empathy and promotes bridges across time and culture. Therefore, meaning and significance and value are not to be described externally as qualities of a text or ministrations of experts but as events, experiences of readers/listeners.

Such a view rests on you, the respondents, and not on teaching, administering instrumentalities of the experts or the written texts. Therefore, discover yourself by reading the stories in this Block.

The block consists of six units. The stories discussed are all written by Indian writers writing in English. **Unit One** looks at the history of short story, basic elements such as plot, characterisation, atmosphere, narrative techniques, point of view. **Unit Two** examines two stories of R.K. Narayan: *An Astrologer's Day, Engine Trouble.* **Unit Three** discusses cultural dualism in the stories of Arun Joshi '*The only American from Our Village* and Manoj Das's *A Trip into the Jungle.* Thereafter in **Unit Four** we have taken up two stories by women writers - Subhadra Sen Gupta's *The Fourth Daughter* and Raji Narasimhan's *A Toast to Herself.* In **Unit Five** we examine one

story each of Shashi Despande - *The Miracle* and Gita Hariharan's *Gajar Halwa* and help you to understand the broad concerns of Indian women short story writers. **Lastly, Unit six** identities essential features of story writing for children by introducing you to the art of Ruskin Bond in his stories *NoRoom for a leopard. Copperfield in the Jungle,* and *An Island of Trees.*

Questions are provided at the end of each unit so that you can ascertain your positions on the various issues discussed in the units. Please read the stories carefully before you start reading this Block.

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UNIT 1 ABOUT THE SHORT STORY

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 History of the short story
1.2 What is a short story?
1.3 Basic elements of the short story:
  1.3.1 Plot
  1.3.2 Characterisation
  1.3.3 Atmosphere
  1.3.4 Narrative Techniques
  1.3.5 Figurative Language
  1.3.6 Point of View
1.4 Glossary of Terms
1.5 Let Us Sum Up
1.5 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to familiarise you with the genre of short story – how it has evolved over the centuries all over the world – its form, its meaning, its readability, etc. We shall pay special attention to the significance of the atmosphere in a short story because a proper setting and authenticity of atmosphere lend meaning to a story.

We would also like to illustrate how choosing the right characters and their convincing development add to the over all effect of a short story. Then do not forget that great masters of the short story have adopted different narrative techniques and styles to make their stories effective and interesting. Finally, you must know that an author wants to convey something to the reader – s/he writes from a particular stand point which lends meaning to a story. Last but not the least, try to study your own developing response to stories. See how far your response is a natural process of selection and elimination based on previously held experiences. Therefore, meaning significance are not to be described qualities of a text or ministrations of experts but as events, experiences of readers/listeners.

1.1 HISTORY OF THE SHORT STORY

The desire to tell stories and to listen to stories is inherent in all of us. According to Somerset Maugham, the short story began when the hunter narrated to his fellows, by the cavern fire, after they had eaten and drunk their fill, some fascinating incident he had heard or witnessed during the day. Curiosity might have killed the cat but the insatiable desire to know what happened next certainly ignited the imagination and skill of the teller and the suspense and patience of the listener. The oldest known tales are said to be of the *Shipwrecked Sailor* written on Egyptian Papyri (about 400 B.C) or the *Book of Jonah* from the Old Testament (350-750 B.C).

The earliest written stories seem to be *The Thousand and One Nights* or the *Arabian Nights Entertainments,* written originally in Arabic but made known in Europe in the early 18th century by Antoine Galland's translation into French and Edward William Lane's translation into English. Though the source of the tales is uncertain, the framework appears to be of Persian origin. It is mentioned by Al Masudi (a.d.944), an Arab traveller and historian, as occurring in a book called *Hezar Afsane*, attributed

according to tradition, to Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C). [they tell the story of the king who had his wives killed successively on the morning after the consummation of their marriage, until the clever Sheherzade, the princess saved her life and that of many others by the never-ending, suspense-filled tales she told him]. The tales were probably systematically collected in Egypt sometime in the 14th-16th centuries.

Boccaccio's tales collected in *The Decameron* were written between 1348 and 1358 and were very popular throughout the Renaissance. Their setting is interesting. Florence is in the grip of a severe plague in 1348. Seven young men flee the city for the beautiful neighbouring villas, entertain each other with stories, each one telling one tale each day. These are one hundred tales in all.

These tales, relying mainly on the oral tradition, are basically discursive, focusing on a moral point. The major difference between these and other such prose tales and the more recent nineteenth century short story is the artist's consciousness and treatment of his or her tale as a distinctive art form. In the nineteenth century the short story acquired a currency and character it had not had before.

Some critics have claimed that the short story is an American invention. Peter S.Prescott claims, "The thing itself is ours, invented by us a century and half ago, and dominated by Americans ever since." [1] While this is obviously not the case, we have to admit that nowhere else has the short story as an exacting, complex literary form been so assiduously cultivated as in the United States, consequently, profoundly influencing short story writers the world over.

The Indian short story, as distinct from the fables of the *Hitopadesh* and the tales of the *Panchatantra*, has a comparatively short story of existence. The first Hindi short story for example, is said to be *Dulai Vali*(1907), though some critics consider *Rani Ketaki Ki Kahani* (1800-1810) to be the first Hindi story. What is remarkable however, is the strides the form has made in almost all the Indian languages, so much so that it now seems to be the major form of expression of litterateurs. Fragmentation of experience as a result of the increasing complexity of social changes, seems to make the short story an apt vehicle for exploring the dark places of the human spirit and disembodied states of being. Short stories have found special favour with readers too in recent times, perhaps also because of the inability to cope with voluminous works. The frenetic pace of modern life leaves all of us exhausted – physically and emotionally. Perhaps this explains the splurge of short story collections in recent years.

The beginnings of the Indian short story in English were made under the influence of the Britishers. The Indian short story writer in English is, therefore, an inheritor of the British legacy bequeathed to him by such eminent practitioners as O.Henry, John Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham, and Rudyard Kipling who themselves were greatly inspired by the French author, Maupassant. The Indian writer shares at least three of Maupassant's intrinsic traits –uninterrupted narration, preservation of curiosity, and the resulting clear picture of life.

The history of the Indian – English short story began towards the close of the nineteenth century with the publication of Kamala Satthianadan's *Stories from Indian Christian Life* in 1898 followed by K.S.Venkataramani's *Paper Boats* (1921) and *Jatadharan and Other Stories* (1937), A.Madhaviah's Kushika's *Short Stories* (1924) and K.Nagrajan's *Cold Rice* (1945). S.K.Chettur and G.K.Chettur evoked a sense of awe and the supernatural through their short fiction. The most notable of the five collections of stories by A.S.P.Ayyar was *Sense in Sex and Other Stories*(1929) dealing with the evils of sex and marriage faced by the Indian women of the day. Shankar Ram's two volumes were *Children of the Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1932). Most of these writers were basically reformists or sermonisers aiming at moral instruction and social amelioration.

The first artistic work in this genre was Mulk Raj Anand's *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934) voicing the concerns and predicaments of the lost ones and the sufferers in our society. Other significant names of this era are Manjeri Isvaran, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. With their humanism they lash out at the lies, shams and hypocrisies of our people. Narayan's sustaining power is his abiding cōmic sense and pure delight in the art of living. (We will be discussing two of his short stories in detail in a seprate unit). Raja Rao evokes the Indian thought and tradition and writes mostly on social and political themes with a philosophical slant. Not at all prolific, he has made a mark in this genre with just two collections – *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978). In his nine volumes of short stories such as *Naked Shingles* (1941), *Shivratri* (1943), *Angry Dust* (1944), *A Madras Admiral* (1959), etc., Manjeri S.Isvaran confines himself to the life of the low and middle classes in the erstwhile Madras State and excels in the sympathetic revelation of the female psyche. With Independence a new consciousness was noticed in writers. Khushwant Singh made his debut with *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories* (1950) launching a scathing attack on our blind beliefs and contradictions in life. Another title story "A Bride for the Sahib" is a tragic tale of the schism between an Oxonian and his docile Indian wife.

Another significant name in the world of contemporary Indian - English short story is that of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala who is a Polish by parentage, a German by birth, an English woman by education and an Indian by marriage. Her four volumes of short stories convey her near total depression and disillusionment in India, which she calls a country of 'heat and dust', of slow movement and activity, of indolence and laziness.

Other memorable short-story writers are K.A.Abbas, G.D.Khosla, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Bunny Reuben, Chaman Nahal, Shiv K.Kumar, K.N.Daruwalla, Bala Krishnan, Ruskin Bond, Arun Joshi, Manoj Das and Usha John. All of them have contributed significantly to the growth and expansion of this genre. Ruskin Bond. Arun Joshi and Manoj Das we will be discussing in detail.

Margaret Chatterjee, K.N. Daruwalla and Shiv K. Kumar basically poets have experimented with this form. Anita Desai, renowned for her novels, has dealt with some deep-hidden human motives and emotions in her stories. Shashi Deshpande, Raji Narsimhan, Subhadra Sengupta and Geeta Hariharan are other significant women writers in this field whose concerns and contributions we will be discussing in detail in this Block.

Currently, one can confidently say that women writers in English are making distinguished contribution to the short story. Though Anita Desai remains a conscious experimentalist, others are attaining a new level of psychological complexity in story telling and technical innovation. They may not be debating crucial cutting edge questions as those of personal identity, self and society and the meaning of emancipation, of freedom, they do focus on the vulnerability to defeat that results from their attempt at relating themselves to others on their own terms or at withdrawing into themselves so as to preserve the autonomy of their selves.

"But they have stopped short of exploring 'the interplay between self-knowledge and social role', (which is, indeed, a pity!)"[2] Shashi Deshpande puts it squarely when she confessed that she is not an expressly or outspokenly feminist writer. The women writers we have chosen work within the framework of tradition-bound, male dominated Indian middle-class society. The women they depict are conscious of

> "their predicament; they are victims of inequality they are creatures of conventional morality: they are the ones who are unfairly abused, misused and ill-used. But they believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of familial concord."[3]

1.3 WHAT IS A SHORT STORY?

A relevant question that may occur to you is how to define a short story. One may hasten to state that the best course is to recognise it by brevity, economy of words, short length. But then the short story is not just a story that is brief – it requires a particular kind of literary construction. Though Edgar Allen Poe feels that it should be easily read at one sitting in order to preserve its unity of impression, it is not a quickie, nor a novel on a reduced scale. In his review of Hawthorne's *Twice –Told Tales*, Poe defines a good short story thus:

> 'A skilful literary artiste has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents: but having conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be brought out, he then invents such incidents – he then combines such effects as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentences tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed....'[4]

A broad analysis of a short story signifies three characteristic elements:

1. Recognition of the familiar – vivid details to create the illusion of reality and actuality, of course, suggesting undercurrents of meaning. Though familiar, the writer has to rid it of any kind of banality, cliché or formula. A short story is, after all, not a transcription of life but a dramatization of it.

2. Empathy: Identifying ourselves so sympathetically and closely with the characters and situations as to feel a part of this actuality – the well worn theme thus gets vivified by being individualized and

3. Readability: The good yarn pleasure tale – being absorbed by the fascination of the tale, we are unable to put it down until we have found out what happened. Of course, beyond the yarn lies a whole range of meaning to be explored.

   The traditional notions associated with the short story such as design, continuity, effect, change etc. are likely to be questioned by present day critics and practitioners of this form who do not think that readability is/should be an essential ingredient of a short story. Not the contemporary short story anyway. And they do have a point. We can have a story without a storyline. Even without the formal narrative parameters, a story can be exciting and evocative. And it doesn't have to lead anywhere. Not necessarily, that is. Because of new fissures and new frictions, new expectations and new equations at every level, personal, family, state, national, international, the modern short story has traversed new grounds both in content and form. A short story is a voyage of discovery, of self-discovery, of self-realisation for the character, but more than the character, for the reader.

1.3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF A SHORT STORY

Having grappled and remaining cross – purposes over how to define the short story as a literary form we wish to lead you away from abstract generic debates and move towards discreet principles of writing a short story. Even though there can be no rules

for the good story, for any story for that matter, there can only be certain general principles – to establish a sense of the relation of the story to life.

The storywriter tries to give a definite form to the inchoate world. A story has to have a formal *plot* or *structure* and the skill of the author lies in making it appear as natural, as lifelike, as spontaneous as possible. The artist wants to make incidents or situations appear natural rather than contrived. A well thought out plot is one in which nothing is superfluous or superficial. A story has to have a beginning and should convey a constant sense of movement. Therefore, an ideal structure would make the story interesting and true to life as also build up suspense and arouse the readers curiosity to know what happens next or how the situation gets resolved at the end. It should also give meaning to the narrative.

A good short story should strive for a unity of effect – a "single effect", to use Edgar Allan Poe's phrase. That is, a story should be compressed and economical the way a poem is, free from digressions and irrelevancies, and marked by its intensity. It should be complete in itself and must have unity, wholeness. A story is meant to be read at one sitting; a novel may take days to read. So the story's effect must be sudden, powerful, revealing: whereas a novel can involve readers at a more leisurely pace, slowly illuminating complexities and nuances.

But then stories also convey psychological reality. Much of what happens in the modern story happens in the character's minds, in the interior world. Therefore, in attempting to reveal the drama of human consciousness, many modern writers have stopped stressing the orderly progression of plots, have played down external action, and have often abandoned photographic realism in favour of a more complex psychological realism.

Do not also forget that the stories require focused attention. In a novel we may skip over the descriptions, especially descriptions of setting. No such skipping is possible in a short story without losing some part of its meaning.

Also, you should know that there is a difference between the events and episodes in a novel and those in a short story. In the novels of Dicknes and Thackeray for example, there was a strong element of episode – each part of the serialized publication had to be complete in itself and also prepare the ground for what was to follow. In a short story, on the other hand, there is nothing to follow, nothing to look forward to. The end of the short story is the end. It is marked by a sense of finality, of definiteness, of tautness from beginning to end. It is self – contained. Its compression induces a feeling of expanding into life, an awareness of life expanding into our consciousness, enlarging our consciousness. In this sense a short story imparts the sense of a discovery. We shall continue in greater detail our discussion on the elements of a short story in the subsections to follow.

1.3.1 Plot

Whereas a simple narrative account is sequential, open and truthful account - a rendering of external events as they happen in time, a plot is not a simple narrative account. A plot is constructed. A plot is composed. The author of a story has in his mind, a simple narrative account but he does things with it. He may rearrange the events in time, he may tell the end first and then relate how events led up to it, he may withhold some information to arouse and sustain our curiosity and interest, he may be biased in favour of or against some of the characters and overplay or underplay certain facts to reinforce his stand. A plot is what an author does to the simple narrative account to make it a story, to give it a meaning, a purpose.

E.M.Forster made the distinction between a simple narrative account and plot very clear when he said, "The king died and then the queen died is a story. The king died, and then the queen died of grief is a plot." [5] The author has in mind causality, a

hypothesis, a point of view. He has a vision of the occasion. The simple sequence of events has been given a meaning. "A plot, then, is a narrative account, artfully manipulated for artistic purpose. To give pleasure and to signify meaning," [6] according to Jack Carpenter and Peter Neumeyer.

Plot implies the idea of unity – various individual events hang together, jell of together. To begin with, there is the matter of cause and effect – we expect to find logic, a reasonable connection between the parts. This logic is not a mechanical thing. Many human responses and nonhuman things may enter into the logic of a story – in the end the central logic we are concerned with is the logic of human motivation. How do human needs and passions work themselves out? Plot then, is character in action. The various stages in terms of plot are 1) exposition 2) complication 3) climax and 4) denouement.

1.3.2 Characterisation

Not all short stories, however, have or need to have perfectly worked out plots. As the writers Wallace and Mary Stegner have stated, "The short story as a distinctive form has turned away from plot, and has tended to become less a complication resolved than what Henry James was to call 'a situation revealed'."[7]

Aesthetic pleasure can be evoked in ways other than the manipulated narrative imitation of a conflict. The highest aesthetic satisfaction may come from the reader's growing recognition and understanding of the characters and their situations. The presentation of human beings or of human situations, and the revelation of the truth inherent in that human being or in that human situation leads to a "gradual, slow illumination", of facts which is more satisfying than a manipulated plot with a neat beginning, a middle and an end. Insights emerge from the encounter between two very different characters representing two points of view.

E.M.Forster classified the characters as "flat" and "round". Flat characters stand for an idea, an attitude, a point of view. They don't grow at all in the course of the story They become static or stereotypes. Round characters, on the other hand, go through many inconsistencies, anxieties, contradictions, etc. revealing new facets of their personality each time they deal with a new situation. They are dynamic. Flat or stock characters are often used to act as a contrast, or foil to the round characters.

Not all characters are treated equally – a clear understanding of their relative importance in the story will help us develop a proper perspective. In keeping with the central idea of the story we have to distinguish between minor and major characters

So important is character to fiction that one may approach the story by asking, "Whose story is this?" The domain of fiction is the world of credible human beings, though an amazingly diverse and varied world. All abstractions must be made credible and significant for the reader to identify himself with. They have to be made believable.

A writer can present his characters in two ways – by telling or by showing. If he tells us about a character directly, his method of characterization is expository. If he allows his characters to be revealed indirectly through thought, dialogue and action, it is dramatic. Most writers use a combination of the two to bring their characters to life.

One of the most important modes for character revelation is speech – the way the characters talk. All of us have our own vocabularies and our ways of putting words together. An author, in order to be convincing must have his characters speak "in character" [8]

1.3.3 Atmosphere

Atmosphere establishes lifelikeness and wins the reader's willingness to accept the world created by the storyteller. It creates the mood as well as the psychological and

physical effects essential to the theme of the story. By providing an apt locale and local colour, the author ensures verisimilitude and authenticity. A short-story writer cannot delineate in a leisurely manner or at length. His word pictures or strokes have to be economical and yet evocative.

The information given has to be to the point and yet revealing. Notice the way the place setting in *An Astrologer's Day* is evoked. "He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways...". A perfect setting for an astrologer "a bewildering criss-cross of light rays and moving shadows."

The period stories and ghost stories, in particular, depend for their interest mainly on atmosphere-exotic lands, moss covered castles and abbeys, pointed arches, haunted alleys, wild torrents, thick forests, etc.

Notice how Arun Joshi has created an atmosphere of pain and deprivation with the minimum use of words by highlighting the thwarted expectations of the father and the resultant tension and trauma. Nothing dissipates the feeling of depression. Atmosphere thus controls the overall effect of the story. It is created by setting, description and dialogue.

