U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prayagraj

MAEN-116

Contemporary Indian Literature In English Translation

Block

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the course on **Contemporary Indian Literature in English Translation!**

You must before anything else spend some time reflecting on the importance of studying English translation of Indian literatures. U.R. Anantha Murthy in his introduction to Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq* was all praise for Karnad's translation of the play. He went on to say that 'along with Indian writing in English which we prescribe to our students, we should also be able to teach English translations of classics in the Indian languages which will engage our students' attention fully and meaningfully. Karnad's *Tughlaq* should be as rewarding an experience to teach and study, as it has been to see on the stage all over India'. That was in 1971. This course entitled Contemporary Indian Literature in English Translation is a fulfillment of that wish. It is by no means an accident that we are teaching both these texts, which are acknowledged classics, U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* and Karnad's *Tughlaq*, besides many other literary masterpieces that include an array of short stories, poems and excerpts from biography, autobiography, pen-sketch and travel writing.

Here is the broad outline of the course:

Block 1	**Background Studies**
Block 2	**Novel (*Samskara*) by U.R.Anantha Murthy (Kannada)**
Block 3	**Novel (*Tamas*) by Bhisham Sahni (Hindi)**
Block 4	**Short Story — I**
Block 5	**Short Story — II**
Block 6	**Poetry**
Block 7	**Drama (*Tughlaq*) by Girish Karnad**
Block 8	**Non-fictional Prose**

We have in this course covered nineteen languages of the country. These include languages from Kashimiri in the north to Malayalam in the south, from Gujarati and Rajasthani in the west to Oriya and Bengali in the east. What is most significant is that we have included for the first time languages of the Northeast like Khasi (Meghalaya), Kokborok (Tripura) and Manipuri — all in one course. This gives the MA English programme of IGNOU its national and truly all-India character. This course will open the 'magic casement', to use Coleridge's phrase for you to undertake a journey of discovery of the rich variety and themes of modern Indian Literature, to see 'God's plenty' in this country, again to use Dryden's words about Chaucer. Fed on the concepts of Western literature and Western thought, students of English literature are often unaware of the treasures lying nearer home. In addition the course endeavours to introduce Indian writers and their indigenious writing to the world outside.

We grant that everyone has his or her own method of studying. But it is advisable if you are to read the text first. Remember, everything in the course — study materials, Questions, commentary and readings — is woven round the text and nothing is more important than the text. The study material consists of 8 Blocks as mentioned above and are anthology containing prescribed short stories, poems and non-fictional prose — except the two novels, *Tamas* and *Samskara* and the play *Tuglaq*. You are advised to buy the editions of these three texts mentioned in the Blocks of the course.

In addition we hope to prepare a few audio-video programmes that you can watch on DD1 and Gyan Darshan every Friday and listen to the audios on local FM channels (23 stations). The telecast/broadcast information can be had from the IGNOU website www.ignou.ac.in

Good luck.

Editors: Prof. Renu Bhardwaj
Dr. N.K. Jain

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The first Block called *Background Studies* aims to prepare you to study the course *Contemporary Indian Literature in English Translation*. Unit 1 *Concept of Indian Literature* evokes your interest in what unites literatures written in various Indian Languages. Thereafter, in Unit 2 we have delineated how the concept of Indian Literature was reinvigorated during the colonial period and further how it shaped up after independence Unit 3 *Comparative Studies in Indian Literatures* shows the relevance of the comparative method to study Indian Literatures. Finally, Unit 4 *English Translation of Indian Literatures* touches upon various issues related to translation from the source language to the target language.

UNIT 1 THE CONCEPT OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 The Idea of India as a Nation
1.3 Search for Indianness in Literature
1.4 Ancient Indian Literature
1.5 Middle Indian Literature
1.6 Conclusion
1.7 Questions
1.8 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will explore and try to establish the concept of Indian Literature and see how it can be delineated from ancient times through the early modern period of literatures in Indian languages (I am looking at it as the middle period in terms of Indian literary history). By the time you complete this unit, you will, we hope, have a fair idea of the complex nature of the question of the concept and also of what goes into the making of the concept. You will also be able to understand why the methodology of comparative literature studies is most suitable to study Indian literature.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

You may wonder why Indian Literature needs to be defined at all. After all, one understands that it is the literature written in India. But as you read the previous sentence, you realize that India does not have one literature, i.e. literature written in one language. We have many literatures and many linguistic cultures, or sub-cultures, some of which were born in opposition to other linguistic cultures or sub-cultures. Hence, the definition of Indian Literature has to be more complex than the one offered earlier. One needs to explain and explore the term further. In fact both India and Indian Literature need to be thought through more clearly.

Culture and literature are closely bound together and if we can have a way of looking at India as a clearly definable cultural entity, then the task of defining Indian Literature would be much easier.

1.2 THE IDEA OF INDIA AS A NATION

We will first consider the idea of India as a nation, and then see why we still don't have a credible history of Indian Literature and why we need to have one. We will then see how the basis for such a history is in our past, in the epics and in folk and popular literature, especially of the Bhakti movements. We will argue for a way to read Indian Literature as a fabric consisting of

weaves from different hands coming from different regions joining together almost seamlessly to create a wonderful whole.

If we think of India the subcontinent that experienced various historical events including colonisation and then achieved independence and partition, we may be able to escape the trap of looking at India as existent only after the idea of the nation-state came into being, after 1947. This is not to say that we should not see how our nation was "imagined" into being. After all, successive governments in independent India have talked of the need for national integration, a need that would have been superfluous if we had already thought of ourselves, i.e. all Indians, as belonging to the same "national" community. Indeed, as part of the struggle against the British colonialists, our political leaders went around the subcontinent educating people about *Bharat Mata*, about their belonging to the same motherland. This was quite a task among people divided by language, race, religion, caste, and food habits. [In fact it is a miracle that we came to be a modern nation state, still cohering as a nation however divided we may appear to be!] They took recourse to the undeniable truth of the underlying cultural unity in the country.

In fact, Jawaharlal Nehru points out our essential differences as well as our essential unity in his book, *Discovery of India*, and this unity precedes nation formation. While describing the obvious differences in racial stock, talking of undivided India of the British times, he points out that even the extreme examples of diversity, the Tamils and the Pathans, "there is no mistaking the impress of India on the Pathan, as this is obvious on the Tamil". (Nehru: 61) He then goes on to say that while the vast majority of Indians fall in between these two extremes, they too "have retained their peculiar characteristics for hundreds of years ... and yet have been throughout these ages distinctively Indian, with the same national heritage and the same set of moral and mental qualities". (61) This heritage was cultural — which meant that it could be seen as a way of life and in "a philosophical attitude to life" (62). He thinks of India as "a culture and a civilization which gave shape to all things". (62) This is a culture that absorbed foreign influences and tried to find a synthesis at all times between older and newer ideas. He then says that India is simply home for the Indians, that Indians will feel more at home anywhere in India than outside, reminding one of the statements of the famous Indian English poet, Nissim Ezekiel, when he was commenting on V.S. Naipaul in his essay, "Naipaul's India and Mine": "In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian".

It used to be a critical commonplace to say that our nation could be divided into two parts — the urban India and the rural Bharat. Sometimes these were seen as elitist English speaking India, which was clearly in the minority, and the majority Indian languages speaking Bharat. The second formulation should immediately alert us to the dangers of easy categorizations. The Indian languages speaking Bharat exists in the cities as well, i.e. in urban India. And people who speak and earn their living in Indian languages can also constitute the elite both in terms of political power and cultural production. However, in common perception, India is represented in English to foreign audiences, while Indian languages cater to only to fellow Indians. Thus, Meenakshi Mukherjee and Nissim Ezekiel called their anthology of translations from Indian languages into English *Another India*. Perhaps, the anthology would have been better served by a title like *Other Indias* or simply *Writing India*.

These titles would have worked better because they do not flatten out or homogenize the various literatures that constitute Indian writing.

The idea of reading Indian literatures in translation is to understand the various linguistic cultures that constitute our nation. But don't or shouldn't we already know about these cultures because they belong to one nation, our own nation? One of the slogans of the Nehruvian era used to be "Unity in Diversity" and this is a useful slogan to remember because it alerts us to the fact that though there may be many common factors in our various linguistic (and religious) cultures, our nation is also marked by a wonderful diversity, that we are by definition a pluralistic nation.

1.3 SEARCH FOR INDIANNESS IN LITERATURE

According to K.M. George the basic problem with the term Indian Literature is that it is used both in the singular and the plural, that is to say that we accept that we have many languages and though they do produce one Indian literature, it is possible to read the literature of each individual language in terms of its own history and development. We don't have a common Indian language but we have what we could call Indian Literature. He gives as analogy to understand this, the case of a traditional brass lamp with many wicks. He says that if we have more wicks, "the brighter the light". (x) As he goes on to say:

> The lamp is the same, the oil is the same, but it is the wicks that determine the brightness of light. The lights from various wicks merge imperceptibly and produce a brightness which is the totality of many lights. Just as many wicks produce one light, India's many languages produce one literature. (George: x)

In other words, various Indian literatures share the same sources and even if Individually they are discrete, they constitute Indian Literature in their totality. 45 K.M. George says, Indian Literature "is the sum total of the literatures produced in the Indian languages, modern and classical". (ix)

One of our most well-known comparatist scholars, Sisir Kumar Das, who tried to develop the concept of Indian literature, argued that India is "a space us disturbed by the changes in geographical factors from time to time affected by political expediency". (Das 1995: xiii) In other words, India was a vision, "less territorial and more spiritual" (xiii), and has "existed in some form or the other throughout the pre-colonial history of India". (xiv) This concept of Bharatavarsa gained "new significations" during the national movement. However, Das argues that Indian literature isn't 'one though written in many languages', but that it is in fact made up of many unique literatures and "looks at each of them as a distinct expression of the experiences of each community". (xiv) This is not to say that he doesn't see commonality among the various literatures — he argues against both homogenization of Indian literatures as well as against a vision of heterogeneity that erases "the commonalities in cultures". (xiv) Historical and geographical factors have made these literatures interact with each other and their separate histories have "certain points of convergences, thematic, generic, ideological...". (xiv)

Thus, we should be able to answer at the idea of Indian Literature by establishing the idea of India — by studying our politics, economics or social

life, which are factors that "are seldom confined to a particular language or region, and an instrument of exploration which transcends the boundaries of a particular language or region". (Mukherjee: 2) In other words, as Sujit Mukherjee says, the 'literary history of India should *account for* our literary past.' (2) As he complains, "Literature in India is as old as its sculpture or painting or music but has not received historical attention in the way that these other arts have". (1) Hence, we must look to discover the common literary past Indian languages have in order to be able to establish the contours of contemporary Indian Literature.

1.4 ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE

According to Sujit Mukherjee, Since the very term 'Indian Literature' is sparingly used in Indian literary circles. Most often, it tends to make people think only of ancient literary works in Sanskrit. No modern and forward-looking concept of Indian Literature has yet been formulated, in spite of the much-used official declaration, 'India has one literature that is written in many languages', authored apparently by Radhakrishnan. This declaration has never been fully explored nor has any serious attempt been made to establish its validity". (Mukherjee: 1) The first important point to note is that Indian Literature has always meant "ancient literary works in Sanskrit". It is important to pause here and to think of what the term means to you, especially the term Ancient Indian Literature, or the term Classical Indian Literature. Perhaps you should write down names of Indian literary works from the period. If you have written down the word "Sanskrit", or if you have gone further and written down names of Sanskrit texts, you should learn to look southwards. Tamil is the only language in India with a continuous literary tradition since the start of the Christian era (or even before, depending on which history you read or trust). It has a rich literary history and interestingly, an early Tamil grammatical text, *Tolkappiyam*, recognizes one other language as its literary equal and perhaps strong competitor, "vadamozhi" or northern language, i.e. Sanskrit. Hence; when we talk of ancient Indian Literature, we need to think of both Sanskrit and Tamil, and then of Prakrit, and we must also remember that Telugu and Kannada also claim a hoary past. Interestingly, we are only considering written works here, for there must have been a strong oral literary tradition in various Indian languages in the sub-continent.

We can immediately see the problem of dealing with Indian Literature — some of you didn't think of Tamil because it belongs to a completely different region, and to a different family of languages. We have so many languages in our country that no one of us can know them all. Hence, we can hardly talk of them with confidence, being dependant on other scholars for information and critical analyzes even to establish commonalities in our literatures. Also, the development of modern Indian languages, the division of our country into linguistic states, and the ever reinforced politics of linguistic identity that forces us to distinguish our languages from others as far and as minutely as possible (arguing that what has been seen as a dialect of a language is actually a distinct language in itself) have meant that we tend to think of our languages in isolation, and perhaps in opposition to other Indian languages. This creates a further difficulty in thinking coherently about Indian Literature. Further, as Sujit Mukherjee has pointed out, "... no previous model exists anywhere in the world for the literary history of a country of this size and containing so

many languages that have achieved a widely scattered and highly uneven literary culture". (Mukherjee: 2)

Nevertheless, it is possible to see in the ancient and, particularly, in the medieval periods, a happy cross-pollination of Indian Literatures that makes it possible to see literary movements across the country. If the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* can be seen as the mainstays of our epic tradition, traveling across the sub-continent and manifesting themselves in established literary traditions as well as folk traditions (sometimes oppositionally), we can also see the Bhakti Movement as the first truly popular literary movement in India. The Bhakti Movement began in South India in the seventh century CE (Christian era). It is because of the popularity of the Bhakti Movement in Tamil, especially of the Saivite saints that Tamil is recognized by many as a Saivite language, and Saivism as a hallmark of Tamil culture. However, ancient Sanskrit literature, whatever the tension between Sanskrit and Tamil, was available as a rich resource in both north and south India. One must remember that many Tamil kings patronized Tamil and that during the medieval period, both Sanskrit and Tamil were used as literary languages in the Tamil courts and not only influenced each other but perhaps were written by the same poets.

We all know of India's Vedic and Upanishadic heritage. Rigvedic poetry is the oldest part of the Vedas. Already well evolved in literary style, they point to a rich and vibrant culture. Even if the Vedas and Upanishads were known only to the Brahmins, their ideas did find expression in popular traditions and were available to the common people. This is where the two epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, played and continue to play a big role. As Nehru said, all Indians shared a common "cultural background" (Nehru: 67), which "was a mixture of popular philosophy, tradition, history, myth, and legend" (67), and that the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, "in popular translations and paraphrases, were widely known among the masses, and every incident and story and moral in them was engraved on the popular mind and gave a richness and content to it". (67) He calls the *Mahabharata* the foundational text of India in the sense that it is in this epic that "a very definite attempt has been made to emphasize the fundamental unity of India, or Bharatavarsha as it was called" (107). The *Mahabharata* is the longest epic in the world, and is a rich source of early philosophy, political thought, religious belief, social structure, myths and legends. The *Mahabharata* is such an inspirational text that it has not only been retold in many languages, and its episodes are part of various folk traditions, it has also inspired many contemporary works. Besides the rewritings of the *Mahabharata* played a crucial role in the development of a few modern Indian languages towards the end of the first millennium in the Christian Era as well as in the second millennium. For example, consider the following: Kabi Sanjay's Bengali version of the *Mahabharata* in the early half of the fifteenth century (some say the sixteenth) or the Malayalam *Bharatamala* from the fifteenth century or the Kannada *Pampabharata* from the tenth century. However, what is of interest to us here is the fact that episodes from the *Mahabharata* provide plots for Sanskrit plays and are also referred to in Tamil Sangam poetry, thus pointing to a common cultural heritage in ancient India.

The noted Sanskrit playwright Bhasa (3rd century CE) wrote at least six plays based on the epic: *Madhyamavyayogam* (Bhima reunited with Hidimba and son), *Dutavakyam* (Krishna as emissary to Kauravas' court), *Karnabharam* (Indra begging the gift of Karna's armour and earrings), *Pancaratram* (Raid on

Virata). **magnlokacam** (Ghatotkacha's message to Kauravas celebrating the death of Abhimanyu that Arjuna would avenge), and *Urubhangam* (Bhima-Duryodhana duel). Who has not heard of Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Sakuntala*, or *Kumarasambhava*? What is of even more interest is the fact that Tamil Sangam poetry refers to episodes that occur in the *Mahabharata* without showing an awareness of the written epic itself, perhaps indicating that oral traditions must have traveled first as also that the events and characters may have formed part of various literary works and been part of popular imagination before being put into epic form in Sanskrit. Whatever be the case, both the epics find expression in Tamil in their first written avatars outside the Sanskrit tradition. Since the first mention of characters from the *Mahabharata* occur in Sangam poetry, it can be assumed that Tamilians knew of them at least two to three centuries before the Christian Era. In *Purananuru* a Chera King, Perunchorru Utiyan Cheralatan, provides food for both the parties in the Mahabharata war. This is an extremely interesting insertion of a Tamil king into the *Mahabharata* which signals the significance of the events for all parts of the land. It was because there was a common cultural heritage that the patrons of the arts, the royalty of the times in a different part of India, are portrayed as characters in the episodes, thus giving them a part to play in both the cultural and the political life of the land. Some of the other references are interwoven in similes as in *Perumpanarruppatai* where the victory of the Tamil king Tontaiman Ilanthiraian is compare to that of the Pandava victory over the Kauravas (414-420). The Kurukshetra war finds mention in *Kalittokai*, which also speaks of the deaths of Drona and Bhisma. As has been pointed out, Tamil dynasties claimed to have participated in the episodes that constitute the epic, with the Pandya kings claiming direct descent from the Pandavas (through Arjuna's marriage to Chitrangada, the daughter of a Pandya king, whose son Babruvahana ascended the throne). In terms of literary affinities, one must also point out that one of the Sangam poets is called Bharatampatiya Peruntevanar, i.e. Perumtevanar who sang (composed) the *Bharatam*. One must also note that the early Tamil epics, both the Jain *Cilappadikaram* (3rd century CE) and the Buddhist *Manimekalai* (5th century CE) contain references to episodes and characters from the *Mahabharata*. There are many retellings of the *Mahabharata* in later years, culminating in what is considered the greatest of them all, *Bharatam* by Villipputturazhvar in the 14th century CE.

One must remember that Sanskrit texts were composed in various parts of India and many of the Sanskrit retellings can be attributed to specific locations in the east and the western parts of India. Sanskrit was the language of high culture. Even during the period when Prakrits came into prominence (between the sixth and eleventh centuries), and Pali was also an established language, Sanskrit was studied and used as the language of communication and literature in various parts of India. It played a prominent role even in the Tamil country. This period has also been called the Apabhrramsa period. While, as Sisir Kumar Das points out, Apabhramsa primarily meant "a sub-standard or corrupt speech" (Das 2005: 4), it was soon recognized as a literary language. Apabhramsa seems to have been widely known in fifth century India, but Sanskrit was still the link language. As said by Burrow, "with progress of time the differences between the local dialects grew greater, so that Sanskrit became a necessary bond for the cultural unity of India. ... Sanskrit was the only language which could serve as a national language in Ancient India, whose cultural unity, far more influential and important than its political

disunity, rendered such a language essential". (Burrow 59-60) Thus, there was a civilizational and cultural unity that was expressed in and through Sanskrit texts but also through classical Tamil and in various folk literatures. Thus it would not be an exaggeration to say that our unity, the idea of India, is to be found in the dissemination of the two epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Think of all the versions of the two epics that you have heard of and you realize how they attest to the truth of that statement. As pointed out stories from the *Mahabharata* traveled into all languages quite early, the *Ramayana* has had a greater history of translation, and at least two well known versions are considered to be equal in significance and effect (if not superior) to the original Sanskrit version — the *Kambaramayanam*, and Tulsi's *Ramcharitmanas*. But the popularity of the *Ramayana* comes only towards the end of the first millennium of the Christian era. As pointed out by K. Nachimuthu the "*Mahabharata* seems to have been more popular than the *Ramayana* in the Sangam period if the frequency of references is an indication of a work's popularity". (Nachimuthu 3) This changes only "after 10th century after the appearance of *Kambaramayana* which made Rama, a cult figure equal to Krishna but in popular versions among folks the *Mahabharata* continued to have sway". (Nachimuthu 3) One must remember that the Jain and Buddhist traditions also traveled south and played a part in the weaving together of Indian culture. Bharata's *Natyashastra* was the basis for analysis of drama in both the north and the south and gave rise to Bharatanatyam, the South Indian dance form. We must also consider the possibility that many Sanskrit texts owe their origin to Tamil climes and that the two literary cultures must have influenced each other in ways that still have to be established fully.

1.5 MIDDLE INDIAN LITERATURE

As already said, the two epics played a major role in the development of modern Indian languages. Malayalam for instance as well as Kannada signaled their literary status by versions of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The first writing that histories of Malayalam begin with is a mostly Tamil rewriting of the *Ramayana*, the twelfth century *Ramacharitam*, which only treats the Yudha Kanda. However Malayalam literature takes definite shape only in the 14th century CE. This was when Madhava Panicker, Sankara Panicker and Rama Panicker composed their versions of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. They are called the Niranam poets, and their works mark an important stage in the formation of Malayalam. Madhava Panikkar wrote a condensed Malayalam translation of *Bhagavad Gita*, while Sankara Panikkar composed **the Bharuthamala**, a condensation of *Mahabharatham*. Rama Panikkar is considered to be the greatest of them, and is the author of *Ramayanam, Bharatham, Bhagavatham, and Sivarathri Mahatmyam. Kannassa Ramayanam* and *Kannassa Bharatham* are the most important of these Niranam works. The two epics were given various Malayalam avatars, and found one of their most famous composers in Thunchattu Ezhuthachan (15th century CE) who composed the *Sri Mahabharatam Kilipattu* as also the famous *Adhyatma Ramayana*. This gave Ezhuthachan the stature of the father of the Malayalam language. One finds that in Kannada, Pampa (10th century CE) is the first of their great writers and achieved his greatness with *Vikramajurna Vijaya*, also known as the *Pampabharata*, because it is a Kannada rewriting of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. Pampa was a Jain and also wrote a Jain epic, the *Adipurana*. While other

Sanskrit works also inspired early Kannada works (e.g. Banabhatta's *Kadambari* which is in prose finds a fine verse equivalent in the Kannada *Karnataka Kadambari* written by Nagavarma, who also belonged to the tenth century CE), the *Mahabharata* continued to inspire Kannada writers, with another tenth century writer, Ranna, composing the *Sahasa Bhima-Vijaya*. The *Ramayana* finds its fist major Kannada version in the twelfth century, when Nagacandra wrote *Ramacandracarita Purana*. This history is repeated in language after language in India, be it Bengali and Krittibass's 15th century Ramayana, or Hindi with Tulsidas's *Ramacaritamanasa* (16th-17th century CE), or Marathi where the beginnings of Marathi literature can be seen in the saint Jnaneswara's commentary on the *Bhagwat Gita, Jnaneswari*, and its consolidation in Ekanatha's sixteenth century *Bhavartha Ramayana*, or Oriya and Sarala Das's *Mahabharata, Ramayana*, and *Chandipurana* are seen as the foundational texts of the language, or Telugu with Nannay's eleventh century *Bharata*.

By now it must be clear that Indian literatures point to a commonality of cultural and religious influences, a unity that is expressed in different languages, and in divergent localized expressions. As Sisir Kumar Das points out, "the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and the Puranas helped towards the growth of a perception of a unified India despite its political disunity" (Das 2005: 16). In fact our idea of India corresponds to that of the India of the middle period which "inherited the idea of a sacred geography characterized by holy rivers and mountains and cities" (16). Places sacred to the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains become part of this imagination. The mythical and the real interpenetrate to give rise to this imagined India. In fact religion played a large part in this cultural continuity with most parts of India participating in the divisions and hostilities between the Saiva and the Vaisnava sects. While bhakti was always a part of our cultural unity, Saivism and Vaisnavism found new avatars in the south during the middle period. Shaktiism or the worship of the Mother Goddess in all her aspects was also prevalent across the country. Thus, it should not surprise us that the texts we have been noticing come out of and give sustenance to Bhakti movement(s) and literature(s). One should not underestimate the work of Sankara (late eighth century CE) and Ramanuja (late eleventh century) in reinvigorating philosophical traditions and their concepts of non-dualism and dualism have become part of popular thought. Sankara also imposed a certain unity in India by establishing four mathas at the four corners of India. Both Ramanuja and Sankara were successful in gaining converts to their positions and both wrote exclusively in Sanskrit, the link language of the culture.

The Bhakti Movement

The Bhakti movement had its beginnings in the Tamil country in the sixth century CE. This movement, which lasted till the tenth century in Tamil Nadu, was powered by the Nayanmars and Alwars, two groups of saint-poets, the first being devotees of Shiva and the latter devotees of Vishnu. Vishnu was also worshipped in his avatars as Krishna and Rama. While Jainism and Buddhism held sway in Tamil Nadu for a few centuries after the turn of the millennium, by the middle of the sixth century, Hinduism (or Brahmanism) reasserted itself. One of the Nayanmars, Triujnana Sambandhar, is credited with single-handedly defeating Buddhism and Jainism. He was a great singer-composer and like other Nayanmars and Alwars would sing in front of deities.

Processions where the saint and the followers would sing and dance their ecstatic devotion became common during this period. This ecstasy in worship, which characterized the Bhakti movement had its origins in ancient practices of worship in Tamil Nadu. According to George Hart, "the custom of ecstasy in worship survived in Tamil Nadu to produce the Nayanmars and Alwars, who went about Tamil Nadu singing ecstatic songs about Siva and Vishnu, and were largely responsible in later times for the position of pre-eminence those gods attained as well as for the Bhakti movement" (29) The Tamil Bhakti movement gave rise to three major texts — *Tevaram*, *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, and *Srimat Bhagavata*. The first is an anthology of songs written by three Nayanmars (Saivite saints), Sambandhar, Appar, and Sundarar, and is in Tamil. The second, an anthology of four thousand devotional songs in Tamil is written by the twelve Alwars. Both were compiled in the tenth century. *Srimat Bhagavata* is perhaps composed entirely in the tenth century and is in Sanskrit, and is an expression of the kind of bhakti that came out of the movement headed by the Nayanmars and the Alwars. This bhakti, as already pointed out is an outpouring of emotions, an intense expression of the ecstasy of devotion. As Sisir Kumar Das says, "the saints spread a new message of love and hope for the common man. If the Bhakti movement emerged mainly as a reaction against the life-negating rigorous principles of Buddhism and Jainism, it was partly against the dry formalism of the Brahmanical system as well". (Das 2005: 50) Also, as Das points out, "by their social behaviour and personal practices the saints went beyond the taboos of caste and birth". (51) Thus, a form of personal worship, one that went beyond and, sometimes, against organized religion, became a force that swept through the rest of India, challenging orthodoxies even while affirming cultural values that had always characterized the people of the land.

From the Tamil Andal (9th century CE) to Meera (16th century CE) in the north, from Tukaram in Maharashtra to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (15th-16th century CE) in the east, there are a number of names that one associates with the Bhakti movement. Between the 14th to the 17th centuries CE, the Bhakti movement became a major force in north India. Vallabha, Kabir, Tulsidas along with Meera, Chaitanya, and Tuka were all spearheads of this movement. The Bhakti poets can be divided into those who worship the formless God or the One with form. However, this distinction did not have as great an impact as the fact that they sang of personal faith. As we know, the Bhakti saints came from different castes and many of them were women. Among the more famous women are Akkamahadevi (12th century CE), Meera, Jahinabai (13th century CE) and Bahinabai (17th century CE). They composed and spoke in the language of the people, and spread the message of individual devotion, thus democratizing literary culture, and strengthening literatures in various Indian languages. Songs, imagery from every day life, using elements of speech, dance, and drama, all characterize Bhakti poetry as attested to in the works of composers like Jayadeva (11th century CE), Vidyapati (14th century CE), Chandidas (14th-15th century CE), Bhakta Narasimha (15th century CE) and Meerabai, from different parts of India, composing in different languages. Other than Urdu, almost all Indian languages that established themselves during this period owe a great deal to the Bhakti movement. The Bhakti movement contributed to the shaping of India's composite culture, influencing practices in various religions. The singing of qawalis in Dargahs by Muslims, and the singing of Gurbani in Gurudwaras by Sikhs owes as much to the Bhakti movement as does the singing of kirtans in Hindu temples. The message of sufi saints is seen to be in dialogue and agreement with that of the Bhakti poets. It would not be wrong to say then that the Bhakti movement

played a major role in the weaving together of the Indian culture and civilization in through the last centuries of the first millennium and through the first half of the second

1.6 CONCLUSION

Thus, we can see that the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are the two pillars on which the edifice of Indian culture is built. These and the *Puranas* have traveled across the land and found avatars in almost all Indian languages. We can also see that there is a great deal of cross-pollination in Indian literatures and that they go through similar phases and movements (sometimes with a certain time lag). This is because the political structures, the social institutions, the cultural roots and traditions, the literary influences, are shared across the land by all the people. Thus, one is able to talk of Indian Literature the same way that one is able to talk of European Literature, where languages have established themselves separately, often define themselves in opposition to other languages, and yet show the same characteristics and are a result of the same cultural and historical influences. This is something we will see in the modern period as well, in the years leading to our independence from British rule, and in the years after our independence.

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. Why is it difficult to define Indian Literature?
2. Is ancient Tamil Literature completely unaware of Sanskrit Literature?
3. If Bhakti has always been a part of Indian culture, what was unique about the Bhakti movement?
4. What is the role of the two major Sanskrit epics in the construction of Indian culture?

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 THE CONCEPT OF INDIAN LITERATURE: MODERN PERIOD

Structure

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will try to show how the concept of Indian Literature was reinvigorated during the colonial period and how it had shaped up till independence. [This is after all the time when the modern nation state of India was debated and imagined and finally came into being (only to be interrogated time and again)]. While we have already seen how Indian literatures do come together weaving a rich tapestry of values and aesthetics during earlier times, we will observe how modern Indian languages established and strengthened themselves during the colonial/postcolonial period of our history. While the comparative method may still be the best way to study Indian literatures, we shall also see how during this period the political consciousness of an entire nation was kindled in unity and in this desire to form a unified India was nationalist literature born. [So even if we feel that we don't have one national literature even now, we can see that nationalist literature was written during the colonial period, when we united in opposing the British who were ruling our land.] This nationalist phase disappeared after our independence when our various languages and linguistic cultures began to seek their own territories and separate spaces. Till 1947 (and even after) various parts of our country underwent similar social and cultural changes, and this similarity may be expressed in our literatures, but part of the similarity between the various literary cultures is the attempt to assert uniqueness, and to showcase distinctness. We will see how in this period similar movements could be seen in our various literatures.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Colonial interventions including the introduction of printing presses and the new education system made an impact on various languages. The growing awareness of the colonial yoke galvanized nationalist feeling and various writers influenced the thoughts of a nascent nation. We shall begin by surveying nineteenth century literatures first and then move on to the twentieth century pre-Independence literature and study the various movements that can be seen to occur in almost all our major literary languages.

2.2 19TH CENTURY

2.2.1 Introduction

As we saw in the previous unit, the way to read Indian literatures is to see the ideas and philosophical movements that crisscross the subcontinent that had considerable impact on various Indian languages. We realized that literatures in various Indian languages were actually in conversation with each other. So in order to study Indian Literature(s), one must pinpoint the common historic moments that shaped these literatures and to trace the common influences on them and their influence on each other. This is not to ignore the differences and our justifiably famed plurality. We are however interested in what unites the literatures and what makes us feel that it is one spirit being expressed in different languages. It is interesting to see that during the 19th century and till half way through the next, even as various Indian languages established their territorial hold, strengthened their cultural and social moorings, they helped to develop an idea of modern India and create a political Indian consciousness. This was because they were enabled to chart their own courses during the period of colonisation when they also allied with each other to oppose the colonial power and helped in the cause to fight for Indian independence. Thus, when we talk about the modern period in Indian literary history we have to start from the advent of British colonialism in our country.

2.2.2 Introduction of Printing Press

It was with the increased British and missionary presence in India that the printing press established itself in the country, standardizing our languages, helping in the development of a supple prose, and changing the way in which our texts were transmitted and circulated — signaling the end of the era of written manuscripts.