1.3.4 Narrative Techniques

Narration is one of the most important elements of a short story. Have you noticed that the most obvious ways to make the story appear lifelike is to tell in the first person. This ensures intimacy and immediacy – making it easier for the reader to identify with the characters. The third person narrative, on the other hand, gives the author greater freedom to move back and forth, and act as an omniscient presence. A story in the first person is supposed to emphasize subjective reality at the expense of objective reality much more than a story in the third person. In the third person narrative the author can draw back from the main character at any time and tell us things that the character cannot know or does not understand.

So, "the first person point of view adds credibility, immediacy and life likeness to the story. The author seems to disappear, leaving the reader in the hands of the narrator. The effect is that the reader comes so close to the action that he begins to share the character's perception of the world. The reader begins to so completely identify with the narrator's vision that he abandons his own critical intelligence and escapes into the character's life."[9]

Some readers assume that the first person narrator and the author always share similar moral perspectives, when in fact the narrator's may be radically different from his creator. A narrator's perception of an experience may be limited, one-sided even biased. The reader may know much more about the significance of the narrator's actions and thoughts than does the narrator himself. A first person narrator is only a character in the story, not necessarily a spokesman for the author;

Some stories have trick-ending to take the reader by surprise. We are not talking of mysteries and thrillers but stories like *An Astrologer's Day* that build up a certain suspense in the mind of the reader regarding the circumstances that had compelled the protagonist to leave his village all of a sudden without any plan or preparation and take to astrology to eke out a living in the town. The revelation at the end comes as a surprise. It goes to the credit of the author though that this sudden revelation unties many knots merely hinted at earlier and weaves the parts into a unified whole. It is a logical climax reached dramatically.

Then we have stories, which may be termed comedies of manners. The author shows us what the characters are doing in such a way that we can understand why they are doing it. Out of the details of what they do and say the authors build up the conflict

and tension. It would weaken *A Trip Into the Jungle*, for example, if the author tried to describe directly the feelings that lie beneath the utterances and actions of his characters or if he intruded into his story with explanatory comments of his own.

Stories written from a particular point of view to denounce a practice or bias are more concerned with ideas than characters. Stock or stereotypical characters reinforce the point they are attempting to make. While analyzing a story we need, therefore, to ask: who is telling the story? What is his/her angle of vision and relationship to the events? Is he/she detached or involved? Is his/her view of the experience trustworthy? Is the narrator's view of the experience complete, or is it limited? Is the narrator presented ironically? How does the point of view help the writer organize his materials?

Dialect or slang is used to place a character in a particular setting. *The ashtamp farosh in Arun Joshi* is closer to the heart of the matter than any other character in the story and is assigned the role of shaking Dr. Khanna out of his cruel apathy towards his father.

In keeping with our world crammed with strange, uncanny and fantastic events, the form of narrative underwent radical changes. The chronological sequence is no longer necessary. The unity of time is no longer necessary. A story does not necessarily have to have a beginning, a middle and an end. Resolution of the complications is also not necessary. After all, life offers no solutions, nor does it follow any system or sequence. Experimental stories of today raise questions and leave the answers to the imagination of the reader. Time is no longer linear to be measured by the clock. Ever increasing complexity of human motives and actions, myriad levels of psychological and objective reality have necessitated exploration of new narrative techniques and devices.

1.3.5 Figurative Language

Writers have a way of using words to convey more than they do on the surface – beyond their literal meanings. Such a use of words is generally called figurative language. Some of the common figures of speech are simile, metaphor personification, symbol, imagery, irony, paradox, satire, antithesis, allegory, euphemism, hyperbole, eulogy, understatement. (You may refer to Block 5 of EEG-01 of IGNOU's BDP Programme) we have explained these terms in the Glossary of this unit as well. For a stylistic appreciation of a short story, an understanding of how the writer has used language to signify something beyond itself is important. Every word will count toward the sum total of that story's significance.

1.3.6 Point of View

Happenings in stories may look lifelike and historically accurate, at the same time they are strongly marked by the authors' feelings about what happens, by their conviction that the essential reality of things is created by what people feel about them. The significant reality is in the hearts of people, hence the emphasis in these stories is on how and what the authors feel about what happens because what ultimately counts is not the events themselves but what we feel about them. Thus The *Only American...* is not really about the brilliant Dr.Khanna settling down in the USA but about the devastating effect of this event on his father. The range and subtlety of the normal dilemmas so effectively dramatized by both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das highlight the intricate codes and mores of our time and the authors' point of view in this regard.

Similarly Subhadra Sengupta and Raji Narsimhan expose our deep-rooted prejudices and preferences causing irreparable damage to filial relationships.

The point of view is thus the interpretation of persons and events, the pervasive and unifying view of life embodied in the narrative. It is what we are to make of the

human experience rendered in the story – always involving directly or indirectly, some comment on values in human nature and conduct. The question most of us invariably ask about life is "What does it mean"? We like the story to work itself out into a unity – just as we feel a need to have our own lives make sense. We all work out our own scale of values and live by it. Different points of view enlarge our vision and help us gain a new perspective. We can and do make, even in disagreement, the imaginative effort to realize what underlies the logic of another's point of view, the logic by which a theme unfolds. Given below is a detailed glossary of terms you will encounter in your critical readings of short stories.

1.4 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Action: Aristotle says that any literary form that tells a story involves the imitation of human action(praxis). A series of events having unity and significance.

Allegory: In allegorical stories the characters and events stand for a set of ideas or moral qualities or abstraction. Realistic plots are not important here.

Allusion: A reference in a story to a generally well-known person, place or event or situation outside the literary work. Allusions to memorable ideas and people expand and enrich the meaning of the work. The most notable sources of literary allusions are history, literature, mythology, legends, etc.

Anecdote: A brief narrative account of some incident or event.

Antagonist: The character in opposition to the protagonist or central character. Agon is a Greek word meaning 'public performance' or 'contest'

Anticlimax: A break in the climatic order of events or effects, a falling off from the expected intensification of effect.

Antithesis: which uses a contrast of ideas

Atmosphere: The mood of the story created by the plot, character, setting and diction. It is distinct from tone, which refers to the author's attitude towards his subject and the audience.

Character: A person in a story. Individual beliefs, habits, mindsets, moral choices and motivation distinguish one fictional character from another.

Cliche: Usually used in reference to a phrase which has lost its force because of continual use. It is applied occasionally to fictional situations or events which have become hackneyed and stereotyped.

Coherence: The hanging together – the interconnectedness – of the parts of a piece of fiction. Truth of coherence has to do with the internal consistency of a piece of literature.

Conflict: An encounter between opposing forces creating interest and suspense. It can be between a good person and a bad person, between tradition and modernity, between ambition and obligations, etc.

Connotation: The cluster of meanings implied or suggested by a word, as different from its literal or denotative meaning.

Denouement: A French word referring to that part of the plot in which conflicts are finally resolved. The final resolution or untying of the plot.

Diction: The words, the vocabulary used in a particular story.

Didactic: Meant to teach or instruct the reader. Parables, fables and allegories are didactic; their moral theme determines the choice of characters and the plots.

Eulogy: High praise of a person or his qualities

Euphemism: Substitution of an inoffensive expression for something that is explicitly offensive

Exposition: That information about characters and events which is necessary for the reader to understand the developing action.

Figurative Language: Language which uses figures of speech, simile and metaphor being the most common, to create special effects and expand the meaning.

Flashback: Interrupting the chronological sequence presenting an event or episode that happened earlier.

Foil: A contrast.

Genre: A French word to denote a literary form such as tragedy, comedy, epic, lyric, novel or short story.

Hyperbole: an exaggerated statement (for comic or dramatic effect sometimes) not to be taken literally

Image: Words and phrases, which suggest concrete, physical or descriptive details, presenting a sense experience.

Imagery: Figurative language which expands the theme of a literary work.

Irony: Contrasts or discrepancies between what seems to be and what actually is, what is said and what is meant.

Metaphor: comparison between two things not usually thought of as similar without using *like* or *as*

Narrative Technique: Methods of telling a story.

Paradox: which uses a contrast of ideas

Pathos:	The sense of pity. The author must see to it that the pathos in a story emerges legitimately and naturally from the situation given. There should be reasonable basis for the pathos in character and situation.
Personification:	giving of human characteristics, powers or feelings to inanimate or non-living objects
Point of View:	Loosely used to refer to the author's basic ideas; for example, one may speak of a detached point of view, a sympathetic point of view, etc.
Satire:	which ridicules vice or folly, or attacks an individual with some kind of non-literal use of language
Simile:	Comparison between two things to present an effective word - picture by using words as *like* and *as*
Symbol:	A sign, a mark, a word or an object looked upon as representing something
Understatement:	A statement which is not strong enough to express the facts or the feelings with full force
Verisimilitude:	Means trueness to life.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have given you a brief account of the history of the short story world-wide and the basic elements of a short story such as plot, characterisation, atmosphere, narrative techniques and points of view. At the end of the unit we have listed Glossary of important terms that will help you with your critical readings of short stories.

1.6 SUGGESTED READING

1) Carpenter, Jack and Neumeyer, Peter. *Elements of Fiction Introduction to the Short Story*, Iowa, WM.C Brown Company Publishers, 1974.

2) A.N. Dwivedi. (edited), *Studies in Contemporary Indian – English Short Story*, Delhi; B.R.Publishing Corporation, 1991.

3) Mizener, Arthur. (edited), *Modern Short Stories The Uses of Imagination*, New York, W.W.Norton and Company, 1979.

4) C.V. Venugopal. *The Indian Short Story in English*, Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1976.

5) E.M. Forster. *Aspects of the Nove*, U.K., Penguin Books Ltd., 1966.

6) R.P. Brooks C. Warren. *Understanding Fiction*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs. 1979.

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[1] Peter S. Prescott. Ed. "American Short Stories" in *The Norton Book of American Short story*. New Delhi Affiliated East/West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1990. P-13.

[2] Balarama Gupta G.S. *"The Short Story Writers Self, Society and Emancipation"* in Kamini Dinesh ed. *Between Spaces of Silence* p.148

[3] Ibid; p.149.

[4] Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer: *Elements of Fiction. Introduction to the Short Story*. Iowa, WMC Brown Company Publishers, 1974. pp 18-19

[5] E.M. Forster. *Aspects of the Novel*, U.K. Penguin Books Ltd, 1966. p.93

[6] Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer: *Elements of Fiction. Introduction to the Short Story*. P.40

[7] Wallace and Mary Stegner. Eds. *Great American Short Stories:* New York. Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1957 p.15.

[8] Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Fiction*, New Jersey. Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs. 1979. p.109.

[9] Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer. p.184.

UNIT 2 R.K.NARAYAN

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 R.K.Narayan
2.3 *An Astrologer's Day*
  2.3.1 Structure
  2.3.2 Atmosphere
  2.3.3 Characterisation
  2.3.4 Suspense
  2.3.5 Meaning
2.4 *Engine Trouble*
  2.4.1 Atmosphere
  2.4.2 Characterisation
  2.4.3 Meaning
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Questions
2.7 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine two stories of R.K.Narayan, one of the best known Indian English writers who appeared on the Indian literary scene along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao in the 1930s. This unit will help you understand Narayan and his style of story writing in a critical perspective.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As you have been told in Unit 1 of this Block, four main elements to be kept in mind while analysing a story are:

a. Structure - the form plays a decisive role in making it interesting
b. Setting and environment – the authenticity of atmosphere is an essential ingredient of a successful short story.
c. Characterisation – choice and development of characters within the constraints imposed by the form.
d. Meaning – author's message and comment, if any, should be inherent in the design and structure.

We are going to examine these in our appreciation of R.K. Narayan's stories – *An Astrologer's* and *Engine Trouble.*

2.2 R.K.NARAYAN

The Indian resurgence received a fresh impetus during the Gandhian Age(1920-1947) which witnessed a tremendous upheaval in the political, social and economic spheres. The freedom struggle reached its peak and there was an unprecedented awakening among sections of society – women, the youth and the down-trodden - which had long suffered under the weight of traditional authority. The major triumvirate of Indian

English fiction – Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao – began to write during this period.



R.K. Narayan (1907-2001)

As this Block goes for print, we have heard of the sad demise of R.K. Narayan. We reproduce the 'In Memoriam' by Dr. Louella Logo Prabhu, published in the *University Today* dated 1 June 2001, 455 no. to this great Indian genius.

In Memoriam – R.K. Narayan

India, and the world of letters, were orphaned by the death of R.K. Narayan. To a newer generation honed by the transcontinental success of Salman Rushdie. Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy he may appear a back number. In fact it was he who stormed the world of English letters when Graham Greene introduced him to Hamish Hamilton who became his first major publisher.

Greene was no Narayan what Yeats was to Tagore. The generously of the British Establishment, sometimes, is highly commendable. Without Yeats. Tagore may not have made it to the Nobel Academy. Narayan may have languished as teacher of English at Maharaja's School. It is ironic to note that when he failed in English, he took a year off to study it. His private readings developed his style and directly led to his trying his hand at creative work.

The postman, who called, would commiserate with yet one more packet arrived-with one more rejection slip.

Malgudi is to Narayan what Egdon Heath was to Thomas Hardy. He worked in the miniature to create a wholly imaginary town which is more real or feels more real that the place you live. Its nearest equivalent is Mysore. That is where his mind, his heart, his very soul lay. He came to all-India fame when one of the Nag borthers serialised his short stories over Doordarshan. It was one of DD's most popular serials ever.

As a nominated MP the one issue he took up was the weight of a child's schoolbag. Otherwise, unlike Shabana Azmi, was apolitical. He lived a long, full life up to the age of 96. It is sad that he has gone but his passing bears with it the plenitude of a life full of personal growth, the ability to take failure, with success, and in the end to be overwhelmed with an amplitude of honours.

R.K.Narayan – as is the practice in Southern India, the two initials preceding Narayan stand respectively for the village from which Narayan's family comes and the name of his father. R is for Rasipuram, a taluq in the district of Salem, to which Narayan's ancestors belonged. By the time Narayan was born (10th October 1907), the family had moved to Madras. Soon after his birth, his father Krishnaswami Iyer got a job in Mysore as schoolmaster and moved there.

Narayan knew only two languages – Tamil and English, but having stayed so many years in Mysore could manage to understand Kannada.

Narayan has produced a sizeable body of work -- more than 10 novels and 6 collections of short stories – which makes him one of the most respected writers in the British Commonwealth.

His first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) made an instant appeal to some of the leading writers and critics in England. Graham Greene hailed it as "a book in ten thousand".

Narayan wrote steadily ever since.

Narayan claimed that his purpose in art was to convey unambiguously the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities, who flourished in a small town named Malgudi (supposed to be) located in a corner of South India.

Narayan wrote chiefly about the Indian middle class because he was a part of it and understood it best. This is the middle class where people are not too well – off to be unworried about money or brutalised by the total lack of it.

Given below are the titles of his major works:

Novels:

Swami and Friends (1935)
The Bachelor of Arts (1937)
The Dark Room (1938)
The English Teacher (1945)
Mr.Sampath (1949)
The Financial Expert (1952)
Waiting for the Mahatma (1955)
The Guide (1958)
The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962)
The Sweet – Vendor (1967)

Collections of short stories

Malgudi Days (1941)
Dodu and other stories (1943)
Cyclone and other stories (1944)
An Astrologer's Day and other stories (1947)
Lawley Road and other stories (1956)
A Horse and Two Goats (1970)

Others

Next Sunday (1956, Sketches and Essays)
My Dateless Diary (1960, an account of his journey to America)
Gods, Demons and Others (1965, a retelling of some classical myths)

2.3 AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY

An Astrologer's Day' appeared for the first time in 1943 in Narayan's third collection of short stories, *Cyclone and Other Stories*. Subsequently in 1947 an other volume by the same title '*An Astrologers* Day and Other Stories' was published.

Like the astrologer, Narayan had "a working analysis of mankind's troubles : marriage, money and the tangles of human ties" We may add caste, poverty, man's harshness to man, and a view of life dependent upon a profound unquestioned religious mentality.

2.3.1 Structure

"All art is an order to form", said noted art-critic Herbert Read. The artist captures the inchoate world in a certain form so that it makes sense, some sense. A well thought-out design implies an effective arrangement of incidents and situations without the slightest hint of contrivance, to make the narrative both interesting and authentic. An Astrologer's Day is an example of a perfectly worked out story with a taut control of the author.

2.3.2 Atmosphere

Narayan has an eye for detail, any significant detail. With his keen observation and "talent for the particular", to use Henry James' words, he creates an atmosphere of a perfect work place for the astrologer. His professional equipment consisted of "a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook, and a bundle of palmyra writing". The boughs of the spreading tamarind tree, the surging crowd moving up and down the narrow road morning till night, the variety of traders – medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians, auctioneers of cheap cloth, and vendors of fried groundnut – vociferously vying with each other to attract the crowd, the light and smoke of the crackling flare above the groundnut heap and hissing gaslights take us actually into the midst of a bewildering criss-cross of shafts of lights, moving shadows and deafening din. Just the right setting for an astrologer. The atmosphere thus prepares us for what is to follow and lends authenticity to the entire episode and experience.

2.3.3 Characterisation

In the beginning of the story we are introduced to only the astrologer. All others transacting their business nearby are there to create the right atmosphere and provide the setting necessary for the development of the plot. The astrologer whose name we don't know (and it doesn't really matter that we don't know it) has the basic intelligence to know how to go about his profession. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermillion, and he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed because this attracted people to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks, and he knew it. He also knew what his clients wanted to hear. You can tell anyone, absolutely anyone, that he is not getting the fullest results for his efforts and get away with it. Clever as he was, he never opened for at least ten minutes which provided him enough stuff for "a dozen answers and advices"

The only thing the astrologer didn't know anything about was astrology. "He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. But it didn't seem to matter at all. He said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice and shrewd guesswork."

We thus have a perfect portrait of an astrologer – the likes of whom we often come across, almost daily, in our own marketplace and township. And even though we may harbour doubts about their knowledge of stars, we do feel tempted to consult them to know what future has in store for us.

2.3.4 Suspense

In our discussion on the history of short stories we have told you how curiosity, and the desire to know the unknown provoked story telling and story making activities. It is the element of suspense that makes readability. Readability is of prime importance in a good work of art for Narayan. And suspense is one way of retaining the readers' interest. By way of the personal life or past history of the astrologer, all that we are told in the beginning of the story is that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life. He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. He had to leave home without telling anyone and he had to cover a safe distance of at least a couple of hundred miles before he could pause and recollect himself and his life. The distance of two hundred miles means something to a villager. We are also told that astrology was not his family business. If he had continued to live in his village, he would have tilled the land and tended his cornfields like his forefathers.

So there obviously was something in his past that had broken this ancestral cycle and forced him to leave all of a sudden. Not only suddenly but also stealthily. Without informing anyone.

At this point in the story we may gloss over this past, so taken in are we with the business of astrology and how our protagonist goes about it but we would obviously want to know these details before the story ends.

The narration continues at its normal expected pace. One night just as our protagonist gets ready to call it a day and picks up his cowrie shells and paraphernalia to put them back into his bag, he looks up and sees a man standing before him. Sensing a possible client the astrologer uses his time-tested gimmick and offers to mitigate his worries if only he sits down for a chat. This obviously means an extra buck coming the astrologer's way. And he wouldn't like to let this God-sent opportunity slip by.

It being a late evening hour, our shrewd astrologer haggles over the amount to be charged, not realising that this is no usual casual client wanting temporary respite from the routine burden of life. The stranger has specific queries and he wants specific answers. No generalities. No soothing platitudes. No bluffing, in short.

The atmosphere becomes significant all of a sudden. The nuts vendor had blown out his flame and gone home. The astrologer didn't have lights of his own. It was dark all around except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground. Obviously it was not constant. Against this background of semi-darkness, the astrologer had obviously recognised the man facing him and now ruthlessly insisting on getting his money's worth by way of satisfactory answers. But as the stranger lit his cheroot, the astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the matchlight. For some obscure reason (obscure to the reader) the astrologer now felt very uncomfortable and tried to wriggle out of the whole thing, his voice shaky, almost faint. But now the stranger won't let him go. "A challenge is a challenge".

What the astrologer says hereafter takes him as well as the reader by surprise. He was left for dead, a knife had passed through him once, he was pushed into a well nearby in the field. The effect is further heightened when the astrologer even gives out his correct name. Guru Nayak is now completely stumped. He asks the astrologer when he would be able to get at the man who had stabbed him and left him for dead. Very confidently the astrologer tells him to give up the hunt -- because the assailant had died four months ago, crushed under a lorry in a far-off town. His parting patronising advice is that Guru Nayak should take the next train and go home, stay put there and

never travel southward again. The episode leaves us with new-found admiration for the astrologer. How could he so correctly read the stranger's past and even know his name? Had he studied the stars and mastered his art, contrary to the common belief? Did he possess some uncanny powers, which could be put to good use, when needed?

The story takes yet another twist when the astrologer reaches home around midnight and talks to the waiting, anxious wife. After dinner, he tells her that a great load is off his chest. All these years he had thought that the blood of a man was on his hands. That was why he had run away from home, settled here, and married her. But the man he thought he had killed was alive. She gasped. So do we. So this was the reason why the astrologer had to leave his village without any plan or preparation. And this was how he could so correctly talk of Guru Nayak's troubled past. Everything begins to fall in place.

Guru Nayak didn't expect his assailant to take on this new garb. It was semi-dark. He could not recognise the astrologer, with his forehead resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion and a saffron-coloured turban round his head. But the astrologer had recognised him by the matchlight when the latter had lit his cheroot. That's when he had started to feel uncomfortable, shiver and pull out of the deal.

But long practice had taught him how to handle such trying situations, to his advantage. Not finding a way out and having won Guru Nayak's trust he advised him never to leave his village, never to travel southward again. Thus he ensured for himself a safe and secure life hereafter. Convinced that his assailant had been crushed under a lorry four months ago, Guru Nayak would not want to venture out of his village especially when it forebode grave risk to his life.

The story thus ends with an incredible twist : "a murdered man" turns up to consult his "murderer" regarding when he will be able to have his revenge; the "murderer" recognises him but he cannot recognise his old enemy in his garb as an astrologer, is astonished to be told his previous history, and meekly agrees to give up his search for his enemy declared to have been crushed under a lorry months ago. Prof. Percy D.Westbrook in his essay entitled *"The Short Stories of R.K.Narayan"* dismisses this as a gimmick. But we have to concede that the author has blended the atmosphere, the setting and the protagonist to perfection.

2.3.5 Meaning

Narayan is a master of irony. The story is as much a comment on the astrologer's crafty ways as on the gullible masses. He knew nothing about astrology but enough about the common man's psychology. And that has pulled him through all these years. His "eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted". A comment on the ways of the simple folk and how they allow themselves to be taken for a ride. An ironic comment on how the science of astrology has been misused by these conmen in our society. An unfortunate consequence has been intelligent people's distrust of astrology and astrologers.

There is an element of social satire also in the story. As youngsters, silly youngsters, the astrologer and his friends drank, gambled and quarrelled badly. What happened one day and how it affected their lives henceforth is for all of us to see. Life could never be the same for anyone of them. We should never let things go out of hand. And yet, such things do take place every once in a while. Only the repercussions are not always so grave. According to K.R.Srinivas Iyengar "there are no good or bad characters in Narayan's works. Human nature is presented veraciously and interestingly and memorably and there is no overt condemnation or praise."

2.4 *ENGINE TROUBLE*

'Engine Trouble' is taken from the collection *An Astrologer's Day* (1947). A man draws a lottery ticket at a fair, winning a road engine. At first he is delighted, thinking that he has made a fortune but with each passing day the engine proves to be a useless burden, costing money to occupy space and to move. Just as the owner is deciding to leave everything and flee from Malgudi, an earthquake occurs, shifting the road engine into a disused well belongings to his creditors. The engine fits the well like a cork and everyone is delighted.

Both the theme and plot are very simple here: the road engine, a heavy inanimate object, attaches itself to the man and influences his living, his human individuality until the balance is restored in the end. There is a firm story-line and the movement is circular.

There is an element of autobiography here in that Narayan has been terrified of Arithmetic in real life and this reflects his incapacity to handle machines. Narayan failed several times in Intermediate and Degree examinations and could not graduate till he was 24. He is inept with mechanical contrivances, electrical gadgets and the camera -- almost anything requiring the use of hands. The winner of road engine in the story under discussion cannot even think of handling the engine himself, with some help and guidance.

In one of Narayan's stories, 'Crime and Punishment' an over-pampered young boy forces his private tutor to act as a stationmaster. Instead of learning the table of 16 the boy opened the cupboard, took out his train set and started assembling the track. He wound the engine and put it down, and it went round and round. The teacher got tired of the game soon enough and got up, much to the displeasure of his pupil. Luckily for him the engine also suddenly refused to move. The boy handed it to him and commanded, "Repair it, Sir". The teacher turned it about in his hand and said, "I can't. I know nothing about it...". The teacher was desperate. He could not turn the simplest screw if it was to save his life. So, *Engine Trouble* is a motif hunting R.K. Narayan since his childhood.

2.4.1 Atmosphere

If you have read *Engine Trouble* you must have gazed that a very natural description is given of the things that take place on the Gymkhana Grounds or RamLila Maidan or Gandhi Chowk of any small town. First the mela-style Gaiety Land with all sorts of fun and gambling and sideshows, with performing parrots and daring motorcyclists looping the loop in the Dome of Death, the cattle show, the breath-taking yogic feats of the Swamiji, the Cosmopolitan Club with its tennis court, the temple, the railway station and the station-master, the mail train. The fifty coolies pushing the road engine take us right into the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

The success of the story lies in the visual images evoked by the narration. The image of a mela comes alive before us with its shooting galleries, Dome of Death, different booths for fun and gambling. We can really imagine a long line of lottery ticket – buyers waiting with baited breath for the draw results. We can also visualise our poor protagonist looking fascinatedly at his engine and its shining brass and patting it affectionately.

The next striking sight is the temple elephant yoked to the engine by means of stout ropes, with fifty determined men pushing it from behind and Joseph sitting in the driver's seat. A huge crowd collecting around and watching in great glee and letting out a joyous yell when the engine runs straight into the opposite compound wall is a familiar enough experience.

The jam-packed town hall spellbound by the Swamiji's miraculous feats, the police inspector making his dramatic entry into the eager crowd flaunting a brown envelope just as the last part of the grand show was about to be enacted, the Swamiji and his assistant leaving the accursed place in great rage – create a highly evocative dramatic scene.

2.4.2 Characterisation

With his intimate understanding of the place and keen observation, Narayan introduces us to a plethora of characters. We begin with the clever showman of the Gaiety Land. The fellow who had brought the road engine here had to be paid a hundred rupees for the job and five rupees a day thereafter. The showman, therefore, sent him away and made up his mind that if no one was going to draw the engine, he would just leave it to its fate. He had got it down just as a novelty for the show (and the move had obviously paid rich dividends). That explains how the road engine came to be included among the prizes.

The Municipal Chairman, Secretary of the Cosmopolitan Club, the sympathetic priest of the local temple, friends and well–wishers pouring in to congratulate the protagonist on his latest acquisition – not knowing how much a road engine would fetch but convinced that there was a lot of money in it, the dismissed bus–driver Joseph, the mail engine- driver pointing out that he had his own locomotive to mind and couldn't think of jumping off at a wayside station for anybody's sake, the Swamiji and his assistant, the police inspector and the owner of the compound wall, a good part of which was reduced to powder by the elephant's kick – recreate for us the entire township, alive and vibrating.

About the protagonist we don't know very much except that he was talkative (how else would he recount the tale of his woes in such great detail !) and that like Mr.Micawber in David Copperfield, he kept hoping against hope that someday there would come his way a lump sum to make amends for all this deficit and suffering. He is not in command of anything, not even his life anymore- he is a man trapped by circumstances so much so that feeling totally defeated and dejected he decides in his weaker moments to leave everything to fate and disappear one fine night.

His wife represents a typical Indian housewife. Unable to suffer her husband's idiosyncrasies (or so they appear to every wife) anymore, she threatens to write to her father to come and take her away.

No names of persons or places are given because they are not important. What is important is the turn the circumstances take to bring about a near devastation in the life of a common man. Even so, the author doesn't miss out on any detail – when the protagonist went to meet the Municipal Chairman, he went with great trepidation and buttoned up his coat as he entered the chairman's room.

Talkative man is the narrator of many a short story of Narayan.

Talkative Man (1986) claimed to be a short story by the blurb, but described by Narayan himself as a long short story of 116 type – written pages, is the story of an amateur journalist proud of calling himself Talkative Man (TM) who narrates the story of a futurologist, Dr. Rangan, Rann with a double 'nn' who proves to be an expert not so much in futurology as in the fraudulent art of Caspanovism, sowing wild oats around.

2.4.3 Meaning

What does the story convey to the reader? Only after the protagonist manages to get rid of the road engine by another quirk of fate, is he able to get his life back on its track. With the engine off his neck and all his dues having been taken care of by the

owner of the compound wall and well, he can hope to be rejoined by his wife. Life returns to an even keel with the protagonist gaining nothing but experience from the entire drama.

The story has a much wider appeal. Hasn't it happened with many/all of us sometime or the other that just when we thought our troubles were coming to an end, they were in fact, just beginning?

At the social level, Narayan makes fun of the municipality and its lack of concern for the people it is supposed to serve.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Narayan wrote that it was one of his principles in telling his stories 'to compress the range of observation and subject the particle to an intense scrutiny' [3]

An innate sense of irony, humour and the complete absence of pomposity and pretence is what makes Narayan the writer he is. Narayan's good – humoured irony as a firm ally of serious moral concern creates thoughtful fiction which has its centre in Malgudi but has a circumference embracing the entire human condition. "Irony is like shot silk showing different colours as it catches the light at different angles, and Narayan is above all a master of irony," [4]
His world may be regional in that it conveys an intimate sense of a given place but it is not parochial or shuttered. His works create a comedy of sadness, suffused with a pure and unaffected melancholy but also lighted with the glint of mockery of both self and others. William Walsh sums up Narayan's art as "exact realism, poetic myth, sadness, perception and gaiety... It is kind but unsentimental, mocking but uncynical, profoundly Indian but distinctively individual. It fascinates by reason of the authenticity and attractiveness of its Indian setting, and engages because of the substantial human nature which it implies and embodies." [5]

Laxmi Holmstrom sees the commonality of themes of the two stories we have discussed as follows: "In both these stories the pattern is cyclic: a man stands outside a whirlpool of events and commitments and is drawn into it by ambition, by falling in and out of love or by accident. He is swept round with the current and thrown out of the whirlpool, having achieved nothing returning to the point where he began" [6]

Both these stories have a dramatic twist -- human beings pitted against social and/or non-human forces but the dilemma is resolved at the end. The astrologer lives happily hereafter knowing full well that Guru Nayak will not leave his village ever again and the Talkative Man will get back to the business of living with the road engine safe inside the well and the mouth of the well neatly cemented up.

2.6 QUESTIONS

(a) The story has been narrated by the owner of the engine. Rewrite the story from the point of view of the engine.

(b) What would you do if you were to win such a prize?

(c) Of the two Narayan stories discussed above, which do you prefer and why?

(d) Attempt a character sketch of the astrologer. Does this story evoke sympathy or anger for him in you?

2.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Dwivedi, A.N. *Studies in Contemporary Indian English Short Story.* B.R.Publishing Corporation, Delhi. 1991.

2. Holmstrom, Lakshmi. *The Novels of R.K.Narayan* A Writers Workshop Publication, Calcutta 1992.

3. Sundram, P.S. *R.K.Narayan*, Arnold- Heinmann India, New Delhi. 1973.

4. Walsh, William *R.K.Narayan : A critical Appreciation*, Heinemann, London. 1982.

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[2] K.R. Srinivas Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1984. p 86.

[3] R.K. Narayan. "English in India" in *Commonwealth Literature*, p. 122.

[4] P.S. Sundaram. *R.K. Narayan*. New Delhi, Arnold Heiremann – 1973, p.122.

[5] William Walsh, *R.K. Narayan A Critical Appreciation* London: Heinemann 1982, pp.168-169.

[6] Laxmi Holmstrom, *The Novels of R.K. Narayan,* Calcutta, Writer's Workshop 1973, p.86.

UNIT 3 ARUN JOSHI AND MANOJ DAS

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Arun Joshi – An Overview of his Work
3.3 'The Only American from Our Village' – A Discussion
3.4 Characterisation
3.5 Narrative techniques
3.6 Manoj Das – an Introduction
3.7 'A Trip into the Jungle' – A Discussion
3.8 Characterisation
3.9 Narrative Techniques
3.10 Let Us Sum Up
3.11 Questions
3.12 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine closely one story each of Arun Joshi and Manoj Das, two major Indian writers writing in English. This unit will help you understand the concerns of these writers from the perspective of cultural dualism and all its deeper implications.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed earlier stories have to be analysed keeping in mind the distinct parameters that govern form and meaning. The three main questions that we will address ourselves will be:

What is the story about?
How has the author organised the material?
Do the devices employed succeed in generating the desired effect and meaning?

Do not forget that these are open-ended narratives. This mode tries to communicate the complexity of life by its refusal to provide neat conclusions. Both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das have taken the dynamics of cultural interaction as the matrix of their vision. We will try to understand in the course of our in-depth analysis of the stories whether the intercultural tension is situation-based or character-based.

3.2 ARUN JOSHI: AN OVERVIEW OF HIS WORK

Arun Joshi (1939-1993) was educated in India and the U.S.A. Although he occupied a very senior position in industry at the time of his untimely demise in 1993, he is regarded as one of the important contemporary fiction writers with the following four novels and one collection of short stories to his credit:

The Foreigner (1968)
The Strange case of Billy Biswas (1971)

The Apprentice (1974)
The Last Labyrinth (1981)
Survivor (1975, short stories)



Arun Joshi (1939-1993)

An existentialist novelist writing in line with Albert Camus and Franz Kafka, Arun Joshi shifted his focus from social realism to psychological realism. Existentialism was a twentieth century phenomena which challenged the then established order of the universe as a divine moral absolute system. Instead it pointed out the aimless existence of a man who is indifferent to everything and alien to everybody. Forces of industrialisation and urbanization have exerted a deleterious influence on the life of man. Joshi has explored the depth of the psyche of an individual trapped in the matrix of decaying human values. "Arun Joshi's works are an illustration of the Indian variety of existentialism" [1]

Multiculturism is today a universal phenomenon. The most distinctive lineament of a commonwealth writer is the duality of selves—the native consciousness and the acquired consciousness. According to A.A.Sinha there have been three different kinds of responses to this cultural multiplicity. "For writers like D.F.Karaka this confrontation has not resulted in any tension creative or otherwise. For the second group the intercultural tension exists but does not seriously affect the course of events in their fictional world. R.K.Narayan and K.Nagarajan have their Malgudi and Kedaram without any marked intrusion of an alien culture. The third group comprises writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi who have transmuted the encounter of cultures in their fiction in different distinctive ways" [2]. In Arun Joshi's fiction the encounter of cultures is wrought in the conflict of tradition and transition and in the juxtaposition of the materialistic, rational view of life and the traditional spiritual, emotional stance. *The Foreigner* is the story of Sindi Oberoi who saw himself as an "uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except himself.... his alienation from the world is not merely one of geography or nationality; it is rooted within his soul like an ancient curse and drives him on from crisis to crisis".[3]

Arun Joshi has never been a prolific story-teller. He has published only a solitary collection of ten short-stories entitled *The Survivor*. There are two other stories, 'The Only American from Our Village' and 'Kanyakumari', which are published separately. The only American from Our Village is included in *Contemporary Indian – English Stories*, ed. Madhusudan Prasad.

3.3 *THE ONLY AMERICAN FROM OUR VILLAGE* – A DISCUSSION

In this story Arun Joshi brings about the predicament of a diaspora and his subsequent mental agony. Dr.Khanna, the most outstanding immigrant physicist at the University of Wisconsin (the finest of all physicists, immigrant or native in his own opinion) decides to visit India with wife Joanne and two sons, fifteen years after he had left it (for higher studies and other prospects presumably).

The four–week trip was a success by all accounts. His fame had preceded him. He was received by an official of the Council of Scientific Research, addressed a conference on Inter-planetary Radiation, inaugurated three well-attended seminars, met the President and the Prime-Minister and was offered many jobs, each of which he politely declined.