One must remember that the first printing press was introduced into India by the Portuguese in sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century there were printing presses in existence in many parts of South India (the most famous being the Tranquebar press, established in 1713). However it was with the establishment of the Serampore Printing Press in Bengal in 1800 that printing came into its own, since the press could publish in various Indian languages. Willaim Carey, who set up the press, also set up a paper making factory. Within the next fifty years most parts of India, from Assam to Gujarat to Kerala saw printing presses and the consequent revolution. While the aim of most of these presses was to help in the work of missionaries, to publish bibles and prayers in local languages, their direct contribution was to the

standardization of grammar, vocabulary and spelling of these languages. With the advent of newspapers, a modern prose developed. This easy circulation of information and literature had an immense impact, social as well as political on Indians. However, we must also remember that this circulation of written literature created a gulf between the elite and the messes ----- earlier all literature circulated through oral means but now a reading public came into being and differentiated itself from the illiterate public. We must also remember that the same fifty years saw the introduction of English as the medium of education, and that the year of our first war of Independence (1857) also saw the establishment of three major Indian universities — Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay (now Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai). Thus, this century saw a radical change come about, a re-evaluation of tradition, a new valorization of the scientific and the rational, and the birth of a new political consciousness that was ironically the result of colonisation.

2.2.3 The Language Situation

The advent of English education sounded the death knell for Arabic and Persian, the two dominant languages of the immediately preceding centuries. Persian, one must remember, was even the court language of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the famous Sikh ruler. While Sanskrit continued to retain its position of prestige, the nineteenth century was the century of modern Indian languages: Tamil of course had an ancient literary tradition but languages like Assamese Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, Punjabi, Oriya, Telugu, and Sindhi too had a rich literary culture by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Urdu was of course seen as the crowning jewel of India at the time, and there were also a number of other languages that had seen the beginnings of literatures, and there were many others who had a rich oral literary culture. Many of these languages acquired scripts during this period. As Sisir Kumar Das points out, "the situation was very complex indeed and yet in terms of the hierarchy between the languages among different groups there was a stable pattern..." (Das 1991: 28) This hierarchy manifested itself in terms of prestige: Sanskrit and Persian were link languages amongst the educated, and were languages that were both held in high esteem, and both conferred prestige on writers and other languages. There were certain dominant local languages also — Urdu and Braj, e.g. — and whatever other language a bilingual writer may write in, it was considered nobler to write in such a literary language. Hindi reached out to most people and would also gain from its association with the independence movement. However, the language of power, prestige, and aspiration was soon to be English.

It will not be an exaggeration to say the situation in India in the beginning of the nineteenth century paralleled that of the beginning of the twenty-first century. People, in both the periods, identified English as the language that enabled them to achieve material affluence. It is seen as a passport to success. There were English teaching shops in Kolkata in the beginning of the nineteenth century as people tried to learn the language anyhow. The initial policy of the British was for the administrators to learn the local languages, not for the Indians to learn English. But there were many Indians who demanded English — some for the new knowledge systems (prominent among Indians who argues for English education for this reason was Raja Rammohun Roy), and others simply for the language for commercial reasons. There was a long drawn out debate amongst the British about their language policy and

finally Lord T.B. Macaulay won the day for English with his justly famous Minute on Education (1835). But even before 1835 many schools had been established that taught in English, and the famous Hindu College (now called Presidency College) in Kolkata came up in the second decade of the nineteenth century and famously produced Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, the first Indian English poet. English dislodged Persian completely, and not only became the lingua franca of the country, it began to influence various Indian languages, and also became a language of literary expression in the country. One has to realize that it was a break with the literary power relations with Sanskrit and Persian, and the new acquaintance with English and European literatures, that allowed literatures in various Indian languages to come into their own in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

2.2.4 Prose and Journalism

While scholars have pointed out that Indian languages had a tradition of prose writing, it does seem that prose came into its own only after the establishment of printing presses and the intervention of foreigners. It is in the nineteenth century that prose is used copiously for both literary and non-literary purposes. The different colleges set up by the East India Company, the College of Fort William at Kolkata, and the College of Fort St. George at Chennai, were intended to serve the interests of British civil servants by producing grammars and readers in Indian languages. Scholars, Indian and British, employed by the colleges compiled tales and other prose texts as source materials for language teaching and conducted research into the structures of various languages, wrote grammars and textbooks for the first thirty to forty years of the nineteenth century. One must remember that Christian missionaries had embarked on a similar activity as far back as in the sixteenth century itself and that prose works, e.g. in Tamil and Malayalam, and grammars and dictionaries had already been produced by Portuguese, Italian, and German missionaries in South India. However, it cannot be denied that this intervention of British imperialism had a lasting impact on Indian prose styles.

Prose became the chief pedagogical tool in language education, and education in general and thus the demand for textbooks around the country strengthened prose writing. Also, the need to defend native religions against the arguments of Christian missionaries and to circulate this defense quickly and effectively called for prose writing and publication. This also led to a felt need for social reform which too was propagated through prose. And with all this came the rise of print journalism and the demand for a prose that would address everyday matters effectively. Newspapers and journals began appearing in various Indian languages in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was in these that writers experimented with prose styles, many of the journalists going on to become established writers in the languages. As Sisir Kumar Das points out, many changes were introduced in the languages:

> There was a sudden influx of loan-words, direct from Sanskrit and Persian, borrowings from English, and neologisms. This helped the growth of technical words as well, thus complementing the efforts of text-book writers ... [There were] also many innovations in syntax, most conspicuous of which is the increasing frequency of reported speech, a feature borrowed from English....

Thus the emergence of prose in various Indian languages can be seen as a major step in the modernization of Indian literatures and languages. This

modernization was a result of colonial intervention but would also serve the cause of nationalism, becoming the vehicle of reaction to the ideologies of western domination.

2.2.5 Literature Till 1857

It is interesting to note that Indian English literature, that was almost a natural outcome of the domination of the English language and the aspiration of Indians to write and interact in the language of power, almost in its moment of conception is filled with patriotism and a new nationalism. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is in this literature that the notion of an independent India was born. The first Indian English poet, Henry Derozio (1809-1831) and the poets who followed him enunciated the idea of a captive India and a need for a national resurgence. They talked of contemporary issues no doubt but to me their importance lies in poems like Derozio's sonnets on India or the short story, "A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945" by Kylas Chunder Dutt, which speaks of an uprising against the British more than a century later — the patriotism and the desire for freedom they exhibit was yet to enter the Indian psyche at large, yet to be exhibited in other Indian language literatures.

For in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, most Indian literatures were enmeshed in their traditions. It is Urdu poetry that dominates this period. The greatest of all Urdu poets, Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869), as well as other writers of the period (Ibrahim Zauq, Momin, Anis, Dabir, to name some) were exponents of their tradition. The pulls of Persian and Arabic can be seen in their poetry just as the pull of Sanskrit can be seen in the poetry of some other languages. The poetry of this period in Indian languages seems to be caught in a time warp, speaking of other times and places and movements. It is only in Indian English writing that one sees the ferment that Indian polity and cultural life was going through.

2.2.6 The 'Birth' of the Novel

Almost all literary historians agree that the novel in India emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was in 1857, the time of the First War of Indian Independence, that the first notable novel was published in an Indian language. This was *Alaler Gharer Dulal*, a novel in Bengali, written by Peari Chand Mitra (1814-83) under the pseudonym of Techand Thakur. This novel had been serialized earlier in a monthly magazine. The novel was noted for both its contemporary theme and vibrant prose, for its use of colloquial language that hadn't yet been used in literary discourse. The impact of the novel was such that this style of writing was soon known as "Alali language'. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), who is popularly known as the first of the novelists, was very impressed by Mitra's achievement, especially his use of colloquial Bengali and his Bengali subject matter. Bankim himself started off his career as a novelist with a work in English: *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864). He followed this up soon after with *Dugesnandini* (1865), which was a huge success and established him as a great writer in Bengali. Bankim was to play a major role in the way fellow Indians imagined their history, as he tried to chart a history of masculine valour, looking toward the Rajputs and the Marathas for Hindu heroes, those who fought the might of invaders. Invariably, the invaders were Muslims, since Bankim not only did not attack the British directly as foreign rulers, he actually expressed in *Anandamath* (1882), his

famous novel that gave us the song "Vande Mataram", the hope that British rule would bring about peace and order. Bankim popularized historical romances, a la Walter Scott, who along with Lytton was a much admired novelist of the era.

But perhaps the most famous of all Bengali writers is Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), and he made as much of an impact on the novel as he did in the other literary genres. He too started with the historical novel: his *Bauthakuranir Hat* (18 83), and *Rajarishi* (1887) were quite different from those of Bankimchandra's even though Tagore held the pioneering novelist in great esteem. Even in his historical novels, Tagore moved into the inner realm of the mind. However, most of Tagore's more famous novels were to be written in the twentieth century.

The novel seems to have entered most Indian languages in the decades after the First War of Independence, and to have been well established by the turn of the century. Like in Bengali, the first novel in Marathi was published in 1857. This was *Yamuna Paryatam* written by Baba Padmanji. This was a novel about conversion to Christianity and attacked Hindu practices especially with regard to widows. The first historical novel in Marathi was *Mochangad* (1871) written by R.B. Gunjikar (1843-1901). Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919) began writing his social novels in 1885 and by the time he wrote *Ganpatrao* (1887-88), which is about the problems of a daughter-in-law, and later novels that show us an accurate picture of middle-class life in its entire range, he had grown to be a major novelist. The first novel in Gujarati, *Karan Ghelo*, again modeled on Scott and about the last Hindu king of Gujarat, was published by Nandashankar Mehta (1835-1905) in 1866. The first novel in Urdu was *Miratul Urus* (1869) by Nazir Ahmad (1836-1912). This novel about a middle-class girl, about the differences that were being made by education and reform arising as a result of colonialism, was highly influenced by *Sandford and Merton*, a little known novel by the now relatively unknown English novelist, Thomas Day. Pandit Rattan Nath Sarshar (1845-1902) was another famous novelist from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. His very first novel, *Farsana-i-Azad* (serialized in 1878-1879 and published in four volumes 1880), made him famous. It is about the decadent Lucknowi culture during the Nawabi era. Towards the end of the century came what is perhaps the most famous Urdu novel — *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899) by Mohammad Hadi Ruswa. This decade also saw the publication of many historical novels.

The first novel in Telugu was *Ranga Raja Charitra* (1872) by Gopala Krishnamma Chetty (1949-1921). This was written as a prose epic to reflect the customs and conventions of Telugu society and to be of help to Telugu students. The author criticizes the caste system and other Hindu conventions. K.V Pantulu (1847-1919) wrote *Rajasekhara Charitra* in 1880, and according to many this is the first genuine novel in Telugu. C.L. Narasimhan Pantulu (1867-1946) was also a successful writer who began his career in the 1890s. His *Ramachandra Vijayam* (1896) is considered a major realistic novel and depicts the life of the Konasima region. This is about the struggle of a young orphan boy and how he overcomes all odds. There were also a number of social novels written towards the end of the century that tackled the evils of the dowry system and of the caste system.

In Tamil, the first novel was published in 1879 — *Pratapa Mudaliyar Charitram* by Samuel Vedanayakam Pillai (1826-1889). A first person narrative, the novel displays a sense of humour even as it tries to educate the

reader. Gnanambal the heroine of the novel, while dressed in male clothes, is chosen as the king by an elephant! She proves to be an able ruler and the narrator tells us many other stories and anecdotes in this rambling novel. Two other major Tamil writers made their debut in the last decade of the nineteenth century — B.R. Rajam Iyer (1872-98), and Madhavayya (1872-1925). The former's *Kamalambal Charitram* (1893) and the latter's *Padmavathi Charitram* (1898) portray the life of common people, but both depict the Brahmin community, and if the first is philosophical the second depicts the impact of English education, the movement to the city, and the plight of widows. The first detective novel also made its appearance in Tamil in 1894 — this was by S.M. Natesa Sastri (1859-1906).

The first novel in Hindi, *Pariksha Guru* written by Shrinivas Das (1850-1887) was published in 1882. This was about a middle class trader and is a realistic novel about the trading community and about generation gap. In Kannada, the first novel came in 1892, a historical novel, *Suryakanta*, written by Lakshamana Rao Gadagkar. Interestingly a translation of Bankim's *Durgesnandini* had appeared in Kannada in 1885. In Malayalam the first novel appeared it 1887: this was Appu Nedungadi's *Kudalata*. Again influenced by Walter Scott, it is a romance credited for its dialogue. However, it is *Indulekha* (1889) by Chandu Menon (1847-1900) that is usually celebrated as the first Malayalam novel. *Indulekha* was a critique of prevailing social customs. C.V. Raman Pillai (1958-1922) introduced the historical novel in Malayalam with his hugely successful *Marthanda Varma* (1891). The first novel in Assamese was written by Padmanath Gohain Barua (1871-1946) in 1890. This novel *Bhanumati* and its successor *Lahari* (1891) were historical novels set in the 18th and the 19th century respectively. In Oriya, the first novel came out in 1891 — this was *Bibasini* by Ramashankar Roy (1858-1907). This was again a historical novel full of romance and adventure. It is set in the days of Maratha rule and shows a band of young men leading a revolt.

In Punjabi, the first novel was *Sundari* (1897) written by Bhai Vir Singh. This deals with Sikh history when the Moghuls were resisted by the Sikhs. The first novel in Sindhi, *Zinat* written by Mirza Qalich Beg (1853-1920) came out in 1890. A novel about the need for education of women, this is more or less a realist piece of fiction that describes the society of its times in contemporary language.

Thus, almost all the major modern languages of India had seen the advent of the novel before the end of the century and in many of them the novel was fairly well established by that time.

2.2.7 Poetry

It is not to Bengali that we must look for the first poetic reactions to the influence of the West but to Gujarati, Kavi Dalpatram Dahyabhai (1820-98). Dalpatram wrote about modernity, about the new (urban) world — about printing presses, railways, fire brigades, education of women, tobacco, foreign travel etc. His first poem, *Bapani Pipar*, was written in 1845 and has been seen as a milestone in Gujarati poetry, the first truly modern poem. He is seen to have written an English type of poetry in Gujarati. Dalpatram's contemporary Narmadashankar Lalshankar Dave (1833-86), popularly known as Narmad, is often seen as the true pioneer who brought in nature poetry into

Gujarati as also a new strain in love poetry, a love that was not devotional. This change to a new idiom was reinforced by the poetry of Narsinhrao Bholanat Divatia (1859-1937) who was greatly influenced by English poetry and who tried to mould Gujarati poetry accordingly. He produced two volmues of poetry in the nineteenth century, the first of which was *Kusum Mala* (1887).

If Indian English poetry from Bengal was the first to react to western poetry and thought, we see that even in Bengali, tradition continued to rule poetry. The first modern poet of note, one who contributed immensely to the development of Bengali poetry, was Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) who began his career as an Indian English poet and turned to writing in Bengali only in 1860, publishing *Tilottamasambhav Kavya*. This was immediately hailed as the marker of a new literary era in Bengali. He then went on to write his famous epic, *Meghnadbadh Kavya* (1861), and followed it with love-lyrics in *Vrajanagana Kavya* (1861). His other works include heroic epistles (*Viragana Kavya*, 1862) and sonnets (*Chaturdaspadi Kavitavali*, 1866). Michael Madhusudan Dutt introduced in this six-year span a whole range of styles into Bengali poetry — the epic, blank verse, ode, heroic epistle, and the sonnet. His *Meghnadbadh Kavya* exhibits the reassessment of tradition that all Indian intellectuals were forced to make and, as Ashis Nandy argues in his foundational book, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983), Dutt makes Ravana the hero of his poem because he is reacting to readings of Hinduism as an effeminate religion, and hence makes the urban, technological masculine villain of the Ramayana his hero and relegates to the other side the pastoral Rama. It is often said that it was his experimentation that had a far reaching impact on Bengali poetry, but perhaps it was the success of his experimentation that led to the freedom of Bengali poetry from the shackles of traditionalism.

Other Bengali poets who followed Dutt were influenced equally by English poetry and a poet like Akshaychandra Choudhury (1850-98) echoes Thomas Parnell and Alexander Pope. While Biharilal Chakrabarty (1835-98) has been hailed for writing modern lyrics, it is also pointed out that he did not know any English poetry and that his work was completely within the Bengali tradition and in reaction to the imitations of western poetry. His mystical and romantic poetry made an impact on the truly major voice to emerge from Bengali — that of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1841) who spans the turn of the century as a true colossus, influencing writing all around India. He published his first work *Sandhyasangit* in 1882. He began his career as a Romanticist but his poetry really came of age with the publication of *Manasi* in 1890, and in the following decade he is said to have written some of his best poems as he moved towards a thirst for God.

While Bholanath Das (1858-1929), and Kamalakanta Bhattacharya (1853-97) are sometimes seen as poets of transition in Assamese, they herald a new spirit in the language. Bholanath Das is known for his introduction of the blank verse into Assamese poetry in his highly successful *Sitaharan Kavya* (1884). His contemporary Kamalakanta Bhattacharya wrote patriotic poetry in the vein of the romantics. He was instrumental in enabling succeeding poets write social poetry rather than religious verse.

In Hindi, poetry writing was impeded because of the ascension of Khariboli as the language for literary activity, displacing Brajbhasha. Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-84), who ushered in the modern era in Hindi poetry,

advocated the use of Khariboli but hiw own poetry he wrote in Brajbhasha. His poetry reflected the nascent nationalism of the time. But it was only towards the last decade of the century that Hindi poets managed to write in Khariboli. Ayodhya Simha Upadhyaya (1865-1947), Maithili Sharan Gupta (1886-1964), Ram Naresh Tripathi (1889-1962), to name a few poets, all began to write after 1895. Their poetry was seen as message poetry, didactic in intention.

Marathi poetry saw the publication of the first modern poem by Keshavsut (1866-1905). This new spirit in poetry was again inspired by the western education system and English poetry. Keshavsut's favourite poets were the English Romantic poets, those represented in *The Golden Treasury*. He was a social reformer, writing against untouchability, the condition of women, about all about the stultifying traditions. He employed the rhythms of spoken Marathi in his poetry and avoided embellishments. The impact of the new times was felt by other poets as well — like Narayan Vaman Tilak (1865-1919) who wrote nature poetry.

The first of the moderns in Oriya poetry was Radhanath Ray (1948-1908). Not just a product of the new education system, Ray was also Inspector and, later, held an important post in the Orissa Education Service. Some of his early works are *Kedaranagari* (1886), *Chandrabhaga* (1886), and *Nandikeswari* (1887). The first is based on the story of Pyramus and Thisbee, the second on Apollo's pursuit of Daphne, and the third is inspired by Ovid and Byron. He tried his hand at the epic in *Mahayatra* (1896), the first poem written in blank verse in Oriya. He was heavily influenced by Milton, Pope, Shakespeare, and other western writers. He changed the style of Oriya poetry and created a taste for the new. His contemporary Madhusudan Rao (1853-1912) was a school teacher and then became a senior officer in the Education Service. He wrote lyrics and sonnets and introduced a mystic dimension into modern Oriya poetry. The earliest experiment in a new lyricism in Malayalam was *Malayalvilasam* (1895) by Rajaraja Varma (1863-1918). However, major changes took place in Malayalam like in other languages, only in the first decades of the twentieth century.

2.2.8 Drama

It is interesting to see the changes that took place in Indian drama with the arrival of Shakespeare and other English plays and the introduction of the proscenium arch and the auditorium. While there were a number of translations from Shakespeare in different languages, one must note that the changing situations in India led to early treatment of the new social dynamics in drama. The Assamese play *Ram-Navami* by Gunabhiram Barua (1837-95), which is about widow-remarriage, was written in 1857. While this was a social tragedy, a number of light plays and farces came to be written soon after in Assamese. Hemchandra Barua (1835-97) wrote *Kantyar Kirtan* (1861) about the evil effects of opium. Padmanath Gohain Barua (1871-1946) wrote *Gaonbura* (1897) wrote about the miseries of a village headman under the British rule. The last decade also saw the development of mythological drama.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the poet, was also a dramatist of note in Bengali. Two farces written by him, *Ekei ki Bhale Sabyata?* and *Buro Saliker Ghare Ro* (both written in 1859) are about contemporary times and mores, and both

are influenced by Moliere. He also wrote more serious comedies and tragedies, among which *Mayakanan* (1874) is often seen as the grimmest of his plays. He was a great dramatist with an assurance of craft. His contemporary Dinabandhu Mitra (1829-74) was not so accomplished but is justly famous for his play *Nil Darpan* (1860), which is about the exploitative indigo planters in Bengal. This is one of the first political protest plays and also one of the most successful. The first public theatre, the National Theatre, was established in Bengal in 1872. Soon, actresses began to perform in plays here. A number of plays attacking British rule or enunciating patriotic values were performed here. Jyotindranath Tagore (1848-1925) and Upendranath Das (1848-95), both had patriotic plays performed in the early 1870s which saw other such plays as well, which led to the promulgation of the Dramatic Performances Act of 1875. One must mention that the major figure who dominated Bengali theatre after this was the actor-manager-playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912). His fame rests on the way he kept his professional company afloat and is a part of theatrical history.

The Parsee theatre emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and though known Gujarati writers like Dalpatram were associated with some of these companies, there is no extant play of any significance from the early period. While playwrights like Dalpatram and Pandya tried to write socially conscious plays, the Parsee Gujarati theatre became a vehicle for entertainment for a long time. Urdu dramatic writing flourished because of Parsee theatre — playwrights like Aram ruled this phase, The Parsee theatre also kickstarted drama in Hindi as it did in other languages like Telugu, Kannada, and Tamil, where professional and amateur companies were formed in imitation. But serious Hindi theatre arose in reaction to it, and the father of modern Hindi poetry, Bhartendu Harish Chandra, was also the first Hindi dramatist. He wrote plays in order to create social awakening. His plays explore the past in order to kindle nationalist passions against foreign domination. Plays like *Prem Jogini* (1875) critiqued contemporary degradation of society. While he protests against decadent social institutions, Bhartendu also attacks westernization in his sixteen plays. His contemporary playwrights like Srinivas Das (1851-97), Pratap Naraian Misra (1856-94), Radhacharan Goswami (1858-1925), and others wrote romantic, mythological, historical or patriotic plays like Bhartendu and also attempted to write problem plays.

2.3 TWENTIETH CENTURY — 1900-1947

This was the time of nationalist ferment, the decades that saw the consolidation of the movement for independence and the serious rift that arose between the Congress and the Muslim League and that led to the partition of the subcontinent. The conversation between various regions as they strove to come together was seen in the extensive translation activity from one Indian language into another. Works by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, and Rabindaranath Tagore were made available in most Indian languages as well as English. They influenced both thought and style in various Indian literatures.

2.3.1 The Novel

The first decades saw not only the continuing influence of English novelists but also that of the famous Bengali novelists. Rajanikanta Bardoloi (1868-

(1939), the Assamese novelist, is said to have taken a vow that he would enrich Assamese with historical novels written in the style of Walter Scott and Bankimchandra Chatterjee. He wrote seven such historical novels beginning with Manomati (1900). He also wrote novel Miyari Jiyari (1894), which is about the Miri tribe. His historical novels depict the decline of the Ahom rule in Assam, and Manomati has the Burmese invasion of Assam as the bacground. It is a love story in the Romeo and Juliet mould.The first of the social novelies in Assamese was Dandinath Kalita (1890-1955) who began to write in 1908. Howere it is Sadhana (1929) that has a Gandhian character, and that begins a phase in his career in which he deals with social purification and the enabcipation of women. The same Gandhian influence can be seen in the novels of Daibhachandra Talukdar (1900-67) wose best known novel is Apurna (1931) that depicts the tragic story of Premadhar, a Gandhian youth who betrays his ideal love .His novels are filled with incident and ideals of the Gandhian movenment, from removal of untouchability to the creation of industry

The early decades of the twentieth century saw two really bright stars in the genre of the novel, both Bengali writers — Saratchandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) and Rabindranath Tagore. It may not seem so now but Saratchandra was hailed as a phenomenal writer, far greater than other Indian writers of the time. His sentimental novels that dealt with middle class life were popular all over India and were translated into many Indian languages. Born in a lower middle class family, Saratchandra wrote with great sympathy about the plight of the middle class Bengali women, and about fallen women. He wrote with great simplicity and his descriptions of lower middle class life as well as about poverty-stricken lives struck many chords as did his expression of traditional womanly virtues — his prostitutes too are chaste at heart. He critiques religious practices that led to social discrimination, superstitions and immorality. The immense popularity and reputation of his works were perhaps because of his narrative ability and his simple language. Saratchandra's first novel, *Badadidi* (1907), was serialized in *Bharti* and brought him almost instant fame. He went on to write several novels, including *Bindur Chhele* (1914), *Parinita* (1914), *Pallisamaj* (1916), *Devdas* (1917), *Charitrahin* (1917), *Niskrti* (1917), *Shrikanta* (Part 1-4, 1917-33), *Pather Dabi* (1926), *Shes Prashna* (1931) etc.. *Srikanta*, *Charitrahin*, and *Pather Dabi* were some of his more popular works. *Pather Dabi* was banned by the British Government because of its revolutionary theme. His continued popularity is attested to by the number of successful movies that have been made based on his works, including *Devdas*, *Srikanta*, *Ramer Sumati*, *Dena-Paona*, *Birajbau*, *Parinita* etc.

Throughout this period, Tagore continued to write and produce some of the most significant of Indian novels. He wrote some of the most difficult to write romantic novels (how would you get an adult man and an adult woman to meet and fall in love in the middle class society of the time?) many of which resort to accidents or chance to bring about the action. While this remains a staple technique in his work, Tagore tackles some of the most important debates of the time, including nationalism. He explores the impact of western influence on Bengali society in *Gora* (1910), *Chaturanga* (1916) and *Ghare Baire* (1916). *Ghare Baire* is justly famous for its complicated reading of human relationships as well as exploring the debate between nationalism and

liberal humanism. Throughout his career he explored man-womwn relationship and was a novelist of the mind as much as about a society in flux.

From the inid twenties. on wards. the Bengali novel saw the birth of **psychological** realism, and the stream of consciousness technique. **The** novelists **of what was** called the Kallol age wrote about the individual and his disjunction from society. This period once again saw a spate of translations from European languages into Bengali. Achintya Kumar Sengupta (1903-76), and Prabodhkumar Sanyal (1907-1983) are some of the well known novelists **from** this period who wrote about the alienated individual. Three other writers, all Banerjees — Tarashankar (1898-1971), Bibhutibhusan (1894-1950), and Manik (1908-1956) — stand tall as novelists in mid-century Bengali. **Bibhutibhushan** perhaps second only to Saratchandra in popularity, is best-**know** for his first two novels *Pather Panchali* (1929) and its sequel *Aparijita* **(1931)** His seeming artlessness is used to great effect to depict the lives, **dreams,** and fears of rural people. Tarashankar Banerjee was a powerful writer, and depicted the lives of simple peasants, boatmen and minstrels of rural Bengal. His novels *Ganadevata* (1942) and *Panchagram* (1944) bring rural life alive. Manik Banerjee was deeply influenced by Marxism and by Freudian psychoanalsyis. Critics say that *Putul Nacher Itikatha* (1936) and *Padmanadir Majhi* (1936) reveal his Marxist leanings as well as his psycholgical approach.

ne pathbreaking work in Gujarati was *Sarasvatichandra*, which was published in four volumes between 1887 and 1901. Written by Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, it had a great impact on Gujarati writing. A huge novel (about 2000 pages long), *Sarasvatichandra* explores the cultural life of the times. But it is K.M. Munshi (1887-1971) who made his mark as a pioneer of the social and the historical novel. A lawyer by profession, Munshi published his first novel, *Verni Vasulat*, in 1913-1914. Written in a simple non-Sanskritised language, this social novel was quite different from anything that had come in Gujarati till then and was highly successful. His historical trilogy — *Pattanni Prabhuta* (1916), *Gujaratno Nath* (1919), and *Rajadhiraj* (1922) — are justly famous. Obviously, Mahatma Gandhi, who also evolved a simple direct prose style in Gujarati had a very great impact on Gujarati literature. One of the most famous Gandhian novelists from Gujarat was Ramanlal Vasantlal Desai (1892-1954). His idealistic novels expressed the spirit of the Gandhian age. His most famous novels are *Kokila* (1928), *Divayasakshu* (1932), *Bharelo Agni* (1935), which deals with the First War of Independence, *Pralaya* (1950), and *Balajogan* (1952). The regional novel also made its appearance in the writings of Jhaverchand Meghani (1897-1947). His novels, like *Sorath Toran Vaheta Pani* **(1937), Verision (1939),** and *Tulasi Kayaro* (1940) are all based in Saurashtra. He wrote of middle and lower middle class life in the region. The rural novel had its practitioner in Pannalal Patel (1912-1989). Novels like *Valamanan* (1940), *Malela Jiva* (1941), and *Manasvini Bhavai* (1949) bring rural Gujarat before our eyes, the last novel being about the great famine in Gujarat towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Premchand (1880-1936) heralded a new dawn in the Hindi novel and is one of the greatest of Indian novelists. A writer with a serious social commitment, Premchand wrote about middle-class life — both urban and rural. An idealistic and didactic writer, Premchand was nevertheless on the right track as far as the problems he identified were concerned. He wrote many works on the problems faced by women. Some of his famous novels are *Sevasadan* (1919), which was about prostitution, *Rangabhumi* (1925), which was a Gandhian

novel, *Nirmala* (1926), *Gaban* (1931), *Karmabhumi* (1932), which deals with untouchability, and *Godan* (1936). The last novel is considered his finest and a landmark in the development of the Hindi novel. A novel about peasant life, known for its sensitive portrayal of the social tragedy rural life in India , *Godan* is truly a novel of social vision. Premchand was influenced by Gandhiism and was aware of Marxism, and was a progressive writer. Many of his contemporaries also wrote novels about the status of women, Jainendra Kumar being the most famous of them. Jainendra's *Sunita* (1935) dealt with extramarital infatuation. He writes about the struggle of modern women against traditional morality but he usually stays with convention. This can be seen in other novels of his like *Tyagapatra* (1935) and *Sukhada* (1953) as well. This search for new moral values can be seen reflected in the novels of writers like Ajneya (1911-1987), in his *Shekhar: ek Jivani* (1940-44). There were also Marxist writers during this period, the most famous of whom is Yashpal (1903-76). Two of his novels from the period are *Deshdrohi* (1943) and *Dada Komred* (1941). Other than the Vrindavan Lal Verma (1889-1969), there are few historical novelists of note during the pre-Independence period. Like other historical novelists of the period he affirms a faith in a glorious past in order to express his nationalism in novels like *Gadha Kundar* (1929), and *Virata ki Padmini* (1930). Even the regional novel took longer to arrive in Hindi that in other languages.

In Kannada, it is said that the novel truly arrived with *Madiddunno Maharaya* (1915) by M.S. Puttanna (1854-1930). But historical novels did make their appearance earlier. The Kannada novel owes as much to translation from Bengali and Marathi (done by Venkatacharya and V.T.K. Galaganatha respectively) as to translations from European languages. If the first historical novel in Kannada was *Suryakanta* (1895) by Lakshmana Rao Gadagkar, the first detective novel was published in 1897 — this was *Coragrahana Tantra* by M. Venkatakrishnaiah (1844-1934). The first social novel was *Indira Bai* (1899) by Gulavadi Venkata Rao (1844-1913). This novel exposed traditional customs for the cruelty they imposed, and explored the hypocrisy that underlies religion. But Puttanna is revered as the first novelist of note because his *Madiddunno Maharaya* brings a rural community alive in the ten chapters it consists of. The novel, which is about the fortunes of two generations of a family, is written in a lively and colloquial style. The next major novelist in Kannada was Sivaram Karanth (1902-1997). His first novel *Devadutaru* (1928) also heralded the beginning of the Navodaya period in Kannada literature, a period of high romanticism, influenced also by the nationalist movement. This was the same year that Masti Venkatesha Iyengar (1891-1986) published his short novel *Subbanna*, and Devudu Narasimha Sastry (1896-1962) published his historical novel, *Mayura*. Sastry's *Antaranga* (1932) was the first psychological novel. Karanth's famous novel (also made into a successful film), *Chomana Dudi* (1933), was about the life of an untouchable. *Marali Mannige* (1942) by Karanth is also justly famous because it shows both the life of a community over three generations as also the relationship between human beings and nature and thus the universe. K.V. Puttappa (1904-1994), who wrote under the pen name of Kuvempu, brought alive the life of the hilly regions in his epic novel *Kanuru Subbamma Heggaditi* (1938). Social protest can be found in *Jivana Yatre* (1934) by A.N. Krishna Rao (1908-1971), and *Vishvamitrana Shrishti* (1934) by Adya Rangacharya (1904-84) is a novel about an outsider but one who is influenced by Gandhian teachings. The first novel to be completely influenced by

Gandhian thinking was *Sudarshana* (1933) by Betagiri Krishna Sharma (1900-1982). The progressive movement in the Kannada novel was to make its appearance only after Independence as did the existentialist Navya novel.