His wife and children were worshipped by his relatives whom they had never met before. In the typical tourist style they had brought for them Gilette razors, pop-records and lots of one-dollar neck-ties. Gifts brought by way of a ritual, a formality. Inexpensive gifts. What else do you bring for people you have not met before and are not going to meet again, in all likelihood. And in the true Indian style the razors were greatly prized, by the women who saved them for their teenaged sons. Anything with a foreign label is a prized possession for the majority of us. In the typical tourist style Mrs. Khanna and the children went off on a sight-seeing tour towards the end of their trip and Dr. Khanna delivered his final talk at a college in his former hometown. A perfect finale to a perfect trip, one would think. But this is where the anti-climax comes in the form of Mr. Radhey Mohan, an ashtamp farosh (seller of court paper in front of District Courts) who knew Dr. Khanna's father. He insists on talking to Dr.Khanna despite the embarassed Principal's unsuccessful intervention because he has come here only to meet him. In the course of his long monologue he tells Dr.Khanna how much his father longed to go to America to spend time with his son and what a tragic end he brought upon himself once forced into sad realisation that his eminent son could spare no time or emotion even for his ailing father.

His story concluded, the ashtamp farosh disappeared shuffling through the dark. Dr.Khanna however, could not be his confident, carefree self again. He had done nothing but stared at his feet thereafter. And he told a psychiatrist that he had periods of great burning in his feet. His output of research had been zero ever since he came back.

The story obviously raises a very pertinent, a very contemporary question: how is making money or holding a chair or presenting brilliant papers at seminars and conferences more meaningful than doing your duty, your filial duty? Self-fulfillment. At what cost ?

In *The Apprentice* Ratan Rathore reflects, "That is a terrible sensation. My friend – may God preserve you from it – the realization that one's life has been a great mistake; without purpose, without results. There are many sorrows of a wasted life...."(194)

Wasted life! Father's or son's in this story? Out of sorrow and guilt is Dr.Khanna forced to grope for the meaning of life? What is the meaning of life? The story is a scathing comment on Western emancipation and oriental indolence.

The protagonists of Arun Joshi's two other stories "A Trip for Mr. Lele" and "Survivor" are survivors of the cataclysms and disasters of the so-called progressive society. Can individuality and personal freedom exist in a vacuum? The story seems to indict the dehumanized morals of the modern society and points to a quest for a

humane society filled with natural love because it is only love that sustains human relations and imparts meaning to human existence. Depicting human angst it involves us in an exploration of the deeper sources of inner strength in the midst of contemporary anarchy and obs(:sion with self-aggrandizement.

3.4 CHARACTERISATION

The story is not so much about Dr.Khanna as about his father, about how the latter suffered because of the callous indifference of his only son. Like a typical Indian father Kundan Lal was proud of his son, telling everyone what all the son had done, getting angry if one was not interested in the son's achievements. Dr.Khanna had left for America at the age of 25. He was unmarried at that time. Like any typical Indian father, Kundan Lal too must have hoped that the son would come back after completing his studies or assignment, marry a girl of a respectable family with his father's consent and blessings and hold a big position bringing contentment and comfort in the life of the old man. He used to say the son would be a big government man when he came back. He would say the son was coming back in one year, two years, anytime.

When the son got married there, he was quiet for many months. His dreams shattered, hopes belied. But a brave man, he started talking again – saying the son was the only American from that village. Had he realized at that time itself that by marrying an American the son would never come back – to his father, to his roots? And so he consoled himself believing and telling others it was an honour for the village. That the son had settled in America? Married an American lady?

A proud man Kundan Lal didn't want to discuss his son or his doings with the villagers. Didn't want to ask his son to send him a ticket so that he could visit America, see his son and his wife. Must have thought the son would do it himself. This was the least the son could have done. That's why he started to shave everyday, bought two new shirts and a suit. When his childhood friend, the stamp-seller asked him why he was doing all that, he took him aside and confided with a twinkle in his eyes that he was expecting a ticket, a return ticket from his son, Kundan Lal going to America: It was not something people could laugh away. The whole village knew about it before the daybreak. But the ticket never came. He drowned his grief and humiliation in religion, in hymn-singing. Hoping perhaps that God would make his son send him a ticket or at least a letter. But that was not to be.

Kundan Lal had been a very bright student. His name was on the school Honour Board. He had stood third in the state. Standing third in forty thousand boys was no joke. He won a scholarship as usual. Made a mark even in Lahore where he went for higher studies. But that didn't get to his head. He loved his mother. After her death he locked up the house and went away. He had seen very hard days. Crossing half a mile of boiling sand in May without shoes every morning and evening must have been harrowing. Tying dhak leaves on his naked feet with a string and then crossing the cho required exceptional guts and imagination.

And Dr.Khanna? We are not even told his initials. He has completely negated his ties as a son, as a brother. When informed telegraphically about his father's illness, he sent an ordinary letter saying that he had to attend a conference. The letter didn't say when he would/could come. When the stamp-seller suddenly asks him why he had not sent his father the ticket, Dr.Khanna replies, "I could not. I did not have the money." But in the very first paragraph of the story we have been told that he was among the dozen or so best-dressed men on the campus.

Dr.Khanna's indifference to his father is chilling. He obviously didn't come when his father died. That would have been sheer sentimentality. Expensive and unnecessary.

If the theory of archetypes has any validity whatever, it is only to be expected that so universal a drive as the Search would provide that collective unconscious with a number of related archetypes. The Quest pattern involves, to begin with, the call to adventure, to explore new territories. Obeying the call to adventure traditionally involves the severance, real or, symbolic, of whatever ties may serve to connect one with the past. Besides the Hero, another archetypal character likely to figure importantly in the Search pattern is one whom Jung designated as the Wise Old Man – a character generally beneficent, whose function is to act as a kind of guide to the erring Hero. According to Jung, "The old man... represents knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness and intuition on the one hand, and, on the other, moral qualities such as good will and readiness to help." The ashtamp farosh is the archetypal Wise Old Man who reunites the son with his father, if only symbolically. In a way the father's quest for his son is also brought to fruition by him.

3.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Radhey Mohan, the narrator, forces a complacent and smug Dr.Khanna to hear of his father's woes and travails. And thereby fills him with remorse and repentance. Can he be seen as his father's alter ego? Some trick of the old man, a slant of the lips, a glint in the eye, the accent -- all these reminded him of his father and made him uncomfortable. Had he been alive today, Kundan Lal too might have worn a greasy jacket with eyes heavy with cataract, with no one to look after him. And during the course of their conversation Dr.Khanna had the unreasonable feeling that the old man was going to slap him (as his own father might have).

The only native word used in the story is ashtamp farosh and it is used 16 times to reinforce the native sensitivity and sensibility of both Radhey Mohan and Kundan Lal. Contrasted with this is Dr.Khanna whose training in the new civilization had been perfect.

Is Radhey Mohan the troubled spirit of Dr.Khanna's father who couldn't rest in peace even after death till he had met and talked to his son on his own soil?

Does the father win in the end by making Dr.Khanna realize the futility and hollowness of his whole life? *The Foreigner* vividly depicts the cultures of Boston and New Delhi. In *The strange case of Billy Biswas* the scene shifts from New Delhi to the Satpura hills in Madhya Pradesh, the two geographic locations representing two different cultures – the sophisticated and the primitive. Here Kundan Lal and Dr.Khanna embody two different approaches to life and relationships.

Unlike the two stories of R.K.Narayan which end on a happy note with a final resolution of the tension built earlier, this story is open-ended. Dr.Khanna keeps staring at his feet and complains of burning sensation there. Like his father he too seems to have lost his mental balance. At least temporarily. Will he regain his sanity? Will he return to his research and earn more laurels?

These are questions only time will answer. Will Joanne continue to be with him and nurse him back to normalcy? Given the American life style and values? Is Dr.Khanna doomed to share and suffer his father's loneliness? Only time will tell.

3.6 MANOJ DAS – AN INTRODUCTION

Manoj Das was born in Balasore, Orissa, in 1934. A Professor of English at Sri Aurbindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, he also edited for years the now defunct monthly *The Heritage*.

Besides collections of short stories and novels for adults, he has written children's tales and fables, and a booklet on Sri Aurbindo. He writes both in English and Oriya. *A Bride Inside a Casket and Other Tales. Man who Lifted the Mountain and other Fantasies, The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* and *Cyclones* (a novel) are his better-known works.



Manoj Das (1934-)

His first book, *Satabdira Artanada*, in Oriya, was published in 1948. At the age of 15 he had launched the monthly *Diganta*, a reputed Oriya magazine.

A recipient of the Sarala Award, Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award and Central Sahitya Akademi Award and Saraswati Samman, Manoj Das regularly contributed a column, *The Bunyan Tree* to *The Hindustan Times* for years.

An authentic story-teller, he is also a social critic. Despite the ambience of fantasy, hard core realistic predicaments and problems underline his vision. His stories linger in the mind because of their satirical undertones which though never cruel or unkind are true enough to be telling.

A Trip into the Jungle was originally published as *The Jungle* in The Illustrated Weekly of India in 1971.

3.7 *A TRIP INTO THE JUNGLE* – A DISCUSSION

A group of five – Raja Sahib, Mr. and Mrs. Mity and, Mr. and Mrs. Chakodi – went to the jungle, to turn primitive for a night as men and women must have been a million years ago, to gorge, to romp and to be violent. Mr.Chakodi, who claimed to be an

authority on the benefit of such occasional explosion of passions had lectured before they began drinking on the philosophy of such deliberate relapses.

Raja Sahib had arranged the outing and had spruced up his almost abandoned bungalow inside the jungle for his guests. They were driven here in the jeep by Shyamal, Raja Sahib's handsome half-brother, one of the numerous illegitimate children of the late Raja but quite low in status as his mother had not been a regularized concubine.

While they all went out hunting, after a round of light refreshment and drink, Shyamal declined to accompany them. Despite Raja Sahib's threats. Mrs.Mity stays backs too, ostensibly to get over the disappointment of losing the deer on the way.

Once left alone, Mrs.Mity managed to fall into Shyamal's arms and made him play her game of flesh. He obyed and obliged her. Stung by the smile of irony dancing on his lips all through and to shatter Mrs.Chakodi's suspicions she concocted an alleged assault by Shyamal, now sound asleep in a corner of the hall, as soon as the party returned. Predictably they all marched towards the sleeping chauffeur and began to kick him frantically. All except Mrs. Mity. Amidst their wild blows and kicks Shyamal swooned away and was dragged into a small room where they had just deposited a half-dead boar. Then they retired into the high-walled kitchen garden, made a fire, sat around it and drank. And then dancing around the fire they cut out and ate slices from the boar, which they had thrown into the fire half alive. Long into the night they ate half-roasted slices from it and sang and danced.

But the next morning when the watchman's knocks wake them up and Raja Sahib advances towards the room into which Shyamal had been thrown last evening so that tea can be arranged, Mrs. Mity stops him half-way. Suppose he opens the door and finds the boar instead of Shyamal there? But didn't they roast and eat up the boar last night? But suppose they see the boar instead of Shyamal in the room? Two hours later they return, Mr.Mity driving the jeep. They didn't look into the room, after all. Bringing Shyamal back is none of their responsibility. He is only a chauffeur, after all. But the suspicion that in their drunken stupor they might indeed have roasted and eaten up the badly thrashed Shyamal instead of the boar sends shivers down our spine.

3.8 CHARACTERISATION

Degeneration of the worst kind is common to the characters of this story. Raja Sahib was ugly, drained of all life from reckless indulgences, of late content with hovering around and brushing against and sniffing women. It was just for this benefit that he had arranged this outing. When Mrs. Mity wakes up the next morning she describes Raja Sahib as a pile of fifth, half a dozen flies hovering around his bloated lips.

Mr. Mity and Mrs. Chakodi had fallen into stupor on the floor, trying to crawl closer, Mrs.Chakodi had called Mr. Mity a wolf on an earlier occasion. Her words sounded innocent but she left the atmosphere sick everytime she spoke.

Mrs. Mity is a bundle of hypocrisy and pretences. When an injured butterfly got crushed under a wheel of their jeep she gave a shriek, her face all butter with pity. Mr.Chakodi used the moment to sympathise with her but actually try to come as close to the buttery face as possible. Mrs. Mity calls him a snob who snores as a pig grunts. The same kind-hearted Mrs. Mity accuses Shyamal of impudence and vulgarity when he refuses to shoot a pregnant deer. Shyamal had his barrel pointed right at the head of the deer. But didn't shoot. And to the five pairs of venon-spitting eyes he explained that the deer was pregnant. But it means nothing to Mrs. Mity – the same Mrs. Mity who had shrieked when an injured butterfly got crushed under a wheel of the jeep. She can't forgive Shyamal for his impudence. Deep anger and frustration clog her

voice. She is again on the verge of a breakdown. Not because a pregnant deer was about to be killed but because the impudent chauffeur didn't shoot the deer despite clear orders to do so, pregnancy or no pregnancy. So much for her delicate concern for the butterflies and beasts! She sat beside Shyamal, the impudent young man who seemed not to care two hoots for their sentiments

Inside the bungalow she manipulates to be left behind with Shyamal. Manipulates to fall into his arms. Manipulates her game of flesh. She has no qualms about telling lies. To punish Shyamal for his ironic smile and to set at rest any suspicions Mrs. Chakodi might have nursed on this account, she concocts an alleged assault and has the unsuspecting, sleeping Shyamal brutally bashed and kicked. She herself stands afar and laughs hysterically. A woman devoid of any morals, any conscience.

The trouble is all them are the same – total moral degeneration has left them hollow.

The trouble also is that they represent a growing section of our society doing the same.

3.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Unlike 'The Only American....' We do not have any central narrator here whose identity; presence and comments could contribute to the meaning of the story. The narrator here is unknown. The effect is situation based. Situations, which expose all the characters in their true light.

The author builds up suspense to the point it becomes almost unbearable and leaves us there. Leaves us to draw our own conclusions.

A Trip into the Jungle' reminds us of a very famous story 'Lady or the Tiger'. The protagonist in that story had the choice of entering one of the two doors – one leading to the beautiful lady and the other to the ferocious tiger. But no one, absolutely no one knew which door led to heaven and which to hell. And no one knew what fate awaited the protagonist once his choice was made. He could have lived in sheer bliss, he could have been devoured by the tiger – the audience were left guessing. We are also left guessing (and gasping !) by Manoj Das at the end of his story. Is Shyamal alive or dead? If alive, the chances are quite remote, how will he manage to come out of the locked doors? Will the watchman help him? Once out, will he let the bygones be bygones or take revenge? He was left for dead, if nothing else. Was he eaten up, as Mrs.Mity feared? All these questions are left unanswered. That's why we call it an open-ended story. The narrative is quite straight-forward.

3.10 LET US SUM UP

In both these stories the authors offer a critique of modern progress and advancement. In the rat race for name and fame Dr.Khanna forgets his father – the man who must have made all imaginable sacrifices to provide his son with all possible facilities to reach the top. The group of five in Manoj Das' story are brutal to the hilt. These men and women of means are devoid of any ethics or concern for others. They live only for themselves. Both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das compel us to look around, peep inside ourselves and assess the role money plays/ should play in our lives and relationships. And the havoc that the power of money can bring about ! And the arrogance of the moneyed people. Both these writers are deeply concerned with values – values that are fast disappearing from our lives and society. Values like love, filial dedication, familial commitment and concern for the under–privileged.

Awareness leads to understanding and understanding hopefully to a solution, sooner or later.

3.11 QUESTIONS

1. Would you prefer stories with neat, clear resolutions to the ones that raise many questions and suggest many possibilities but leave everything dangling in mid air at the end?
2. Do you agree that both these stories are a close reflection of the life around us today?
3. Why did Dr.Khanna's father hasten his end and that too in such a tragic manner?

3.12 SUGGESTED READING

Rajendra Prasad. *The Self, The Family and Society in Five Indian Novelists: Rajan, Raja Rao, Narayan, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai.* New Delhi, Prestige, 1990.

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Ibid; p.5.

UNIT 4 SUBHADRA SEN GUPTA & RAJI NARASIMHAN

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Subhadra Sengupta – an Introduction
4.3 'The Fourth Daughter' – Some Issues
4.4 Characterisation
4.5 Narrative Techniques
4.6 Raji Narasimhan – an Introduction
4.7 'A Toast to Herself' – Some Issues
4.8 Characterisation
4.9 Narrative Techniques
4.10 Let Us Sum Up
4.11 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to closely examine one story each of Subhadra Sengupta and Raji Narasimhan, two contemporary Indian women writing in English. This unit will help you understand the concerns of these writers as women. The stories we have selected attempt to draw your attention to the plight of the girl child and some of the problems women face in our society today. These are stories written from a particular point of view.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Women continue to be trapped by tradition. Prosperity has not brought social progress with it. Son worship continues unabated. Both these stories are concerned with some of our social mores and modes with all their ethical and human implications. The three basic areas of our concern will be:

i. What does the story try to stress?
ii. What narrative devices does the author use to draw our attention to the issues raised?
iii. Does the story succeed in generating the desired effect?

These are problem–based stories. Characterisation is not as important here as the problems stated. The main concern of the authors is to make the readers conscious of the prevalent social ills and their ethical/personal dimensions. It is hoped that awareness will lead to understanding and some possible remedy. It is not necessary to provide a resolution at the end. It is inherent in developing the right perspective.

4.2 SUBHADRA SENGUPTA - AN INTRODUCTION

Subhadra Sengupta was born in 1952 and received a Master of Arts in History from Delhi University. She has been writing regularly since 1976, and her first collection of short stories titled *Good Girls are Bad News* was published by Rupa

in 1992. She also writes fiction for children. The Children's books are Good Times at Islamgunj (1982), The Mussourie Mystery (1986), and Bishnu, the Dhobi Singer (1996) and its sequel Bishnu Sings again (1998) set in the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar, History Mystery Dal and Biryani (2000). She has also written a non fiction book Devalya, Great Temples of India (2000).

Subhadra Sengupta lives in Delhi where she works as a freelance writer and copy-writer.



Subhadra Sengupta

4.3 *THE FOURTH DAUGHTER* : SOME ISSUES

"A mother refusing to feed her newborn child. It was something Parvati Bai had never heard of before"

Nor had we. So much is said and made of a mother's love for her children that no one can believe it, no one can imagine it happening under any circumstances. Well under certain circumstances it may happen. If it is a daughter, if it is a fourth daughter. It does not matter that the parents and the grandparents are affluent. They too need a son. Perhaps more than the common people. Because they need an heir to inherit and take care of their vast empire. The family mansion and the jewellery shop of Seth Bhagwan Das in this case. And the logic is simple. If there is no son to carry on the line, their money would be scattered among relatives. Surely that's a thought no one could possibly bear.

But refusing to feed her own child? Rejecting the child just because she is a daughter? Abandoning the famished crying child just because she is the fourth daughter? Affluence should bring generosity, here it only brings cruelty.

The obsession with sons is deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche, particularly in the northern states. Thanks to rising consumerism and escalating dowry demands, nobody wants a daughter. Even in the most prosperous houses the girl child has little value in comparison to her brother. Traditionally the bias towards sons manifested itself in the neglect of girls during infancy and at times in infanticide by smothering or poisoning newborn girls. Today, modern diagnostic techniques enable selective abortions of female foetuses. Even after the ban on the amniocentesis test in 1994 by many state governments in the country, the situation has only worsened.

Tests are now conducted clandestinely at ultrasound clinics. Ultrasound makes the detection of the sex of an unborn child easier than amniocentesis and at an earlier stage of pregnancy. Those baby girls who are not aborted have a difficult life ahead.

Therefore, Mini, the fourth girl, began her life by nearly dying. If there is a God, then he sent her into the world with every disadvantage he could think of. Her mother was fair and exquisitely beautiful. But Mini was born with her father's dark skin and plain looks. If she had been a cuddly, pretty baby, maybe her mother would have relented. But for the mother of four unwelcome daughters there was nothing to warm up to in the thin, dark squatting baby with huge accusing eyes.

And so Mini, the unwelcome fourth daughter, survived because Parvati, the maid and family driver's wife took her up to the room over the garage, carrying a bowl of milk from the kitchen, while her teenage son went running to the market to get a feeding bottle.

And Mini continued to live because Parvati, the maid, hunted through her trunk for her children's old clothes and put them on her. Mini survived because whenever she fell ill Parvati's husband would rush to get a doctor. Mini learnt to smile when he got her a rattle. And she learnt to love because Parvati's son carried her around with him like a favourite toy and paced up and down with her in his arms when she cried at night.

So Mini grew up in a misty place between the garage room and the big house. No one ever kept her away from the house but instinctively she knew it was not her home. Her three sisters tolerantly allowed her to play with them but at meal times she would sit beside Parvati in the kitchen to eat. And at night she would follow Parvati up to the room above the garage.

And all this while her own mother, the mother who had given her birth, lived on the first floor in perfect comfort and luxury. Who says blood is thicker than water? Radha never felt anything for this child of hers, not even when Parvati told her one fine morning that Munia had said her first word and that it was 'Ma'. But even this failed to touch Radha's heart.

And Mini's fault? She was being punished for being a daughter, for being a fourth daughter. As if it was her doing. As if she could have altered it. Well, this is the fate that awaits hundreds and thousands of girl children in our country. Unwanted. Unwelcome. Neglected. Spurned. Sweets are freely distributed on the birth of a son. Sweets and greetings and smiles. But tears and silence and perhaps consolation (even condolences) await the birth of a daughter.

least Mini was lucky to have Parvati and her husband for Amma and Babuji. And Parvati's son was her beloved Bhaiya. Most other girl children don't have even that compensation.

The irony is that her parents and grandparents were rich enough to afford a large family, to afford the education and upkeep of four daughters, to afford even their dowry. Instead they choose to abandon this fourth daughter. Three are bad enough. And Parvati, the maid, without means, without money, decides to bring the child up as her own. The child can't possibly be allowed to die.

There is thus a subtle suggestion that affluence dries up the milk of human kindness and leaves one utterly callous, even cruel. The poor, on the other hand, still have certain values and emotions intact. That explains why Radha didn't want Mini to study at all. Until Parvati, the maid got angry, Radha's argument was that Mini was only fit to be like Parvati. Working in the kitchen. But when Parvati heard about it, she went and yelled at Radha, her mistress. Parvati obviously forgot that she could be turned out of the house for this impertinence. And at her age it might not have been all

that easy to find another job. But these considerations become secondary. Her primary concern is Mini's education, Mini's future. She couldn't let this girl starve to death, years ago. Today she cannot let this girl be denied even the basic perquisites to lead a decent, honourable life.

She cannot let this girl be denied what is her due. And this when Mini is not her own daughter, not her kith and kin. Mini's future means nothing to Radha, her real mother. Mini's future means everything to Parvati, her foster mother. And Mini's foster father, the family driver, would do his utmost to convince her that she is their best daughter, the smartest, prettiest and his favourite. With his arguments he convinces her that one's dark complexion is no limitation, no handicap. Mini is beautiful despite her dark complexion. And she also has brains. Unfortunately, those who gave her birth failed to see or chose not to see her bright intelligent eyes, her quick mind, her chatter and laughter. In fact, they hardly noticed their daughters. All their time was spent doting on their son.

This is also ironic that girls learn to accept the discrimination early in life. Mini's sisters go to a local government school in a rickshaw but their brother, their only brother, will go to a convent school in the car. And they are grateful that they are at least being educated. They obviously don't mind the car carrying their brother driving past their cycle rickshaw morning after morning.

Most of the girls wait to get married - that would end this humiliation of theirs. Mini looked for her salvation in her studies, with a desperate determination. Radha's rejection of her only intensified with time. Mini's defiance only deepened it. Her brains became her weapon of defence and she topped among girls in the school leaving exams. Press reporters came to interview her and photographers clicked her pictures. But when she announced that she planned to study medicine, her real parents ordered her to stay at home and learn to cook and sew until a suitable boy was found for her. Mini tried to argue in vain, "Suppose your son had done well would you ask him to stay at home?" Radha's attitude was dismissive, as usual, "You're not my son".

Mini persisted, "I've got a scholarship. You don't have to pay for anything."

Even this failed to thaw Radha's stony heart, "No daughter of mine will..."

The reader doesn't know whether to laugh or cry at this statement. Is Mini really her daughter? Has she ever treated Mini as her daughter? Mini's retort is to the point, "But I'm not your daughter? Mothers feed and care for their children. When have you fed or cared for me"? The best thing for the parents is to let this girl, this impossible girl, do whatever she likes.

Mini proves to be a girl of substance – a truly modern girl. The son, the heir of the clan, the darling of the family, discovers the dubious pleasures of gambling, alcohol and women. He marries the best dowry he can find. The only condition of the deal is that he would go and stay in the bride's home as her parents do not want to let go of their only child. The son and heir happily agrees, packs his bags, gets into his sports car, waves goodbye and vanishes in a cloud of dust.

Radha and her husband watch helplessly.

Mini, now a full – fledged doctor, would check Radha's blood pressure when she fell sick, help the dark man, her biological father, with his financial dealings, run errands to the bank, etc. In a way, this unwanted, unwelcome fourth daughter-abandoned and abhorred by her own parents, her own people, proves to be the only support in their old age. She almost takes on the role of her brother – providing support and succour to her parents. Tradition and modernity are thus combined in the story to prepare the reader, as it were, for the parents' change of heart at the end. The end of the story

marks a real homecoming for Mini and her newborn son – her parents at long last waiting at the door to welcome her with open arms. Something they should have done many, many years ago. But all's well that ends well. Let's hope no more daughters undergo the hurt and humiliation that would have bruised and battered Mini's childhood and adolescence but for the kind intervention of Parvati.

4.4 CHARACTERISATION

The story has been written from a certain standpoint to highlight the plight of the girl in our country and the characters are more or less stereotypical. The grandparents and parents are thoroughly conventional – eagerly waiting for the birth of a son. The birth of the fourth daughter naturally is too much for them to bear. So the child is left to die. Well, almost.

The author has exaggerated, to a certain extent, the inhuman cruelty of these people. Ordinarily under such circumstances, parents and grandparents would curse the daughter, abuse her, admonish her but not starve her to death. Not in their own presence. Not in front of their own eyes. And the mother! Ordinarily she would curse herself, her bad luck but not the innocent child.

Similarly the kind love and affection of Parvati and her family has also been exaggerated to stress the sharp contrast. Parvati's characterisation is more natural – though kind, she is practical too. When Radha told her in clear words to take Mini away, she argued, 'Bringing up a child costs money.' And Radha dropped the cupboard keys into Parvati's hand without a word. That became the ritual every month. When Mini spoke her first word, Parvati tried once more to restore the child to her mother but met with only an irritated frown.

The sisters' apathy and indifference is also quite exaggerated – they must have learnt early on that Mini was their sister. Yet they never tried to recompense, even in their own childish, sisterly fashion for their parents' cruelty.

The son's complete volte-face does not come as a surprise. It is poetic justice. His development has not been shown at all. Only his falling on evil ways and days has been reported. The third daughter's death is literally a bolt from the blue.

The characters thus are either too good or too bad. And they remain static more or less. They represent an attitude, a rigid standpoint that the author wishes to discuss, disapprove and finally discard.

4.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The narrative is straightforward. It follows the conventional chronological pattern-- beginning with the birth of the fourth daughter and ends with the expected/ desired change of heart and perception of her biological parents who had so callously and cruelly abandoned her – to die.

Yet the simplicity of the narrative is deceptive. Following the conventional pattern it raises many unconventional questions and points to many unconventional possibilities.

Mini's childhood and adolescence have been described in great detail highlighting all the occasions where a rapprochement could have taken place between her and her

biological parents. The same occasions have been used to highlight the glaring difference between how Radha rejects her and how Parvati protects her.

Things move rather fast towards the end of the story. Mini's grandparents died. So did one of her sisters. Grandparents' death would be expected, more or less. Though both of them did not have to die in a quick succession. The death of Mini's sister comes as a big shock. Apparently she was the third daughter. Quite young naturally. We are not told anything about her ailment, if any. Did she die in an accident? But she is disposed of in half a sentence. Nor is there any mention of the effect of her sudden death on either her parents or Mini. It is too sudden and abrupt.

The son's departure is also too dramatic. His parents are rich. He is the only heir. He doesn't really have to fall headlong for someone else's wealth. Is he going to forfeit his own heirdom? Is that what his parents-in-law and bride-to-be want, may want? All these details have not been given because the purpose of the author is to stress the new equation Mini will henceforth have with her biological parents. And their sense of guilt and repentance. It is never expressed in words though.

The ending is quite expected. The abandoned daughter alone comes to their aid. The darling son discards them almost as easily as they had discarded Mini many years ago. They welcome Mini back into the fold perhaps much too late. One doesn't know how long it will take Mini's scarred psyche to heal, completely.

The description of the reception Mini gets on reaching the house straight from the hospital along with her newborn son is strikingly identical to the celebrations accompanying her brother's birth years ago. "There were garlands at the door, *rangoli* on the floor" and Mini seemed to see the ghost of her grandmother feeding the beggars. The repetition reinforces the hurt Mini has nursed all these years.

The wheel has come full circle. Mini was abandoned. All the smiles and sweets of the family and friends were reserved for the brother. The brother has abandoned the family and it's only Mini proving to be a source of strength to her ageing parents.

But their change of heart? These celebrations at the end are for Mini or her son? The doubt lingers in the readers' mind and raises a series of new questions and possibilities.

4.6 RAJI NARASIMHAN – AN INTRODUCTION



Raji Narasimhan (1930-)

Raji Narasimhan was born in Madras, Tamil Nadu, in 1930. After her graduation she worked as a reporter and feature writer for *The Indian Express*. She left her job in the early '70s to take up full-time creative writing. In addition, she has been regularly reviewing books and writing critical articles for *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Literature*.

Her publications include four novels: *The Heart of Standing is You cannot Fly* (1973), *Forever Free* (1979), *Drifting to a Dawn* (1983), and *The Sky Changes* (1991). *The Marriage of Bela and Other Stories* (1978) is a collection of her short stories. Her book of criticism, *Sensibility Under Stress: Aspects of Indo-English Fiction* (1976) is recommended reading in the English literature department of some universities in India.

Her first story 'The Poor Folk Around Town' was published in *Quest* in 1969.

'A Toast to Herself' was first published in *Indian Literature* in 1986.

Her other interests are dance and theatre. For a long time she was the dance and theatre critic for *The Patriot*.

Raji Narasimhan lives in Delhi.

4.7 *A TOAST TO HERSELF* : SOME ISSUES

This story is about a writer. Priya's fifth book has just been published. She is expecting a review of it in the papers. Joshi of the *Herald* has told her he'll be publishing it soon. She is anxious and nervous. What if the review is bad? The fear is close and biting like a mask. One might argue that it should not matter to a committed writer like her. What is a review? Just words. "Will you stop writing if this review doesn't appear?" She asks herself sternly and hears herself whine, "Yes, I might." Every writer wants to be read and recognised. The reading public and the reviewer may not at times be aware of what their responses and reactions may mean to the writer. Stepping away from the full set of her books, Priya sees them huddled like children separated from their mother. Wrapped in their jackets, they do seem like her physical offsprings, sprung from the clay and kiln of her body. She celebrates the publication of her book as one celebrates the birth of a child. Drinking a toast means wishing happiness, success, etc. to somebody or something while raising a glass of wine. Here Priya wishes herself success and happiness drinking lemonade in the company of her mother and Dr.Kesavan under the navy blue sky.

Can one earn one's livelihood by writing in India? The answer apparently is no. Especially if it is not popular reading. Her writing brings Priya pebbles. Her mother tries very hard and persistently to make Priya realise that writing is for those with money. For people like Priya, it should only be a hobby. But Priya refuses to understand. Refuses to understand the hard realities of life. Two hundred, two fifty is the most she gets for an item – a story, an article. If she does four items a month, writing all the time, she must be making a thousand rupees. Priya knows a taxi driver makes more but she doesn't seem to mind. She wants little. Her wants have shrunk suddenly ever since she went into writing. Her books are more precious than any money she may get. Writing alone can sustain her now. This is why and how many writers continue to write and live in near penury. Writing becomes an end in itself. It becomes the be-all and end-all of one's life.

Economics however, plays a big role in our life today. Priya's mother keeps standing pressed to the gate looking out for the postman to bring her widow's pension for the month. It isn't due yet. The month isn't over yet. But she will stand there glued to the gate, forgetting to eat. Perhaps this money is her only safety. Priya may seek her

safety in writing but she slides off to a calculation of her mother's assets even in the midst of her anxiety about the review and the face of Kesavan prying in and out in a degenerate sexual recall. Obviously somewhere in the recesses of her heart, Priya is conscious of how little she has by way of worldly possessions and what it may mean in a moment of crisis.

Mother-daughter relationship and the generation gap have also been stressed. Priya was far too miserable following her divorce. But her mother hated her for that. Instead of sympathising with her or supporting her, she hated Priya – maybe for her guts, maybe for her refusal to tow the traditional line and accept whatever destiny had in store for her. She was jobless too and again, her mother hated her for it actively and openly. Priya has to repeatedly assure her mother that she doesn't need her pension, that she can fend for herself. The only solution the mother can think of - to pull Priya out of the mess and morass she has so willingly bound herself to, is second marriage. If Priya will somehow agree to marry Dr. Kesavan even at the age of 50, her economic hardships will end. And once married she may outgrow her passion for writing – writing which doesn't fetch her a single paisa by way of royalty.

For most of us, for most of our women at least, marriage remains the only goal, the only worthwhile goal in a woman's life.

Not only her mother, Priya might have herself liked to get married and happily settle down in life. After her divorce, years ago, when Kesavan had called her into his clinic when he need not have and had given her an injection in her buttock because there was virus raging in the air, she thought he was about to make a proposal. And she might even have accepted him. But he didn't. Even today, at 50 her thoughts slip to Kesavan and she admits that sex always lurks in some fold of her mind, vying with writing for the possession of her. While nervously waiting for the review of her latest book, she felt herself go woman and winding like a mermaid in the presence of Dr.Kesavan. She would have liked to rest her head on his chest and take the male comfort she had rejected all these years. She wished she could take a respite from the exacting taskmaster of writing to which she had bound herself. Writing or art, for that matter, can supplement life, it can't substitute it.

The story thus depicts Priya as a woman, as a woman writer and as a writer transcending, if only temporarily, all the pulls and pressures of sex and society.

4.8 CHARACTERISATION

There are only three major characters drawn sympathetically and sensitively. Mother and Dr. Kesavan are, on the whole, conventional. Mother's concern for this divorced, jobless daughter of hers is only natural. Today she is there to willy-nilly support her, look after her but what will happen when she is there no more? Every mother wants to see her daughter happily married and settled in life. This mother is no exception. Nor can she understand Priya's obsession with writing – what has it given her all these years? She is a typical Indian mother caring for her daughter and trying to ensure a secure future for her in her own conventional way.

Dr.Kesavan is a typical Indian male – wanting Priya and not wanting Priya. He is attracted to her but something in him holds him back. Maybe it is her divorce. Divorced women are seen as aggressive, assertive and offbeat. Maybe he is not sure she will make a good wife or he a good husband – to her at least. Priya is 50. He must in all likelihood be older – but no reason is given about why he chose not to marry. Not yet.

Priya is a strong, unconventional character. A divorcee, she does not seem to have any regrets. She would want to live life on her own terms. She knows this may be hard.

She knows she may have to pay a heavy price for it and she is prepared to pay it. Her wants have shrunk suddenly ever since she went into writing. She is above all normal plentitudes now, it seems. Writing keeps her cheerful even when hunger charges into her and chaps her lips. A crumpled *kurta* pulled out of the *dhobi's* basket makes up her clothing. When she assures her mother she doesn't want a penny of her pension, she means every word of it. How far she will be able to carry on like this is, of course, a different matter. She has her moments of weakness and fatigue and anxiety. She would like to rest her head on Dr.Kesavan's chest and take the male comfort she had rejected all these years. She is a new woman torn between her newfound freedom and ambition on the one hand and her natural urges on the other. She is a brave woman who knows what she wants from life and knows how to get it. She can celebrate today without unnecessarily and unduly worrying about tomorrow.

4.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

It is a simple, straightforward, third person narrative. But for a brief flashback telling us about Dr.Kesavan's possible interest inher after her divorce, it deals with the present. Raji Narsimhan uses word pictures to convey the meaning. We can really visualize Dr.Kesavan giving Priya an injection in her buttock or her mother standing glued to the gate, forgetting to eat, waiting for the postman to bring her her widow's pension for the month. Or Priya frantically trying to ring up Joshi. Priya coming out with a full set of her books and the doctor picking up the ones on top, feeling their girth and shape. And we can actually see Priya drinking a toast to herself with her mother and Kesavan joining in. All these pictorial images heighten the effect of the narrative and help us sense the tension within and without. Instead of detailed descriptions we have intense emotions and responses – pent up and suppressed. They tell us about "the duplicities of making art from life."

4.10 LET US SUM UP

The first story draws our attention to the status of the girl child in an Indian family, the blatant preference for a son and the resultant frustration and heartburns. The second story introduces us to the world of a woman writer – the odds she has to face at home and outside. Both these stories have for their protagonist women of substance, of firm determination and grit. These are women who defy the social code and convention, and shape, to a large extent, their own destiny. They have a purpose in life – to establish their worth and value as human beings and they achieve it. Their life is hard and arduous but it is satisfying and fulfilling. They take their own decisions and set their own priorities.