Mention has already been made of C.V. Raman Pillai who wrote the first historical novel in 1891. His characters and events are chosen from Travancore history and his fist two novels are named after Nair chieftains, Marthanda Varma and Dharma Raja. Pillai's *Ramaraja Bahadur* (1919) is often said to be the most successful of his novels. A number of historical novels were written after Pillai among which T. Raman Nambisan's *Keraleswaram* (1941) is considered to be equal to Pillai's historical romances. Narayan Gurukkal (1861-1948) wrote strong political satires — *Parappuram* (1906) and *Udaya Bhanu* (1925), and like in other languages detective fiction too made an early entry in *Bhaskara Menon* (1909) written by Appan Thampuran (1876-1942). The first social novels that are known for their social criticism are *Parishkarappati* (1925) by K.K. Thomman, which depicts the lives of Syrian Christians and the effect of English education on women, Potheri Kunjampu's *Sarasvati Vijayam* about the struggles of an ostracized Brahmin girl and a casteless boy, K.M. Panikkar's *Dorassini* (1931) which is a satire on westernized Malayali women, and B. Namboodaripad's *Aphante Magal* (1933) which is a critique of Brahminical society. While the progressive movement made its entry through the short story, the socialist realist novel makes its entry into Malayalam in the 1940s with the publication of *Balyakaalasakhi* (1944) by the well-known writer Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1910-1994) and *Otayil Ninnu* (1944) by P. Kesav Dev (1905-83). Basheer's first novel was a tragic love story which delineates the lives of the Muslim community in Kerala and *Otayil Ninnu* has a working class hero. The other major Malayali novelist of this generation, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (1912-99) wrote his most successful novels only after 1948 even though he began writing in the 1930s.

The Marathi novel had made an earlier beginning and had evolved into social entertainment, though some serious social novels did make their appearance in the nineteenth century itself. But it was the historical novels of Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919) that ushered in the modern period in the Marathi novel. From 1895 he began to write a number of historical novels — five on Shivaji (starting with *Usakkal*); one on Rajputs; one on the age of Chandragupta; one on the Vijayanagar empire. Apte's success inspired a whole spate of historical novels. As said earlier, he also wrote a number of social novels. One must also mention Vaman Malhar Joshi (1882-1943) who wrote strong novels about women, starting with *Ragini* (1916). The mid-twenties saw the emergence of two major writers — N. S. Phadke (1894-1978) and V.S. Khandekar (1889-1976). Phadke was an extremely prolific writer but one who believed in art of art's sake and wrote well-crafted works, many of which explored the minds of characters. Khandekar, on the other hand, was a Gandhian and wrote socially relevant fiction. Another major novelist of the period, G.T. Madhkholkar (1899-1976) was a political novelist who has written on the freedom movement. He also wrote social novels, again concentrating on women. Marathi again saw the emergence of women novelists like Gita Sane and Vibhavari Shirurkar. The regional novel made its appearance in the writings of R.V. Dighe whose *Pananakala* (1939) is said to be the first of such novels. R.S. Mardhekar's *Ratrica Divas* (1942) was the first stream of consciousness novel.

The colossus overshadowing everyone else in the Oriya novel is Fakirmohan Senapati (1843-1918). His *Lachama* (1901) and *Chamana Athaguntha* (1902)

are considered to the first two true novels in Oriya by many critics. He wrote about the common people and their problems, and used a colloquial style. The first novel is set in the past during the Maratha invasion of Orissa and shows the influence of Bankim. The second novel was a trend setter, followed later by novelists like Premchand and Tarashankar, that exhibited stark realism and dark humour, and was written with great sympatyhy for the poor. Senapati's influence on Oriya literature can never be overestimated. Among the social novelists who followed him, mention must be made of Nandakishore Bal (1875-1928) whose *Kanakalata* (1925) supports widow remarriage. Kuntal Kumari Sabat (1900-38), a major woman novelist, who wrote five novels, was full of patriotism and wrote for social reform, particularly with regard to women. The historical novels also became an established sub-genre of the Oriya novel. Gandhi and the freedom movement made their impact on the Oriya novel as well and one can safely say that K.C. Panigrahi's *Matira Manisa* (1934) is one of the most famous novels from the period.

The Punjabi novel before independence was first dominated by Bhai Vir Singh and then by Nanak Singh. If Vir Singh's attempt was to further the cause of the Singh Sabha movement by creating the Sikh hero, Nanak Singh, who was a prolific novelist, turned to Gandhian ideology and advocated social reform and humanism. His formula novels were to rule the roost till the emergence of Surinder Singh Narula in 1946 with his novel *Pio-Puttar*, which narrates the story of Amritsar during 1896-1918.

The Sindhi novel saw a number of social novels written in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This trend began earlier, in 1892 itself, with the publication of *Ajab Bhet* by Pritamdas Humumatrai. Two novelists from the early decades are Lalchand Amardinomal (1885-1954) and Bherimal Mehrchand (1875-1950). The first was known for his prose style, and the later for his advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity and also for the first crime novel in Sindhi, *Varial ain Naimat* (1915). Sindhi then saw the emergence of the Freudian psychological novel as well as the influence of Gandhi. Assanand Matora is a writer belonging to the psychological school, while Shewak Bhojraj is a Gandhian. There were also novels on rural life but the Sindhi novel of the period is known for its explorations of Hindu-Muslim interaction, an important area of concern for Sindhis.

- The first few decades belonged to popular entertainers in Tamil fiction. Perhaps the most powerful novel from this period is *Chandrikayin Kathai*, an incomplete novel by the famous poet Subramania Bharati (1882-1921). A major novelist who began to write in the 1930s was Kalki (R. Krishnamurthy, 1899-1954). He wrote a number of historical and social novels. His novel *Tyaga Bhumi* (1939) captures the social tensions of the times brilliantly. It is about a young woman, Savitri, and how this young village girl is transformed into a sophisticated urban woman with progressive views about women's liberation. She is reunited with her estranged husband when both of them participate in the national movement. Kalki's *Partipan Kanavu*, which began to be serialized from 1941, was a historical novel, which in the guise of talking about the struggles of the Chola king against the Pallava dynasty sketched out the Indian fight for freedom from the British. He wrote two other major historical novels — *Sivakamiyin Sapatam* (1945) and *Ponniyin Selvan* (1950). The forties also saw some rural novels but Kalki overshadowed most novelists during this period.

While the new century began with translations from Bengali which paved the way for a rejuvenation of the Telugu novel, the demand for a separate Andhra state in 1910 was the cause for the road it took. Many Telugu novelists like V.P. Kavulu, C.L. Narasimhan Pantulau, and D.R. Satchastri wrote novels with Telugu settings. But the Telugu novel reached its maturity in the 1920s with the publication of *Malapall*, the only novel written by U. Lakshminarayana (1880-1953). This is a realistic novel about the state of untouchables in pre-Gandhian Andhra land. It is justly famous for both its technique (especially its use of spoken language) and content. A new romantic movement took place in the novel in the late thirties and forties in Telugu. The three main novelists of the period are Chalam (1894-1979), V. Satyanarayana (1895-1977), and A. Bapiraju (1895-1953). The first wanted free love, the second Hindu revivalism, while the third fused art and life. The psychological novel also makes its appearance in Telugu in the 1940s.

Premchand, the great Hindi writer, was also a great Urdu writer, and it was he who ushered in the modern novel into Urdu with his path breaking *Gausa-i-A fiat* (1919) and *Chaugan-i-Hasti* (1924) and *Maidan-i-Amal* (1934). Gandhian ideals and the struggles of peasants under colonial rule were major themes in his novels. His realism made a deep impact on the short story in Urdu. The reaction to this realism was a predictable romanticism. The main writers in this stream were Sajjad Hyder Yaldram (1880-1943), Niaz Fatehpuri (1887-1966), Majnoon Gorakhpuri (1904-1988), and Qazi Abdul Ghaffar (1862-1956). The progressive movement played a prominent part in Urdu literature. Its beginning was signaled by *London ki Ek Rat* (1938) by Sajjad Zaheer (1905-74). He depicts Indian in London and their sad life, using the stream of consciousness technique in this short novel. Major writers like Krishan Chander (1914-1977) and Ismat Chugtai (1915-91) began to write under the influence of this movement. They of course became even more well-known after 1947.

Thus, we can see that the novel in various Indian languages had similar influences, both foreign and Indian, and developed in similar ways. This rich tapestry that was woven before the departure of the colonial power attempted to construct the Indian nation and leaned towards a nationalist literature even while strengthening their local identities.

2.3.2 Poetry

The same is true of poetry in Indian languages. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the era of romantic poetry in Assamese, which was presided over by Lakshmikant Bezbarua (1864-1938), Chandrakumar Agarwalla (1867-1938), and Hem Goswami (1872-1928). Experiments in forms like the epic and the sonnet also went on. Notable for this is Padmanath Gohain Barua (1871-1946), whose *Lila*, written in blank verse is an attempt to write like Wordsworth (or the *Prelude*). Another major poet of the period, who too was heavily influenced by western classics, was Hiteshwar Barbarooah (1876-1939). Another poet from these times, Ambikagiri Raichowdhury (1885-1967) was a revolutionary turned Gandhian and his poems show the stages of his life. Other patriotic poets were Padmadhar Chaliha (1895-1968), Jyotiprasad Agarwalla (1903-51), Prasannalal Chowdhury, and Binandachandra Barua. All were Gandhians. This period of romanticism also saw mystical poetry. Poetry in Assamese changed dramatically after the Second World War and the independence of the country.

In Bengali, it was Rabindranath Tagore who overshadowed everybody in the beginning of the 20th century. His middle poetry moved from western romanticism to a deep search for God. This period begins in 1901 with *Naivedya* (1901) and it was in this period that he composed *Gitanjali* (1910) that won him the Noble Prize. He went on to speak of man, to affirm life, to mention death, and to try various experiments in style. It is because of Tagore that the prose poem was such a hit in Indian poetry. Tagore's was an overpowering presence and the first real note of opposition to his poetics was struck by Mohitlal Majumdar (1888-1952). He focused on the body (as opposed to Tagore) and went back to Madhusudan Dutt for inspiration. However, one of the most famous poets from this generation is Nazrul Islam (1899-1977). He was known as the rebel poet. His was poetry to be read aloud and he had great mass appeal. He was also a great composer of songs. He wrote politically charged poetry, the poetry of protest. While there were also poets of the rural countryside the real change came about in Bengali poetry through poets associated with the journal *Kallol*. This group introduced modern poetry into Bengali — poetry about physical and the mundane, about the city and its ugliness, which was written in free verse. Jibanananda Das (1899-19-54) is one of the most famous poets to emerge from the 1930s, Buddhadeva Bose (1908-1974) is another major poet from this decade. Bishnu Dey (1909-82) was a great influence in Bengali poetry, with his political poems. Samar Sen and Subhash Mukhopadhyah ushered in Marxist poetry in the 1940s. This decade also produced Sukanta Bhattacharya (1926-47) a hugely popular communist poet.

Many of the major nineteenth century Gujarati poets continued to write in the early decades of the twentieth century. This is often called the Pandit Yug by Gujarati critics. One of the major innovations introduced at this time was the blank verse and the sonnet, both by B.K. Thakore (1869-1952). Gujarati critics call the next phase, from 1915-1947 the Gandhi Yug. Two major poets of this era are Sundaram, the pen name of Tribhuvandas Luhar (1908-1991) and Umashankar Joshi (1911-1988). The two are named almost in the same breath, so inseparable are they in Gujarati poetry. Both were spiritualists and influenced by Sri Aurobindo. Sundaram's *Kavya Mangala* (1933) and Joshi's *Gangotri* (1934) are milestones in Gujarati poetry. The poetry of this era was imbued with nationalism, social awareness, and idealism. The language was less ornate and the poetry embraced the public stage, to be recited to large gatherings. The post-independence poetry would go in a different direction.

As we noted before, in Hindi, the challenge was to tame Khariboli to make it an apt vehicle for poetry. The poets we named earlier continued to write in the early twentieth century. Among their works, Maithili Sharan Gupta's *Bharata Bharati* (1912) was a huge success because of its cultural sweep as also because of is spirit of nationalism. This prolific poet produced about fifty one original works and helped to establish the poetic diction of the language while reviving epic poetry. In the early 1920s romanticism swept Hindi poetry in the shape of three poets — Jaishankar Prasad (1889-1937), Nirala, the pen name of Surya Kant Tripathi (1896-1961), and Sumitra Nandan Pant (1900-78), of whom the latter two were major trend setters. This movement, called *Chayavad*, was romantic and nationalist, reasserted cultural traditions even while it argued for the spirit of freedom. During this period itself there was a different kind of poetry being written in Hindi, one more concerned with the real world, with national and **social** consciousness. This has been called

Rashtriya Dhara or *Hriday Dhara*. Makhanlal Chaturvedi (1889-1969) was a major poet in this trend. Two poets from late period of Chayavad, two secular lyricists were Mahadevi Verma (1907-1987) and Harivanshrai Bachchan. (1907-2003) Two movements succeeded Chayavad — *Pragativad* and *Prayogvad*: the first was progressive and the latter experimental. The most powerful voice in the progressive camp was that of Nagarjun (1911-1988). Another leftist poet who is known for his experimental poetry was Bharat Bhushan Agrawal (1919-1975). He introduced the limerick form into Hindi. Thus we can see that Prayogvad was not a distinct movement from Pragativad and that progressive writers also turned experimentalists. A new personal poetry called for a new language and a new form of expression and Prayogvad tried to find the answers to this need. 1943 saw the publication of a collection of poems by seven experimentalist poets, *Tara Saptaka*, edited by Agyeya, a landmark in Hindi poetry. Agyeya (1911-87) himself, and Muktibodh (1917-64) were major poets to emerge from this period. This was to be followed by the Nayi Kavita, new poetry movement after 1947.

Critics say that no great poetry was written in Kannada till the 1920s and that the first two decades prepared the way through translations and initial experiments. The 1920s saw the emergence of the Navodaya movement, as in the case of other Indian languages, a romantic movement. This was inaugurated by a book of poems translated from or inspired by English poetry *Inglis Gitagalu* (1921) by B.M. Srikantaiah (1884-1946). This book paved the way for modern Kannada poetry. Navodaya was again inspired by the national movement and thus had two pulls — one towards lyricism and passion, and the other towards a reassertion of cultural values and tradition. The two major poets from this period were K.V. Puttappa (1904-94) and D.R. Bendre (1896-1981). Both turned to mysticism and both explored the Kannada identity. The lyric, the sonnet, the ode, blank verse, the epic, and free verse all entered Kannada poetry during this period. Kannada poetry too would enter a new phase after Indian independence.

Malayalam too saw the emergence of a romantic movement in poetry in the early decades of the twentieth century. The trio who dominated this era are Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), Vallathol (1878-1958), and Ulloor 1877-1949). The first was a spiritualist, a follower of the famed Sree Naryana Guru (1856-1928), who in turn had enriched Malayalam literature with devotional and metaphysical poetry. Asan's disaffection with the Hindu social system manifested itself in his poetry of renunciation, of the materialness of life, a spiritual, metaphysical poetry. Vallathol and Ulloor were nationalists, Vallathol being equally influenced by Gandhi and Marx. He also venerated cultural traditions and traditional wisdom. Ulloor was more influenced by western poets but he had studied Sanskrit as well. His patriotic poetry picked up incidents from history and he writes about revolts and romantic adventures. Vallathol had many followers but Tagore too was a great influence on the lyricists who began to write in the 1920s — poets like Narayana Menon (1887-1954). In fact lyricism ruled the roost in Malayalam for quite a while. G. Sankara Kurup (1901-1978) is one such major lyricist who received the first Jnanpith Award in 1965. He began his career as he ended it with spiritual romantic poems. However, his middle period was one of social commitment; he was then a socialist and a nationalist poet. Other poets who must be mentioned are Balamani Amma (1909-2004), who was not swayed by Marxism or nationalism, though she does acknowledge both, but wrote about the world of a mother; Raghavan Pillai (1908-30) and Krishna Pillai (1911-47) who wrote some of the most romantic of poetry, poetry of love and death; and

Gopala Kurup (1902-80), who has a very good translations to his credit. Interestingly, a more committed poetry, more political and revolutionary would begin to appear after 1947 mainly because of the failed armed uprising staged in Vayalar in 1946.

In Marathi poetry followed the trends of the nineteenth century till about the 1920s. The Ravikaran Mandal, a group of writers formed in Pune, set out to reform Marathi literature. Three poets from this group should be mentioned — Yeshwant, Girish (1893-1973), and Madhav Julian (1894-1939). They took poetry to the people and made it popular. They were influenced by nationalism but nationalism was the burning theme of poets like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar ((1883-1966) and Govind (1874-1956). Romantic poetry held firm till independence in Marathi poetry as well. Some major poets from this period were Anil (1901-82), a master of love poetry, Anant Kanekar (1905-80) and N.G. Deshpande. One must also mention Kusuagraj (1912-) whose *Visakha* (1942), a collection of poems of protest and hope brought him great fame and popularity.

Oriya poetry too carried on in the vein of earlier poetry for a while — epics and long poems, along with lyrics, poems dealing with nature and history were all produced during this time. So were satires, thanks to the famous fiction writer Fakirmohan Senapati. The first changes came about because of the spread of nationalism and the poets who pioneered this are called part of the Satyabadi Movement, which takes its name from a school set up at Satyabadi, near Puri, by these nationalists. The senior-most of these poets was Gopabandhu Das (1877-1928); and two of the others were Nilakantha Das (1884-1967), Godabaris Misra (1886-1956). Committed poetry continued in the poetry of Marxists like Ananta Pattanayak and Sachindanand Rautray and satirists like Lakshmikanta Mahapatra and Godabarish Mahapatra. The same period, from the 1920s to the 1950s, also saw also saw the growth of personal poetry, a mystic romantic poetry. This was triggered by the Abuja Andolana started by poets like Baikuntanath Pattanayak and Kalindi Charan Panigrahi in 1931.

Even when Bhai Vir Singh towered over others in Punjabi, straddling the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, Puran Singh (1881-1931), who was well-versed in western literature and was influenced by Walt Whitman, liberated Punjabi poetry quite early from the stranglehold of traditional poetics. Kirpa Sagar (1875-1939) too adapted western form to Punjabi rhythms. Nationalism and Romanticism arrived hand in hand as usual in Indian poetry to Punjabi as well. Patriotism, gender equality, and Punjabi culture are the subject matter of nationalist poetry — the chief poets in this movement are Gurmukh Singh Musafir (1899-1976) and Hira Singh Dard (1889-1964) along with Puran Singh. The major romantic poets from this period are Mohan Singh (1905-78) and Amrita Pritam (1919-2005). Both of them wrote intense love poetry, and were lyrical poets of repute. However, both also became progressive poets. It was after independence that Punjabi, like in many other languages, turned to experimental and new poetry.

In Sindhi too the tradition of love-lyrics continued in the first two decades of the 20th century. But the freedom movement came to Sindh soon after the partition of Bengal and Lalchand Amardinomal (1885-1954) wrote poems on Swadesi in 1905 that were meant to be sung during marches. Gandhian ideals

came to influence the poetry of Kishinchand 'Bewas' among others and one of the most prolific writers of nationalist songs was Hundraj Dukhayal (1910-2003). Hyder Baksh Jatoi (1901-70) was the first of the socialist poets. He was one of the main contributors along with Shaikh Ayaz (1923-1997) to the progressive monthly *Nai Duniya* that was established in 1945 in Karachi. Independence and the partition was a great blow to Sindhi poetry.

Tamil saw the twentieth century dawn with the nationalist poetry of Subramanya Bharati (1823-74). He wrote a new poetry for the people, a poetry that glorified Tamil as well as sang the nation, a poetry that called for a new equality. Bharati was followed by Bharatidasan (1891-1962), who became a poet of the Dravidian movement. If the first was a nationalist poet preaching unity and equality, the second was a Tamilian poet, a reformist and a separatist. Bharatidasan was also inspired by socialism and wrote against inequality. The two poets had separate bands of followers, those who accepted nationalism as well as Tamilianness, and those who believed in Tamil nationalism alone, writing against Aryanism, and showing their intense love for Tamil. In the Bharati camp were poets like Desika Vinayakam Pillai (1876-1952) and in the Bharatidasan camp were poets like Vanidasan (1915-77). While new poetry came into its own only in the fifties and sixties it began in the forties in Tamil with poems by poets like Na, Pichamoorthy (1900-78) and Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan (1902-44). These poets were influenced by western poets like Whitman as much as by Bharati's prose poems.

The two poets who could compete for the position of the first of poets in modern Telugu are G.V. Appa Rao (1861-1915) and R. Subba Rao (1892-1984), and both ruled the first decades of the twentieth century. Appa Rao (also known as Gurajada) popularized lyrical poetry and revived folk traditions. Subba Rao was a poet of love and was influenced by English poets like Goldsmith. While he used traditional metres he brought in a new spirit into Telugu poetry. The romantic movement entered Telugu in the 1920s and held sway till 1940. As usual this consisted of love poetry, patriotic poetry, mystical poetry, and the pastoral. D.V. Krishna Sastri (1897-1980) was the principal poet of this movement. The same period saw poems written inspired by the Andhra (sub)nationalist movement. Progressivism also became a major force in Telugu poetry and gave us Sri Sri (1910-83). These poets also popularized the prose poem. The progressives carried on after independence along with the subsequent experimentalists of the free verse movement.

Though the early twentieth century was the era of Mohammad Iqbal (1873-1938) in Urdu poetry, the first decades saw the romantic movement enter its oeuvre. This is marked by subjectivism, sensuousness, obliqueness, search for beauty and an experiment in form. Some of the major figures of the movement are Josh Malihabadi (1898-1982), Akhtar Shirani (1900-48) and Saghar Nizami (1905-83). Josh was also called a rebel poet because of his revolt against social conventions. A number of poets wrote patriotic poetry around his time. Iqbal, who gave us the popular "Saare Jahaan Se Achcha", too wrote patriotic poems as well as poems about nature. A humanist and a religious poet, he was influenced by Marxism and strove for Muslim unity. Progressive thought had a great impact on Urdu literature, and the first Conference of the Progressive Indian Writers at Lucknow in 1936 seemed to speak for many of them when it declared that it was "the sacred duty" for all writers to use all their "creative effects" to struggle for "the people's freedom". Poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-84), Majaz (1911-55), Ali Jafri (1913-2000), Kaifi Azmi (1919-2002), and Sahir Ludhianvi (1921-80) came to the fore now. Many of

them belonged to the trade union movement or had participated in movements of workers and peasants and used poetry for communicating with their readers and listeners with a sense of immediacy. Again, like many other Indian languages, but perhaps the difference here being more stark, the same period saw the experimentalists come up with a different agenda from the progressive writers. They called themselves the *Halqa* poets, did not concern themselves with politics, and wrote of the psyche and paid great importance to form and style. Some poets of this movement were Taseer (1912-49), Miraji (1912-49) and Akhtarul Iman (1915-96). Again new poetry would come to Urdu after Independence from the British.

Again, we saw that there is a similarity in the way poetry developed in various Indian languages, that they all had the same influences, and that they were in dialogue with each other.

2.3.3 Drama

The mythologicals of the late 19th century were followed by the historical in Assamese. Padmanath Gohain Barua's *Jaymati* (1900) was the first historical play. He also wrote other historical plays like *Gadadhar* (1907) and *Lachit Barphukan* (1915). Lakshmikant Bezbarua and Daibachandra Talukdar were two other historical playwrights of note. The mythological and the historical held the stage in Assamese till Independence.

Bengali has always seen lively theatrical activity. Bengali too greeted the dawn of the 20th century with historical plays and plays from the puranas. If D.L. Ray (1863-1913) wrote *Pasani* (1900) and *Sita* (1902), Girish Ghosh wrote historical plays to negotiate the aftermath of the Bengal partition of 1905 — some of the plays being *Sirajuddaula* (1905), *Mir Kasim* (1906), and *Chatrapati* (1907). This kind of drama — romantic-historical, musicals, puranic melodramas, religious drama, and domestic tragedy — was staple fare in Bengali theatre till the end of the Second World War. However, there was also another kind of drama available during this period. One must not forget that the colossus Rabindaranath Tagore was active in theatre as well. He started off with operatic plays and then moved on to verse drama in the nineteenth century. In 1908 came a different kind of drama from him, the play *Saradotsav*, which was more contemplative than anything he had written till then. The plays of this phase were metaphysical, the form fluid, the language prose. Nature is vital to some of these plays. In others, e.g. *Dakghar* (1912), he focuses on existence, and in a third group of plays, an example of this being *Acalayatan* (1912) he looks at the impact of organization and regimentation. In his last phase, in the 1930s, Tagore went to experiment with ballets. The progressive movement, ushered in by the Indian People's Theatre Movement, came to Bengali theatre in 1944 with *Navanna* by Bijan Bhattacharya (1917-78), about the Famine of 1943.

The mythological and the historical along with adaptations from western theatres kept Gujarati going through the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th. Nanalal Dalpatram (1875-1946) tried to write plays of literary values but these were hardly stageable. K.M. Munshi, on the other hand, wrote many stage-worthy plays, mythological as well as social satires. But it is C.C. Mehta (1901-) who ushered in the modern theatre into Gujarati. His first important play was *Aggadi* (1934), which is set in a railway colony and was one of the

first realistic plays. He constantly experimented in theatre and wrote a wide variety of plays. Pragajibhai Dosa and Adi Marzban were two other important playwrights of this period. Gujarati also saw the development of the one-act play from the 19th century itself. Initially this was a form for farces, and quite successful in Parsee theatre, but later (from 1922 onwards) was adapted for serious plays as well. Umashankar Joshi was a major writer who wrote serious one-act plays. Jayanti Dalal (1909-70) also wrote short plays successfully.

In Hindi too the mythological and the historical continued their hold in the first two decades of the 20th century. They become better crafted and with greater focus on characterization and motivation. Then the era of Jaishankar Prasad (1890-1937) began in the 20s. His was a literary drama, historical and fiercely nationalistic. However, it was his contemporary Lakshmi Narayana Misra who ushered in modern Hindi theatre. He introduced and popularized the problem play. Perhaps his inherent idealism is the reason that Upendranath Ashk (1910-1996) is seen to the first of the moderns. He is a realistic playwright and set the trend for Hindi drama that was to last till after Independence.

Influenced by the Parsee and Marathi theatre, Kannada theatre was full of mythologicals and melodramas till the 1920s. In the twenties B.M. Srikantaiah (1884-1946) wrote *Gadayuddha Nataka* (1925) and *Asvathaman* (1929) and ushered in a new era of elite theatre. He introduced the western notion of tragedy into Kannada drama. This *Navodaya* period saw other good plays and playwrights as well. But it is T.P. Kailasam (1884-1946) who shook the theatrical world with his realistic contemporary play *Tollu-Ghatti* in 1923. He is a major playwright, Shavian in spirit. The other playwright, also influenced by Shaw, who was an equally towering figure in Kannada drama, was Adya Rangacharya (1904-84) who wrote under the name of Sriranga. The two of them had introduced real men and women on the stage. This theatre was to last till Independence.

In Malayalam translations had held sway in drama in the nineteenth century, followed by musicals, the latter lasting through the first decades of the 20th century. However, the prose play took over in the first decade, the first of them being dramatizations of popular novels of C.V. Raman Pillai and O. Chandu Menon. C.V. Raman Pillai also wrote farces. The farce then gave way to a comedy of manners. E.V. Krishna Pillai (1894-1938) is a notable playwright of the times who moved from farce to serious comedies and also wrote the historical play. Historical and puranic plays were written in Malayalam in the twenties and the thirties. Social plays, especially on the status of Nambudiri women, were also written in the thirties. The first political play was *Pattabakki* (1938) by the communist playwright K. Damodaran (1912-76). Ibsenian realistic drama enters Malayalam in 1940 with *Bhagnabhavanam* by N. Krishna Pillai. While experimental theatre also began around the same time in Malayalam, it had to wait till the fifties to take over the stage.

In Marathi, the period till the 1920s set the stage for serious theatre through translations and adaptations. Dramatists and directors like G.B. Deval (1855-1916) were heavily influenced by Shakespeare. K.P. Khandilkar (1872-1948) who belongs to this period wrote plays to arouse the Marathi public against colonisation. His *Kichakavada* (1907) was popular enough to be banned. In his last phase Khandilkar wrote plays for the famous actor-singer Balagandharva and made the musical extremely popular in Marathi. While the

historicals took over in the twenties, the decade also saw the freedom struggle enter the stage. Playwrights like B.V. Karlekar (1883-1964) attempted stage realism and wrote about social evils as well as political struggles. Marathi drama was to witness great changes after Independence and achieve its dominant position then.

The Jatra tradition held sway in Oriya theatre till the 1920s. It was then that Kali Charan Patnaik (1900-78) began his career and changed the face of Oriya drama. He brought in the colloquial language and after beginning with musical plays, went on to social plays by the late thirties. He overshadowed everyone else till the 1950s.

In Punjabi, the first two decades of the twentieth century were of translation, plays influenced heavily by western or Sanskrit drama, and a few didactic plays like *Raju Lakhadata Singh* (1910) by Bhai Vir Singh. The first major playwright happens to be Ishwar Chander Nanda (1892-1956) who won a one-act play competition organized by Norah Richards, who had links with Irish theatre. She wanted Punjabi drama to demonstrate similar links with the native soil and Nanda obliged brilliantly. He wrote about social problems of the day, from widow remarriage to ignorance and superstition. He used folk elements in his plays which were otherwise western in technique. The realism that Nanda advocated was the major inspiration in Punjabi theatre till the progressive movement. A dramatist like Sant Singh Sekhon makes his appearance then in the 1940s and gives a Marxist reading of history. In his controversial play *Kalakar* (1946) he uses Ahalya to talk about the modern woman. Balwant Gargi and Kartar Singh Duggal too began to write during this period and carried on to be major playwrights after independence.

Similarly in Sindhi, theatrical activity till 1920 consisted of translations and adaptations from Shakespeare and other western dramatists on the one hand, and Sanskrit source on the other. Khanchand Daryani (1898-1965) changed all that with his social and nationalistic plays in the 1920s. His first play *Gulab Jo Gul* (1920) was about the conflict between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. This period also saw the dramatization of Sindhi folk stories. The zeal to reform saw the enactment of short play called *Cahcita* in street corners, and this led to the writing of one-act plays. Playwrights like Karomal Khilnani, and Lalchand Amardinomal Jagtiani are some famous writers of such plays. This politicized sermonizing sub-genre soon became a more polished theatrical art with new writers like M.U. Malkiani who wrote in the 30s.

Ibsen, Shaw and Wilde had a great influence on Tamil drama in the early 20th century. For example, one of the most successful plays of the late 20s and early 30s Aundy's *Mangalyam* (1925) is an Ibsenian play about women's emancipation. Tamil theatre had to face the early challenge of films and the most successful genre in Tamil became the musical play. This genre had developed in the nineteenth century itself. The one-act play as well as the social play too had a marked presence in Tamil. Theatre was company — and star-oriented and was used for political purposes as well. Two chief ministers of Tamil Nadu, Annadorai and Karunanidhi, have written scripts for plays.

Telugu saw a number of translations from contemporary Indian language drama as well as from English and European playwrights. Mythological plays began to be written in the 1890s and continued into the 20th century.

Chlakamarthi Lakshminarasimhan's **Gayapakhyanam** (1909) sold more than one lakh copies! The mythological drama held its own till the thirties. Telugu too saw the historical nationalist drama, as well as the devotional. If *Ramadas* (1920) by D. Gopalachari was a devotional play, *Rasaputra Vijayam* was a patriotic play produced during the Vandematharam movement and *Na Raju* (1920) was a powerful historical play by Pingali Nagenra Rao. Even in the 1890s Telugu drama had witnessed social plays and Gurajada Apparao's *Kanyasulkam* (1897) is a wonderful social satire. But it is in the 1930s that the social play came into its own. P.V. Rajamannar (1901-78) and Acharya Atreya are outstanding social dramatists of this era. The thirties also saw the first psychological play *Sarojini* (1930) by Panuganti. This was also the era of musical plays.

Agha Hashr (1880-1938) took over from Aram in Urdu theatre which was still a part of the Parsee theatre movement. He too was inspired by Shakespeare, and his main contribution was to demonstrate the potential of Urdu as a dramatic language. It was in the late 20s that changes took place in Urdu with the entry of Imtias Ali Taj (1899-1975) with his *Anarkali* (1927). With this play Urdu literature saw the arrival of well-constructed and serious plays. Playwrights like Abid Husain, Mohammaed Mujib and Ishtiaq Husain Quraishi came into prominence now. Influenced by western theatre, this was a theatre that seems derivative to a large extent. It was IPTA in the forties that gave a sense of urgency and commitment to Urdu theatre. Ali Sardar Jafri's *Yeh Kis Ka Khoon Tha?* (1942) began this movement which had eminent playwrights like K.A. Abbas who began his career with *Zubaida* (1943). This new realism ruled for a while till after independence.