4.11 QUESTIONS

a) Do you agree that there is a widespread bias against the girl child in our society? Do you approve of it? Do you have any suggestions about how it can be removed?

b) Instances of divorce are on the rise these days. Whom do you hold responsible for it?

c) Did you know that a writer anxiously waits for the review of his/her book? What according to you, are the characteristics of a good review?

UNIT 5 SHASHI DESHPANDE AND GITHA HARIHARAN

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 Shashi Despande – An Introduction
5.3 'The Miracle' – A Discussion
5.4 Characterisation
5.5 Narrative Techniques
5.6 Githa Hariharan – An Introduction
5.7 'Gajar Halwa' – A Discussion
5.8 Characterisation
5.9 Narrative Techniques
5.10 Let Us Sum Up
5.11 Questions
5.12 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will closely examine one story each of Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan. Shashi Deshpande is a major Indian writer writing in English. Githa Hariharan has made a name for herself despite only three publications so far. This unit will help you understand the broad concerns of these women writers transcending gender and geography. The issues they take up are universal and perennial.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit the questions that we will primarily concern ourselves with are:

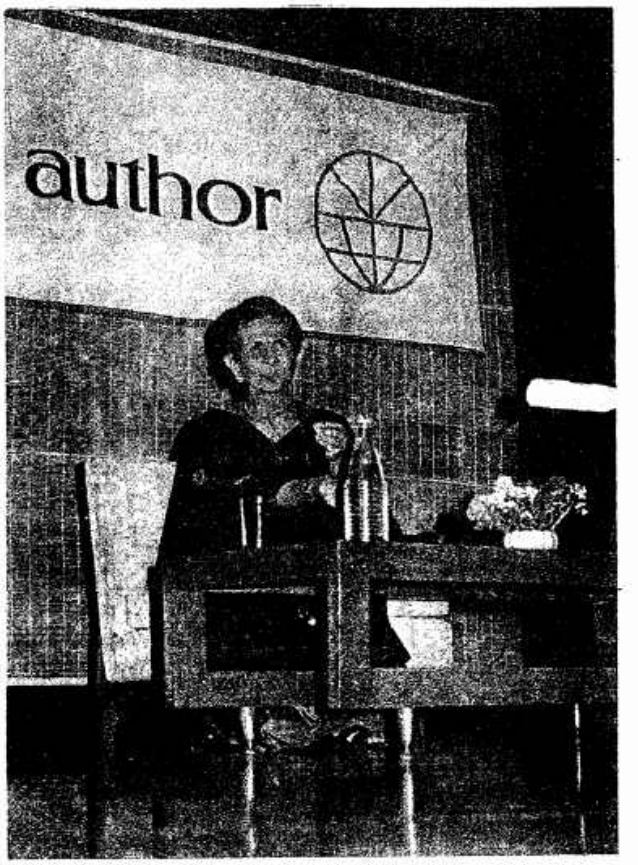
i. Do writers remain male and female and write from a fixed, pre-determined point of view?
ii. Do women writers write only about women's issues?
iii. Do writers ultimately rise above the immediate, narrow consideration and develop a broad vision encompassing the whole of humanity?
iv. Of course, the writer's own sensibility and sensitivity will determine the treatment of the theme and the direction it will take.

We have been examing stories in this Block keeping certain questions in mind. These could relate to the form or content of the stories. In the last unit we had discussed two stories written specifically from a female point of view – the plight of the girl child in a typical Indian home and the trauma and turmoil of an unmarried woman writer has to undergo, even at the hands of her own mother. Both these writers were attempting to draw our attention to certain social problems and compel us to think and do something about them. Sometimes even the recognition of something opens rooms for a dialogue or change of heart at a later date. It shakes us out of our inertia or slumber.

The writers of this present unit are also women but they are not confining themselves, in these two stories, to the issues related to women alone. They are talking of broader issues, of course, their sensibility is their own – giving a particular slant to the narrative.

Both Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan have dealt at length with the Indian stereotypes of daughter, wife, and mother – but in these two stories they concern themselves with things more basic and comprehensive.

5.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE – AN INTRODUCTION



Shashi Deshpande (1938-)

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Shri Adya Rangacharya. At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay, graduated in Economics from Elphinstone College, then moved to Banglore, where she gained a degree in Law winning two gold medals. The early years of her marriage were largely given over to the care of her two young sons, but she took a course in journalism from the Bhavan's R.P. College of Mass Communication, winning three medals including The Times of India Gold Medal she worked on a magazine for sometime. Her writing career only began in earnest in 1970, initially with short stories, of which several volumes have been published. She is the author of four children's books and seven novels, the best known of which *are The Dark Holds No Terrors, The Long Silence* which won the Sahitya Akademi Award and *The Binding Vine.* Shashi Deshpande lives in Banglore with her pathologist husband.

Shashi Deshpande's works are in their own way all about humankind and society -- the essential loneliness of being and the human predicament, a matter of interest to all humanity. She says that generally, she starts with an idea, a vague one really, and as she goes on writing she finds that she is going into other regions, exploring other ideas. Writing gives her a constant sense of discovery.

Following is the list of her novels and short--story collections:

The Legacy and Other Stories (1971)
It was the Nightingale (1986)

The Miracle (1986)
The Intrusion and Other Stories (1993)
The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980)
If I die Today (1982)
Roots and Shadows (1983)
Come up and be dead (1983)
It was Dark (1986)
That Long Silence (1988)
The Binding Vine (1992)
A Matter of Time (1996)
Small Remedies (2000)

5.3 *MIRACLE* – A DISCUSSION

This story is taken from *The Miracle and Other stories* published in 1986. Since the time of Descartes more and more people have relied exclusively on reason and adopted a quasi – mechanical conception of the universe, which is reduced to space, matter and motion, operating strictly under mathematical laws.

Modern medical science has managed to make remarkable strides and get phenomena. breakthroughs with the help of tests carried out on animals. The rationale is that these animals are sacrificed for a big cause – the future of mankind. Considering the ultimate gain, the price paid in terms of the animals losing their lives is not much. Cures are now available for illness considered fatal till only sometime ago. Medical research continues to conduct new tests, hoping to find remedies for many incurable diseases.

Shashi Deshpande recreates one such laboratory where two doctors, a male and a female, are deeply engrossed in carrying out some test on monkeys to find out why an innocent–looking thing growing everywhere caused a strange disease when people ate it. People ate it, fell sick and died. These doctors are feeding the monkeys with this to know what actually happens inside them so that a cure may be found before it's too late.

Fair enough, one would say.

The problem arises when one particular monkey, Raaja, doesn't die even after he is given all that poison to consume. All the other monkeys have died. And that convinced Narayan, an employee there, that this is not an ordinary monkey. He is Hanuman, the monkey god himself. He is reincarnation of the great god. That in turn means that he should not be killed, his devotees should save him. Narayan sees it as a miracle -- all other monkeys have died after consuming that poisonous thing. Raja hasn't. He refused to die. Surely that's a miracle. And who other than a god can perform miracles? And Narayan cannot just helplessly and passively watch Hanuman being killed mercilessly by this team of doctors.

The doctors are predictably aghast. A miracle? A mystery? How can anyone believe in miracles in this age? There is an explanation for everything. If this particular monkey whom Narayan insists on calling Raaja has not died, they will want to know why and they will find out the cause soon enough. It would, infact, help them understand things better. There is a scientific explanation for everything.

But Narayan's faith wouldn't let him give in. He obviously understands the importance of what the doctors are doing. He only wants this monkey, this particular monkey, this Raaja, to be let off, to be set free. He is no ordinary monkey. He is none other than Hanuman himself. For the doctors all this is "shoddy bogus, religious stuff"

and they are surprised that the typist girl who should know better, is pleading for Narayan, "You can't destroy someone's faith."

"But if it's built on sand?"

"Faith is always built on a rock. It's only if you stop believing that you see it as sand."

The next morning Raaja is missing from the animal house. He has escaped. Again a miracle! Well, if he is an incarnation of Hanuman, he can perform miracles, locks and keys can't keep in a god.

The doctor duo obviously suspect Narayan of helping the monkey to escape. Narayan vehemently remonstrates – he can't possibly afford to lose his job – what would happen to his wife and children? Though he does let out to the typist that he did have a hand in Raaja's escape.

The doctor is surprised that any educated person, anyone who can think, should believe in this theory of reincarnation. The typist is put off by his self—righteousness and retorts that she would "rather believe in that than in nothing". Forgetting for the time being that she is a mere typist who shouldn't talk that way to him, she asks him, "Do you think that one is born and that's the beginning. And one dies and that's the end. Is that all of it?"

"What else?' he asked me wonderingly.

The typist looks around. The shelves are laden with glass jars, and bits of human beings pickled inside leer at them obscenely. Obviously a doctor dissects a being and puts the bits under a microscope and thinks that he/she can find all the answers. She grows defiant now, "You can put me under a microscope and you will never find ME. A human being... that's a miracle. A baby's first cry.... that's a miracle. A monkey, will to live... that's a miracle!"

The female doctor laughs and makes fun of her but the male doctor begins to understand the point she is trying to make and quotes Walt Whitman, "And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels." He again shows better understanding and empathy when he talks of Raaja, thus recognising that a monkey can have an identity.

Raaja reappears at lunchtime on the windowsill but instead of trying to have him captured she offers him her banana and helps him disappear into the branches and leaves. However, she is shocked to notice that the male doctor has been standing in the door all this while and has witnessed her act of treachery. Soon she gets over her fright – why is she afraid? What is she worried about? Her job? Well, let it be. There are limits to everything.

Her surprise and joy are, therefore, beyond words when he confesses, "There are miracles everywhere if you only open your eyes." Raaja ceases to be a mere test animal for him, he becomes a monkey called Raaja, having an identity of his own. Narayan is no mere worker either. He is a man with two daughters and a son and faith in Hanuman should be accepted and respected as such.

And the doctor finds the typist too no less than a miracle. And they get married soon thereafter. They have different tastes. She loves strong coffee while he drinks weak tea. She loves bright colours while he just blinks his eyes at them. But love is accepting the other person with all his/her peculiarities and individuality. Love is recognition of the other person, other being, as an individual, as an entity. The last sentence beautifully sums it up, "Whoever heard of an incompatible Hindu marriage?" If you recognize and respect the otherness of the other person, where is the incompatibility? The secret lies in noticing life's miracles all around us.

The importance of science, of medical science, has not been denied or undermined. What is being stressed is the importance of faith in life, in human life. The two should co-exist, the two can co-exist. After all, it's love for mankind, for the human race that compels scientists and doctor and researchers the world over to confine themselves to the laboratories and test tubes – to find remedies for ailments hitherto considered incurable and thus ensure a better future for us all. And life cannot be reduced to tests or theories or formulae. Life still contains many miracles and mysteries which no scientific discovery or invention can claim to fully fathom or unravel.

5.4 CHARACTERISATION

There are only four characters in this story -- the male doctor, the female doctor, the typist girl and Narayan. The first three are not referred to by any names -- only pronouns. Narayan alone has a proper name. And of course, Raaja, the monkey.

The two doctors are busy working on the monkeys to find a remedy for the killer disease. Human beings, living beings mean only tests and experiments and findings to them. Logic is their guiding principle. Emotions are out. Faith is out – it is built on sand. Their intentions are noble – we can't fault them there -- except that a living being is much more than the bits of body pickled and preserved inside glass jars to be studied under a microscope. A human being, a living being is much more than that. The female doctor refuses to concede that, refuses to recognize that. She derides people like Narayan for their illogicality, for their faith. She is a doctor, a scientist, inside out, and her regret is that all their work, many months' work has been wasted because of this irrational fiath. She refuses to concede Narayan his individuality, his beliefs. She refuses to concede the possibility of any other point of view, different from hers. She refuses to even recognize the existence or presence of the typist in the room or around. She is depicted as a competent and committed doctor but without any emotions and any regard for others' feelings and sentiments.

The male doctor, on the other hand, is more human, more humane. Gradually he begins to see the other point of view, begins to concede Narayan's right to his faith. When Narayan and two others go to him in a delegation, he tries to explain things to them, tries to make them see reason. After the typist's outburst, he is quick to realize the limits of reason and research. Though very important, they cannot substitute life. Unlike his female counterpart, he remembers who Raaja is, and reconciles himself to Raaja's escape – accidental or intentional. He marries his typist and the two seem to be living happily hereafter.

The female doctor seems too conscious of her social, professional status. She practically looks down upon the typist, upon every one else. The male doctor, though equally engrossed in his research and experiments, treats his subordinates with love and compassion.

The typist is a proud woman. That explains why she has had to change jobs so often – ten jobs in four years. But she has been here for full one year – not because she loves her work but because she is in love with the doctor. She knows the doctor is hardly ever aware of even her presence. But that is love. Despite this weakness, she is a woman of substance who can and does take a stand, no matter how high the stakes are. She will do what she feels like doing. And if she loses her perks in the process, to hell with the perks. A new woman seeking and finding a space for herself – a woman who is capable, who knows her mind and who is willing to pay the price for her actions and decisions.

Both the typist and doctor are new women – women who have their own identity and individuality – educated, enlightened, independent in their own way.

Then we have Rajaa, the monkey, and the reincarnation of Hanuman as Naryan and others would have us believe. Shashi Deshpande makes his presence felt, his appearance and disappearance noticed. Huge and dignified, like a king, he daintily peeled the banana.... When he reappeared, he 'just sat there like a man unable to make up his mind'. Rajaa is not just a name, not just a presence in the background but a living being darting forward, jumping into the branches, forcing people to relate to him in their own way. It is because of him that there is this crisis, this commotion all around. He thus helps many people to relate to the larger, non-humane world. He helps to enlarge our vision and broaden our horizons.

5.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Shashi Despande shows a preference for the first person narration but her stories are free from distorting confessional fury and achieve a remarkable sense of objectivity. She has an eye for detail, whether this relates to physical sensations or workings of the mind and shows considerable skill in the choice of background and the creation of atmosphere.

The atmosphere inside the laboratory is very matter-of-fact, clinical. The two doctors discussing the tests and their results all the time. That they are not given any names only heightens the effect of the story. They symbolise an approach, an attitude. They are no ordinary human beings talking of mundane things, of everyday routine. They can only talk of and think about research and logic and reason. Their not really recognising the typist is quite in place. They do not do it on purpose, they do not do it to humiliate or embarrass her. She has a role in their scheme of things and beyond that she does not matter.

Narayan has a name. He has his faith, his individuality, his family. He tries to defend them all. His assertion, his courage makes even the typist girl give up her fences, her reservations and come out clean with what she thinks about it all. The monkey has been portrayed without any sentimentality, in a natural manner. He does not perform any supernatural deeds, does not act larger than life. He eats bananas -- something all monkeys are known to do and relish. It is this no-nonsense, natural depiction of Rajaa that makes the narrative plausible.

Shashi Despande makes effective use of language. When the doctors said, "an interesting case," the typist said, "poor child." When they said, "that bronchogenoic carcinoma," she said, "that poor man with the three children". The contrast is made amply clear. Human beings are only medical cases for the doctors -- they see them in terms of their ailments. The typist sees them as human beings.

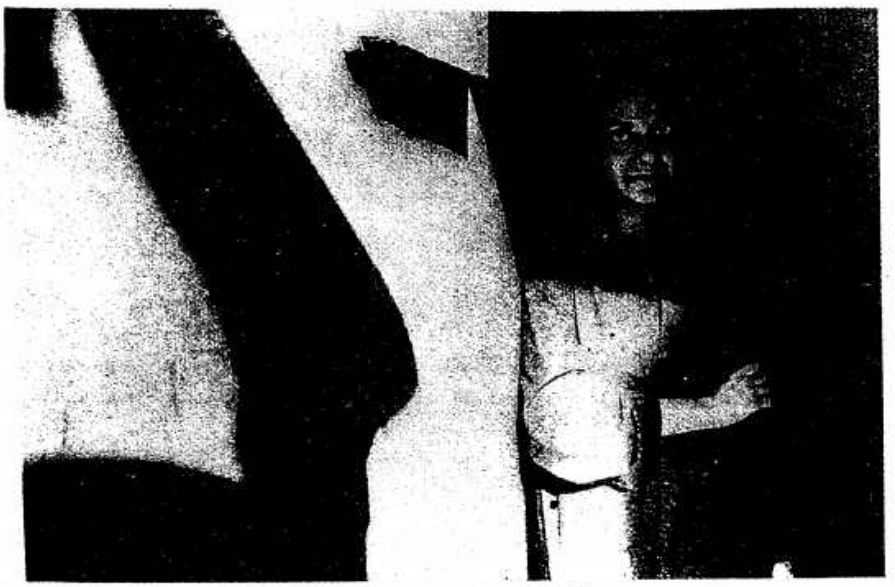
The male doctor's change of perception is clearly indicated when he quotes Walt Whitman in support of the typist. Literature is emotions, human beings, and relationships. Something reason seems to negate or at least undermine. This incident successfully breaks the barrier between the doctor and his typist and proves to be a turning point in their relationship.

Shashi Deshapnde uses colours also to highlight contrast. The typist is always dressed in brightly coloured *saris*. The male doctor walks past a flaming gul mohar tree in May without an upward glance. But when at long last he notices her and concedes that she is another miracle, she is dressed in a bright yellow sari. On the other hand, the female doctor always moves about in her white coat, on flat slippers. Colours denote life, zest for life.

The extreme simplicity of the styleless style hides consummate craftsmanship: the stereotypical characters reveal unexpected strength of character and conviction. The disarming quality of the narrative is only a way of bringing home basic truths about life.

5.6 GITHA HARIHARAN – AN INTRODUCTION

Githa Hariharan grew up in Bombay and in Manila. She was educated in these two cities and later in the United States, where she worked in public television. Since 1979, she has worked in Bombay, Madras and New Delhi, first as an editor in a publcishing house, then as a freelancer. Githa Hariharan has published several short stories in magazines and journals. *The Art of Dying and Other Stories* (1993) contains twenty of her short stories. Her two novels are : *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), and *Where Dreams Travel* (1999) *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994). The thousand Faces of Night her maiden novel, won her the prestigious Commenwealth Writers Award for 1993. She has also edited *A Southern Harvest* a collection of short stories translated into English from four south Indian languages. She lives in New Delhi with her husband and two sons.



Geeta Hariharan (1954-)

5.7 *GAJAR HALWA* – A DISCUSSION

This story is a moving account of young Perumayee's life in Salem and out of it. Life for her was extremely hard in Salem. The parents didn't get along. Mother was always screaming. So the father left. It didn't seem to bother his wife one bit. 'We're well rid of him, he's a lazy drunken bastard, she said. She went to work everyday, even on days when she was sick or when her stomach was empty, to the highway they were building near their village. She would leave at six in the morning after drinking the strong, sweet tea Perumayee made for her. She coiled a rag on her head, ready for the baskets of gravel she would carry all day. On her hip she held the youngest child who was still breast-feeding. We don't need much imagination to know the extent of her drudgery to fend for her four children.

And Perumayee! Young Perumayee would get her brother Selvan ready for school, feed him his gruel, oil and comb his hair, and wave at him from the door of their hut. Then, along with Thayee, her baby sister, she would begin her chores for the day. Chores which included collecting the firewood, the water queue that got longer and longer (that's where she learnt to fight and push and shove), scrubbing the clothes hitting them again and again on the, rocks near the river. Her reward! 'That Perumayee is like a little mother, everyone said, the irony is too obvious. At an age when she should have gone to school, she was taking care of her siblings. And we

cannot blame her mother either. She is doing whatever she possibly can, whatever the circumstances allow her to do, to keep herself and her children alive – so that they can have some rice or gruel or once in a while a handful of dal in lots of tamarind water.

No one could think things would get worse. They did. The highway was built after eighteen months of backbreaking work. No more work thereafter. The rains failed for the second year, making life still harder, provisions costlier.

Around that time their neighbour's cousin Chellamma was talking five of the village girls to Delhi with her. It was decided that Perumayee should go too so that she could earn something and send it home. That perhaps was the only way out.

Perumayee stuck to Chellamma like a leech on the train and didn't look at anyone's face. Then they reached her home, a small room in Munirka (a locality in Delhi) that smelt of urine. The room was actually a scooter garage but even this small, dark hole with no tap for water and no toilet, Chellamma has got after years of working for the same memsahjb in the colony.

Chellamma has no difficulty finding a job for Perumayee for two hundred rupees a month. Cooking, cleaning, washing, looking after the baba. Perumayee has to give Chellamma, her mother now, fifty rupees from her salary every month. The rest she can send home.

At the milkbooth, which reminds her of the fights at the water-tap in the village, Perumayee makes friends with girls who work in the flats in the same colony. Their memsahibs are a lot like hers. They themselves are not very different from her. One can imagine the kind of childhood they have had and the family circumstances that have compelled them to take to this drudgery.

Githa Hariharan has very effectively portrayed the plight of the poor in rural India forcing them to reach Delhi in search of a better life, in quest of a dream. The hard realities of life take away their childhood, their innocence.

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. Necessity makes us invent lies, falsehoods. It makes us conceal the truth. Necessity to find a job for Perumayee makes Chellamma tell the memsahib that the girl can cook, sweep and swab and look after children even though she knows full well that Perumayee has never cooked anything more than rice or gruel or perhaps a handful of dal once in a while. Telling the truth would mean getting fifty rupees less. It might also mean not getting a job and consequently taking the first train back to Salem.

Necessity not only forces Perumayee to learn enough Hindi in a few weeks but also forces her to learn how to shirk work, how to swab quickly, skipping corners and under the beds when the mistress is not around or to just squeeze out the baby's stinking clothes with the yellow stains drying in crust on the diapers whereas back at home in Salem she used to scrub and scrub the clothes, hitting them again and again on the rocks near the river. Or she would steal a quick look behind her and pop bits of something or the other into her mouth. The chores she is supposed to do included peeling and grating mounds of carrots, or so it seems like to this young girl, for halwa. Scraping so many carrots leaves her arms stiff. Her fingers feel as if they will never straighten out again. And then stirring the pan of milk (with all these grated carrots) on the fire, round and round, scraping the sides of the pan again and again her arm becomes numb with pain. This is an indication of the life ahead of her.

Githa Hariharan has also managed to bring out the north-south contrast. The language problem, to begin with. It suits Perumayee in the beginning because she does not have to reply to memsahib's questions. She can pretend not to understand her instructions or queries and just say yes or no, hoping it is the right answer. Even though she quickly picks up enough of Hindi, she cannot pronounce gajar correctly. She must call

.. kaachar. And she is justifiably hurt when the mistress laughs at it. Her memsahib calls her Prema. Despite her education and ability to drive the car, she can't say Perumayee, the girl argues. Perhaps Perumayee doesn't realize that it is not her memsahib's inability to correctly pronounce her name, it is some kind of a social convention, social custom to shorten the name of your retainer. The change in weather has also been indicated. The sun doesn't shine properly for days in Delhi. The water freezes Perumayee's fingers. In Salem, they obviously didn't have this problem with lots and lot of sun for most part of the year. The situation demands adjustment on various levels – physical, economic, emotional.

5.8 CHARACTERSIATION

The story is mainly about Perumayee – the young girl from Salem – and what all she goes through, in Salem and then in Delhi. It's also about her evolution and initiation into the city life and its ways. When Perumayee comes to Delhi, she feels she should speak the truth, tell her prospective mistress that she cannot cook anything more than rice or gruel and maybe dal. Quickly she learns the Delhi ways, learns to swab quickly, skipping corners and under the beds when the mistress is not looking, learns to just squeeze out the baby's stinky clothes without properly washing them. She learns not to slave for her memsahib, learns to shut the kitchen door, turn the gas knob to high and hold her hands over the onions sizzling in oil to feel warm and safe. Learns also that in six months, once she has picked up the basics of city housekeeping, she can get a job for double the money in a richer colony. In a few years' time she may be no different from our wise, fawning Chellámma, bringing young girls from the village and supplying maids to the city folks making, in the process, a quick buck or two herself. Chellamma, we are told, had brought five village girls with her to Delhi. We can safely surmise that the other four girls would be as quick at adapting themselves to the Delhi ways as our protagonist. We can also safely guess what Chellamma would have been like the first time she herself came to Delhi. The process goes on – as long as the circumstances don't change, Delhi will continue to entice the poor villagers. And the young village girls will continue to become part of the metropolitan system sacrificing their simplicity and innocence.

Chellamma knows how to bargain what, to say and when, how not to give in. She knows the exact words that would please or soften the memsahib. She knows the mistress is needy but she also knows that she should not stretch things too far. She is no good Samaritan – Perumayee has to pay her fifty rupees a month for her services and liason work.

Then we have the mistress. We are not told her name. That's not important. What's important is that she badly needs a domestic help to do the chores and look after her baby. Perumayee is just a servant girl. No more or no less. The relationship between the two is very formal, matter-of –fact. She asks Chellamma her age – perhaps to gauge how much she knows, what all she can manage. She does not ask her name, does not ask her anything personal. Does not want to know why she has come all the way to Delhi at such a young age. Does not want to know if she misses her mother. Being a mother herself, she could have shown some emotion, some concern for the girl. But she does not do so. Perumayee is coming to her as a maid – she should prove herself to be a good maid, and that's that. She is a typical mistress and the mistresses in other flats in the colony are a lot like her. Other maids are not very different from Perumayee either. So we can conclude that they too would be having more or less similar relationship with their employers. Education and affluence do not necessarily bring in understanding and compassion.

Perumayee's mother has been portrayed in detail. An unhappy woman. A hard-working woman. She went to work every day, even on days when she was sick or when her stomach was hungry, to the highway being built near the village. She would

leave at six in the morning after taking just a cup of strong tea. On her hip she held the youngest child she was still breast-feeding. And she would carry on her head baskets of gravel all day long. Her husband of gravel all day long. Her husband was lazy and a drunkard. Obviously not bothered about his responsibility as the head of the family. Not bothered about his wife and four children. No wonder Perumayee's mother was always screaming. She couldn't possibly see the children starve to death. She couldn't possibly watch the husband squander money on drinks – whatever little money there was. And so he left. A very familiar scenario! And she is left to fend for her four children. Again these characters are not given any names. This could be any couple in rural India. What is important is the situation, the compulsions of the situations. She is a brave woman who faces the situation with courage – accepts this backbreaking work and when even this tunnel is blocked, takes the bold decision to send Perumayee with Chellamma in search of a job.

In a way all these are stereotypical characters but together they create a very vivid, moving picture of our society, of our times.

5.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Gajar Halwa – a common home made sweet-dish in winter in almost the whole of north India. A favourite dish. Githa Hariharan uses it as a very effective imagery. Making it requires a lot of hard work. Hours of peeling and grating and stirring. The young maid does it all – it gives her stiff fingers and arm numb with pain. Ofcourse, the great red gold warmth of the grainy, syrupy thickness, once it's ready, spreads all over her and she becomes part of it. It symbolises the city life, the new life for Perumayee. Hard yet tempting. Like the carrots absorbing, sucking in and swallowing the sugar, the ghee and the milk, the city sucks in and absorbs numerous Chellammas and Perumayees who become part of its thickening red sweetness.

The device of contrast is also used to highlight the rural migration to the city. Back at home all that Perumayee has seen is rice or gruel or maybe a handful of dal and tamarind in the good days. She has never seen such a pile of carrots before. Nor so much of milk and sugar and ghee. There is a gas stove and fridge, and they have meat thrice a week. Almost a dreamland. And then the water queues getting longer and longer in the village contrasted with the cold, fresh water gushing out of the city kitchen pipe, never ending, as if the entire river lies inside it. Scarcity and abundance! Her mother carrying the baskets of gravel on her head all day-long and the memsahib driving a car and ordering her around. The backbreaking work her mother did to provide two (?) square meals for her children and the smooth, pink skin of her memsahib who has been to school just like her brother Selvan. To a much better school. Who wouldn't want to come over?

The city has other attractions too! Before sending any money home, Perumayee would like to buy a sweater, a blue one with shiny, beaded flowers the kind she saw a girl wearing at the milk – booth queue, for herself. Then she wouldn't have to sleep with the thin, lumpy mattress on top of her, pretending it is a blanket. Quite fair and natural, one would say. Except that her mother and siblings back in the village might not even have a morsel to eat, given the miserable conditions there. But Perumayee forgets that. This is what the city does. Saps human emotions, human ties, and human bonds. Perumayee forgets, if only temporarily, the pressing needs of her family. Her memsahib forgets that she is a frail, young girl -- too frail and too young to do this kind of work.

Language has been used to denote moods and stress points. Peel, peel, grate, and grate. The repetition conveys the size of the pile pf carrots and the hard work involved. Stir, stir, the memsahib says. And then – stir, stir, she barks. This one word conveys her anger and authority.

Colours have been used to heighten the over -- all affect. The peeled carrots, freshly washed, dazzle Perumayee's eyes. Later, great red-gold warmth spreads all over her bones. The gajar halwa sucks in everything, likewise the city sucks in everyone. And the earlier spluttering becomes a faint but steady heave of red, like a heartbeat, then gentle sighs. And you eventually get used to it, accept it, and become part of it.

In a way both these stories are concerned about how women deal with the sanction of space in the Indian society and the possibility or absence of choice in the broad context of our ethos and social mores.

5.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen that the women writers in India do not confine themselves to women alone issues – we have read that Shashi Deshpande refuses to be called a feminist. As such the two stories have broader concerns. In a way the two stories show how women make the best out of the limited space they have in Indian society. Their choice or possibility of choice, as said earlier, remains in the broad context of Indian ethos and social mores.

5.11 QUESTIONS

1. The Miracle highlights man's cruelty to animals. Have you heard of the SPCA? Do you love animals? Which character impresses you the most in this story?

2. What is the essential message of this story?

3. Why does the doctor marry the typist at the end of the story?

4. Are education and faith mutually exclusive?

5. Perumayee feels that her father left them because her mother was always screaming. Do you agree with her analysis?

6. Do you agree that 'Gajar Halwa' offers a scathing comment on our social inequalities?

7. How do you view Chellamma's role in the story? Does she try to take advantage of the situation in her own way?

5.12 SUGGESTED READING

Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal. *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction in Indian Writers series General* Ed. A.N. Dwivedi, B.R. Publishing Corporation New Delhi, 1998.

Sarbjith Sindhu. *The Image of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* New Delhi, Prestige, 1996.

Anuradha Roy. *Pattery of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers*. New Delhi, Prestige, 1999.

UNIT 6 RUSKIN BOND

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 Writing for Children
6.3 Ruskin Bond – A Biographical Sketch
6.4 No Room for A Leopard – A Discussion
6.5 Copperfield In The Jungle – A Discussion
6.6 An Island of Trees – A Discussion
6.7 Characterisation
6.8 Atmosphere
6.9 Let Us Sum Up
6.10 Questions
6.11 Additional Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to identify essential features of story writing for children suitable themes, the role of fantasy, the language and technique, the significance of illustrations and the induction of moral and contemporary values in such tales by introducing to you the art of Rskin Bond's story telling.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the course of our discussion on stories by Ruskin Bond for children we are, going to acquaint you with the art and craft of story writing for children. But, first we need to mention the distinctiveness of this form of writing. Writing for children is a special branch of literature. Its requirements and qualities are different from adult literature. The old Indian classics are rich in material that can be exploited for writing children's stories. Nevertheless children's literature is still scant in our country though, of late, efforts have been made to promote and popularise this specialized genre. Ruskin Bond is one of the few major writers writing for children.

6.2 WRITING FOR CHILDREN

In recent times, writing for children, a specialised form of writing, has grown into a distinct genre. The writer has to select his themes very judiciously because of the special target audience he is addressing. A different approach is required for different age groups. Animal stories, fantasies, fairy tales, heroic adventures, mountaineering, sea-faring, dacoits, bandits, police, exploration and travel, space odysseys, stories of children's courage, self-reliance and initiative are generally children's favourites.

Books for children explore and portray themes which children can identity with and find relevant and meaningful. Thus this literature abounds in child protagonists undertaking all manner of journeys, voyages and adventures and negotiating the complex environment they are thrown into.

The Ruskin Bond Children's Omnibus



These stories are not very lengthy because of the limited retention span of children. Lively and often colourful illustrations add to the over-all effect of the story.

The world of wonder, often ignored by the adults, fascinates every child. Adventure and excitement, dangerous and exciting situations make the child want to know what happens next. Curiosity and suspense hold the child's compassion and concern for others.

Children go on imagining things. They create a world of fancy and an atmosphere of magic and unreality. It's a world in which unreal people and creatures roam about doing unexpected things and encountering unreal adventures. But even in a fantasy there can be a moral. It must not however, be made too obvious.

Entertaining the child is the primary aim of a good story. At the same time, a streak of virtue must run through the story. Love and kindness towards animals as well as other human beings, and triumph of good over evil in the end are essential qualities in every good story written for children.

The genesis of story-writing for children lies in our long tradition of folk tales and the stories told by wandering story-tellers and by grandmothers in our homes at bedtime, drawing heavily on classics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharath*, the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesh*, the *Kathasaritsagara* and the *Jataka* stories. The tradition of oral story-telling puts a lot of stress on moral teaching and hero-worship.

Despite a rich tradition of creative writing for children in our country has not been very rich or even satisfactory.

Till sometime ago, writing for children was not considered a significant or serious activity. It has deemed to be a child's play, a secondary kind of writing. There were very few magazines for children. Generally speaking, parents didn't think it worthwhile to spend on books for children, apart from textbooks. It was considered a wasteful expenditure.

Of late, though, Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, has done considerable work to promote and produce good children's literature. The animal fantasy of modern times started with the *Jungle Book* and *Just –so Stories* of Rudyard Kipling. Kipling and A.A.Milne in *Winnie the Pooh* created a unique world of jungles and beasts. The animal world was later expanded by such imaginative writers as Beatrice Potter, Kenneth Grahame, Margery Sharp, C.S.Lewis, Llyod Alexander, Michael Bond and Robert Lawson. Jim Corbett's *Man Eaters of Kumaon, More Man –Eaters of Kumaon, The Temple Tiger* and *The Man – Eating Leopard of Rudra Prayag* have left generations of young readers breathless. Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland*, L.Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, and Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio create a very different kind of fairy tale with all kinds of eccentric characters. In Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* very different animals form a friendship.

Many contemporary authors have written fairy tales with a new twist. Jay William's *Practical Princess* slays the dragon and lets the prince out. In another of William's story the Princess insists that she will help the prince only when he promises to shed his laziness. The traditional image of a helpless young girl quietly sitting in an ivory tower patiently waiting for the prince charming to come on horseback and rescue her has been dismissed and discarded to keep pace with the changing times. Young men alone need not display bravery or chivalry. Modern girls can take care of themselves and others.

In Roald Dahl's famous *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* too, despite its overriding surrealism, a touch of modern-day reality has been introduced in the portrayal of the poor Charlie. Of course, in the end Charlie emerges the winner and Willy Wonka declares him his heir purely on the basis of his endearing qualities of head and heart. While children's literature has evolved from a world ruled over by parents and teachers into a freer world for today's boys and girls, earnest effort is being made to inculcate domestic, ethical and social values.

Writing for children is more difficult than writing for adults because in case of the latter we can speak in our own voice, as adults. But children belong to a phase of life we have long passed. We have to thus put ourselves back in time and constantly remind ourselves of what it was like when we were eight or nine or ten years old.

Great writers of children's works do not speak as adults, always write from children's point of view, never adopt a condescending tone, use simple but vivid language and avoid clichés and complex structures. Ruskin Bond goes a step further. His child

protagonist seems to show the adults the drawbacks in their approach to nature and the animal world.

6.3 RUSKIN BOND : A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



Ruskin Bond (1939-)

Ruskin Bond is a long time resident of Landour and Mussoorie, a beautiful hill station in Uttar Pradesh of India. He is a prolific writer of poetry, fiction and non-fictional essays, and has published some 70 odd books to date. He has weekly English language columns in leading Indian newspapers. Ruskin Bond was born in 1939. As he lost his father at an early age and had to grow up in his step-father's house, he became rather an introspective reticent person who immersed himself in a world of books. As a child he spent long periods with his grandparents in Mussoorie and imbibed a love for nature and animals from his Grandfather. Ruskin Bond started writing at the age of ten. His novel *The Room on the Roof* won him the prestigious John Llewell Rhys Prize when he was only 18. in 1992 his collection of stories *Trees Still Grow in Dehradun* got him the Sahitya Akademi Award.

Ruskin Bond's works mainly depict children growing up and maturing through adversity and experience. The natural scenic hills of Dehradun and Mussoorie almost invariably form the setting of his works and reflect his ardent faith in the healing powers of nature.