2.4 CONCLUSION

We have seen in this unit that modern India came into being in a reevaluation of the past, a reformation of the present, a surge towards freedom from the British, an acceptance of some western ideals and ideologies, and reassertion of cultural traditions, a construction of a national identity even while securing one's particular cultural location and difference. The influence of Gandhi and of Marx, the exploration of western forms and the integration of Indian elements, the philosophical quest and the political protest — all these mark modern Indian literature. It is a literature of identity, the identity of Indianness, the politics of language negotiating with the politics of nationalism against British imperialism. We can again see that the best way to read Indian literature(s) is through the perspective of comparative studies. Since we cannot know more than a few Indian languages, we have to access most of these literatures in translation as you are to do in this course. We have also seen the role that translation played in the shaping of Indian literatures and the impact of the dialogue between our languages in the historic juncture that shaped our destiny as a nation.

2.5 QUESTIONS

1. What is the role of translation in the development of Indian literature in various languages?
2. Is there a similarity in the development of the novel in various Indian langauges?
3. What do you think characterizes poetry in Indian languages from the 1920s till 1947?

4. What is a social play and do you find it in all Indian literatures? What problems did it deal with?

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN INDIAN LITERATURE

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 What is 'Comparative Literature'?
  3.1.1 Introduction
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  3.1.3 Definitions
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3.4 The Role of Translation in Comparative Studies in Indian Literature
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3.9 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will introduce you to the relatively new area of literary study, comparative literature or more accurately, comparative literature studies. It will begin with a brief account of the evolution of the concept of comparative literature and will then discuss the relevance of the idea in a multilingual and multi-cultural country like India. It will finally deal with issues and approaches and methods of study of Indian Comparative Literature. It will also glance at the enabling role of translation in the study of comparative Indian literature. After reading the unit, you will be better acquainted with issues in comparative literature studies.

3.1 WHAT IS 'COMPARATIVE LITERATURE'?

3.1.1 Introduction

'Comparative literature' is a study of more than one literature in relation to one-another. It is also a study of the relationship between literature on the one

hand and other areas of knowlwdge and belife and fine art s and films on the other. In other words, it is a comparative study of one literature with another literature, or with a subject trelating mainly to the areas of humanities and social sciences or the arts. And those scholars who work in the field of comparative litrature studies are know as comparitists .For instance a study of patition literature produced in India and Pakistan would fall under the category of comparative studies in literature. In the same way, a study of partition novels in India and the films produced on the subject would also fall under the same category.

The term 'comparative literature' is really a misnomer because it is not used to identify or classify any particular literature but to refer to a method of studying literature. So when the term comparative literature is used, we are really talking of comparative literature studies or comparative studies in literature.

3.1.2 The Evolution of the Idea of Comparative Literature Studies

The comparative study of literature is as old as literary criticism. For instance, Aristotle's approach to the study of literature was comparative. He brought into his discourse the question of relationship between poetry, history and philosophy and took recourse to a comparison between poetry and painting. The ancient Romans had realized the importance of comparative literary studies as they noticed the vast influence of Greek literature on Latin. (Students will recall that the introductory unit of Block 1, MEG-1: British Poetry discusses in detail the relations between poetry and painting with the help of pictures.)

The beginnings of comparative literature studies could be traced to the work of mythologists and ancient literary historians in Germany and in France. It was realized that literatures do not remain confined to the political boundaries of the countries of their origin and that they often interact. The historical connections between modern European literatures and classical literatures were too obvious, but the relationship among the modern languages and literatures themselves received fresh critical attention in this period. European scholars who found remarkable similarities in the linguistic patterns and the mythological structures also paved the way for the study of commonness of various literatures. This phase of comparative literary study was confined mainly to the study of influence of one literature on another, or of one writer on another, or of one text of a language on another text written in another language. French scholars constructed an elaborate scheme of detecting the influence of language 'A' on language 'B' and to analyze as well as to find out the channels of influences. Such a scenario could be visualized as the first phase of comparative literature studies as an academic discipline.

Matthew Arnold was probably the first to coin the world Comparative Literature in English. In a letter to his sister, Arnold wrote (May 1848): "How plain it is now, though an attention to the comparative literatures for the last fifty years might have instructed any one of it, that England is in a certain sense far behind the continent". In all probability, Arnold translated the phrase *Literature Comparee* used by the French scholar Villemain in 1829. Furthermore, it could be stated that Matthew Arnold was the first creative writer and critic who, pointedly referred to the need for comparative literary

studies. In his inaugural lecture delivered at Oxford in 1857, Arnold emphatically stated:

> The spectacle, the facts, presented for the comprehension of the present age, are indeed immense. The facts consist of the events, the institutions, the sciences, the arts, the literatures, in which human life has manifested itself upto the present time; the spectacle is the collective life of humanity. And everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration; *no single event, no single literature, is adequately comprehended except in its relation to other events, to other literatures.* The literature of ancient Greece, the literature of the Christian Middle Age, so long as they are regarded as isolated literatures, two isolated growths of the human spirit, are not adequately comprehended, and it is adequate comprehension which is demanded of the present age.

While Matthew Arnold emphasized the need for comparative literature study, H.M. Posnett, an eminent Irish barrister-turned-comparatist from Britain who later became a professor of Classics and English literatures at the University College, Auckland, wrote what is probably the first book on the subject, *Comparative Literature* (1886) in any language. Thus Posnett is considered the first scholar who wrote a book which exclusively dealt with the methods and principles of a new field. He defined comparative literature as "the general theory of literary evolution, the idea that literature passes through stages of inception, culmination and decline". Posnett's definition of comparative literature was found to be inadequate by later scholars who didn't accept Comparative Literature merely as a "general theory of literary evolution", and who tried to define its business more clearly. It has been argued that comparative literature is neither a general history of literature, nor world literature, but a study of literatures in contact at a particular historical time and place.

In the United States the first course devoted solely to comparative literature studies was given at Cornell University in 1871 by the Reverend Charles Chauncey Shackford and then by Charles M. Gayley at the University of Michigan from 1887 to 1889. The oldest American department of comparative literature was the one founded in 1899 at Columbia University. George E. Woodberry headed the department. He identified the study of "sources, themes, forms environments and artistic parallels" as the chief concerns of his discipline, thus combining sociological perspective with traditional areas. However, it was not till the post-war years that Comparative Literature Studies were established firmly as discipline in the United States. Many journals were launched and according to a survey published in Volume Twenty (1971) of the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, there were over seventy degree granting programs in the United States alone. At a distance from the nationalistic favour of the European states, the American School took interdisciplinary as its key component. Right from the very beginning there was also a tendency to see comparativism in idealistic transnational terms with assumptions regarding the humanizing power of great works of art.

In the seventies, with the advent of the epoch of theory, Comparative Literature departments became centres of theoretical work. Although, theory for many was linked with deconstruction and its practices, comparative literature studies were never really taken over by deconstructive theory with its undecidability and comparisons that would end in indifference. Rather,

there was a strong impact of theories which involved fresh insights from ethical perspectives related to social practices. Various questions regarding the nature of literature's relation to experience, to ideology, of the relationship between gender and power which were being asked within feminism and other schools of thought became important. Foucault's study of discourse associated with the regulatory mechanism of power and Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic imagination and of language as a highly variable set of discourses brought new dimensions to the study of literature. There was also the influence of New Historicism offering new contexts for reading literary texts. Colonial and post-colonial studies also came to occupy a very important position after the publication of Edward Said's: *Orientalism* and works by Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. However, what has been stated above is true not just of the United States, but of comparative literature studies in different parts of the world as well.

3.1.3 Definitions

The American View

A useful and pragmatic definition of comparative literature has been given by an American scholar S.S. Prawer. He states that comparative literature study is "an examination of literary texts (including works of literary theory and criticism) in more than one language, through an investigation of contrast, analogy, provenance or influence; or a study of literary relations and communications between two or more groups that speak different languages" In fact, American scholars extended the area of comparative literature to other arts as well. In this context, the following definition which contains a new definition of comparative literature is also an example of the flexibility of American school of comparative literature. It comes from Henry H. Remak, known as 'one of the most distinguished scholars and also one of the greatest exponents of Comparative Literature in our time from America. Remak states:

> Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of relationship between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g. politics, economic, soçiology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with other spheres of human expression.

This comprehensive definition not only increases the scope of Comparative Literature Studies but also it increases its manifold functions especially in the areas of other arts.

The French View

French scholars underlined the importance of the study of 'influence' or 'relationship' as a necessary element of comparative literature study in order to understand and appreciate the course of literary development. Paul Van Tieghem, a French scholar, wrote in 1921 that general literature studies movements and fashions, transcends national lines, while the comparative literature studies focus on the interrelationships between two or more literatures. He stated that 'the object of Comparative Literature is essentially the study of diverse literatures in their relations with one another'. Another

French scholar M.F. Guyard defined Comparative Literature as 'the history of international literary relations'. As a matter of fact it can be stated that the French scholars of comparative literature studies gave importance to 'factual contacts which took place between Byron and Pushkin, Goethe and Carlyle, Walter Scott and Vigny, between the works the inspirations and even the lives of writers belonging to several literatures'.

The Indian View

The idea of comparative literature in India was first introduced by Rabindranath Tagore in an essay entitled "Visva-Sahitya" [World Literature] (1906). Tagore took the idea of Goethe's World Literature and explained it further. He states: "Just as the world does not mean my land, your land and his land and to think thus of the world is to think in a parochial way, so literature is not my work. We are in the habit of seeing literature in this fragmented way. We must now free ourselves from narrow parochialism and discover the image of mankind in World Literature". Besides Tagore, many other nationalists, leaders and philosophers including Sri Aurobindo also talked about Indian literature in a wide perspective, though comparative literature was perhaps not central to their thought. It was only after the establishment of the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University in 1956, that several Indian scholars including Buddhadev Bose (1908-), the first Professor of the subject in India became seriously concerned about the nature of the subject and its methodology.

The contemporary Indian literary critics have realized the importance of comparative literature studies as a new space to understand the significance and uniqueness of each Indian literature, which had been operating in isolation within the departmental system in our universities. Comparative Study of Indian Literature is, therefore, the study of the literature of one nation, though written in many languages. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said: "Indian Literature is one, though written in many languages". In that sense a comparative study of Indian literature is the study of the literature of one nation that appears as regional literatures. Sisir K. Das, through his monumental writings and lectures delivered on the subject pleaded eloquently for the abolition of the walls dividing the different literature departments in Indian universities and to create a new consciousness of literature, interdependent and interrelated. In his article 'Muses in Isolation', he wrote: "The teaching of literature must have a hardcore or national literature, but it must accommodate the literatures of other cultures"

3.2 COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN INDIAN LITERATURE

3.2.1 Introduction

It will not be wrong to say that Comparative Studies in Indian Literature come as naturally to Indian linguistic and literary situation as petals to a rose flower. India is a multilingual and multicultural society and the very structure, framework, text and context of Indian literature have an inbuilt comparative system. The statement is elaborated further and it is pointed out that 'there is a major distinction between Comparative India Literature and Comparative Western Literature. One is comparative literature in a multilingual situation, the other comparative literature in a diverse world of many languages. One is comparative as such, the other has to work out the comparisons.

As in the case of Greek and Roman literature the criterion of informal studis in.comparatives contexts was observed in the ancient literatures of India. Sisir K. Das aptly pointed out. That the ancient Indian writers could use more than one language within one text without qualms, and the ancient critics found that practice normal enough, is itself an evidenee of a view of literature that extends beyond one language". One of the interesting evidences of such an interaction between two Indian languages is to be seen in the growth of a style known as manipravalam. This was an attempt and quite a successful one towards creation of a hybrid style composed of Sanskrit and Malayalam. The fourteenth century text *Lilatilakam*, written in Sanskrit, deals with grammar and rhetorical devices of *manipravalam*. This is the first work in Indian criticism which analyses a literary phenomenon which cannot be adequately understood without involving two languages and two literatures. Another oft-quoted example is of Charles E. Gover's *The Folk*-Songs of *Southern India* (1871). The book is a study of several old literatures taken as a single corpus of poetry providing a comparative critical framework.

3.2.2 Multilingual and Multicultural Traditions

Since ancient times, India has consistently remained a land of bilingual, multilingual and multicultural traditions. This specific socio-cultural phenomenon has been witnessed as a hallmark of Indian literature, ever since the origin and development of almost all the regional Indian languages have taken place. When we go back to ancient and medieval periods and study the linguistic and literary history of India, we find a series of works which show 'simultaneous and co-lateral' growth of religious poetry in the regional languages spread all over the country. For instance, to quote from Comparative Literature: Indian Dimensions, the devotee poets from regional language literatures are described in the following order: "Basavesvara in Kannada (12th C) ; Baba Farid in Panjabi (12-13th C); Jnanadeva in Marathi (13th C); Tikkanna in Telugu (13th C); Namdeo in Marathi (13-14th C); Chandidasa in Bengali (14th C); Lall Ded in Kashmiri (14th C); Vidyapati in Maithili (15th C); Kabir in Hindi (15th C); Narasi Mehta in Gujarati (15th C); Banda Nawaz Gesu Daraz in Urdu (15th C); Mirabai in Rajasthani (16th C); Surdas in Brajabhasha (16th C); Sankaradeva in Assamese (16th C); Haba Khatoon in Kashmiri (16th C); Ezhuttacchan in Malayalam (16th C); the Panca Sakhas in Oriya (16th C); Akho in Gujarati (17th C); Kshetrayya in Telugu (17th C); Sant Tukaram in Marathi (17th C); Vemana in Telugu (17th C); Shah Latif and Sachal Sarmast in Sindhi (18th C); Tyagaraja in Kannada (18-19th C); Dayaram in Gujarati (18-19th C); or the long illustrious line of poets in Tamil from Andal (8th C) down to Tayumanavar (18th C).

These works make us believe how strong, deep-rooted and ancient are the ties of regional Indian literatures among themselves. They have grown in close interaction and from a common root of imaginative resource. They provide a new dimension to the study of existing Indian language-literatures and help discover their mutual historical and aesthetic inter-dependence and interrelations.

The concept of sharedness in comparative Indian literature is visible from the above examples, which suggests that this sharedness of Indian literatures written in many languages has been a fact of Indian literary history. It denotes a common heritage, which is seen as an essential basis of unity and diversity

in the Indian situation. This view has been examined by literary critics and historians by referring to ancient and medieval literary traditions such as Nath Literature, devotional poetry and ramifications of literary classics such as The Mahabharta and The Ramayana in the various Indian languages. There are in fact certain pockets of bilingualism and multilingualism in various regions of India.

3.2.3 Comparative Studies in Indian Literature and Indian Writing in English

Very soon after the consolidation of the British-empire there emerged a new stream of English writing in India. By the beginning of the twentieth century this new literature, Indian writing in English, came of age and produced a substantial corpus of literary texts which claimed serious consideration from the critics. This literature was inspired by the English language and it was for sometime considered a part of the Anglo-Indian literary traditions. This literature can thus be legitimately called a bi-product of the interactions between the literatures of two countries, India and England. It provides a new area of comparative literature involving the Indian experience and Indian literary traditions on the one hand and the English linguistic tradition on the other.

There has been enthusiastic involvement in the pursuit of comparative Indian literature studies on the part of Indian teachers of English. This has been commented upon by a comparatist as a 'foretaste of better things to come'. One may visualize two patterns emerging out of this interaction: (a) Those who feel inclined to promote studies in Indian literature seem to have accepted not only the continued use of English in India, but also the significant reality of creative writing in English by Indians. In fact they forcefully argue that it is no use condemning the Indo-English writer's choice to make an acquired tongue (English) rather than his own mother-tongue the medium of his creative expression. As Sri Aurobindo has rightly stated: "It is not true in all cases that one can't write first-class things in a learnt language" (*Collected Works*), (b) secondly, Indo-English writers themselves have realized that the Indo-English literature written by them is after all one of the Indian literatures even though (paradoxically as it may seem) English is not exactly one of the "Indian" languages. And hence, it is believed that the sooner the Indo-English literature begins to interact with other Indian writers and writings, the better it would be for the growth of comparative studies in Indian literature.

3.3 COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN INDIAN LITERATURE: APPROACHES

3.3.1 Introduction

The immense possibilities of comparative studies in Indian literature were, in fact, realized only after the Constitution of free India accorded recognition to major Indian languages of the country. At present there are more than twenty-two independent literary languages in India. Every year, the literary work adjudged best in each language — including English, is ceremoniously conferred an award by the central body of letters, Sahitya Akademi. Taking the cue from what Sri Aurobindo describes as a "rich variety in the unity of Indian culture and literature", the important question of the oneness of Indian literatures has invariably been debated at length in numerous literary seminars

and conference as also in articles and books by eminent creative writers and critics over the years.

We can refer to various methodologies , which have been followed as possible approaches to the study of this new area. These approaches are based on one or two important assumptions, The first relates to the fact that Indian literature is an offspring and intimate expression of a composite socio--cultural unit. The underling conviction,as Krishna Kripalani states it , is that "Like the Indian civilzation of which it is more less a faithful expression,Indian Literature is a composite growth reflecting the impact of diverse ages, races, religions and influences, and maintaining simultaneously, sometimes in harmony, sometimes disharmony, different levels of cultural consciousness and intellectual development".

The second assumption is the one which recalls Dr. Radhakrishnan's often quoted dictum: "Indian Literature is one, though written in many languages". One can prepare a long list of writings that substantiate this view. The list would include titles like *The Literary Unity of India* by Suniti Kumar Chatterji and *Literatures in the Modern, Indian Languages* by V.K. Gokak, to mention only two. For others please see the titles mentioned in the end of the unit.

Though it is difficult to frame a list of fool-proof methodologies for Comparative Studies in Indian literature, a few approaches are being suggested below. These approaches include those that have been tried or are being used for research in the area.

3.3.2 Methodology Based on the Proximity of Two or Three Indian Language Literatures

This approach envisages a multi-literary methodology for making a comparative study of Indian literature. I take the liberty of explaining this point by quoting an illustration given by Amiya Dev. In his 'How to do Comparative Indian Literature", Amiya Dev says that all the twenty-two Indian languages-literatures can't be approached simultaneously for that would sound" euphoristic or perhaps utopian". His suggestion is to work out a viable methodology depending on the proximity of two or three languages. One can think of two/three language clusters like the following:

Bengali-Hindi	Bengali-Hindi-Oriya
Bengali-Assamese	Bengali-Hindi-Assamese
Bengali-Oriya	Bengali-Oriya-assamese
Panjabi-Hindi	Panjabi-Hindi-Urdu
Tamil-Malayalam	Tamil-Malyalam-Kannada

Amiya Dev explains that in addition to proximity of languages, one can think of proximity of communities belonging to distinct languages in certain areas for such clusters formation. For instance, in Calcutta, one can think of clusters like Bengali-Marathi, Bengali-Gujarati, Bengali-Panjabi, Bengali-Tamil. Similarly, in Delhi one can think of a number of two or three language clusters such as Hindi- Punjabi-Urdu, Hindi-Bengali-Oriya, Hindi-Bengali-Assamese, etc.

3.3.3 Influence or Impact Studies

The approach involved in studying the influence of one author on another and reception study of one literary movement on another literature has been both very interesting and very fruitful in the realm of Comparative Literature research. First of all, this trend helps us to identify a creative relationship that already exists, for instance, between Indo-English literature and the Indian literature in regional languages. This corpus of literature can be studied from different aspects — such as influence, impact and reception as well as from thematic similarities and differences and as a part of two different historical traditions. The comparative studies undertaken invariably fall into one or other of the following three classes: (a) The "influence" study involving impact of a tradition upon an individual author and/or his works, such as "Western Influence on the fiction of Agyeya (Hindi Novelist)", or "The Influence of Eastern Thought on Thoreau"; (b) case studies comparing two or more authors and their literary works such as "Rabindranath Tagore and T.S. Eliot: A Union of Aesthetic Sensibilities" or "Croce and Tagore : A Study in Expression"; and (c) thematic study of the Indo-English novel in comparison with fiction in an Indian language in the context of shared common cultural or historical experiences-such as the pre-colonial (ancient, classical and medieval) cultures, the colonial (the British) cultural impact, and the post-colonial cultural developments. Examples of such studies are: "The Anti-Colonial Hero in Mulk Raj Anand's *Sword and the Sickle* and Premchand's *Godan*", The East-West Encounter in the fiction of R.K. Narayan (Indo-English) and Nanak Singh (Panjabi)" and "The theme of partition in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (Indo-English), Bhisham's *Tamas* (Hindi), K.A. Abbas's *Inquilab* (Urdu) and Nanak Singh's *Ag Di Khed* (Panjabi)". Examples could easily be multiplied.

3.4 THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN COMPARATIVE INDIAN LITERATURE

3.4.1 Introduction

In a multilingual country like India, which has twenty-four regional languages contributing to the richness of Indian literature, translation studies have acquired more relevance and importance. Translation activity is now being looked upon as a primary shaping force within the literary history of Indian literature.

Translation Studies have not only flourished but have contributed significantly for making it as an essential priority area for the study and development of comparative studies in Indian literature. Sujit Mukherjee's remarks in this context are quite pertinent: "Practically every English language publisher of repute in India — and a few disreputable ones as well — is busy building a list of titles in translation as rapidly as possible. Writers themselves are no less eager to get translated into English. Some don't even tarry for a translator, or cannot trust such intervention, and do the job themselves. Others would like to be translated by a foreigner. When none in available, they settle for Indians living abroad in English-speaking countries. Only those who are truly bereft of contact or resources have to make do with an Indian translator — a friend or that friend's wife, some hitherto unknown admirer, a faithful fan or otherwise breezy devotee and so on. As was said of Cleopatra, the variety is endless and the number keeps growing.

3.4.2 Translation in Practice

Picking up a cue from the above insightful remark, it may be stated that in the comparative study of Indian literature, translation has occupied an immense potential as a pedagogical and integrative force. In the corpus of translated literature, we may discern a few clear-cut sub divisions:

Firstly, works in Indian languages translated into English by the authors themselves. The often-quoted example in this case is that of Tagore, as the translation of *Gitanjali* was rendered by the poet himself from the original Bengali. But there are many other writers, for instance, Raj Gill, K.S. Duggal in Panjabi, who not only wrote in their mother tongue but also translated the scripts into English themselves.

Secondly, works in Indian languages translated into English by Indian and Europeans as well. For instance, U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Sanskara* which is translated from Kannada into English by A.K. Ramanujan. Such examples can be multiplied.

3.4.3 Translation of Indian Literature by Western Scholars

Translation of Indian literary text into English started with the initiative of English scholars during the British regime. There is a famous example of comparison of seven significant English translations of *Gita Govinda* by William Jones (1792), Edwin Arnold (1875), George Keats (1940) and also by Lakshmi Narayan Shastri (1956) Duncan Greenlidge (1962), Monika Varma (1968), Barbara Stoler Miller (1977).

> Literary works have translated into English, restructuring it into equivalent textual material of the target language. In simple words, the process is described as transcreation. The famous example is the translation of *The Rubaiyats of Omar Khayyam* (1858) by Edward Fitzgerald (1809-63). He was proud of his transcreation: "I would rather have a live sparrow than a stuffed eagle". These attempts show the possibility of a comparative study of a single source text translated by one or more than one eminent scholar-translator.

3.5 NEW AREAS OF COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN INDIAN LITERATURE

3.5.1 Indian Mystical and Philosophical Tradition and the Anglo-American Response

It is not only that Anglo-American writers responded creatively to the Indian literary texts of the medieval or modern period but that the ancient traditions of philosophy had an impact on various poets and writers in the 19th and early twentieth century. One finds similarities of thought between Wordsworth and Indian philosophy and occasionally between Shelley and the Vedanta.

Similar affinities can be found between the Upanishadic thought and the world view of Emerson and Thoreau and Whitman. T.S. Eliot who was a student of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy incorporated some of the major thoughts of the

Upanishads in his *The Wasteland* (1922). He considered the Bhagwat Gita as one of the greatest religious poems of the world and it is quite clear that some of the basic philosophical doctrines of Bhagwat Gita contributed to the making of the world of his poetry. Nigel Leask in his well-researched work *British Romantic Writers and the East* (1993) demonstrates the relation between Byron, Shelley and Coleridge and India. He refers to Byron's *Eastern Tales* which he describes as a sample of the oriental. Similarly the Brahmins, temples and pyres have found romantic representations in Shelley's poetry. John Drew in his *India and the Romantic Imagination* (OUP, 1987) presents a very fascinating narrative of the British response to Indian poetry and mythology beginning with Sir William Jones' writings on India and points out the later works by poets like Coleridge, Shelley and finally the novelist F.M. Forster. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound, Shelley's account of his emulation of the imaginary of the Greek poets* 'drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed' (SPW, p. 205), suggests a linkage in his mind between the Greeks and the oriental poets discussed by Jones in his *On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations and Essay on the Arts, called Imitative*. (Nigel Leask, p. 141). There is a wide scope to study the various areas of affinities between the romantic poets and Indian mystical traditions as they are yet to be properly worked out. Several English writers, Kipling and Forster, for example, though poles apart in their understanding of India, presented fascinating narratives of Indo-English cultural encounters.

From the early periods of Indo-British relationships numerous writers have written on their Indian experiences, many of which are forgotten today (for instance, those narrating the experiences of Sepoy mutiny), but the present has a long and complex history of the confrontations and relationships between two cultures and two people. There are sensitive accounts of this history to be found in Edward Thomson's novels in India as well as accounts of imperialistic bigotry and insularity in numerous others, travelogues, diaries, memories, that were produced during the colonial periods. India became a part of British imagination and it occupied several English writers covertly as well as overtly.

3.5.2 New Literatures in English

Literatures in English began to emerge in countries that had once been colonized by the British Empire. In this context one can mention African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island and Sri Lanka. There were various stages of the development of English texts produced in the colonies corresponding to stages of national consciousness and the project of moving away from the Imperial centre. The first texts in the colonies were often produced by representatives of imperial power, travelers and memoir writers. The second stage marks the writings of those privileged classes who had gained access to the language producing literature under the 'imperial gaze', such as the large body of nineteenth century poetry and prose in English in India. It is only in the later stages that there is a tendency to move away from the 'centre', to use the language in new and distinctive ways, often be subversive and explore their rich native traditions within the English language. An exploration of how new literatures in English differ often lead to new insights into questions of tradition and identity.

New writings in English enlarge the scope of comparative literary studies. It includes the rich corpus of diaspora writings. There are two types of writings, which invariably appear in the category of **Writers of Indian Diaspora**. The first set of writers of Indian origin are those who continue writing in their mother tongue such as Gujarati, Panjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil etc. while they are settled in the country of their immigration such as Canada, USA and UK. The themes of their writings mostly relate to the question of individual identity, fond memories of the places where the writers had lived in and the social and economic problem of the double binding in the case of migrated women. "These images, verbal, auditory or visual, play a crucial role in shaping diasporic subjectiveness". (Satchidanandan, p. 30). The second category includes those who prefer to write in the language of the migrated country; it is English in most cases. The discernable denominator in both the categories is the choice of the same subject matter. Interestingly, when analyzed from a comparative framework, most of the writers of diaspora deal with the experiences of migrancy which evoke their responses to a syndrome of 'home country versus migrated country'. They often cross over from one culture to another, which in a comparative context is termed as 'bicultural pulls'. The list of the writers of diaspora, who deal with such sensitive questions in their fiction, poetry and prose writings is quite long, yet some names whose writings could be studied as part of Comparative Studies in Indian Literature includes Uma Parameswaran, Bharati Mukherjee, M.G. Vassanji, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Iqbal Ramoowalia (Panjabi and English) and many more.

3.5.3 Poetics of the Margin

Over the last few decades it has been observed that dominant cultures have hegemonized and marginalized many vital and rich but less fortunate literatures in all parts of the globe including in India. Languages like Bhojpuri, Maithili, Rajasthani and many more have remained almost subjugated for quite a few decades. As a result, the process of canonization leading to mainstream literature, knowingly or unknowingly, succeeded in keeping the dalit and tribal literatures in a sort of suppressed situation. However, of late, this trend has been reversed and better results have started appearing in the corpus of Indian literature.: Maithili has already been included by the VIIIth Schedule of Indian Constitution and a resurgent language is now producing vibrant modern literature. Rajasthani has also been included by the Sahitya Akademi in its activities. Among the tribal languages also, Bodo and Santali have been recognized by the Government of India. Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore has been assessing the status of such other tribal languages of the North-East like Khasi, Mizo, Garo etc. It will be a comparatist's delight to study the transition from oral tradition to written tradition in those tribal languages which are rich in folklore.

There is a global recognition now that the history and literature of a country remains incomplete if the country's aboriginal heritage gets ignored in its writing. A country's literary history would further miss its core, if the voices of its ethnic, tribal and minority writers remain unheard and unrecorded. This phenomenon is of great importance in multilingual and multicultural societies such as ours. The plea in favour of retaining the pluralist heritage consisting of diverse ethnic and tribal communities is beautifully expressed thus in the report of a tribal commission: 'Every flower has the right to grow according to

its own laws of growth; .... to spread its own fragrance, to make up the cumulative beauty and splendour of the garden. I would not like to change my roses into lilies nor my lilies into roses. Nor do I want to sacrifice my lovely orchids of rhododendrons of the hills'.

The importance and vastness of tribal literature can be judged objectively in two ways: a) by studying it as a body of literature consisting of diversified beliefs, myths and philosophies, especially of the Elders of the community and also emotional strains of autobiographical notes, b) by studying the literature found in the rich oral tradition of story telling, discourses, songs on the various occasion of life carrying the bitter sweet memories and prayers to the Great Spirit. The oral tradition is "the continuous flow of verbal interaction" that works as the fundamental reality of language. For instance, the oral literature of Canada's natives and India's tribals consist of formal narratives, informal story telling, songs and prayers as well as pungent political discourses. In fact in both cases and also in the corpus of other tribal literatures there exists a vast and remarkable diversified body of rich oral narratives.

An important area of study that has remained out of focus till recently is dalit literature written in different regions. Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati and other languages can now speak of sizeable dalit literatures and calls for comparative study. For instance, the narrative strategy of the dalit writer has become an important part of study of comparative literature. Another interesting study can be conducted on the positional difference between a dalit autobiography and a mainstream autobiography.

Similarly, the poetics of the margin also reflect women's voices. It is often said that the feminine mystique in literature is gradually yielding place to genuine women's voices where the bottled-up frustration, if not fury, of a thousand year's oppression are finding expression. The recent discovery of a number of nineteenth century texts like women's diaries and memoirs — all unpublished till the other day, shows that this frustration had always existed as a form of resentment. Since the Women's Lib and other such movements in the West, the Indian women also started becoming more and more liberated, and this has found expression in art and literature and has become an important area of comparative study of Indian literature. There is so much work that needs to be done that one can say that sky is the limit.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In a multilingual and multicultural country like India, Comparative Studies in Indian Literature have become the need of the hour and have made a space for themselves. The possibilities of such studies are enormous.

A welcome development has reportedly taken place at the new Dravidian University, where the School of Comparative Literary and Translation Studies has involved five departments i.e. Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and English and Communication, besides the study of Dravidian Folklore. This could be seen as the first step towards the demolition of walls between different literature departments in universities of which Sisir Kumar Das, the doyen of comparatists spoke. Comparative Indian Literature and Translation Studies are in the process of becoming an integral part of the courses of study

at graduate and post-graduate levels. We can say with confidence that this is, indeed, a foretaste of better things to come in the ripe field of Comparative Studies in Indian literature.