Now at 61, Ruskin lives at Landour, Mussoorie along with his adopted son's family, surrounded by pines, the blue firmament, the sun kissed dew-drenched buttercups, vine and children. And he still continues to pour his heart out in his writings. He said in a recent interview, "I don't always write professionally or for money. It is something I feel I have to do to relate my impressions in the day-to-day life that I see around me."

Major Works of Ruskin Bond :

1999 *A Season of Ghosts.*
1994 *Delhi is not far : the best of Ruskin Bond.*
1994 *Quakes and flames Bond.*
1992 *An island of trees : nature stories and po Bond.*
1992 *Mussoorie and Landour : days of wine and R Bond.*
1991 *Snake trouble.*
1989 *Time stops at Shamli and other stories.*
1988 *Beautiful Garhwal : Heaven in Himalayas.*
1988 *The night train at Deoli and other stories.*
1986 *The adventures of Rusty.*
1985 *To live in magic : a book of nature poems.*
1980 *A flight of pigeons.*

1977 *A girl from Copenhagen.*
1975 *Lone fox dancing : lyric poems.*
1972 *An axe for the Rani.*
1972 *It isn't time that's passing.*
1969 *Strange men, strange places.*
1968 *My first love and other stories.*
1967 *The neighbour's wife and other stories.*
1957 *The room on the roof.*

6.4 *NO ROOM FOR A LEOPARD* : A DISCUSSION

This story was first published in *A Bond with the Mountains* in 1998. It is a very moving account of the killing of a trusting leopard by a group of shikaris. Leopard skins were selling in Delhi at over a thousand rupees each. Of course, there was a ban on the export of its skins but there were always ways and means ... Because of such unscrupulous persons, the leopard, like many other members of the cat family, is nearing extinction in India.

Because of deforestation taking place in the hills and surrounding areas, many animals have been driven into the valleys inhabited by human beings. This exposes them to grave risks and fatal encounters – one such encounter has been described in this story. But for the rapid deforestation the shikaris would not have caught and killed the leopard so very easily. In the familiar surroundings of the forest the leopard would have found a safe haven.

Of course, this deforestation has brought one indirect advantage too – of bringing humans and non-humans closer to each other. The protagonist – we are given neither his name nor age – came into close contact with the folktails, kaleej pheasants, langurs, red foxes and even a sinewy orange–gold leopard. As he had not come to take anything from the jungle the birds and animals soon grew accustomed to his face. They began to recognize his footsteps. After some time, his approach did not disturb them. The birds would no longer fly away, they would remain perched on a boulder in the middle of the stream while he got across by means of other boulders only a few yards away. The langurs in the oak and rhododendron trees would just watch him with some curiosity and continue to munch up the tender green shoots of the oak. Not only that, when one day they saw a leopard poised on a rock about twenty feet above the young narrator, they tried to warn him of the hidden danger by grunting and chattering. They thus showed their concern for him. A deep bond thus got established between the narrator and the animal world without their ever exchanging a single word.

The difference between the children's thinking and the adult thinking has also been brought out. Children love nature. They love all the birds and animals. It comes naturally to them. No ulterior consideration enters their innocent minds. They can never ever think of harming the animals or exploiting them for their personal gain or profit. But the adults are solely driven by mercenary considerations. If a leopard's skin can fetch them a good price, they would not think twice before killing him. Compassion, trust, love .... these mean nothing to them. An idyllic world stands shattered because of this selfish cruelty.

The young narrator loved every bird and animal. He meant them no harm. They in return trusted him and accepted him and cared for him, in their own way. But their acceptance of his presence, of human presence proved to be their undoing. The leopard became trusting, became less cautious, took the shikaris also to be friends. And lost his life. Hereafter at least animals stopped trusting human beings. And this distrust soon spread far and wide. Even though all men are not selfish and cruel, many

of us deeply love animals and care for them but the act of shikaris will make them suspicious forever.

A long and hazardous journey in pursuit of something noble is often the theme of good and absorbing children's stories. The perilous journey exemplifies the value of cooperation and the quality of friendship. Here the young narrator crosses the forest and the small stream at the bottom of the hill every morning and evening, all by himself. We are not told why he does so. It is left to our imagination. Perhaps he goes to school, though his bag of books or satchel is never mentioned. But that is not important. What is significant is the trust that develops between him and the animals and the subsequent breach of that trust.

The best in children's literature has a double purpose. While it entertains the young reader and the adult as well, it also teaches something – helps understand the norms of the society in which we live. Transmission of ethical and social values is skillfully woven into the texture of the story. Ironically, in this story, the ways and thinking of the adult world are censured. At the end of the story the child does not stand enlightened, he stands embittered, disillusioned. In a way this story is a comment on the modern world and its life style. The adults no longer provide role models for our children. Models of right thinking and right behaviour. Children are making them aware of their misdeeds.

In the last few decades we have become increasingly aware of the evils of deforestation and other environmental imbalances. And the havoc these changes are playing in our lives. This story thus takes up a very contemporary and a very relevant theme that concerns all of us today. Filtered through a child's consciousness it becomes all the more poignant and pressing.

6.5 *COPPERFIELD IN THE JUNGLE* – A DISCUSSION

This story was first published in *Tigers For Ever* in 1996. It is an autobiographical story. It tells us how the young Ruskin Bond could never get interested in the hunting expeditions of his Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends. Perhaps he had inherited this trait from his grandfather who never understood the pleasure some people obtained form killing the creatures of our forests. Killing for food – most animals die that could be justified to an extent but killing just for the fun of it could not be justified or understood.

Even at the tender age of twelve Ruskin disliked anything to do with shikar or hunting. He also found it terribly boring. To illustrate this point he narrates an experience. Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends once took him on a shikar expedition into the Terai forests of the Siwalik hills. The prospect of spending one whole week in the jungle with several adults with guns only filled him with dismay. They would all the time be thinking and talking of hunting a tiger or an elephant and he did not at all look forward to it. So, on their second day in the jungle, he managed to be left behind at the rest house. And in a corner of the back verandah of that old bungalow he discovered a shelf of books – some thirty volumes, obviously untouched for many years. Much too young to know what was good and what was not, he would have read any thing and every thing with pleasure. However much to his delight the bookshelf contained, among others, P.G.Wodehouse's *Love Among the Chickens*, M.R.James's *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, Edward Hamilton Aitken's *A Naturalist on the Prowl* and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. This chance acquaintance with Mr.Micawber and family, Aunt Betsy Trowood, Mr.Dick, Peggoty and many other characters in Dickens's novel seemed to set him off on the road to literature. James's book had him hooked on ghost stories for the rest of his life.

Ruskin's imagination becomes active the moment he discovers the books. Who could have left them there? A literary forest officer? A memsahib who got bored by her husband's camp–fire boasting? Or someone who had no interest in the 'manly' sport of slaughtering wild animals?

At the end of the week the four men with guns could only see a spotted deer and shoot two miserable, underweight wild fowls. Sitting in the rest-house with his treasure of books Ruskin Bond saw not only the spotted deer crossing the open clearing infront o the bungalow but also a large leopard making off into the jungle with one of the dogs held in its jaws. Since the leopard had done it only to help itself to a meal, it did not disturb young Ruskin beyond a point and he returned to his reading. The hunting party however, refused to believe this, attributing this bit of information to his overactive imagination under the immediate influence of Dickens's vivid portrayal of Master Copperfield. Ruskin brings the half – finished novel back with him. David Copperfield, published in 1849-50, is Dickens's veiled autobiography.

6.6 *AN ISLAND OF TREES* – A DISCUSSION

This story is taken from *An Island of Trees* published in 1992. This is a dialogue between Koki and her grandmother. They are sitting on a string cot in the shade of an old jackfruit tree and Grandmother talks about her father and his great love for trees and flowers. She tells Koki that she was convinced that plants and trees loved her father with as much tenderness as he loved them. She recalls how sometimes when she sat alone beneath a tree
she would feel a little lonely or lost. But as soon as her father joined her, the garden would become a happy place, the tree itself more friendly.

Grandmother personifies the trees. Peepul trees are great show – offs. Even when there is no breeze, their broad – chested, slim – waisted leaves will spin like tops, determined to attract your attention and invite you into the shade. An old peepul tree had forced its way through the walls of an old, abandoned temple, knocking the bricks down with its vigorous growth. Her father rebuilt the temple around the tree. The tree protects the temple and the temple protects the tree. People believe that there's a friendly tree spirit dwelling there. Her father also believed that the trees are always trying to move – to reach out with their arms.

The same with the banyan tree. While its leaves were still pink and tender, it would be visited by the delicate map butterfly who left her eggs to their care.

Koki's great – grandfather had such a passion for planting trees that during the monsoons he would walk into the scrubland and beyond the river bed, armed with cuttings and saplings, and he would plant them out there, hoping to create a forest. And he told his daughter that he was not planting the forest for people to see. He was planting it for the earth and for the birds and animals who live on it and need more food and shelter. He also told her why mankind, and not only wild creatures, need trees – for preventing the banks of rivers from being washed away. But everywhere people are cutting down trees without planting new ones. This is the message that Koki's grandmother wants to convey to all of us. In "No Room for a Leopard" we have seen the grave consequences of such mindless acts. The thought of a world without trees is simply nightmarish.

At the end of the story Grandmother narrates an experience, which reveals the deep bond that grows between humans and non-humans if only there is love and compassion. After twenty years or more she returned to her parental house and one day walked over to the island where her father had once planted all kinds of trees. While a small spotted deer scampered away to hide in a thicket and a wild pheasant challenged her with a mellow 'who are you?' the trees seemed to know her and

beckoned her nearer. She ran her hands over their barks and it was like touching the hands of old friends. She noticed that many small trees and wild plants and grasses had sprung up under the protection of those whom she and her father had planted years ago. The trees had multiplied. The forest was on the move. Her father's dream was coming true – the trees were walking again, by multiplying, by spreading their shade and benign influence.

6.7 CHARACTERISATION

In 'No Room for a Leopard' and 'Copperfield in the Jungle' the protagonist is a young boy of about twelve years of age. We are not told his name. That is not important. What matters is his love of animals and complete affinity with

nature. In 'No Room for a Leopard' even his age is never mentioned. Only from the illustration do we surmise that he is no more than 10 – 11. We don't know why he crossed the forest every morning and evening. True, his cottage was just above the forest but we are not told why he travelled all by himself and why his people back home never worried about his safety. Surely they would have known about the many birds and animals frequenting that area. The shikaris show more concern when they tell him that there is a leopard around and he should carry a gun.

Nor are we told anything about the shikaris except that they were only interested in the money the leopard's skin would fetch them. We don't know their names or number. We don't know where they came from or where they went. They symbolise an attitude – selfish materialism. And it's contrasted with the child's spontaneous love for the animals.

In 'Copperfield in the Jungle' again, all that we know is that the protagonist is twelve years of age, dislikes hunting and loves reading. Why he has to accompany Uncle Henry and his sporting friends almost against his wishes is not known. Nor are we told anything about the shikaris except that despite their tall claims they managed to shoot only two miserable, underweight wild fowls at the end of the week. And they blamed it on the beastly weather. Of course, they use typical hunters' vocabulary. They constantly talk of bagging a tiger – that is, killing or catching a tiger, beating the jungle – that is, going into the jungle to drive out game for sport or shooting usually accompanied by drum – beaters and camp fire boasting – that is boasting of their past exploits, often imaginary, sitting around the fire made with logs in the open air at night. Only in 'An Island of Trees' Kokis's grandmother controls the narrative but she is throughout reminiscing about her own childhood, when she would not have been older than Koki herself. To make Koki understand the value of trees in life she recreates her past – her happy memories of a loving and caring father.

Not yet conscious of the burdens of life and several extraneous considerations, children easily relate to the natural world, establishing a spontaneous relationship with birds and animals and plants. These children carry a message for adults. If hunting for fun or profit goes on, if trees continue to be felled, the earth will become a desert in no time.

6.8 ATMOSPHERE

Since "No Room For A Leopard" is about deforestation and its accompanying aftermath, the story gives a vivid picture of the forest along with the magic of its flora and fauna. Trees, plants, birds, animals – they instantly grip the imagination of the young. Since the forest of oak and maple and Himalayan rhododendron was just

below the cottage of our young protagonist, he must have been frequenting it since his early childhood. It is not surprising, therefore, that he knows the place almost inside out and can mention each tree by its proper name. By nature children love birds and animals. A bond of understanding and trust soon develops between them and the protagonist who is never referred to by name because that is not important. He represents all children and their innonence is contrasted with the selfish cruelty of the grown – up shikaris who have also not been given any names.

A fantasy also must have a logical framework; may be not logical from our practical point of view but some way of thinking which the characters themselves have evolved. The leopard's quest for food, the quickening cry of the barking deer, the nervous and excited grunting and chattering of the langurs, the fireflies mistaken for the eyes of the leopard by the nervous child, his leart banging away against his ribs all have a sound logic of their own. The young child venturing out all by himself every morning adds to the magic of the atmosphere and makes him a real hero. Against the tall trees climbing into the sky, a small figure in the foreground looks solitary and courageous – quite in keeping with the spirit of the hills and forests.

"Copperfield In The Jungle also reconstructs the jungle atmosphere. The young protagonist accompanies his Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends on a shikar expedition into the Terai forests of the Siwaliks. We are not told his name but we know that he is twelve years of age and has inherited his deep dislike of hunting and killing just for the fun of it from his grandfather.

The terminology commonly used by the shikaris and the tall claims made by them are effectively used to stress the contrast between the adult thinking and the child's thinking. A bungalow in the jungle has its own magic. A shelf of books half-hidden in a corner of its back verandah is nothing short of a treasure for a twelve year old who has to look after himself during the long absence of his uncle and friends. Wiping the thick dust off the covers and examining the titles was really a treasure-hunt for the boy whose reading tastes had not yet formed. *The Ghost Stories, A Naturalist On The Prowl* and *Love Among The Chickens* only add to the child's world of fantasy. Reference to Jim Corbett earlier shows that the child was interested in books. David Copperfield establishes beyond doubt the autobiographical element. The protagonist of "No Room For A Leopard" also ends his narration with a line from D.H.Lawerence's poem.

In "An Island Of Trees" the narration is controlled by Kokis's grandmother but the grandmother is recounting and reliving her own childhood all through. There aren't very many birds or animals here except for an occasional map butterfly or hawk-cuckoo or ladybird or caterpillar. The importance Koki's great -grandfather attached to trees for life on earth is the focal point. The banyan tree gave shelter not only to the human beings but many birds during the monsoon – the gossipy rosy-pastors, quarrelsome mynas, cheerful bulbuls and coppersmiths and sometimes a noisy, bullying crow. All of them would feast on the scarlet figs. Even the dark flying foxes at night!

The illustrations, almost an essential part of a children's story, animate the mood. heighten the over all impact and reinforce the deep bond of friendship between nature and children, between animals and children.

And the fantasy in all these stories is as much geared to magic as to modern science and modern ways of living. These is none of the macabre hair – raising of a dyed-in-the-wool horror story. There are no ghost but the stories have a haunting atmosphere which stays with us for a long time.

We reproduce below the poem by D.H.Lawrence that is referred to at the end of "No Room For A Leopard":

MOUNTAIN LION

CLIMBING through the January snow, into the Lobo canyon
Dark grow the spruce-trees, blue is the balsam, water sounds still unfrozen, and the trail is still evident.
Men !
Two men !
Men ! The only animal in the world to fear !

They hesitate.
We hesitate.
They have a gun.
We have no gun.

Then we all advance, to meet.

Two Mexicans, strangers, emerging out of the dark
and snow and inwardness of the Lobo valley.
What are you doing here on this vanishing trail?

What is he carrying?
Something yellow.
A deer?

Que tiene, amigo?
Leon –

He smiles, foolishly, as if he were caught doing wrong.
And we smile, foolishly, as if we didn't know.
He is quite gentle and dark – faced.

It is mountain a lion,
A long, long slim cat, yellow like a lioness.
Dead.
He trapped her this morning, he says, smiling foolishly.

Lift up her face,
Her round, bright face, bright as frost.
Her round, fine-fashioned head, with two dead ears;
And stripes in the brilliant frost of her face, sharp, fine
dark rays,

Dark, keen, fine eyes in the brilliant frost of her face.
Beautiful dead eyes.

Hermoso es!

They go out towards the open;
We go on into the gloom of Lobo.
And above the trees I found her lair,
A hole in the blood-orange brilliant rocks that stick up,
a little cave.
And bones, and twigs, and a perilous ascent.

So, she will never leap up that way again, with the yellow
flash of a mountain lion's long shoot !
And her bright striped frost-face will never watch any more, out of the shadow of the cave in the blood-orange rock,
Above the trees of the Lobo dark valley-mouth !

Instead, I look out.
And out to the dim of the desert, like a dream, never
real;

To the snow of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, the ice
of the mountains of Picorisi,
And near across at the opposite steep of snow, green
trees motionless standing in snow, like a Christmas toy.

And I think in this empty world there was room for me
and a mountain lion.
And I think in the world beyond, how easily we might
spare a million or two of humans
And never miss them.
Yet what a gap in the world, the missing white frost-
face of that slim yellow mountain lion !

6.9 LET US SUM UP

It is important to remember that even in a fantasy there should be a moral. Of course, it should not be made too obvious. Children are indirectly and subtly taught certain virtues like love and kindness towards animals as well as other human beings, helping those in trouble, punishing or defying the wicked, truthfulness, respect for elders, etc. Paradoxically, these stories have a very clear message not for children but for adults. We, the adults, have to realise and remember what trees mean to us, to our future. We, the adults have to realize and remember what deforestation can and will do to our environment and ultimately to us. We, the adults, have to realise and remember the harm mindless killing of animals, for the fun of it or for monetary gains, will ultimately do to life on earth in the days to come. Children, the future of mankind, are asking the adults to ensure a safe future for them in a healthy environment.

6.10 QUESTIONS

1. Why does the young protagonist feel responsible for the killing of the leopard in 'No Room for a Leopard'?

2. What is the full implication of the leading hunter's remark in 'Copperfield in the Jungle', "Young Master Copperfield says he saw a leopard"?

3. What do you learn about Koki's grandmother in 'An Island of Trees'?

4. In the first two stories the young protagonists have not been given any proper names. Does it adversely affect the over-all effect of the stories?

5. What is the strength of these stories? How are they different from 'The Miracle'?

6.11 ADDITIONAL READING

1. *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, eds, Carpenter and Prichard, Oxford University Press, 1984.
2. *Writers, Critics and Children*, eds Geoff Foxetal, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976.
3. *Children's World*, a magazine published by the Children's Book Trust, New Delhi.

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