3.7 GLOSSARY

Manipravalam: a hybrid style composed of Sanskrit and Malayalam or Tamil. Such hybridization is the result of interaction between languages. In his book *A History of Indian Literature: 1800-1910 Western Impact: Indian Response,* Sisir K. Das refers to the song *Vande Mataram* as 'an instance of modern *mani-pravala* it being written in a mixture of Sanskrit and Bengali' (346)

Charles E. Gover, author of *The Folk-Songs of Southern India* (1871): According to Devendra Satyarthi's book *Meet My People*: *Indian Folk Poetry*. Chetna, Hyderabad (1951), the book contains — Introduction, The Folk-Songs of Southern India, Canarese Songs, Badaga Songs. Coorg Songs, Tamil Songs, the Cural, Malayalam Songs, and Telugu Songs.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. In what sense is the term 'comparative literature' a misnomer?
2. Account for the rich scope for comparative studies in Indian literature.
3. If you had to choose a language cluster to work upon, which language cluster would you choose and why?
4. Examine the presentation of women in the stories that you have read as part of your syllabus.
5. If you were to choose a subject for writing a paper of a comparative nature from the texts in your course, which one would you choose? Prepare an outline of your paper.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4 ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 What is Translation?
4.3 Issues and Problems Involved in the Translation: Some General Considerations
4.4 Importance of English Translation of Indian Literatures.
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  4.5.1 Linguistic Problems
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  4.5.3 Translators can be Arbitrary Too
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  4.5.5 The Question is: Which English?
4.6 Translations of Source Texts as Viewed From the Translators' Desk
4.7 Let Us Sum Up
4.8 Activities
4.9 Glossary
4.10 Questions
4.11 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will introduce you to a discussion on English translation of Indian literature in general and will focus on its aims, its present status, the major issues it raises, and the linguistic and cultural problems it presents, with the help of concrete examples.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Translation is as old as creative writing itself. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, named after the legendary king of Sumerian city state of Uruk in Mesopotamia and considered among the oldest known literary works, may well have been read by the early authors of the *Bible* and of the *Iliad in their own languages*. Parts of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, have been found in translations into several Asiatic languages of the second millennium BCE. However, translation has not always enjoyed the status that it is coming to enjoy now. In the West the original seems to have been valorized over the translated version. Ramchandra Sharma, the well-known Kannada poet and translator from Kannada into English and vice versa, refers to Dante saying that 'nothing that the Muses had touched can be carried over to another tongue without losing its savour and harmony'. In more recent times Nabokov called translation 'a profanation of the dead'.

However, the original is not seen as superior to the translated text any more. Gabriel Garcia Marquez once openly conceded that the English translation of his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was certainly richer than its original in linguistic and semiotic qualities. Eugene Chen Eoyang, in the essay, "Translation as Enhancement" in his book *Borrowed Plumage: Polemical Essays on Translation*, quotes Alastair Reid to establish this point:

"In our time, we do have at least one instance when an author, far from denigrating the attempts to render him into other languages and assuming — like Frost — something must always be lost in translation, maintains the superiority of a translated version over his original. Speaking of Gregory Rabassa's English translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, according to Alastair Reid, 'insists that he prefers the English translation to the original".....Garzia Marquez was not merely conceding equivalence between his original and Rabassa's translation: he was insisting that he preferred Rabassa's version to his own". **(Eoyang,128)**

As for India, traditionally we have always accepted *translation*, or more accurately *adaptation* or reworkings of the same story as a creative activity. No one would dream of calling great poets like Kamban, Pampa, Kumara Vyasa, Ezhuttachan, Tulsidas, Chaitanya and Sarala Das as translators because they have told the great epics in their respective regional languages, even developing these languages in the process. These pioneers were seen as great writers who wrote in the regional languages to reach out to the common people. Moreover, the kind of author-centric attention to the book, again something we inherited from the West, was not so much in vogue in ancient times — except perhaps on the occasions when poets and dramatists recited their poems (even composing extempore), or staged plays to get preference in royal patronage, as in the case of Kalidas and others in the court of King Vikramaditya of Ujjain.

Even so, translation in the limited sense in which we use it today has been viewed as a secondary activity in our country and translators have been considered inferior to creative writers. As a result, translated books don't always carry the name of the translators on the title page.

Attitudes towards translation are, however, changing everywhere. As Susan Bassnett says, 'interest in the field has never been stronger and the study of translation is taking place alongside an increase in its practice all over the world..(Bassnett:1) It has begun to be seen as 'a fundamental act of human exchange', and translation, she says, 'has a crucial role to play in aiding understanding of an increasingly fragmented world'. From the periphery translation has moved to the centre and a whole new discipline of Translation Studies has emerged in universities. . These studies now form part of literary and cultural theory. Colonialism, post-coloniality, literary history, semiology and deconstruction are seen linked to translation.

The new academic respectability that translation has achieved in the West has filtered down to the Indian academic world also. The new theoretical interest is evidenced by the publication of important books like Harish Trivedi's *Cultural and Linguistic Problems in Translation* (1971), Sujit Mukherjee's *Translation as Discovery and Other Essays* on *Indian Literature in English Translation* (1981) and Paul St. Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar's edited volume *In Translation:Reflections, Refractions and Transformations* (2005). As a reviewer of the last mentioned book says, there is 'a pervasive questioning of

translation's role and function now. Simultaneously.translations in in general and translations into English in particular are coming to be seen as inevitable in a multi-lingual country like ours. They are indeed the life breath of our being-our cultural,social and political life. Ideally multi-lingualism should be seen not a problem but as part of our strength. I Translations os Indian Literature into English are naturally an essential part of it.

Before we discuss the issues and problems arising out of translation further. we need to begin at the beginning and see what translation means etymologically

4.2 WHAT IS TRANSLATION?

Let's begin with a dictionary definition of translation. According to *The* **Reader's Digest, Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary, translation is an act of** turning words, sentences or books from one language into another, or expressing the sense of something in another form of words. Etymologically, "translation" is a "carrying across" or "bringing across".

The Latin "*translatio*" derives from the perfect passive participle, "*translatum*", of "*transferre*" ("to transfer" — from "*trans*," "across" + "*ferre*," "to carry" or "to bring"). This metaphor can be extended to mean carrying or transporting across the borders between one language and another, one country and another, one culture and the other. In a sense the metaphor of 'carrying over' holds the key to the efficacy or otherwise of translation. Several questions arise from it.

[Additionally, the Greek term for "translation," "*metaphrasis*" ("a speaking across"), has supplied English with "metaphrase" (a "literal translation," or "word-for-word" translation) — as contrasted with "paraphrase" ("a saying in other words," from the Greek "*paraphrasis*")].

The all-important question perhaps is:

Does the translation carry the sense and the spirit of the original or the souree text over to the new or the target text faithfully?

Other subsidiary questions follow.

1. How **faithful** is the translator? This raises the question of the **aims** of the translator? More specifically, it also raises the problem of finding **the right equivalents.**
2. Has the translator taken liberties with the source text? Has he attempted a **free translation or a literal translation?**

Related to these are some general questions: G.N. Devy in his essay 'Translation Theory: An Indian Perspective' suggests a whole list of them. Here are some of these questions. 'Is translation possible?' 'What is a good translation? 'Should a translator move from his mother tongue to the other language?' 'Can poetry be translated without losing its soul?'

Moreover, translation is seen as a cultural activity involving cultural codes. It is not an innocent activity and can be a highly manipulative exercise, particularly if the relationship between the source language culture and the target language culture is asymmetrical.

I shall not attempt full-scale answers to these questions and issues here. Translation Studies is a large field with numerous facets and the limited space available in the unit doesn't permit me to deal with more than a few of them. But I want you to keep these questions in mind and ponder them. I shall only suggest that most of us who need translations would want to read translations that are faithful and that approximate to the original in letter and spirit as much as possible.

Here we shall glance briefly at the importance of translation of Indian literature in English and then go on to discuss linguistic and cultural problems and other issues related to translation. You will also get to read how some of the translators of texts included in the course have gone about their task of translation and how they have solved the difficulties that they faced.

4.3 ISSUES AND PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN TRANSLATION : SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

a. A major problem is of finding appropriate equivalents. Words and phrases or dialectical variants in the source language may not have any readymade corresponding expressions in the target language. Faithful translation becomes very difficult in such a case. For example, in *Indulekha*, the Malayalam novel by O. Chandu Menon, JWF Dumerge the British translator, is at a loss to find the equivalence of the form of address a Shudra makes towards a Nambudiri Brahmin. The term used (on page 81, third paragraph, first line) "Thirumanassu" which literally means "Your Holy Self", is plainly translated as "you". However, in the fifth paragraph, it has become "Your reverence". The variation is to be noted, as the translator becomes confused about the linguistic value of the term. (Chandu Menon, 81) In any case the flavour of a dialect, especially a rural dialect, is well nigh impossible to be translated into another language.

b) Strategies to forge alliances with sub-cultures in the culture of the target language may lend relevance to the translation and ensure its contemporaneity. This may aid in saving the text in the target language from being blandly dressed in a characterless, literal idiom. [For example, a Hindi or a Punjabi novel translated into English may retain traces of the original in the TL text which is aimed at the expatriate readers who might have come from Punjabi or the Hindi belt.] Likewise, political/religious subtexts in the SL text would need to be conserved in translation and this may often involve inventing similar subtexts in the translated texts. This is precisely what O.V. Vijayan didn't do, while translating 'Rawthers' and 'Ezhavas' in the SL text as 'Muslims' and 'Hindus' in the TL text.

c) Translation is not an innocent activity and can be used to tilt the translated text in favour of the powerful. According to Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi:

"Translation does not happen in a vacuum, but in a continuum; it is not an isolated act, it is part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer. Moreover, translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems" (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, 1-18.)

In other words, if the translator is 'a creative artist who ensures the survival of writing across time and space', it can also be used as an instrument of domination where there is inequality of power relations between the source culture and the target culture. If translation is taking place between the language of the colonizer and the language of the colonized, there would be the question of hegemony involved. That is, the colonial master will take liberties with the original text to suit the purposes of the readers in the more 'powerful' language — the language of the colonial master. Then, when the colony gains independence and the colonial master physically leaves the country, the language of the colonizer lingers behind. What happens to that language and its literature, and their influence on the life and thinking of the people of the erstwhile colony, along with a myriad of other lingering traces of the colonial rule in various spheres of life, can be described as post-coloniality. Linguistic and cultural problems thrown up by translation of a literary text are to be seen in the context of such a complex situation.

d) Literary translation in a post-colonial context poses specific challenges. I have already explained what post-coloniality means. In the first place, literary translation in a post-colonial context poses specific challenges. I have already explained above what post-coloniality means. In the first place, there is the danger of a translated text getting appropriated by the target language culture as its own. An explanation of what appropriation is, becomes relevant here. In the theory of appropriation, it is assumed that if one should benefit from something, someone, somewhere else must suffer a corresponding loss.

"Indeed, the theory of appropriation is a much more attractive proposition than the ageing theory of progress, which tells us that civilization, despite its temporary lapses, tends towards a final goal—an earthly paradise, a New Jerusalem, or a perfect association of free individuals....The theory of appropriation resuscitates a clear vision of reality and a belief in binary oppositions, since it assumes that if there is a gain, there must be a concomitant loss" (Kuhiwczak, 1990: 119).

The ruthlessness inherent in the process is lost sight of by the beneficiary, as in all capitalist/imperialist set-ups. An example is provided below from JWF Dumergue's translation of O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*:

On page 60, paragraph four of the translated text we find, "As soon as the meal was over, Govinda Panikar, taking his son inside the house, embraced him and, kissing his head, said...."

This is how it goes in the original: "As soon as lunch was over, Govinda Panikar called his son into the interior of the house, sat him down on his lap

and kissed him on the crown of his head (translation mine)". In the place of this expression of affection a father has for a son typical in our culture, the purely western 'embrace' comes in. While Dumergue seems to be shy to place Madhavan, a grown up young man, in his father's lap, he doesn't mind an embrace. Obviously, the translator being an Englishman, a colonial administrator, did a free translation, appropriating the scene from its original description, rendering it suitable for the consumption of the target language readership.

This leaves the translator from a language which is hegemony-wise in a secondary position, with the need to maintain a balance between ensuring communicability on the one hand and resisting cultural appropriation on the other.

e) Questions of free translation versus literal translation also are relevant. A free translation takes place when the translator takes off from the original and creates a free version in the Target Language, without caring much for equivalent expression of the original in the translated text. A literal translation happens when the translator, with a legalistic bend of mind as it were, does something like an audit of the equivalences of expression of the original while rendering them into the target language, without bringing in aesthetic considerations. [The worst case of literal translation is 'rank-bound' translation.] For example, Narayana Menon, in his translation of Thakazhi's *Chemmeen*, has resorted to this practice. Pareekkutty, Karuthamma's paramour, in one instance, calls her 'Ente Ponninkudamee!' which literally means, 'O my pot of gold!' and that is exactly how Narayana Menon's translation goes! A common-sense translation of the expression could have been, "O my sweet-heart!" or something similar. Literal translation may pose problems of communication to the readers of the target language as seen here. How can a lover call his sweet-heart a pot of gold! Such literalness needs to be guarded against.

There is another practice at work — to retain in an English translation [from Malayalam fiction in this case], kinship terms like Achhan, Amma, Chettan, Chechy, etc., names of food items like dosa, idli, sambar, appam, etc., forms of address like Achhaa!, Ammee!, Chettaa!, Checheee! and many such expressions. A translated text full of such expressions cannot easily be appropriated. On the other hand, however, however, free translation may facilitate comprehension on the part of the target language readers to understand the work; but this understanding would be possible only in their own terms, as they would *like* to read and experience things. For example, reading the TL text of *Indulekha*, the average British reader will imagine a Cupid, an out-dated Greek god, in the place of the ever-present Kamadeva of our own mythology, when a free translation of the latter is done as the former. (Illustrations involving the same terms are provided later in greater detail). Authorial authority could be usurped here. What the original author intends is sabotaged in the process. There is a need to interrogate these processes in relation to certain aspects of cultural politics.

f) We need to use Indian English. The choice of the variety of the target language is an important factor in the post-colonial context. If an Indian writes a novel about India and Indian ethos now, using British English, it would look as if the writer is trying to put the clock back.

The English language that has developed in India, soaked in our culture, is a distinct language. Sahitya Akademi, the National Academy of Letters of India, considers this English an Indian language and has included literature written in it for awards as for all other regional languages. Raja Rao (d. 2006) pleaded for writing in Indian English in his introduction to his novel *Kanthapura* (1938). Much the same holds good for translation of Indian literature into English.

g) Erratic use of power by the translator. Question of the misuse of power by the translator is another important issue. In the first place, the translator can subvert authorial authority, especially in a free translation. What the original author accomplishes in the text in the source language can be changed into something different in the text in the target language, through the intervention of the target language and culture. The translator also becomes the ultimate authority who decides what the reader of the text in the target language should read. It is possible that the translator may resort to suppression, partial elimination or misinterpretation of elements or aspects of texts in the source language. Attempts on the part of the original author to get to the reader of the text in the target language, as illustrated in Milan Kundera's Introduction to the translation of his novel *The Joke* would need to be studied. This would take us to the questions of authenticity and authorial authority over the text in the target language.

These are some of the theoretical and practical issues involved in translation in a post-colonial context in the Indian situation.

4.4 IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF INDIAN LITERATURE

The English language has a history of more than three centuries in our country. After the British obtained overall control of India, their language naturally became the language of power and governance, and acquired the status of a 'must learn' language. 'The Bengali Renaissance' that began in the mid-eighteenth century, the first sign of modernity in this country, was singularly the result of English education of the 'natives'. One of the earliest Malayalam novels, *Indulekha* by O. Chandu Menon, has, as one of its objectives, the 'propagation' of English education among the common people, to accelerate the forces of modernity in society. There would be many other examples for this in other Indian languages. In a country where we speak hundreds of languages, and where the national academy of letters, Sahitya Akademi, has recognized 24 major language literatures, and several more marginal and tribal language literatures, the need of a link language is obvious. When the British were in power in India, English became the natural choice as a language that was commonly used all over India for higher education and also as a fashionable means of communication among the upper classes. Once again, to fall back upon Malayalam literature for an example, it is interesting to know that great writers and poets of the renaissance period like C.V. Raman Pillai, O. Chandu Menon, Kerala Varma Valiya Koilthampuran, Kumaran Asan and even modern poets like Changampuzha who held their mother tongue close to their heart, conducted their personal

correspondence mostly in English'. Even after the british left India, the language has remained in power. Now, with the advent of modernization and liberalization, and the spread of the Internet, English has become the international lingua france, wielding enormous power.

We are a multilingual country who have grown up with at least three languages, one of them being compulsory English and can easily access the literatures of other regions of the country through translation. Translation of our literatures into English will make available to us a body of literature which is truly Indian. Students in our schools, colleges and universities will be able to study English as a language, while the literature part of it will remain Indian. A majority of universities in the country still keep English literature from the time of Chaucer to the Twentieth Century as a compulsory part of their curriculum for Honours and post-graduate studies. This arrangement makes it obligatory for our students to study British literature at great length, while they get hardly any opportunity to study Indian literature in English translation. If translation of Indian literature takes place on an adequate scale, our students will be able to study English literature of the Indian variety.

No less important is the prospect of taking our literatures out to the rest of the world through translation. Besides facilitating access to Indian literature within the country, English translation will put our regional literature on the world literary map and our authors will get the due that has long been denied to them. With multinational publishing houses opening their offices in India, Indian literature in English translation has a better chance of reaching the West.

From the time *Bhagavad-gita*, translated by Charles Wilkins, was first published in 1785, Sir William Johns translated Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* as *Sacontala* in 1789, through to the age of JWF Dumergue who translated *Indulekha* more than a hundred years ago, numerous western translators have translated Indian literature into English. William Radice who translated Tagore's works, Ronald E. Asher who translated Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's Malayalam fiction into English, Gillian Wright, Rupert Snell, Philip Lutgendorf and others who translate from Hindi — the list lengthens.

There are a large number of Indian translators who are producing work of high standard. While more than a century-old translation of *Indulekha* and seven decades-old translation of *Marthanda Varma* will remain part of literary history, the new crop of translators uses the language of the present. This is true among others of this writer's translation of Paul Zacharia's short stories *The Reflections of a Hen in Her Last Hour and Other Stories* (1998), or of M. Mukundan's novel *Kesavante Vilaapangal* (Kesavan's Lamentations), or to offer another example, Vasanta Surya's translation of Tamil short stories in the anthology, *A Place to Live* (2004).

I shall close this sub-section by pointing out that Indian literature in English translation was a major theme of the prestigious International Book Fair held at Frankfurt, Germany in 2006.

Finally, a word about the publishing scene in the country. Fortunately, over the last decade and half, after the introduction of economic liberalization, many multi-national publishers are taking a deep interest in Indian literature, mainly fiction, in English translation. Penguin India had been on the scene longer than the others, and has understandably published a lion's share of

translation from regional language fiction. But houses like HarperCollins, Picador India, Random House, and others have set up shop and have ventured seriously into this competitive area. Traditional English publishers like Oxford University Press, Macmillan, Orient Longman and others as well as prestigious Indian organizations like Katha, Rupa & Co., India Ink, Roli Books, Permanent Black and so on, are also contributing considerably to the publication of Indian literature in English translation on a big scale.

The Sahitya Akademi and the National Book Trust, India have detailed book lists of Indian literature in English translation. As you can see, the entire scene is buzzing with translating activity. [Harish Trivedi's "Introduction" to Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice, will come in handy .I suppose:

"The word for translation in Sanskrit, which persists unchanged in most of the modern Indian languages, is *anuvad*, which etymologically and primarily means, 'saying after or again... . The underlying metaphor in the word *anuvad* is temporal (relating to time) — to say *after*, to repeat — rather than spatial (relating to space) as in the English/Latin word, 'translation' — (meaning) to carry *across*. (Thus,) those two source books of Indian culture, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, were worked and reworked....with various shifts of emphasis and ideology through which gaps in the original were inevitably filled in, silences were rendered poignantly accurate, and even some of the great heroes turned into villains and villains into heroes" (Trivedi: 1999). Literary translation, therefore, could be defined as a creative process in which the original is re-invested with life in the receiving language, within a degree of acceptability in the present context of that particular language.

Clarification of two terms becomes necessary at this point: Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL). Source Language is the language from which a text is translated. Target Language is that language into which the text is translated.]

4.5 PROBLEMS AND ISSUES RELATED TO THE TRANSLATION OF INDIAN LITERATURES INTO ENGLISH

There are broadly two types of problems involved in the translation of Indian literature into English — linguistic and cultural. Whereas linguistic problems may vary from case to case, cultural problems in the case of most of the Indian languages are similar.

4.5.1 Linguistic Problems

We shall deal with linguistic problems of translation first. The reason for this is that linguistic uniqueness is non-negotiable, and it leaves very little room for manoeuvre. Specific linguistic features of each language throw up the problem of untranslatability. In such cases, there are only limited options. Either, one must attempt a very free and approximate translation, which may be frowned upon in the surcharged cultural situation in the post-colonial scenario. The other option is to retain such linguistic approximations and provide explanatory notes or glossary. But this practice is being eschewed

nowadays. For example, in English translations of Latin American fiction, most of the culture-specific terms are retained, albeit italicised. However, of late, italicisation is also being done away with. For instance, in the latest English translations of modern Malayalam fiction, Malayalam and Sanskrit words are retained in the target language text without italicisation. This is one way of asserting the independence and power of the original text, without standing in awe of the target language culture by exhibiting modesty with the genuflection of italicisation or footnotes

When it comes to kinship terms, forms of address, honorifics, or even slang, patois or dialect used in conversation, the hands of the translator are tied even more. So also, when unique idioms, phrases, adages, axioms, proverbs or, even an exclamation, onomatopoeic words or pun are to be translated, we find ourselves at a loss. Ronald E. Asher, the renowned linguist and translator, in his now famous notes on the translation of *'Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant!': Three Stories of Muslim Life in South India*, has dealt with the problem of finding acceptable equivalents. To quote him:

> Cultural items, in the realms of dress and food, for example, do not always have a ready English equivalent. In some cases, we have had to make do with an approximate equivalent; in others we have seen no alternative to using a transliterated form (ignoring all diacritics that a pedant might properly require). All such forms are italicized on their first appearance, the only exceptions being words (not necessarily part of most English-speakers' active vocabulary stock) that are to be found in the Oxford English Dictionary — such as 'jambu' and 'pandal'.
>
> A few remarks on specific items of dress maybe appropriate. One 'bisexual' garment is the cloth worn in Kerala to cover the lower half of the body. For this garment as worn by men we have used the reasonably familiar term 'dhoti', but, at the risk of seeming inconsistent, have used a romanisation of the Malayalam word, *mundu*, when it is described as being worn by a woman.... (I would like to intervene here and point out that in the original Malayalam, *mundu* is the word used in both the cases, and 'dhoti' does not carry the equivalence, as *mundu* is a single-fold, smaller piece of cloth worn casually and not elaborately as a 'dhoti'. Asher seems to have needlessly laboured to bring in the differentiation. I would have used *mundu* in both the cases and let the context do the differentiation).
>
> ...For the long-sleeved, long-waisted blouse worn by Muslim women in Kerala we have kept the Malayalam *kuppayam*, above all because it is an important feature of an incident in one of the stories (*Ntuppuppakkoranentaarnnu* or '*Me' Grandad 'ad an Elephant!*') that, in the view of some people, no self-respecting Muslim lady should wear a 'blouse', that is to say one with short sleeves and allowing a view of the wearer's midriff.
>
> ...Part of the special flavour of Basheer's stories for a Malayali reader lies in his use of *bapa* as a term of address and reference for 'father', and *umma* for 'mother'. It has seemed to us best to keep this in almost all cases. We have been rather more sparing in the use of *uppuppa* for 'grandfather' and have used English equivalents for all other terms but one, and this only in one story ....

A cultural feature of a different kind, but also in the field of the use of kinship terms, concerns the convention that one does not refer to one's elders and betters in the family by name but by the term of family relationship. We have followed this convention,even though it may on occasion seem strained.....

One Muslim feature we have sacrificed entirely. The dialect of Malayalam spoken by Muslims (particularly those who have not had the opportunity to advance very far up the educational ladder) is quite distinct from other dialects, as regards pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. In the conversationa passages of his stories, Basheer faithfully represents all aspects of this dialect. It would naturally have been possible to choose some 'non-standard' dialect of English, for these dialogue sections. We decided against this for two reasons. Firstly, and more importantly, there is no specifically and exclusively Muslim dialect of English. The only choice, therefore, would have been some regional variety. Yet there would have been no motivation for choosing one such variety in preference to another, and whatever had been chosen would have had an entirely different flavour and impact from the original. ...It has nevertheless been necessary to make one or two exceptions to this rule in '*Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant!*', since the better-educated Aisha tries to improve Kunjupattumma's pronunciation along with teaching her to read and write. Hence we have had to indicate here and there by devices of spelling that certain characters in the story speak with an uneducated accent. We have followed the author in symbolising this in the title too.

One problem, however, we found admitted of no really satisfactory solution. In the last chapter of '*Me' Grandad 'ad an Elephant!*', we find some rude and uninhibited urchins claiming that the famous *aana* ('elephant') of the title was in reality no such thing, but a small insect for which the name in Malayalam is *kuzhi-aana*. The English equivalent is 'ant-lion' which regrettably, does not allow the necessary pun. We have made the best of a bad job by inventing the term 'elephant-ant' The reader is warned that, to the best or our knowledge, there is no such insect. One similar, and repeated, allusion to the elephant of the book's title we have ignored. The name by which the heroine's grandfather is known is Anamakkar, literally Elephant Makkar' (for, did he not own an elephant?). The relative clumsiness of this expression as compared with the Malayalam form spoke against its use...

I hope this rather long quote would adequately explain my postulations at the beginning of this section. There is something additional I would like to draw your attention to. Notice how Asher approaches the problem of style inherent in translation, especially from a source language that is from outside the language family to which the target language belongs. More specifically, Basheer's use of the dialect of the uneducated Muslims, which determines his style in stories dealing with life in the Muslim community (not stories like his "Birthday", on which you will read in one of the other Blocks on Short Stories. That story is about life in general, and is written in a neutral language), which Asher finds unique and non-negotiable. This is precisely where translation needs to retain the flavour of the original, and Asher manages to do that through strategies he has detailed in his note above.

In the course of the detailed analysis of sample texts, the present writer came across a number of instances of inaccurate translation. Inaccuracy can creep in owing to a variety of reasons ranging from the translator's poor grasp of the Source Language — as in the case of Ronald E. Asher, in spite of having the services of a co-translator — to finding wrong equivalences. These also come under the heading of linguistic problems. The following instances illustrate this point:

1) On page nine, after Majid says Suhra is his "princess", she says, "You're joking". It is meant to be an equivalent to "Po Cherka", or "Go, boy".

Majid replies to this incredulousness by swearing by his mother. "Upon my mother", he says, and not "On my honour" as seen in the TL Text. "Upon my mother", is an acceptable enough exclamation now in Indian English, in the context of swearing an oath. A few sentences later the same is repeated, in the scene where Majid pares Suhra's nails. The following sentences: "On your honour?" and "On my honour", are questions and answers of Suhra and Majid, respectively. However, "Upon your mother?" and "Upon my mother", respectively, seems more accurate [translation mine].

2) On page 13, last paragraph, fifth line, there is a word "standing lamp" in the TL Text. It is the literal translation of "*nilavilakku*" or the traditional wick lamp made of brass. This is an unnecessary translation that looks awkward. The original word should have been retained and glossed. This has been the practice followed in numerous other cases, and has come to be accepted. This is a specific case of linguistic and cultural problem of translation combined together.

3) On page 14, second paragraph, in the fifth and sixth lines, there is the sentence: "A sensation like the tearing of the dried film of an areca-nut leaf", describing how Majid experienced the act of circumcision. The translation of the Malalyalam word, "paala" as "the dried film of areca-nut leaf" is erroneous. It should have been "leaf-spathe of the areca-palm"(translation mine). "Dried paala" is much thicker and harder than a "dried film". This is a case of incorrect literal translation. Here also, the original word should have been retained and glossed. Again, we come across a linguistic/cultural problem.

4) In the second paragraph on the same page, describing Majid's circumcision, the TL Text goes like this: "...rather like having a circle of ink at the end of the finger from the mouth of the bottle without actually touching the ink". In the original it is like this: "Like red ink smeared around the tip of the finger when it is tightly inside the mouth of the ink bottle, without it getting dipped" (translation mine).The translation is incorrect.

5) On page 15, first paragraph, sixth line, we see the use of "bandy-legged", which is not accurate. The Malayalam is "he walked with his legs wide apart". "Bandy-legged" implies the curvature of the part of legs from knees down.

6) On page 20, in the big paragraph among the dialogues, we find the sentence, "...with appetites like the demon Vaka". This is an incorrect

translation. "Bakantha", the original Malayalam word used, is a corrupt word in the Muslim patois, equivalent to "vasantha" of the Christian patois, which means "pestilence". "Save us from Panjam, pada, vasantha.... (famine, wars, and pestilence)" was a stock prayer of grannies in the Syrian Christian community.

7) In the story '*Me*' *Grandad* '*ad an Elephant!*', on page 59, and elsewhere, the Islamic way of naming the Old Testament characters, as "Adam Nabi, Ouvah Bibi, Nooh, Ibrahim, Dawood, Moosa, Eesa", etc., has been anglicized as "Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, David, Moses, Jesus" etc., which makes them appear out of character. Again, on the same page, in the last but one paragraph, the name of the angel "Gabriel" is used in the Biblical way, rather than the Koranic, "Jibreel" used in the SL Text. These names in the original should have been retained, if not for anything else, at least for the "exotic effect" Asher refers to this in the "Introduction".

8) On page 66, first paragraph, eighth line, "Not a trace of the heavens or the earth will remain," runs like this in the original: "The solar system and the cosmos...nothing will remain". Basheer's is a very specific and modern expression, whereas the translator has fudged it through the mystifying generalisation, "heavens or the earth".

9) On page 142, the word "banana" is used a couple of times, as equivalent of "*njalippoovan pazham*" which is essentially "plantain" and not "banana". In the Kerala context, "banana" solely means the big, "*ethappazham*".

10) On page 149, in the paragraph that comes after the conversation part in Chapter Two, there is the expression, "Did you see it piddle! Did you see it piddle!"

This is a gross mistake. The original Malayalam expression is "Mullanathu kandilla" which means, "that with which he pees is not to be found". What is described is not an enquiry into the act of piddling: it rather refers to the tool with which one pees! The goat had eaten up the front area of Abi's shorts, because the child had put an appam (rice pancake) in his pocket, and the goat had smelled it and tried to grab at it. Then, the natural outcome will be the disappearance of the male member together with the fabric, imagines the child!

The lesson that could perhaps be drawn from this is that when no acceptable equivalents are available, we resort to the source language expressions and add an explanatory footnote.

4.5.2 Cultural Problems

i. Cultural Appropriation

The term 'appropriation' has already been explained above.

First of all, cultural appropriation by the hegemonic language and culture, happening uninterruptedly in the field of Indian fiction in English translation,

alongside the recent boom in Indian English fiction-writing, has to be interrogated. For example, O. Chandu Menon's Malayalam novel *Indulekha,* (1890) almost the first novel in Malayalam,(the chronologically first novel is Appu Nedungadi's *Kundalata*, published in 1887 which is considered by leading critics as a non-starter, really), was translated by JWF Dumergue, who was Chandu Menon's boss in the colonial government service, and published in1890 with the primary intention of recording the rituals, customs and relationship patterns of educated Imperial subjects of Malabar, as also to provide entertainment for readers back home and to highlight the spreading of the message of English education. It may be noted that modern Malayalam fiction at its very inception was appropriated by the hegemonic power. Here, a bare summary of the story would be appropriate. Indulekha is a young aristocratic Nair lady, whose uncle took the initiative to give her English education, while the lucky ones among her peers would have become the wives of Nambudiris and the rest, the vast majority, would have become the wives of Nair men and borne them children. The English education gives her self-confidence, and she practices free-thinking and adopts an individualistic and rational kind of lifestyle. Hers is the first voice of women's liberation in Malayalam fiction, and perhaps in the whole of modern Indian fiction as well. She falls in love with her cousin, Madhavan, also an English educated, modernized youth, who, though, retains elements of male chauvinism. Madhavan leaves for Madras (present-day Chennai) for higher studies. The separation proves to be vexing for the young couple. But to add fuel to the fire, the simple-minded uncle of Indulekha develops a misunderstanding about Madhavan and is hell-bent on marrying Indulekha off to a middle-aged, much-married, wealthy Nambudiri aristocrat. The scenes provided by the Nambudiri's encounters with Indulekha, trying to woo her in his boorish way, and her rebuff of him, provide comic relief. Finally, the lovers are reunited, and all ends well. The virtues of English education, modernity, progress and so on are discussed at length in this novel.

When Dumerge translated the novel, the attractive narrative was retained, whereas the culture-specific and linguistic peculiarities were smoothened out, and defaced without even giving adequate explanatory notes or providing a glossary, with the express purpose of providing reading pleasure for the target language readership that had no idea about the culture of Kerala. Apart from the few examples already given elsewhere in this lesson, a few more are given below, to illustrate this point:

1) On page two, line one, the translation runs, "I will now tell my readers something of his character and person". But in the original, the same line, literally is, ["Now, I'll describe him briefly". (translation mine.)] The addition made by Dumergue is to be specially noted, as it is meant expressly for the target audience back home.

2) At the bottom of the same page, a sentence begins on the last but one line that reads, "His flowing locks, when loosened from the knot in which they were usually tied according to the Malayalee custom, hung down to his knees". Literally the same sentence should read, ["If Madhavan's body is to be measured, one can do so till his knees, with his extremely attractive long hair reaching down to that part of the body". (translation mine)]. Addition and paraphrasing by the translator are to be taken note of as evidence of the imperial tone that characterizes the colonial times. Much more, Dumergue's statement in his "Translator's Preface" that he translated this novel out of

ethnographic concerns — to get to know more about the customs and behavioural patterns of the imperial subjects of Malabar, a district of the Madras Presidency — has to be taken into account. What he does here can be viewed also as a kind of report, when he mentions, "...according to Malayalaee custom...". (p. 2).

3) On page 48, the first line begins: "My darling, my true, my only love..." However, in the original it is, "O my husband, the lord of my life...". It is obvious that when Chandu Menon says that the lovers had already performed *antakkaranavivaham* (marriage of their conscience) what he means is that for all practical purposes they had married each other spiritually, and thus, it was normal for Indulekha to call Madhavan her husband. But for Dumergue, whose legalistic understanding of the status of the relationship between the couple — that they are not legally married — must have inhibited him from using the word, "husband" when, in actual fact, the Malayalam word, "*bharthavu*" has only one meaning, that is, "husband". Later in the novel, on page 3 *1* in the last paragraph, ninth line, the same word is properly translated as "husband," in the place where Indulekha shouts the word in terror, in the aftermath of a nightmare. Again, the fact that Indulekha had called out "my husband", is reiterated by her mother on page 359, line ten, and the same is confirmed, explained and defended by Indulekha, elaborately in the paragraph hat follows, on the lines of the argument the present writer has already put forward. [The translator has ignored all these "husbands".] This is again a case of the administrator taking over from the translator explaining the technicality of the relationship to the TL readership. It also shows the level of insensitivity of the translator to the cultural mores of a society [he had quite successfully merged into] as a colonial administrator.

The arbitrariness involved in the whole exercise is so symptomatic of the colonial times that Anitha Devasia and Susie Tharu made the following formulations about it:

"The result is a fluent and eminently readable translation, one that does not seem like a translation at all. But it is also a translation that rewrites its original into the dominant (and therefore also transparent) discourse of the target-language, providing the target language reader with the pleasure of recognizing his or her own culture in the foreign text and feeling at home in another history and another culture. Such translations obviously domesticate the foreign text, obscuring differences of history, politics, intertextuality, context etc...In fact Dumergue's 'cultured and broadminded' (we are citing T.C. Shankara Menon from his Preface to the 1965 reissue of Dumergue's translation) judgment of Indulekha as a 'well-told, pleasing love-story' that was also 'a faithful, fascinating picture of life in Malabar...not only interesting but also useful to administrators and historians' become both the basis of his translation practice and of the canonisation of the original. The translation displaces the original as it establishes the reading in which *Indulekha* is rendered intelligible and of value, and circulated canonically in Malaylalam — and world — literature (Devasia and Tharu, 1997: 74-75)". If the above is not a plain description of appropriation, what is?

The post-colonial experience urges to assert the nation's identity, as we have seen ever since we became aware of our nationhood. Beginning with the

"pride" the people of each language-based state of the Indian Union take in their own language and literature, and ending at language chauvinism, at times even virulent and violent, and crowning it all with the obsession of creating a "national language and literature", the Indian post-coloniality vis-à-vis language and literature is a very touchy subject. Yet, we have opened ourselves to the opportunities offered in the lands of the erstwhile colonisers, and the neo-colonisers (as the so-called masters of globalisation can be described) and are dazzled by their success and material riches. This has given birth to an ambivalent attitude towards the English language — at once one of hatred, being the language of the ex-colonial masters and of admiration, as the language of power that ensures success. The dutifully patriotic middle-class young man religiously speaks and writes Hindi, or the regional language, at the same time watching with envy and longing the lifestyle of the successful city-boy who has empowered himself with the English language. English, for Indians, had long ceased to be the language of the ex-colonisers, though; it was a language that went far beyond the pale of Anglo-Saxon ascendancy and ushered in the age of the unipolar world. If the Brown Sahib (or the Indian gentleman, bred in the English tradition and leading the intellectual and cultural life of an Englishman within India) was the earlier paradox, the MNC 'smart-guy' who mouths American English and dominates the play in all spheres is the latest phenomenon. The advent of the Internet brought with it, its own hegemony; English was re-consecrated as the international lingua franca, which empowers the individual. The 'tyranny of English' is already there on the scene; the number of people taking crash-courses in the language is increasing day by day. Globalisation practically became a game in which the masters and bookmakers controlled the play to their advantage. Free market became a free-play of market forces among unequal partners, the most powerful among them having all the say.

To look at it from a radical point of view, reflecting on the problems of translation of regional language literatures into English in this context resembles the meticulous cleaning, airtight packing and exporting of super-quality cashew or prawn. The hegemonic culture will get hold of all the best things from all parts of the world as Americans proudly tell any visitor to the United States. Our colonial past has provided us with a ready processing and packaging centre; we certainly have a way with our English and are quality conscious enough. Exporting our cultural items as commodities, or finished cultural products, has been happening before our very eyes; most of us have taken it as a mark of the level of success we have achieved. This longing for success and recognition abroad is seen all the more in the field of literature, especially fiction. *Chemmeen* is the most glaring example of this trend. The systematic omission in the TL Text, of whole sections and passages found in the original tempts one to question Narayana Menon's intentions in doing so. For, these omissions do not appear to be the result of oversight. There seems to be some design behind it, a definite pattern behind these deletions. About one third of the original text matter has thus been deleted, as ascertained by the present writer. Was it selective editing by some foreign editor? One is led to suspect that Narayana Menon has consciously made the omissions, or acquiesced with an editor's intervention, with an eye on target language sensibilities. The portions that are left out are, none of them, insignificant or superfluous. They certainly contribute substantially to creating Thakazhi's lyrical narrative style in the original. One is led to surmise that editing out the exuberantly romantic and lyrical elements from the narrative language of the original is clearly with a view to conform to the sensibilities of a western readership that appreciates a terse, subdued, narrative style. When one

analyzes the text in depth and in detail, comparing it with the original, one finds that the TL text of *Chemmeen* made available to the world is a highly manipulated, edited, doctored one, shorn of the local cultural specifics. Making the translation eminently readable and racy — at the cost of the narrative marvel of the original — through deletions, suppressions, and mutilations. Narayana Menon has played a major pioneering role in 'packaging' the novel for consumption by the Western reader. Some illustrations of this have already been given elsewhere in this lesson. To cite a few more:

1) After the last paragraph on page 14 that ends with the line, "He must not sing in her vicinity", an entire paragraph has been omitted in the TL text. This paragraph is translated below: "Till two days ago, she flitted about animatedly like a butterfly. The changes that have come over her within these two days! She got things to sit down and think about. She began to understand herself more and more. Isn't it something that adds gravity to life? She is being careful about herself. She must put each step forward cautiously. How can she then dash about as before? A man looked at her breast. That moment she became a woman (translation mine).

2) On page 87, towards the end of the page, a paragraph is missing in the translation. It is translated thus:

Karuthamma has spoken out all that was there to say. There is nothing more left in that history. But Chakki isn't aware of it. If she did, what all a mother would have had to ask further? Or, has Chakki understood everything? A woman, even though she is a mother, may understand the course of her daughter's love. And remain silent about it.

"My child, Mother will pay off that debt".

"I know that Father won't pay it". (translation mine).

These illustrations depict the ethos of a rural community, which may not be of any interest to a 'global' reader. The style of the original was specific to the culture of the milieu in which the action takes place. Replacing it with an alien style (an imitation western style), is what Narayana Menon has attempted, through his omissions and deletions, to make it readily acceptable to the West. More explanations are provided in the section, "Questions of Power", below.

The desire of the regional writers of fiction to get their works competently translated and published in English is understandable. This 'urge for simple self-assertion', as Susan Bassnettt and Harish Trivedi call it, largely accounts for the translation boom in the country. But such publishing activities under the guise of the good old ideal of 'universalism', and solely with an eye on the market, will kill the soul of the creative works, unless translation is done in a bonafide manner.

Looking at the scene of literary translation into English after Independence that is heavily biased in favour of the hegemonic language, one gets the feeling that one has to necessarily strike a balance somewhere. There is nothing wrong with aspiring to get one's works translated into English. But

product by the hegemonic western culture is placed in perspective in this backdrop. Cultural appropriation on the literary front becomes easy when we accept the idea of free translations shorn of all cultural contents, or at least, watered down to suit international taste-buds. Finding unequal equivalences in the target language (e.g. translating "Kamadeva" as "Cupid" as already referred to above) is a relevant illustration here.

This programme of appropriation had begun in this country very early in the colonial times, alongside the plundering of the riches. The foreign translators had translated the important texts found in the colony for a number of reasons that were mostly extra-literary, like ethnographical, anthropological or other interests. Almost all the translators believed in the superiority of their own language, and most of them thought the literatures they translated from were crude. What is happening now is a continuation of this process in many ways; whatever exotic fare is in demand abroad has to be processed to suit their taste; and whatever is thorny by way of linguistic and cultural specificities found in the SL Text, has to be removed!

Thus, we need to oppose cultural appropriation by the hegemonic language, English most vehemently. Although the process of translation was kept up during the colonial times through "the ideology of selective appropriation and cautious canonisation" as K. Satchidanandan puts it, (Satchidanandan, 1999: 172) we need no longer recognize the aforesaid process as a legitimate activity. In an era of commodification of culture, import and export of cultural products, homogenisation of all sources of human expression and a unipolar world presided over by a single superpower, identification of power relations in the realms of literature and culture on a realistic basis would help us put up stiff resistance to all that is dehumanising and anti-human in such projects.

Illustrations

1) In the first paragraph of Chapter One of the JWF Dumergue's translation of O. Chandu Menon's Malayalam novel *Indulekha*, the character Chathara Menon uses the word "Karanavan", (meaning, "the head of the house"). However, in the third paragraph, for the same word, Kummini Amma, another character uses the expression "the head of the house". Again, on page four, first line, Sankara Menon refers to the "aged head of the family" (as a translation of the expression). Further into the text, many similar expressions are used as equivalents for this particular term, Use of the word "Karanavan" should have been consistent throughout, since the word has already been explained in detail in a note at end of the book. A combination of linguistic and cultural problems is presented here; linguistic, because it is impossible to find the equivalent of the word "Karanavan" in English, as it is a unique expression in the Malayalam language; cultural, in the sense that "Karanavan" is particular to the matrilineal system of family, particular to the culture of Kerala's Nairs.

2) On page 103, line fourteen, appears the question "Ullattil Panchu Menon, is it"? from Suri Nambudiripad. Nothing could be more inaccurate or inappropriate in the place of the original, "Ullattil Panchuvo"? which literally means, "Aren't you Ullaattil. Panchu?" When the caste appellation was not there in the original, the translator

did not have to bring that in. The reason is that a Nambudiri never calls a member of a lesser caste, by his caste name. A Nambudiri, in such cases, uses only the maiden name. Therefore, we encounter here a serious cultural problem of translation. This is also a clear case of appropriating the cultural code of the original, for the benefit of the target readership.

ii. Free Translation Leading to Appropriation

Free translation can also lead to appropriation, of the text by the dominant language culture. The above example readily serves as an illustration for this too. The Malayalam novel *Marthanda Varma* (1891) of C.V. Raman Pillai, translated into English by B.K. Menon, (1936) is the biggest extant example of free translation in the history of modern Malayalam fiction in English translation. In the case of novels, disturbing the architectonics of the original lays a great responsibility on the translator: that of supporting the roof-structure with his bare back, if he so much as dares to touch any one of the stone pillars. And that is exactly what B.K. Menon does in the case of the translation of *Marthanda Varma*. B.K. Menon drops entire sections of certain chapters from the original and adds fresh matter, to prove the political points of his own time. Moreover, he trashes the grand narrative style of C.V., replacing it with a style resembling that of a racy, contemporary thriller.

Illustrations

The translation of Sanskrit verses from *Shakuntala* that appear in the novel *Indulekha* is not provided in the original text. What is given is a transliteration in Malalyalam. The original text follows the convention of quoting from Sanskrit as a matter of course, as is wont even now. (Something similar takes place in the "Translator's Preface" of the novel in which two French words are quoted taking it for granted that the meaning of those words are ordinarily understood by the TL readers.) However, in the translated text, the Sanskrit stanzas are also given in translation, for arranging which the translator has had to take a lot of trouble. Although the verses read smoothly in English, it is a liberally free translation. For example, "Madana" is translated as "Cupid." and the word is repeated throughout the TL text as an equivalent wherever words like "Madana" "Manmatha" "Maara" or "Kamadeva" are used. The later translators of classical or moder poetry into English have followed this example, and until recently, this abject subservience of English literature to Greek and Roman mythology used to be shamelessly aped by our translators (Some even now persist in this habit. This point will become clearer, too, when you read detailed illustrations provided in other sections below.) Free translation rubbing off the rough edges of the original for the benefit of the privileged target language reader who is in no position to understand the nuances of the original is evident here. [Certainly, true translation is possible only between unequal languages!]

One of the main points of contention among practitioners of literary translation is whether translation should be "free" or "literal". Those who advocate "free translation go to the extent of demanding "transcreation" of the SL text, completely abrogating authorial authority. Luckily, most of such texts which are subjected to mindless 'transcreation' happen to be in the public domain, (where no author or his executor will come and bother the translator).

On the other hand, literal translation kills the soul of a poem or a story, because in any kind of imaginative writing, connotative meanings, echoes, innuendoes, dhwani and so on are more relevant than the denotative meaning of words. What is called for is a creative translation. By far the sanest voice is that of the doyen of Indian translators, A.K. Ramanujan who while putting his thoughts beautifully, also expresses the dilemma of a translator:

> "...a translator is an artist on oath'. He has a double allegiance, indeed several double allegiances. All too familiar with the rigors and pleasures of reading a text and making another, caught between the need to express himself and the need to represent another, moving between two halves of one brain, he has to use both to get close to the 'originals'..... (*Poems of Love and War*, 296-7)"

On the other hand, literal translation is a virtue only in translating scientific treatises and factual prose.

The ideal approach to good translation is neither free, nor literal. It has to be a sensible mixture of the two, being faithful to the essence of the work of art at hand, and keeping closely in line with the artistic devices the original author has used, but never stooping to the legalistic, mechanical mode of literal equiyalence

4.5.3 Translators Can Be Arbitrary Too

The translator could also be erratic and assume more authority over the text than is due. He may arbitrarily suppress details in the original text: likewise, he may adapt, dilute or manipulate the structure of the original. The anxiety of the author over the fate of his work takes the form of authorial intervention, accusing the target language text of lack of authenticity. The author attempts to re-establish authorial authority over the target language text.

In such cases translation could be described as an act of subversion. The translator decides to unsettle the supremacy of the original text and literally dismantles it to create the target language text. What s/he has decided to retain in the target language text will remain, and what s/he decides to drop, will be dropped. Captivated by the autonomy enjoyed by the original author, the translator may be tempted to be present in the translated text, to lay claim to the text to the extent possible. As a practising literary translator over the last three decades, I have had occasion to notice this tendency among translators. This happens mostly in the cases of translations from regional languages, in which an original writer may not be in a position to compare the original with the TL text. Of course, some may rail at the translator for dropping certain portions from the source language text, or suppression of details, from the texts of their favourite writers. But, what of it? The original author has to grant her/his permission for the publication of the target language text provided s/he is still alive. Won't s/he safeguard her/his own interests? These are the common assumptions. But the reality is that most of the translators get away with what they do.

There are many translators engaged in free translation, subverting authorial authority. The translator places himself in a position of authority who decides what the target language reader should read. The possibility remains that the translator may suppress, eliminate partially or misrepresent the source

language text in a number of ways. The poor regional language author, who is not able to authoritatively pronounce a judgment on the quality of the translation may acquiesce, satisfied with the fact that the work is getting at last translated into English!

Narayana Menon's translation of *Chemmeen* comes in handy here as well, as an illustration. Thakazhi's voice was eliminated through the alteration brought about in the narrative pattern, by systematic deletion of typical passages of the author's exuberant style — repetitive and explicatory narration, — as opposed to the implied, subdued narrative style of the West, attempted at by Narayana Menon in his translation. If it was poetry that was translated thus, no one would let off the translator. Since *Chemmeen* was fiction, it was looked upon as a 'cultural product', a means of entertainment, to be packaged in the most attractive way; the omissions and commissions by the translator have escaped largely unnoticed and have not been commented upon. Here, the translator was clearly acting arbitrarily, or exercising his power to suit his own designs, of conforming to a style that suited the palate of the West. The end result is the affirmation of the cultural hegemony of the West, where the cultural product from the poor East, is processed and submitted for the former's consumption. Free translation, homogenization, cultural appropriation, questions of power and so on are intrinsically inter-related. The portions given below from *Chemmeen* amply illustrate this point:

1) After two paragraphs on page 15 there appears the sentence. "Why don't you go and stare at the women working at your curing yard?" In the original, it is, [Why don't you go and stare at the breasts and behinds of the women...". (translation mine) (p.17)] The deletion seems to be in deference of TL sensibility. Suppression of original material is to be noted here.

2) On page 49, towards the middle, a sizeable portion of the original has been deleted, which is given below in my translation:

"Whatever Chakki said was right. And she was right about saying what she said, in a cut and dried manner. But those words seemed to rip through Karuthamma's heart.

Walking some distance, Karuthamma looked back. Not wittingly; she cannot help looking back like that. As they reached home, that heart-piercing song began from the seashore.

Said Chakki: "Isn't that boy going to sleep today?"

Again, Chakki spoke, aiming at Karuthamma. "Somehow, you will have to be sent away from this seaside now".

There is an accusation implied in her mother's words. Her presence has brought trouble there; everyone has lost peace of mind. Unable to bear her sorrow and anger, Karuthamma said:

"What did I do?"

"Chakki didn't say a word. (p. 49)"

As I mentioned earlier, following a specific pattern of deletion, leading to the loss of about one-third of the original text, the translator has done away with culture-specific items from this ethnic novel which would be hard for the TL readers to understand. In other words, the translator has arbitrarily usurped the original author's version of the novel, exercising inordinate power over it in the process of translation.

As more instances of the arbitrariness of the translator in his exercise of power over the original text, I am quoting the following from *Marthanda Varma*:

1) C.V. Raman Pillai opens the narrative in his novel *Marthanda Varma*, withholding the identity of the region. This is how the original opens, when literally translated: "The incidents described at the beginning of this story happened in a jungle tract". (translation mine) C.V. has his own reasons for doing so. In fact, C.V's narrative technique employed in this novel hinges on keeping the suspense on as long as possible. However, the translator, opens with the sentence: "The story opens in South India, in the heart of the vast jungle tract known as Panchavankadu, that stretched before Nagercoil...". It would seem the translator is doing so with the express purpose of presenting the novel before a world readership, taking into account the kind of hegemonic role English has. The paragraph ends thus in the original, "The Nairs, who are keenly interested in hunting, have not even planned to attack this jungle stretch, owing to their concern for their own feet" (translation mine). But the translated text goes like this: "...secure from the molestations of shikaris, who, for more reasons than one, never dared to venture into the depths of that particular jungle spot..." The poor 'Nairs' have been needlessly replaced with the anonymous 'shikaris'. It is an instance of free translation wreaking havoc.

2) The next paragraph opens with the statement of a universal truth in the original. However, the translation begins only after deleting the two sentences in which the above statement is couched. This is a needless deletion. The description of the moon in the translation is totally different from the original that reads: "Although the aforesaid jungle had been glowing with the touch of moonbeams in the first quarter of the night, 'the full moon that rose with the colour of red sandstone,' upon reaching the zenith, had turned pale, losing its complexion"(translation mine). The translated text reads, "A pale ghost moon rose above the bank of clouds and streaked the darkness below with silver". This "infidelity" also has been committed needlessly, as the grandeur of C.V's description is totally lost because of the free translation. The paragraph ends with C.V's statement, "Let us find out what is that incident that has shattered the slumber of the birds and beasts of this jungle which people believed was the abode of Yakshis, ghosts and others evil spirits". (translation mine) However, in the translated text, the paragraph ends thus: "Panchavankadu, which had witnessed thousands of cold-blooded crimes, seemed to be the abode of Evil Spirits that wander about in the silent watches of the night in a dismembered state thirsting for human blood". Certainly, this is a case of the translator trying to improve upon the original author's techniques, in an unwarranted manner, floating a plea of free translation. In spite of the translator's protestations, we fail to see the necessity for such distortions, effacing C.V's narrative techniques in

the process, except that the translator is exercising unnecessary power over the text of the defenceless author who is dead and departed.

3) There is yet another illustration, this time from drama. Omchery's Malayalam play *Pralayam* is a well-known drama text that has bagged Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award. Written more than four decades ago, the play deals with the nuclear arms race and the impending doom of the human race in an atomic holocaust, and remains prophetic even today. This play was subjected to a free translation by Paul Jacob, entitled *The Flood*, thirty-three years ago, in July 1973. However, the present writer translated the play in 2004 under the title, *The Deluge*. It is interesting to note the wide variations that appear in *The Flood*. The latter translation shows that there was no necessity to resort to free translation and that translators sometimes use their power arbitrarily. "The Lord's Prayer" is a standard Christian prayer that appears in the New Testament of the Bible, as taught by Jesus to his disciples. Omchery told me he used that prayer in the original, as it appears in the old Malayalam Bible of the Syro-Malabar Catholics, edited by Ka. Ni. Mu. Sa. Manikathanar. I have translated the same faithfully, as below:

"Our Father who art in Heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name;
Thy Kingdom come;
Thy will
Be done on earth as in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
Forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;
For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory; Amen".
The only special effects I gave were by adding the archaic forms, "Thy" "Thine" etc., in keeping with the solemnity of the Bible prose.

However, Paul Jacob's free translation runs thus:

Our Father that is in Heaven
May your name be renowned
Your government established
Your laws carried out
Here as elsewhere.
Give us what we need
And forgive us our greed
As we forgive those who feed upon us.
Don't let us be misled
But save us from the irrevocable.
For, yours is the government.
The strength, and the greatness, always.

As you can see, both the versions vary violently; but the reason why Paul Jacob resorted to this kind of mutilation in the name of free translation, cannot be easily comprehended. There are many such instances in *The Flood*.

This shows the arbitrariness with which the translator sometimes use power over the original text.

4.5.4 Authors as Translators

What happens when an author comes out to translate his own text? We begin with the example of Milan Kundera's *The Joke*. It will be useful to give a brief summary of the publication of the book.

When the first version of *The Joke* translated by David Hamblyn and Oliver Stallybrass was published in London in 1969, Kundera was amazed to find that he could not recognize the book at all. It was so different from the original and was full of deletions and omissions, even surpassing the handiwork of the communist censors in Kundera's country, Czechoslovakia. As he was unable to reach the translators and demand full rectification of the damage done, owing to the restrictions of the dictatorship imposed on him, he had to be content with publishing a letter of protest in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which resulted in a revised, complete version of the book being published by Penguin Books in 1970. This text too was full of free translation, especially in the matter of punctuations, breaking up one long, "infinite" sentence in the original, into several small sentences.

Before the Penguin version appeared, however, another version had been published in America a year earlier, by Coward-McCann in New York, based on the Hamblyn-Stallybrass translation. In this translation, the chapter-sequence was retained, but the entire matter was curtailed in a planned manner. All the protest telegrams Kundera sent to the American publisher went unanswered. In 1982, the fourth version of the novel appeared from Harper & Row. Kundera himself had selected the translator, Michael Henry Heim, a young American professor of Slavic Studies, who had faithfully translated and published two chapters which the translators had omitted from the first version. However, when Heim did the full translation, he too took so much of freedom that Kundera called it "translation-adaptation". Having been fed up by four abortive attempts, Kundera sat down together with Aaron Asher of Harper & Row and the fifth and final version was on its way! This process is described below:

"On enlarged photocopies of the fourth version, I entered word-for-word translations of my original, either in English or in French, wherever I thought it necessary. The changes grew more numerous, and soon I realized that, based on that fourth version, a new, fifth version was taking shape. In Heim's translation there are, of course, a great many faithful renderings and good formulations; these naturally were retained, along with many fine solutions from the Hamblyn-Stallybrass translation. I sent my work in regular installments to Aaron, who created an English-language version from these disparate elements and sent it to me for final correction and approval. (Kundera, 1992: x)"

It has to be remarked here that this edition of the novel does not carry any credit line indicating the translator's name. It appears as if Kundera had appropriated back his novel from all the four previous "unfaithful" translations!

Although not as disillusioned with his translators as Milan Kundera was, Paul Zacharia is known to the present researcher as intervening in the texts of his stories in English translation. Says Paul Zacharia in the "Author's Note" of his *The Reflections of a Hen in Her Last Hour and Other Stories*, translated by the

present writer and the author. "My interventions in these translations have been limited to using the latitude available to a writer to cut, chop and trim his work to make them more presentable to another audience. My mother tongue so dear to me, can be boringly self-adoring and pompously verbose in hands like mine. Whatever problems that remain in these stories are neither hers as the translator's but mine. (Zacharia, 1999: xi)"

Obviously, the author/translator is conscious of his different constituencies in Malayalam and English. What goes well with the Malayalam cultural ethos, the author/translator is editing out or modifying if they are not relevant to the target language readership. One may well ask whether what is good enough for Malayalee readers is not presentable to the English readers. However, when the author exercises his prerogative to check the translation against the original and grants his approval for the translated text only on condition of his full satisfaction, he ensures that authorial authority is maintained. Using this very same authorial authority, he decides that such and such portions of the story are no longer valid in the changed circumstances, and edits them away. Who is going to ask him? But the fact remains that the translated text has become different from the original text to that extent. This is certainly an act which would be deplored if it were done by a mere translator.

Another example of the same thing happening relates to O.V. Vijayan's *Legends of the Khasak* (1991). One of the most important happenings in the world of modern Malayalam fiction in English translation is the writer's translation of his own works. Take the case of *Legends of Khasak* that came out from Penguin India, in 1991, which went for a reprint in 1994. Vijayan's magnum opus that ushered in a new era in high modern Malayalam literature, had to wait for publication in English translation, for a number reasons; but the most important among them was the virtual untranslatability of the original. The local patois used in almost all the conversations in the novel, is beyond any translation. What comes out of an attempt at translation of these is a mere explanation of their meaning. Why did Vijayan translate this work, then? He does not answer this question anywhere, but does reveal the problems he encountered in the translation. He says in the "Author's Note" in the beginning of the book:

"It has been difficult translating this book. It is full of dense images of nature, old folk customs, evocations of caste differences, the rich play of dialects, all of which are difficult to render into English. So much has been lost, there was no way it could have been salvaged. I have tried to make the narrative depend on its own energy as much as possible, and preserved the pace and rhythm of the original (Vijayan 1998, p.3)".

I have to intervene here and say that the narrative is not even a ghost of its original, not to speak of the rhythm. One has to view this claim as the fervent wish of the author.

However, critics have looked at the author/translator's efforts differently. There has been a persistent clamour bewailing the fact that Vijayan has been sanskritising his language to such a degree that in successive novels the language he uses becomes opaque and obtuse, with tonalities alien to Malayalam and more in the domain of the *devbhasha*. In other words, Vijayan has been obviously improving upon his own creative language and style, in

silent acquiescence of obscure cultural diktats. If he could be doing this to his own Malayalam, what would he not do in sprucing up his works in English translation? Observes P.P. Raveendran:

".....the motive behind Vijayan's choice (to be truer to the translator in him) cannot be far from the sentiments attributed to Edward Fitzgerald (1809-63), the legendary translator of *Rubaiyat*. Writing about Persian poetry in 1851 Fitzgerald stated: "It is an amusement for me to take what liberties I like with these Persians who, I think, are not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really want a little Art to shapes them" (qtd. in Bassnett, 1988, p.3). Vijayan has taken a great deal of liberties in translating *Khasak*, more indeed than what is generally allowed for by international copyright regulations. And it is possible to imagine that his reasons for taking those liberties were not greatly different from FitzGerald's. The Malayalam original of *Khasak* after all needed "a little Art to shape it". For, by the time of *Gurusagaram* (1987) Vijayan had radically revised his concept of art embodied in *Khasak* in favour of a new poetics centred apparently on a monological imagination and a centrally controlled fictional landscape. The predominantly sanskritised diction of *Gurusagaram* is an index of this new and emerging landscape which Vijayan perfects in his translation in *Legends*.

"But in doing this, Vijayan was also taking the sensibility of the Malayalam novel back by several decades...He seems...to have retraced several steps backwards to scan the world from the expressive realist perspective of a Thakazhi or to go further back, from that of Chandu Menon....(Raveendran, *IL* 191-May-June 99: 184-185)"

Vijayan is considered as a fiction-writer who was so rooted in the rural culture of the environs of Palakkad that a village Thasaraak, which he turned into 'Khasak' in the novel, has retained its fictional identity, even at the cost of its original one. There are regular literary pilgrims visiting this village, going in search of particular spots and characters. Vijayan is still the presiding deity of that village, even more than a year after his death. The Vijayan who lived in Delhi was known as a cartoonist and political analyst who wrote incisively on international affairs as well as domestic policies. But he wrote his fiction only in Malayalam. So, when he himself translated his own works, it was rather the political analyst that took over the creative writer. One example will prove this. In the Malyalam original of *Khasaakkinte Itihaasam* there is a mention of Ezhavas (Hindus belonging to the palm-toddy-tapping community) and Rawthers (Muslims of Tamil origin, who were not regarded on par with the 'high-born' Muslims). In the English translation they became "Hindus" and "Muslims" respectively, letting them loose in the supercharged mainstream communal politics of India that got aggravated in the post-Babri Masjid era. He could very well have retained the original terms and glossed them. He didn't do it, for reasons best known to him. But the point is that, this violence done to the text resulted in violence perpetrated on sensibilities as became evident by criticisms like P.P. Raveendran's quoted above.

4.5.5 The Question is: Which English?

The story of the English translations of Indian creative texts begins with the *Bhagavad-gita*, by Charles Wilkins, first published in 1785, (the first-ever Indian great literature to be published in English translation) followed by *Sacontala, or the Fatal Ring: An Indian Drama*, the translation of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* by William Jones in 1789. And the best of classical

Indian literature began to be translated and archived in the Asiatic Society set up by William Jones, establishing a new branch of learning, namely 'Indology'.

However, one cannot fail to observe that these translations were heavily anglicized, aimed at facilitating the reception of the translated text by the readers back in Britain. As observed earlier, even Indian translators of classical works followed the footsteps of the colonial masters. Here is a sample from M.C. Dutt's translation of Kalidasas' *Kumarasambhava*, translated as *The Birth of Kumara*.

'Uma with red palms Shiva a wreath, of lotus flowers' nice seeds made,
Was about to give, he to take, loth to spurn favours displayed
Cupid when fired fatal shaft, trace of love came, as well it might,
Over hermit's breast as the sea swells at rise of moon at night...'.

This is the famous scene in which Kamadeva is about to be burned to ashes by the fire that darted forth from Shiva's third eye. Let us analyze the lines from the beginning. Uma is shown as making a red palm-wreath, in keeping with western imagery of adorning the head of heroes with wreaths; but soon we find that it is with lotus seeds that the wreath is made, creating unnecessary confusion in the readers — all for keeping conformity with western tastes. Next, 'loth to spurn fovours displayed' is an outright reproduction of classical English versification, using 'the language of the centre'. Finally comes the word 'Cupid' instead of 'Kamadeva,' as cited more than once earlier in the lesson. 'Cupid' or Eros of Graeco-Roam mythology is not equivalent for 'Kamadeva', except that both are designated gods of love. The burning of Kamadeva represents Shiva's victory over the senses, making him the ultimate ascetic. Cupid has no similar roles in mythology.

Now, consider the scene below, depicted in the celebrated Malayalam poet ONV Kurup's *kaavya* titled *Ujjayini* which I translated into English, and compare it with the above passage:

".....the god of love,
Shooting flower-darts at Shiva from hiding,
Hara whose mind deflects momentarily, and
Rati who weeps like a *Kurari* bird, thinking of Mara
Burned to ashes in the shower of embers
From Shiva's third eye in the middle of his brow".
(Kurup, 2002, p.48)

You would find no attempt to dilute the very Indian ethos in these lines, and that they are perfectly intelligible to any discerning reader, as Sanskrit words like 'Mara' are retained in the original since such words are familiar now, especially through the Internet and Google search engine.

Now, in the context of the post-colonial experience, the question as to which English you are translating into becomes relevant. Is it the Queen's English, of the erstwhile colonial establishment, the language of the centre, or Indian English, the language developed in the erstwhile colony, the language of the periphery, "english" (which is recognized by the National Academy of Letters, Sahitya Akademi, as one of the Indian languages, having at least a fledgling

literature to be nurtured and sustained.)? As soon as this question is asked, one can readily answer it with another question: why should one go after an English spoken and written in far away England that is far removed now from the controlling power in this country? Why should one see English as the language spoken and written only in U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Australia, South Africa or elsewhere, and not in India? The language that remained in India after the colonizers left, has by now evolved into a medium that can easily accommodate Indian ethos; even the metaphors of the remotest rustic corners of this vast country, find their way into Indian English poetry, as is evidenced in poems by Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar or Jayanta Mahapatra. All the Vedas, Upanishads, almost all the Puranas, Itihasas, Sastras and Agamas, Kavyas and Nataks had already been translated into English, thanks to the indological explorations of the colonisers. So are most of the early, mediaeval, renaissance, and classical literatures of the regional languages. Sahitya Akademi and National Book Trust, India, the two premier State-funded publishing establishments of the country have, between themselves, shared the bulk of such translations from regional literatures. Harish Trivedi and Susasn Bassnett have this to say on the subject:

"...translations from the various Indian languages into English, whether done by foreigners or by Indians themselves, have attained a hegemonic ascendancy. The widely shared post-colonial wisdom on the subject is that the vampire can translate back only into English, or into that lower or at least if ever-case variety of it (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 8). To any counter-claims that In nature especially with a post-colonial thrust is being written equally or even more abundantly in languages other than English, especially in countries such as India where only a small elite (variously estimated to constitute between 2 and 10 per cent of the population) knows any English, the usual sceptical western retort is: But show us — in English translation (Trivedi and Mukherjee (eds) 1996:239)...". "Meanwhile, however, the old business of translation as traffic between languages still goes on in the once-and-still colonised world, reflecting more acutely than ever before the asymmetrical power relationship between the local 'vernaculars'(i.e. the language of the slaves, etymologically speaking) and the one master-language of our post-colonial world, English (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999:10-13)".

There shouldn't be any doubt whatsoever about the variety of English in which we have to translate our regional literatures. If we want to retain our cultural identity in the translations, we must translate in an English language that developed here. Learning the latest idiomatic English of Britain or America to translate into is as unwise as taking a crash-course in western culture of the present. In any case, translations so done in a foreign idiom will only qualify as export quality merchandise and will not pass for genuine cultural expression.

It must be noted here that all the problems described above, are not separate and confined to watertight compartments. They are, in fact, inter-related. Appropriation, free-translation, suppression of the original, deletion of inconvenient portions, authorial intervention, selection of the type of English to be used in translation and so on appear to be ultimately questions of power, and in the final analysis coalesce into the politics of translation, forming the bulk of cultural problems. Because, identity lies at the root of culture; every human being finds himself or herself either on this side or that side of a cultural fence. Questions of nationality develop from this stage. One of the primary aims of translation is, to provide passages of negotiation across such

fences. But who will pass first through such a passage, and in which direction, is a matter of precedence. The powerful will naturally pass through first, holding on to their preferences. The ideal situation would be where both parties can cross over peacefully, without jostling each other. But this remains just an ideal, in the real world of the present, a so-called 'unipolar' world.

If a neutral translation is the answer to this problem, then one can think of pure academics bringing about such a result. Ronald E.Asher's translation of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's stories is the only case I have come across as a classic example of such a neutral translation.

4.6 TRANSLATIONS OF SOURCE TEXTS AS VIEWED FROM THE TRANSLATORS' DESK

So far we have discussed issues related to English translation. We now give you first hand account of what some of the translators of the source texts have to say about their experiences of translation.

In an interview with Tutun Mukherjee, Girish Karnad shared his experiences of translating his plays into English. He said that he wrote his plays in Kannada and then translated them into English. His translations must be seen as approximation to the original. He said that he translated *Tughlaq* at the suggestion of Alyque Padamsee who wanted to stage it. When asked if he transformed/recreated his plays when he translated them into English, he conceded that translating from Kannada into English 'required a lot of re-writing — yes, like transcreation'. The basic problem lay in his search for 'appropriate cultural equivalents'. One aspect that he said he found problematic was rhetoric. 'Every speech pattern resonates with connotative richness. In India, a man has only to open his mouth and his speech will give away his caste, his geographical origins, his background and economical status. I'll take the example of Tale-danda. The original Kannada version presents a play of languages which reveals social inequalities. Naturally this aspect could not be conveyed in the English version'. (Tutun Mukherjee: 219) He also agreed that dialects were quite impossible to be rendered intact through translation.

Anantha Murthy's own novel *Samskara* was most ably translated by A.K. Ramanujan in 1976, some 11years after its publication in Kannada in 1965. In his foreword, Ramanujan writes: 'A translator hopes not only to translate a text, but also to translate a non-native reader into a native one'. (Samskara: A Critical Reader: 227). The novel has a very long glossary of local terms consisting of nearly 90 items used in the novel, which explain the numerous references to characters in Puranas and other old classics. This glossary is meant for the non-Kannada, Indian reader as well as for the non-Indian reader. Ramanujan calls this glossary 'a confession of failures'. As Vanmala Vishwanatha says, "the English translation recreates the ambience of the Kannada text maintaining its defining quality of 'an allegory rich in realistic detail". (227). Harish Trivedi's translation of Amrit Rai's biography of his father Munshi Premchand is of an abridged version of the book. The proposal to translate it into English came from the publishers who gave the translator liberty to delete passage from it or to restore others to the original. Trivedi

calls it a necessary privilege' which he has used rarely and then chiefly to include brief descriptions of some of Premchand's short stories'. He has also rearranged some of the chapter divisions in the 'interest of coherence and proportion within the present version'. A more important change relates to the choice of the title of the biography. Instead of the original title Munshi Premchand: Qalam ka Sipahi, he and Amrit Rai both chose *Premchand: His Life and Times*. The title 'The Pen as the Sword' was rejected as being 'a little corny'. But if this is corny, the title finally chosen is cornier still. I wonder if they ever thought of 'Soldier with a Pen'. Like A.K. Ramanujan's glossary of 90-odd items to *Samskara*, Trivedi has made a few additions to his translations: a Chronology, detailed entry on Premchand in the General Index, and the annotated Works of Premchand: A List and Index. All these are very welcome additions for they can only add to the reference value of the biography.

The question of title is important but at times a translator may be tempted to change the title. This is what happened with Afsar Ahmad's story now titled 'Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur'. The Bengali title was 'Arthaheen Katha Balar Nirbharata'. It seems the writer isn't particularly happy with the changed title. But its translator Chandana Dutta has had reasons of her own, though she doesn't explain them in her Translator's note. What she does in that piece instead is to focus on the theme of meaninglessness of life as a part of human life. This is what she says: 'The title of the story, "Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachoor" uses three words which are very familiar and close to the Bengali heart. Individually, they convey sense; together they become 'non-sense'. Their continuous chorus through the story forces us to look for their 'purpose'. We are unable to dismiss them or their relevance. The narrator himself vacillates periods of no-sense and phases of lucidity. After all, he does not have the complete luxury of slipping into 'meaninglessness'; the world awaits him — in the form of his wife, his daughter, the policeman, the friend'. From this one can guess that she chose the present title for its suggestiveness.

According to Chandana Dutta translation is a complex activity that works at several levels. Each translation, she says, involves a range of details which may not ultimately be seen on paper but which nevertheless contribute to the process. The process, she continues, becomes more complex when it involves the translation of a piece of fiction. She also rates translation as a creative work. She asserts that a translated short story is 'something that is independent of its original': 'The same source story and the translated story must ultimately stand as two separate pieces of work. This is not to say that the translation should not ever reflect back to its original, or that the translator should erase every trace of that first piece, but it is a work on its own and this sense must be conveyed to all readers'

'As for notes or glossary, the English versions of the Bengali story 'Salt' by Mahashweta Devi and Oriya story 'Tadpa' by Gopinath Mohanty carry some notes or rather footnotes. There is no indication whether these additions have been made by the original authors or by the translators. The same holds good for Ismat Chughtai's Urdu story 'Tiny's Granny' in English translation.

It needs to be said that not all notes or explanations are given for the benefit of non-Indians. Indian readers unfamiliar with the cultural milieu would also welcome help on one occasion or the other. And we shouldn't forget that even Shakespeare's plays need glossary.

J.S.Rahi and Rita Chaudhri's translation of Haribhajan Singh's long poem *Tree and the Sage* has as many as 130 items of annotations provided at the end of the book. And a large number of these annotations are fairly full. Lakshmi Holmstrom's translation of Bama's autobiography *Karukku* too includes a page and half long glossary. But more important than that is Bama's extraordinary use of language. As the translator Lakshmi Holmstrom says, "Bama is doing something completely new in using demotic and the colloquial regularly, as her medium for narration and even argument, not simply for reported speech. She uses a Dalit style of language which overturns the decorum and aesthetics of received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout, elides words, and joins them differently, demanding a new and different pattern of reading". (Karukku: xi) Holmstrom adds: "Bama's work is not only breaking a mainstream aesthetic, but also proposing a new one which is integral to her politics". What is demanded of the translator and reader, is, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, a "surrender to the special call of the text". (xi) If a proof of the power of Bama's language was needed, it came from a novelist and translator Raji Narasimhan who said that the powerful language of the narrative was the one in common use among the Parayas, the lowest among the dalits. Unfortunately much of that power gets lost in the English translation.

The excerpt from *Manimahesh* was translated by Sanjukta Dasgupta. Though we don't have any comments by her, we have some very useful comments on the translation by the course unit writer, Nivedita Sen. The writer concedes that a translation can never be 'an exact replica of the text in the source language, particularly if it is translation from an Indian language to English'. It is, she says, 'vain to expect that the translation should convey without distortion all the colloquial expressions, ethnic words, use of proverbs and descriptions of customs and traditions that are there in the source language'. But of course the translation should 'read smoothly and convey the sense of what has been written in the source language'. Nivedita Sen then goes on to list the omissions and inaccuracies that have crept in the translated version.

This is how some of the translators of important texts in your course have viewed translations. What conclusion do we draw from the foregoing account? The only golden rule is that there is no golden rule, with one exception. We must always remember what A.K. Ramanujan has said — that a translation owes a double loyalty, to the target language as well as to the source language.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

Translation of our literature into English makes it accessible nationally and internationally. But this needs to be done on a non-hegemonic, equal basis. by way of cultural transference. K. Satchidanandan sums it up beautifully: "When a work in an Indian language is translated into English, it entails the representation of a regional culture for a more powerful national/Indian culture; when made available outside India, it involves representing a national culture for a still more powerful international culture. There is here an interplay of cross-cultural pride and prejudice when one world is represented for the other in translation. The practice of translation in post-colonial contexts has given form not only to discourses of domination, but also of resistance.

Translation theories so far have mostly been dominated by translations involving western culture. It is necessary to relocate the theory and practice of translation within the hitherto unexplored, Eastern cultural contexts. Translation activity needs to be examined as policy prioritisation, empowerment, enrichment, and culture learning within post-colonial contexts since cross-cultural relations are reconstituted not on an abstract transcultural universal of beauty, but on immediate encounters with other cultural systems. Translation is also a celebration of difference and a re-inventing of cultural identities. The choice of language signifies one's position in the social reality, and the conflict of codes functions as a representation of linguistic diversity. Translation activity constructs cultural identity by reframing the boundaries of the sayable and changing the terms of affiliation". (Satchidanandan, 2003: 124-125).

Translation properly so called builds bridges between cultures and languages and a translator is 'an intercultural mediator and interpretor', as Susan Bassnett calls him. But translation has also come to be seen as a highly suspicious activity, particularly when the translation takes place between languages having an asymmetrical power relationship. That is why we have made a case for opposing cultural appropriation most vehemently. Although the process of translation was kept up during the colonial times through selective appropriation, we need no longer recognize this as a legitimate activity. In an era of commodification of culture, import and export of cultural products, homogenization of all sources of expression and a unipolar world presided over by a single superpower, identification of power relations in the realm of literature and culture on a realistic basis would help us put up stiff resistance to all that is dehumanizing and anti-human in such projects.

Those of you who have read English translations of Latin American writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, George Amando and Mario Vargas Llosa have probably noticed that Spanish, Portuguese and native Indian terms have been retained in the text, without even italicizing them Most of them do not use a glossary. And yet people all over the world read them and understand them. Such is the power of great literature. The necessity to retain the identity of the source language and culture cannot be illustrated in a better way.

4.8 ACTIVITIES

1. Identify a novel, or poem in your own mother tongue, which has an existing English translation. Pick out sample passages from the original and compare them with the corresponding English translation. Mark out differences, inconsistencies, if any, as shown above in the illustrations, and write a detailed note, describing your findings.

2. Select short stories, passages from novels, poetry or drama that appeal to you and translate them into English yourself.

4.9 GLOSSARY

Semiology: the study of signs and symbols, especially the relations between written or spoken signs and their references in the physical world or the world of ideas.

Deconstruction: a method of critical analysis of philosophical and literary language which emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning, and the assumptions implicit in forms of expression.

Cultural codes: a set of conventions governing behaviour or activity in the sphere of culture.

Hegemony: leadership or dominance, especially by one state or social group over others.

Commodification: the process of turning something into a commodity, especially in the area of culture, like in the case of literature, music, dance, the fine arts etc.

Unipolar: the world order in which there is only one superpower, which serves as the sole pole around which all others operate, consenting implicitly to its hegemony.

Homogenization: making everything same or similar.

Indology: the academic study of the history, languages, and cultures of India of classical times, and now, the entire South Asia.

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. Define translation.
2. How is literary translation different from the translation of a factual text?
3. Based on the above lesson, what are the main problems faced by a present-day translator of a literary work in an Indian language into English?
4. What is appropriation?
5. How would you describe problems related to power in translation?
6. "Authors are not necessarily the best translators of their own works". Do you agree? Substantiate your view.
7. "While translating a creative work from an Indian Language into English, one must necessarily use Indian English". Do you agree? If so, why?
8. Outline the linguistic problems one may encounter while translating an Indian Language work into English.

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MAEN-116

Contemporary Indian Literature In English Translation

Block

2

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This Block deals with U.R. Anantha Murthy's epoch making Kannada novel *Samskara* (1965) translated by the doyen of translators, A.K. Ramanujan. It discusses modern man's quest of his true self in terms of themes like asceticism and eroticism, and Brahminism and Anti Brahmanism, which are cast in the form of an allegory.

Unit 1 gives you background information about Kannada language and literature, and Kannada novel in particular and converges on U.R. Anantha Murthy as a writer. **Unit 2** offers help with the narrative in detail. **Unit 3** discusses the allegorical form of the novel and its themes. The final **Unit** deals with characters and with the information on the critical attention the novel has received and closes with a discussion on the contemporary relevance of the novel.

UNIT 1 THE WRITER AND HIS LITERARY CONTEXT

Structure

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1.1 Kannada Language and Literature
  1.1.1 Kannada Language
  1.1.2 Old Kannada Literature
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1.4 Let Us Sum Up
1.5 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall give you (i) a short history of the Kannada language and literature in order to acquaint you with the literary trends from the very beginning till date; (ii) a brief view of the growth of the Kannada novel and identify the chief concerns and themes of Kannada novels; and finally (iii) introduce you to the writer and his works and their major themes. All this will help you to understand U.R. Anantha Murthy's novel *Samskara* better and will enable you to put it in the context of Kannada literature. It will also hopefully help you to understand his unique contribution to Indian literature.

Many a time our students know more about Western literature than they do about their own language and literature. This unit will update your knowledge of Kannada literature and also help you to get a comparative perspective.

1.1 KANNADA LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1.1.1 Kannada Language

Kannada is one of the oldest Dravidian languages and is spoken in its various dialects by close to 5 crore people. It is the state language of Karnataka, one of the four southern states in India. The Kannada language has been spoken for about 2500 years, with the Kannada writing system being in use for about the last 1900 years.

The initial development of the Kannada language is similar to that of other Dravidian languages, notably Tamil and Telugu. During later centuries,

Kannada, along with Telugu, has been greatly influenced by Sanskrit vocabulary and literary styles. Spoken Kannada tends to vary from region to region. The written form is more or less constant throughout Karnataka, however. Linguists identify about 20 dialects of Kannada. The Kannada script itself is derived from Brahmi script.

Kannada is almost as old as Tamil, the truest of the Dravidian family. Initially the area of the Kannada speech extended much further to the north than the present Karnataka, but it was pushed back by the Indo-Aryan Marathi. The early (pre-800 AD) bits and pieces of Kannada literature that are available are insufficient to lay claims to the literature's origins. The oldest extant book is Shrivijaya's *Kavi Raja Marga* (circa 840).

1.1.2 Old Kannada Literature

The old Kannada phase of Kannada literature marks the period from the 10th century to approximately the 12th century. This period consists mainly of Jain religious literature. The most famous poet of this period was Pampa (902-975 AD), one of the most famous writers in the Kannada language. His *Vikramarjuna Vijaya* (also called *Pampa Bharatha*) is hailed as a classic to this day. With this and his other important work *Adipurana* he set a benchmark of poetic excellence for the Kannada poets of the future. The former work is an adaptation of the celebrated Mahabharata, and is the first such adaptation in Kannada. Noted for the strong human bent and the dignified style of his writing, Pampa has been one of the most influential writers in Kannada. He is identified as the *adi kavi* (first poet).

Ponna (939-966 AD) was also an important writer from the same period, with *Shanti-Purana* as his magnum opus. Another major writer of the period was Ranna (949 CE). His most famous works are the Jain religious work *Ajita-Tirthankara Purana* and the *Gada-Yuddham* (The Mace Fight), a bird's eye view of the Mahabharata, set in the last day of the Battle of Kurukshetra and relating the story of the Mahabharata through a series of flashbacks. Structurally, the poetry in this period is in the Champu style – essentially it is poetry interspersed with lyrical prose.

1.1.3 Medieval Kannada Literature

The medieval Kannada period gave birth to several genres in Kannada literature, with new forms of composition coming into use, including Ragale (a form of blank verse) and metres like Bhamini, Shatpadi, Sangatya and Desi. The works of this period are based on Jain, Hindu and secular themes. Two of the early writers (13th century) of this period were Harihara and Raghavanka, both trailblazers in their own right. Harihara established the Ragale form of composition, and most of his works are based on the Shaiva and Veerashaiva traditions. Raghavanka popularized the Shatpadi (six-lined stanza) metre through his six works, the most famous being *Harishchandra Charitre*, based on the life of the Hindu mythological character Harishchandra. The work is noted for its intense attention to human ideals. A famous Jaina writer of the same period is Janna, who expressed Jain religious teachings through his works, *Yashodhara Charite* and *Ananthanatha Purana*. A seminal work on Kannada grammar from the same period is *Shabda Mani Darpana* by Keshi Raja.

Vachanas were revolutionary poems. They were the strongest reactions to the existing social, religious and economic conditions of that time. More importantly, they hold a mirror to the seed of a social revolution, which caused a radical re-examination of the ideas of caste, creed and religion. One of the important ideas coming out of this revolution was the view that work is worship and a pathway to spirituality. Some of the important writers of Vachana literature include Basaveshvara (1131-1167 AD), Allama Prabhu, Chenna Basavanna, Jedara Dasimayya and Akka Mahadevi, the first woman-writer in Kannada.

Arguably, Kumara Vyasa has been the most famous and most influential Kannada writer of all times. His lifetime work, the *Karnata Bharata Katha Manjari*, is a sublime adaptation of the first ten Parvas (chapters) of the Mahabharata. A devotee of Krishna, Kumara Vyasa ends his epic with the passing of Krishna in the tenth chapter of the Mahabharata. The work is easily the most celebrated in Kannada literature. Its fame arises out of the fact that it has appealed to people of all strata of education and intellect right up to the present day. The work is entirely composed in the Bhamini Shatpadi metre, a form of six-lined stanza. The range of human emotions that Kumara Vyasa explores and the versatility of his vocabulary are extensive. The work is particularly known for its use of sophisticated metaphors, earning Kumara Vyasa the title Rupaka Samrajya Chakravarti (Emperor of the Metaphors).

Bhakti literature is the literature composed by the Dasas or saints, around 15th century, singing the glory of God through poems. These poems called Padas were usually of 10 to 20 lines. They express the desire of the Bhakta or devotee to be one with God. This form of poetry was highly amenable to musical composition and exposition. This music evolved into the highly sophisticated and codified Karnatic music. The Haridasas spread the message of peace, love and bhakti in their Dasa Sahitya, which are also popularly known as Devaranamas. Important writers of the Bhakti genre are Purandara Dasa (1494-1564), and Kanaka Dasa.

1.1.4 Modern Kannada Literature

Modern Kannada literature begins with the arrival of English language through colonial administration. This literature is called Navodaya Sahitya. *Navodaya* literally means a new birth. This indeed was the reincarnation of Kannada literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, after a period of dormancy in the face of the British occupation of India. This period saw greats like B.M. Srikanthaiah, K.V. Puttappa, popularly known as Kuvempu, D.R. Bendre, Masti Venkatesh Ayyangar, P.T. Narasimhachar, K.S. Narasimha Swamy, Shivaram Karanth, A.N. Krishna Rao, Basavaraja Kattimani, Niranjana, Betgeri Krishnasharma and many others. These writers were highly influenced by western literature, but recreated the west in the Kannada context. It was Srikanthaiah who started this movement of sorts with his translation of a few critically acclaimed English poems of the Romantic period. Many educated Kannadigas, especially those who were in the teaching profession, realized that they needed to express themselves in their mother tongue and started writing in Kannada. Kuvempu is a case in point, who was convinced by his professor (of British origin) that he should write in his mother tongue. Kuvempu went on to become a Rashtrakavi (national poet). His love of nature, realization of the greatness of man's spirit and the vision to see the blend of nature and God made him more than Kannada's Wordsworth.

His most famous work is the *Sri Ramayana Darshanam*, based on the Ramayana. He wrote two extraordinary novels – *Kanuru Heggaditi* and *Malegalalli Madumagalu*. Another interesting writer is Shivaram Karanth who was a man of great intellect, rock-solid convictions and a profound social commitment. His powerful social novels include *Marali Mannige* (Back to the Soil), *Bettada Jiva*, *Maimanagala Suliyalli*, *Chomana Dudi* and *Mukajjiya Kanasugalu* (A Dumb Granny's Dreams). Masti Vankatesh Ayyangar's novel *Chikkavirarajendra* brought him the Jnanpith award. Niranjana and Basavaraja Kattimani are regarded as progressive writers. They wrote against social evils.

1.1.5 Post-Independence Period

Indian independence in 1947 brought with it the promise of freedom and a new genre sprouted in Kannada poetry. The torchbearer of this tradition was Gopalakrishna Adiga. The *Navya* poets wrote for and like disillusioned intellectuals. The sophistication in the use of language and the importance of technique to literature reached new heights in this genre. U.R. Anantha Murthy, P. Lankesh, A.K. Ramanujan, K.V. Tirumalesh, Shantinatha Desai, Subraya Chokkadi, Sumathindra Nadig, H.M. Chennayya, Gangadhara Chittala, V.K. Gokak, K.S. Nisar Ahmed and Vaidehi, are all leading writers of this movement. Students should note that *Samskara* emerged out of the Navya movement.

Navyottara (Postmodernist) Kannada literature in the last 50 years has been closely related to social aspects. The oppressions of the caste system gave rise to the Bandaaya and Dalit genres of Kannada literature. Feminist movements in Indian society gave rise to the Streevaadi (Feminist) genre of poetry. Short stories have been very popular in the 20th century. Siddalingayya, Devanuru Mahadeva, Amaresh Nugadoni, Mogalli Ganesh, Boluvar Mahammad Kunhi and Sara Abubakar are all leading writers of this movement. They are all currently writing.

It is a testimony to the greatness of Kannada literature that its writers have won seven Jnanpith awards (K.V. Puttappa, D.R. Bendre, V.K. Gokak, Shivarama Karanth, Masti Venkatesh Ayyangar, U.R. Anantha Murthy and Girish Karnad), more than writers of any other Indian language. Also, more than 46 Kannada writers have received the Indian Sahitya Akademi award.

This section has provided you with a brief account of the development of Kannada literature from its ancient past to the present. Kannada poetry has had a very long, rich and varied history. Prose however, emerged only in 20th century. Prose writers like Masti Venkatesh Ayyangar, Shivarama Karanth, Kuvempu, Anantha Murthy and Lankesh have created a literature which is greatly significant in tone and structure. Kannada literature has had a longer and more sustained history than that of many other Indian languages

Questions/Activities

1. Write an essay on the origin and development of modern Kannada literature.

2. Pinpoint some of the important writers who gave new dimensions to the Kannada literature.

3. Pick up at least one of the several Jnanpith awardees of Kannada literature and try and find out more about him.

1.2 A SHORT HISTORY OF KANNADA NOVEL

1.2.1 The Emerging Kannada Novel

Any discussion of the post-colonial literary cultures in India must begin with a reference to the history of colonialism. The process of colonization affected not only the economic and political spheres, but also the culture of the colonized. The different literary genres, models, and movements – indeed, the very institution of "literature" – in the regional languages of India, in the colonial and post-colonial period have their beginnings in the attempts of the colonized people to come to terms with the colonial rule. The development of linguistic self-awareness, the formation of new literary and cultural practices is closely connected with the regulation of the socio-cultural life of the colonized by the establishment of colonial administrative apparatus. In this section we shall examine some moments in the history of the novel and set out its relationship to colonial rule and the emergence of nationalism. This attempt is to sketch the 19th century historical context that made possible the emergence of the novel. We shall also deal with the representation of life in the early Kannada novels.

The most significant phase in the cultural history of colonial India was the emergence of the English educated middle-class. It is important to note here that the Brahmins were the first to receive the benefits of English education and to exploit the opportunities it afforded to consolidate their political and socio-economic position in the new order that was emerging. Another related development of 19th century history was the construction of the Vedic tradition, which was only one of the diverse traditions of India, as the canonical tradition. The result was the codification of customs and the textualization of tradition, with Brahmins as the sole authority in matters relating to native customs and practices. This enabled the colonial state to regulate and discipline the heterogeneous customs and practices that were resistant to its exercise of political and cultural control. This process further reinforced the cultural and political power of the Brahmin community. Ideologically, the English educated Indian middle class of the 19th century was the product of an admixture of liberalism, utilitarianism and a "discovered" or constructed Vedic tradition.

Within the knowledge system and ideological framework imposed by the British, the Indian middle class began to develop some form of patriotism. On the one hand, the middle class began to articulate the "spiritual greatness" of the Indian civilization, and, on the other it strove to assimilate Western science and technology. The cultural ideal of an "East-West" synthesis is one of the important features of the nationalist discourse. This paved the way for the emergence later of an elite intelligentsia. The very logic of its emergence separated this intelligentsia from the local traditions and the life-styles of the common people. Having emerged as a "trishanku" class between the rulers and the ruled, it was not possible for this middle class to embody politically its feeling of patriotism, especially during the ascendancy of colonial rule. Thus it

was important, socially and politically, for this class to define and establish its identity.

Given the multi-dialect formation of India, the consolidation of different dialects into major regional languages played a crucial role in the growth of Indian nationalism. The goal of a unified Karnataka was, in the early 20th century, an important factor both in shaping the freedom movement and in the development of Kannada literature in Karnataka. The emergence of a socially and politically dominant elite, the projection and propagation of the dialect of this elite as the language of the region, deploying that language in newspapers and other print media, in education, and in creating a literature to articulate its socio-political aspirations – these were the concrete historical features of the 19th century nationalist discourse. In the process of defining its social identity, the middle class tried to secure both regional and national identity.

And it is during this process that the novel emerged. This particular form of narrative was developed by the middle class to clarify its place and task in a rapidly changing world. Thus the beginning of new literary efforts in regional languages can be seen as an aspect of the shaping of national identity. The Kannada novel, as a new form of storytelling, grew out of the socio-political needs of the middle class. It is not surprising, then, that the early Kannada novels tell the story of this "trishanku" elite's efforts to consolidate its political position and achieve a sense of social identity. The Kannada novel foregrounds the problems, the aspirations, and the anxieties of this class; the struggles of the lower classes and other historical problems are passed over in silence. In this sense, one can say that the novel in Kannada, as elsewhere, is "an epic of the middle-class".

1.2.2 Early Kannada Novelists

A noteworthy feature of the history of the novel in Karnataka is that most of the early writers were Saraswath Brahmins. Look at some of the names of the writers and translators: Gulwadi Venkata Rao, Bolara Babu Rao, Annaji Rao, Benagal Rama Rao, H. Narayana Rao, Panje Mangesha Rao – all were Saraswat Brahmins. Another feature is that, in terms of their social stance, these writers were reformists.

Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka State was the first district in Karnataka to come under direct British rule, as part of the Madras Presidency, soon after the fall of Tippu Sultan in 1799. Since 1834, the Basel Mission started its activities in this region. By the time of the First World War, this Mission had sent more than 100 missionaries to India, and more than half of them were working in the field of language, literature and education. As elsewhere in India, in this region too, the Saraswaths were the first to receive English education and seize the opportunities opened up by that education. They were originally *Karaniks (*accountants*)* during the rule of the Keladi Kingdom and were traders in the 19th century. Their high social background and literacy had placed them in a position of advantage to best utilize the opportunities opened up by English education. Moreover, being a migrant community, the Saraswaths were skillful at adapting to new circumstances. In The Madras District Gazetteer and *The Madras District Manuals* we find highly appreciative remarks regarding this community's progressive character, its adaptability and its business acumen. These sources also note, with

approval, their involvement in the field of education, their presence in upper level bureaucracy, their departure from traditional ways of living and their assumption of modern life-style: "They are an active and progressive class and many of them have ceased to attach any value to any particular way of living."

We should not, however, forget that the 'Saraswaths' pragmatism and their ability to adapt to new circumstances were really attempts, on their part, to preserve their social identity. As Frank Conlon has observed, this community, having begun its migration from Goa in the 18th century, has had to undergo many changes. In the early stages of its rule, the strategy of the colonial state was to govern and open up new opportunities without greatly upsetting the existing socio-economic structures. Given their access to the public and their literacy, the Saraswath community was in an ideal position to grab these limited opportunities and thus advance itself socially by learning new concepts and techniques. But this also gave rise to severe problems within the community. The teachings in the Basel mission schools began to disturb the religious beliefs of the community.

The educated Saraswaths started rebelling against the taboos and religious customs of their community. They questioned the basic tenets of the religion. In fact, one of the leaders of the Saraswath community, Ullal Raghunathayya, helped to found the Brahmo Samaj in 1870. The Swami of Pandurangashram tried to enforce a strict observance of daily religious customs; this resulted in an intense ideological and philosophical conflict between the religious leader, who thought that the urban youth's sensibility was a violation of dharma; and the progressive youth of the community, who contended that the religious practices were meaningless in the modern context. This conflict gave rise to heated and vigorous debates on issues such as sea voyage, widow remarriage, education for women, disfigurement of widows, etc. It would be more appropriate to understand this conflict as an attempt to redefine religious practices in the changed historical circumstances. As I have already indicated, the Saraswath community was facing an identity crisis in the new social order, and the debate over religious reform was essentially an attempt to resolve that crisis. As Frank Conlon rightly pointed out:

> It would be more accurate to state that all Saraswaths, including the Swami, were experiencing changed conditions and were endeavoring to adjust to the opportunities and requirements of the times. Many of the Swami's reforms were departures from what had been Saraswath practice in the previous century. What distinguished these reforms from those of social reformers was their reference to a different set of standards and priorities. The reformers for their part similarly aimed at an abstract model derived more from the Western experience.

The Saraswaths' involvement in this conflict also enabled them to become the pioneers of modern literature. The novel emerged as an important medium in which to portray this conflict and to articulate the terms for its resolution. It is a form through which the middle class attempted to "make sense of a world radically altered by colonialism and to redefine (its) place in the world". The early novels in Dakshina Kannada District deal with the problems that arose out of the Saraswath community's social situation. Among them are Gulwadi Venkat Rao's *Indira Bai* (1899), generally considered as the first social novel of Kannada, and Bolar Babu Rao's *Vagdevi* (1905). These novels rehearse in detail the debate between the traditional and progressive sections of the

community, and convey the firm conviction that the defeat of the characters subscribing to traditional values is historically inevitable.

In *Indira Bai,* the characters representing tradition are portrayed as hypocritical and dishonest and the educated characters are presented as mature and honest. Bheema Rao, the local businessman, poisons his own servant Sundara Rao, because his wife does not like the servant. He gives his daughter in marriage to Vittal Rao who is very ill and who dies soon after the marriage. When the President of the *santamandali* tries to seduce Indira, her parents tell her to satisfy him. Finally Indira runs away and marries Bhaskar Rao, a western-educated Assistant Collector, with the help of the local lawyer Amrita Rao. The message of the story is clear. Those who subscribe to western rationality and act according to it are good. Indira Bai too escapes from "tradition and orthodoxy" through "reading".

According to Gulwadi Venkat Rao, his novel is about truth and honesty, the only virtues that are valid not only here but also in the hereafter. *Indira Bai* reads as a satire, since the tension between opposing values is resolved outside the structure of the novel. There is a certain kind of optimism regarding the coming history. Indeed, the absence of tension in the structure of the novel and the optimism regarding the future are two characteristic features of most early novels of Kannada.

In Bolara Babu Rao's *Vagdevi,* there are no characters to represent modern values. It portrays the corruption and the inevitable crumbling of the old order. The characters are dissolute, selfish and cowardly. In Gulwadi's novel, at least the *dharmagurus* are portrayed as men of integrity, *Vagdevi* however portrays them as most corrupt. Thus we see the dissolute and lecherous religious head, Chanchalnetra, seducing the innocent Vagdevi, keeping her as his mistrees, and even bringing her to live on the Temple premises. Vagdevi too learns to use her "body" and "beauty" to acquire money and status. There are, then, no good characters, no heroes, in this corrupt social order, which, thus, has no right to continue. At the end of the novel, the whole edifice collapses under the accumulated weight of the characters' sinful lives.

In both these novels, the traditional life is understood and evaluated on the basis of western rationality. According to them, the transformation of Indian life is a historical necessity. But the point of view here is subjective, and the assumption is that the individual is the source of history, meaning and work. The narratives try to rationalize the subjugation of "Indian" culture. The world-view of the middle class, itself a product of colonial modernization, redefines religion, truth, virtue, etc. There is an attempt to reform social and gender roles within a liberal-individualist framework. Let us look at this conversation between Amba Bai and Indira Bai in *Indira Bai:*

"What book are you reading?"
"I finished *Stri Dharma Niti* yesterday, and now I'm reading *Aesop's Fables.*"
"Aren't those missionary books?"
"I've no idea."
"They publish those books to violate the purity of our caste."
"I don't see anything of that sort in the books I'm reading.
How can the purity of caste be violated by merely reading these books?"
"They contain things that go against our religion."

"Not in the books I've read. They contain very good instructions for women about how to behave with parents, husbands, and strangers."

"Not in the books I've read" – notice the historical conviction of this response. It turned out to be the case in history. The educated Saraswaths of the 19th and 20th century marched ahead by rejecting Amba Bais and Bheema Raos. The early novels reconstruct religion in the light of the knowledge acquired by the emerging middle class. They accept universal standards based especially on the notion of progress. They are nationalists to the extent they try to "re-equip the nation culturally in order to transform it". Their concern is with the regeneration of national culture. In the largely reformist thrust of these novels, the element of cultural distinctiveness is underplayed.

Bhagirath by Gulvadi Venkata Rao, *Indir* by Kerur Vasudeva Rao, *Madiddunno Maharaya* by M.S. Puttanna, *Sushile* by Nanjanagudu Tirumalamba, are the names of a few important early Kannada novels.

1.2.3 Important Kannada Novelists

After 1930, Kannada novels began to flourish. Many important Kannada novelists emerged during the 1930s. The greatest of them, undoubtedly, was Dr. Shivarama Karantha, another Jnanpith awardee from Karnataka. He wrote more than 60 novels and in his novels he continued the reformist tradition of Gulwadi, although his treatment of traditional society is more complex and his criticism softer. His novels tell the story of the great transformation of Dakshina Kannada district. Within the liberal ideological framework of his novels, Shivarama Karanth tries to articulate some kind of scientific religion, economy, and individualism. We can see this clearly in *Comana Dudi, Marali Mannige, Maimanagala Suliyalli, Mugida Yuddha, Oudaryada Urulalli, Sarasammana Samadhi, Kudiyara Kusu, Alida Mele, Mookajjiya Kanasugalu,* and *Bettada Jiva.* These novels detail, with insight and empathy, the changing life in pre-Independence India. When Karanth deals with post-Independence Indian politics, he depicts, in moralistic terms, the corruption of people. In *Chomana Dudi* the narrator is fully aware of the shape of things to come. The focus, however, is on traditional society in transition. The desire of Choma to own a piece of land is a historical expression of the changing social relationship in the countryside, even though Karanth describes it as something innate to human nature. Still the novel makes it clear that the very humanism which underlies its structure, cannot be realized within that structure. Choma's drum keeps on beating. We may consider the symbol of the drum important for understanding the way in which not only Karanth, but also other Kannada writers have conceptualized art. As a matter of fact, after 1928 we have many novels with artist-heroes. For Karanth, Choma's drum symbolizes art: it is an expression of pain, of social reality. Karanth's humanism sees nationalism in largely cultural terms, even as it understands culture ("the role of the artist") in elite terms. Basically, Karanth's novels examine human nature, and tell the story of the success and failure of individuals. The individual is the source of all historical change. That is why it is not surprising that in his later novels he depicts post-Independence politics as a story of corruption and dishonesty.

K.V. Puttappa, Masti Venkatesh Ayyangar, Devudu Narasimhacarya, V.K. Gokak, A.N. Krishna Rao, Basavaraja Kattimani, T.R. Subba Rao, V.M. Inamdar, Betageri Krishna Sharma, Niranjana, Rao Bahaddur, P. Lankesh, U.R. Anantha Murthy, Devanuru Mahadeva, Shanthinatha Desai, Chandrashekhara Kambar, are other important novelists in Kannada literature.

This section helps you to understand the emergence and development of Kannada novels from its beginning to the present. Dr. Shivarama Karanth has been awarded the prestigious Jnanpith award for his novel "Mookajjiya Kanasugalu". Kannada novels generally have had a very long, rich history. Novelists like Masti Venkatesh Ayyangar, Shivarama Karanth, Kuvempu, Anantha Murthy and Lankesh have written internationally reputed novels. Sadly however, many good novels have remained untranslated into English or any Indian language.

Questions

1. Summarize the anti-Brahminism in the novels discussed above.
2. Analyze the social context that caused the birth of Kannada novels.
3. Who were the important Kannada novelists in its early stages?
4. Pinpoint some of the important writers who gave new dimensions to the Kannada novels.
5. Learn more about Jnanpith award winner novelist Dr. Shivarama Karantha.

1.3 LIFE AND WORKS OF DR. U.R. ANANTHA MURTHY

1.3.1 A Biographical Sketch of U.R. Anantha Murthy

Udupi Rajagopala Acharya Anantha Murthy was born on December 21, 1932 at Melige, a remote village in Tirthahalli Taluk, in Shimoga District of Karnataka State. Anantha Murthy had his early Sanskrit education in a traditional pathashala. He completed his B.A. Honours from Maharaja's College, Mysore and Post-graduation in English from the University of Mysore in 1956. Later in 1966, he earned his Ph. D (English & Comparative Literature) from the University of Birmingham, U.K.

He began his career as a Lecturer in English in 1956 and continued as such till 1963. Later he joined the Regional College of Education, Mysore, as a Reader in English and served there till 1970. During the period 1970-80 he was Reader in English at Mysore University. He was Professor of English at the Department of English, University of Mysore during 1980-92. He became the Vice-Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala in 1987-91.

He has been a visiting Professor at a number of foreign and Indian Universities like the University of Iowa (1975), Tufts University (1978), University of Hyderabad (2001), University of Cornell (2000), University of Pennsylvania (2000), Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi (1993), University of Tubingen, Germany (1992), and Shivaji University, Kolhapur (1982).

He was Chairman, National Book Trust of India, Delhi in 1992-93; President, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi in 1993-98; and Chairman, Indian Institute of Social Sciences, Delhi in 1998-2002.

Awards

U.R. Anantha Murthy has received numerous awards both from the Government and also Akademis and other academic institutions for excellence

in different fields. These include the Masti award in Literature, Jnanpith Award in 1994, and the Padma Bhushan.

Lectures

He has lectured on a wide variety of subjects including politics, culture, literature and art. Some important lectures of his are: on "Culture and Destiny" at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal; on "Indian Literature" in the University of Madison and Chicago in 1985; on "Indian Society, Culture, Politics, and Literature" at the University of Birmingham, Alabama in 1987; on "Colonialism and Indian Literature" at the University of California in; and on "Art in the Modern Age" at Bangalore University in 1989.

In one of his interviews, Anantha Murthy has stressed the need for de-glamorizing English.

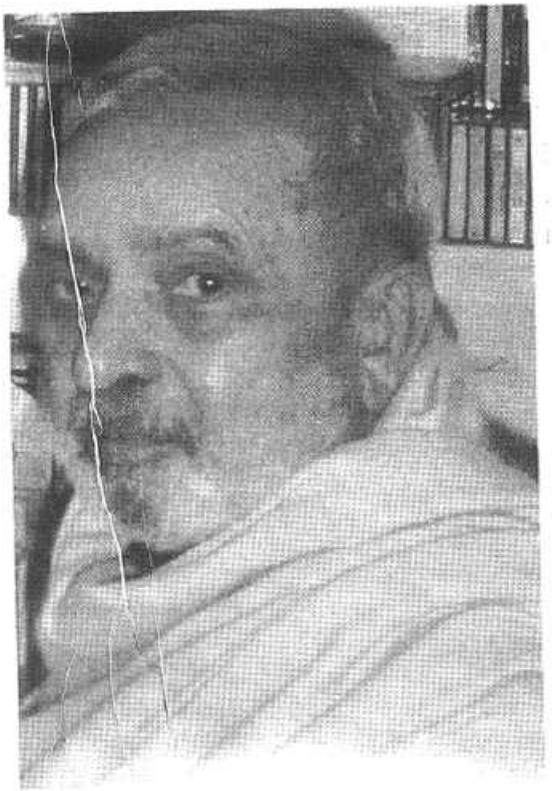
Currently, he is residing at Bangalore and his address is – 498, 6th A main, RMV 2nd stage, Bangalore-560 094, Telefax, 080-3415125

1.3.2 His Works

In Kannada, Anantha Murthy's works can be classified into short stories, poetry, plays, novels and essays. The list of his publications given below –

Short stories

Aidu Dashakada Kathegalu, 2001
Suryana Kudure, 1995
Mooru Dasakada Kathegalu, 1989
Akasha Mattu Bekku, 1981
Mauni, 1972
Prashne, 1962
Endendu Mugiyada Kathe, 1955



Poetry

Eeevaregina Kavithegalu (collected poems) (2001)
Mithuna (1992)
Ajjana Hegala Sukkugalu (1989)
15 *Padyagalu* (1970)
Bavali (1963)

Novels

Divya (2001)
Bhava (1994)
Avasthe (1978)
Bharathipura (1973)
Samskara (1965)

Play

Avahane (1971)

Essays and others

Kannada, Karnataka, 2001
Yuga Pallata, 2001
Daw Da Jing, 1994
Poorvapara, 1990
Samakshama, 1982
Prajne Mattu Parisara, 1974

Journal

Rujuvathu, a cultural and literary quarterly in Kannada, started 1 Jan 1981.

His novel *Samskara* (1965) has been translated into English, Russian, French, Hungarian, German, Swedish, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi, Urdu, Tamil and Gujarati.

Publications in English/English translations

English translations

Many of Dr. Anantha Murthy's works in Kannada have been translated to English by different persons. Details are as follows:

i. 'Initiation' a Kannada story translated by Gary Wills.
ii. *Avasthe* a novel, translated by Shanthinath Desai (1990).
iii. *Bhava*, a novel & 'Twenty Vachanas from Shunya Sampadane' is a set of twenty poems translated from the Kannada by Judith Kroll.
iv. *Bharathipura,* a novel has been translated by P. Shreenivasa Rao (1996).
v. His short story – 'Sooryana Kudure', translated from the Kannada into English by A.K. Ramanujan and Manu Shetty.
vi. A recent publication *Stallion of the Sun and Other Stories* brings together five stories from his five collections translated by Narayan Hegde (1999).

English

The other works in English include essays on various topics like *Literature and Culture* (2002), "The Concept of Man in Kannada Literature" (1979) and "Why Not Worship in the Nude?"

Film versions

Sanskara was made into an award-winning film in 1970. Two of his stories, 'Bara' and 'Ghatashraddha' have also appeared in film versions.

1.3.3 Anantha Murthy as a Writer

U.R. Anantha Murthy is one of the most significant writers in contemporary India. A Lohiaite socialist in his outlook, much of his work is a severe indictment of brahminical orthodoxy and evinces a spirit that is restless for

change. *Samskara* (1965) expresses his rage at the oppressive tradition of brahminism that is decadent and burdensome and describes the spiritual struggle of an individual as he tries to forge a new identity for himself. In *Bharathipura* (1973) his central character Jagannatha, a Brahmin landlord newly returned from England after completing studies there, wants to usher in a social revolution by leading a group of untouchables into the temple. If we accept this character as an alter ego of the writer, then a passage in the novel gives us an idea of the mind of the dreaming revolutionary:

> He [Jagannatha] must wait for the birth of a new man within, whose eyes would look upon and comprehend the reality around with compassion, and at the same time, dissect it clinically with a desire to change it for the better; who would passionately love it and still stay detached; understand why there was the caste system and realize that he too was not above it but would transcend it in his actions and walk with his head held high. With that birth, Jagannatha would be able both to embrace the world and renounce it, grow gradually into a concrete form, walk the path of cruelty, violence and greed and still stay unaffected, reduce Manjunatha into a cipher and unload the baskets of human excrement from the untouchables' heads. An Indian would attain real dignity only when it became possible for a Brahmin boy to desire a dark-skinned untouchable girl with flowers in her hair, only when a Brahmin girl longed to be hugged by a coarse-haired and dark-skinned untouchable boy. (*Bharathipura*: 203-204)

Here is an agenda of change most of which still remains unrealized. However, in this novel the writer interrogates the notion of an ideal revolutionary. The social revolution envisaged by Jagannatha fails and in depicting this failure, Anantha Murthy is writing 'a critique of the limitations of the radical middle classes, claiming an exclusive and sympathetic right to change the nation,' as Professor Nagarajan puts it in his introduction to the English translation of the novel (xv).

Anantha Murthy is perhaps best described by the term 'critical insider' that he himself used in his essay 'Being A Writer' (1992), (*Literature and Culture*: 139) "A truly critical insider", he says, 'would have boundless compassion for the poor and disinherited in India, would passionately engage himself with the present in all its confusion of values, and only with such a mind and heart would he know what is usable in the rich past of India for a creative present" (139). Talking about how others have viewed him, he says: "I am described as a rebel against the caste system, a votary of individualism, a modernist against traditions—for which I am either praised or disliked. Nowadays ... I am also either attacked or praised as a traditionalist, as a lapsed revolutionary, or as one growing soft (or wise?). In the manner of all writers past their middle age. People don't seem to respond to the passionate critique of religion in my earlier works, and the critique of modernization which follows, in my later works" (140).

Clearly his thematic concerns have evolved over the years. This evolution can perhaps be seen in the recent publication *Stallion of the Sun and Other Stories* (1999) which brings together five stories from his five collections. These stories, says the jacket, represent the writer's journey from 'an angry young radical to an intensely humanist conservative'.

In this section we have given you information on U. R. Anantha Murthy and his multi-faceted creativity and his characteristic themes. This should help you to understand *Samskara,* the text under study, better.

1.5 QUESTIONS

1. What are the major works of Dr. Anantha Murthy?
2. Do you think you can find the time to read the writer's *Bharathipura* or at least one or two of his short stories? My own choice from among his short stories would be 'Ghatashraddha' and 'Clip Joint'.
3. Remember, any extra reading of the writer will pay you rich dividends in terms of your understanding and your score in the examination.

UNIT 2 *SAMSKARA* : THE NARRATIVE

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Chapterwise Summaries and Comments
2.3 The Narrative: Three Important Features
  2.3.1 Focalization
  2.3.2 Intertextuality
  2.3.3 Structure
2.4 Let Us Sum Up
2.5 Questions
2.6 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit is meant to enable you to get to know the text of *Samskara* intimately; to train you to look at major features of the narrative, particularly focalization and intertexuality; and finally, to examine the form and structure of the novel. After reading the study material, you should be able to examine a narrative critically, particularly with respect to focalization and intertexuality.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

After giving you a survey of Kannada literature and the Kannada novel, we can now zero in on the text of *Samskara*. Written in Kannada in 1965, it was made into a powerful film with Girish Karnad playing the part of Pranesacharya. The English translation of the novel came out in 1976. It is a short novel as novels go — only 144 pages. (*Tamas* is 352 pages!) You should have no difficulty in reading it in one or two sittings. There is an interesting story about how the novel came to be written. U.R. Anantha Murthy wrote the novel in 1964, when he was in England doing his Ph.D. He was 32 at that time.

Anantha Murthy recalls how as a child of 13 he had met a former army man and had come to know of his romance with one of the loveliest dark girls from the untouchable huts and of their elopement and how he had written a story about it. The story was meant for a magazine which he and several other friends of his edited in Kannada, Sanskrit and English. He had written the story metaphorically in order to hide the true story from the elders of the community. The girl reminded him of the story of Matsyagandha, the fisherwoman with whom the ascetic Parashar had fallen in love. He rewrote the story in 1964 while doing research in England. What triggered off the writing was his visit to a film along with his English supervisor, Malcolm Bradbury.

'...many years later in 1964, when I was 32 years old, I went to see a Bergman film "The Seventh Seal" in England with my friend and guide, the famous novelist Malcolm Bradbury. Seventh seal is a film on a Christian facing a belief crisis. It was a great and symbolic film, but I saw it without sub-titles. I was stirred by it. Often creativity is aroused by imperfect understanding and even misunderstanding. I told Bradbury, "Look Malcolm, as an Englishman you have to create your medieval times through learning and knowledge acquired with hard scholarship. But the medieval times are part of my consciousness; centuries can co-exist in the Indian mind." Malcolm said that my writing must reflect such an existence. I had to give the next chapter of my thesis on Marxism and fiction to him. What a boring and hard chapter to write and I wanted to evade it. What better ruse can there be if your teacher is a novelist? I told Malcolm that I have begun to write a novel and I did. I finished it within a week. Being away for nearly two years from my own land and people, the language Kannada with all its richness and the people whom I knew came back to me and I found myself rewriting the story, which I had written at the age of 13. But with a lot more in it than I could grasp in my tender years.' This was how *Samskara* was born in England.

The above accounts tells us several things about Anantha Murthy — his early distrust of the caste system, his early creativity, and most significantly, a clue about his choice of the mould in which he had cast the story of *Samskara,* namely the story of the love of the ascetic Parashar for Matsygandha told in the Mahabharat.

Well, read on now. Do keep noting your reactions in the margin as you do so. *This naturally applies if it is your own copy of the novel.*

For your convenience we have given summaries of all the chapters in the novel along with comments and questions. But remember the summaries are given *as an aid* to your reading. They are not meant to be a substitute for the experience of reading the text.

All references to the text in this study material are to Samskara *published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1976.*

2.2 CHAPTERWISE SUMMARIES AND COMMENTS

Part One (Chapters I-X, pages 1-62)

Chapter I: Naranappa's death creates turmoil among the Brahmins of Durvasapura.

Samskara is the story of a *Madhva* Brahmin colony, led by Pranesacharya, a devout Brahmin well read in the scriptures and the shastras. The name of the colony or agrahara was Durvasapura. Pranesacharya led an exemplary life looking after his invalid wife. For twenty years he had followed a routine that consisted of taking a bath, saying prayers, cooking for himself and his wife, giving medicines to her and reciting sacred legends before the Brahmins assembled in his house. He thought his salvation lay in his willing performance of duties to his ailing wife.

One morning Naranappa's concubine Chandri came and told Pranesacharya of the death of Naranappa. Naranappa was a heretic in the colony and had defied every known Brahmin way of life. The news created a commotion in the agrahara. Pranesacharya's first task was to go and tell all the Brahmin families in the agrahara that Naranappa had died, for no Brahmin could take meals while the body of a fellow Brahmin lay uncremated. Later the Brahmins assembled in Pranesacharya's verandah to hear his verdict on who would do the funeral rites. The wives, distrustful of their husbands, had also come in through the back door. Naranappa had no children. So, **the most important question was – who would do the death rites?** Pranesacharya said that, according to the shastras, *any relative could, failing which any Brahmin could offer to perform them.* Garuda and Lakshmana were related to Naranappa but each of them had quarreled with him and were not interested in performing the rites. The unbrahmin-like actions of Naranappa were raked up. He kept a low-cast concubine, drank liquor, and ate meat, and desecrated the temple pond with his Muslim friends by fishing there. Most of all, he was charged with corrupting the young people of the agrahara and of Parijatpura also.

While the Brahmins were thus debating as to who should perform the funeral rites, Chandri offered all her gold ornaments to pay for the funeral expenses. This changed the entire situation.

The Brahmins now feared that someone else might be tempted to agree to perform the funeral rites and so they vied with one another in giving accounts of Naranappa's evil deeds.

Finally, at Dasachrya's suggestion it was decided that the Brahmins of Parijatapura who were *smartas* and were not so strict in their orthodoxy and who were quite friendly with Naranappa should be informed of his death. As for gold, Pranesacharya would decide who it should go to. He would of course study the sacred books to find a way out of the dilemma they faced.

Comments/Questions/Activities

1. Note the reactions of the residents of the agrahara to the death of Naranappa. While condemning him they reveal aspects of their own character.
2. In what way is Pranesacharya different from the other Brahmins in the colony? What qualities does he possess? Tick off the qualities that you would associate with him: asceticism, compassion, learning, piety, humility. Any other?
3. What does Naranappa stand for? Are Pranesacharya and Naranappa in opposition to each other?
4. List out all the anti-brahmin actions, which Naranappa is accused of. Which of these activities, according to you, are *not* objectionable?
5. Which two sins is the writer talking about here? The sin of gluttony and the sin of greed for gold.
6. Which is the incident that reveals the brahmins' love of gold? Which of the characters are described as being most greedy?
7. **Purity and Pollution**. These twin ideas are very crucial for our understanding of the dynamics of brahminism in the novel.
8. Which characters are presented sympathetically in this chapter?
9. **Narrative**: The story is being told by an omniscient narrator in the third person.

10. **Tone of the Narrator**: How would you describe the tone of the narrator? Is is objective or is it ironic? I think it is *ironic*. One example of it is the narrator's description of the way the announcement stops the Brahmins dead in their tracks. 'Garudacharya was in the act of raising a handful of rive mixed with Saru to his mouth, when Pranesacharya entered and said: 'Narayana. Don't Garuda, don't eat. I hear Naranappa is dead, ...'(3)

    Think of other examples.

11. **Intertexuality**: The first chapter refers to several other texts like Vatsyayana's Manual on Love *Kamasutra*, Matsyagandha, the Fisherwoman in Ravi Verma's painting, (8) and Manu (13). Make a complete list. What do you think is the purpose of these references?

Chapter II: Durvasapura Brahmins go to seek help from Parijatpura Brahmins.

The contrast between Naranappa and other Durvasapura Brahmins extends even to the flowers grown by them. Flowers in other brahmins' homes were meant for the worship of god but those that bloomed in Naranappa's yard were meant for Chandri's hair.

The brahmins of Durvasapura, hot and hungry, crossed the three-pronged stream of Tunga, entered the forest, and journeyed for an hour to reach Parijatapura. There they went to Manjayya's house. Manjayya welcomed them warmly. When he heard the news of Naranappa's death, Manjayya felt sorry and correctly inferred that he had died of plague, though he was afraid to speak the name of the disease. The Parijatpura folks were happy to get a chance to cremate a high-caste Brahmin but felt that Pranesacharya was the best person to decide on the question of morality involved in the task. Manjayya on his part unhesitatingly said that Naranappa was his friend and that he would spare no expense in performing the funeral rites properly.

Comments/Questions

1. The contrast between Naranappa and the rest of the Durvasapura Brahmins is stated in terms of day and night: "All day the smells were gentle and tranquil, the sandalpaste on the brahmins' bodies and the soft fragrance of *parijata* and other such flowers. But when it grew dark, the night-queen reigned over the agrahara" (15). Notice that the focus here, as in the previous chapter, is on the question whether or not Naranappa was a Brahmin.
2. The priest of Parijatpura, Shankarayya, says 'that a snake is also a twice-born'. What is he really referring to?
3. How do the Brahmins of Parijatpura appear in comparison to those of Durvasapura? Manjayya seems to be more generous.

Chapter III: Pranesacharya's attitude to Naranappa

While the Brahmins were away at Parijatpura, Pranesacharya pored over his sacred books trying to find a solution to the dilemma they faced.

Naranappa had always been a problem for the agrahara. The real challenge was to test what would win in the end: his own penance and his faith in ancient ways or Naranappa's demonic ways. The Acharya had promised Naranappa's mother as she lay dying that he would look after her erring son and even fasted two days a week for him. Once when the Acharya visited to counsel him, Naranappa told him irreverently that since the Congress was coming back to power, they would have to open the temples to all outcastes. When the Acharya told him not to separate Shripati from his wife, he laughed loudly saying that only barren Brahmins lived with women who gave no pleasure. He too had discarded his hysterical wife for the same reason. He belonged, he said, to the hedonist school and lived by the precept of *Borrow, borrow and drink your ghee* (20).

He was critical of Garuda's greed that had made him rob a poor widow of her property. Three months before his death, the Acharya visited Naranappa again in response to a complaint that he had fished in the sacred temple pond along with his Muslim friends. The Acharya feared that this desecration might set a bad example for the lower classes, who he thought, followed the right path out of fear. On that occasion Naranappa asked his concubine Chandri to bring liquor and had the effrontery to offer it to him. And he challenged him again saying that he would destroy brahminism (23). He in fact, accused him of telling juicy tales that excited his listeners and corrupted them. He went on to tell a thinly veiled story that paralleled the Acharya's own practice of reciting legends of Shakuntala and other women from the Puranas, and the erotic effect they caused in a young listener. This young listener was so sexually aroused that he went and took a young outcaste woman bathing in the river in the moonlight. Naranappa drew the conclusion that it was he, the Acharya who had corrupted brahminism. The Acharya scolded him but later stopped reciting luscious puranic stories to his listeners. Naranappa advised them to discard their sick wives and take those that gave them pleasure.

Questions/Comments

1. **Allegorical character of the story**: The tussle is broadly between good and evil, between *punya* and *paapa*, 'between the Acharya's own penance and faith in ancient ways and Naranappa's demonic ways' (19-20). The conflict between Pranesacharya and Naranappa is again clearly stated by the latter: 'All right, let's see who wins, Acharya. You or me? Let's see how long will all this Brahmin business last' (20-21).
2. Whose story does Naranappa tell the Acharya? The story of Shripati's liaison with Belli. See chapter v.
3. What is Naranappa's charge against Pranesacharya?
4. What effect does it have on the Acharya?

Chapter IV: Focus on Garuda and Lakshmana's greed and Dasacharya's hunger

Two incidents held against Naranappa are Garuda's son Shyma joining the army and Lakshmana's son-in-law Shripati's separation from his wife Lilavati, for both of which Naranappa was held responsible. This chapter focuses on the accusations leveled by Garuda and his wife Sitadevi against Naranappa and the counter-accusations made by Naranappa's enemies. Garuda's eye was on the money that would come to him if he were asked to

cremate Naranappa. He would then be able to secure the release of his only son from the army. With this intention he went to the Acharya, flattered him for his learning and finally confessed why he needed the money so urgently.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the thinking in Lakshmana's household and on Lakshmana's miserliness. His wife Anasuya was in tears at the loss of her sister's jewellery to Chandri and blamed Garuda for ruining Naranappa through what she called black magic. At the same time, she accused Naranappa of making him go astray — he kept the company of Yakshgana players, visited a prostitute, and causing him to separate from his wife. Actually she had taught her daughter to twist her legs and not yield to her husband in order to teach him a lesson. So in order to forestall Garuda, his wife goaded him to go the Acharya. Lakshmana was more straightforward than Garuda and told Pranesacharya that he didn't have any objection in cremating Naranappa.

Just then Dasacharya and some other Brahmins also joined Garuda and Lakshmana The former confessed that he was tormented by hunger and asked for an immediate solution to the problem. He suggested that they could donate the gold to the Maruti temple, leaving both Garuda and Lakshmana crestfallen. Finally Pranesacharya promised to pore over the books throughout the night and asked them to go away.

Comments

1. The turnabout in the conduct of the characters after Chandri's generous offer of gold is complete.
2. **The denial of sex**: Anasuya's instructions to her daughter Lilavati are an example of the denial of sex practiced in the agrahara : 'Don't give in to your husband when he wants it. Knot up your thighs, like this, and sleep aloof. Teach him a lesson' (31).

Chapter V: Shripati makes love to Belli, an outcaste, discovers Naranappa's death and runs out.

This chapter takes us inside the consciousness of Shripati as he comes back to Durvasapura after spending a happy week with a drama troupe from Kelur. It was night and he was carrying a flashlight while crossing the forest.

We get to know about Shripati's secret friendship with Naranappa, his love of dramatics, his desire to escape the Brahmin dump, and his liaison with Belli, an outcaste girl. Pranesacharya's description of the erotic beauty of Shakuntala during his recital of puranic legends had excited him so much that he went and took Belli at the river ('He had personally, carnally enjoyed the Acharya's description.') (38). It seems it was his story that Naranappa was telling the Acharya when the latter had come to counsel him to behave (Chapter III). The balladeer of the troupe had promised him a girl's role. If he could find a part in the troupe, he could escape the Brahmin dump and its endless funeral food. After taking Belli in the outcaste hutments, he went to see his friend Naranappa but finding him dead ran away to Parijatpura.

When the child-widow Lakshmidevamma saw him running she shouted that it was Naranappa's ghost.

Comment

1. Here we are given a direct, sympathetic view of Shripati, in contrast to Lakshmana's wife's accusation that Naranappa had corrupted her son.
2. This chapter mentions the celestial temptress Menaka and Kalidas's Shakuntala as examples of erotic beauty. Chandri is spoken of as being 'utterly beautiful, beyond compare" (38). According to Shripati 'the best connoisseur of them all is Pranesachary, really one in a million' (38).

Chapter VI: The seventy-year old widow, Lakshmidevamma, curses Garuda for robbing her; Pranesacharya returns Chandri her gold.

This chapter introduces the seventy-year old child widow Lakshmidevamma, known in the Brahmin colonies around for her sore temper, her resounding belches and her curses and offers proof of Garuda's greed in taking away whatever little property she had.

Chandri was waiting at Pranesacharya's house for his verdict. She had lived with Naranappa for ten years but the delay in cremating him unnerved her. As a prostitute she was considered to be sinless. "Born to prostitutes, she was an exception to all rules. She was ever-auspicious, daily-wedded, the one without widowhood. How can sin define a running river' (43)? She ate bananas to allay her hunger and slept curled up on the floor.

Pranesacharya on his part was poring over books to find a solution to the dilemma facing the community. If his quest proved fruitless, it would be a victory for Naranappa. We are also given a glimpse of the Acharya analyzing his motives in not excommunicating Naranappa. Compassion for the man was the chief impulse behind his 'inaction' but not without a certain willfulness on his part, his belief that he could bring him back to the right path. It suddenly occurred to him that he should go the Maruti temple across the river and seek His help. He also thought of Chandri, gave her a mat and a blanket and a pillow and also returned all her gold ornaments. She would need them in her life.

Comment

1. In his self-analysis Pranesacharya is honest and admits to the presence of a strand of willfulness along with compassion in relation to Naranappa. This self-analysis gives a foretaste of what is to follow later in the novel, particularly in Part Three.

Chapter VII: Pranesacharya leaves the stench-filled agrahara and goes to the Maruti temple for divine guidance.

The rotting body of Naranappa filled the agrahara with unbearable stench and the Brahmins with superstitious fears. The rats leaped and tumbled and died, much to the unthinking delight of the children. The Brahmins distressed by hunger approached Pranesacharya again and he told them of his plan to go to the Maruti temple. Chandri followed him, waiting for his word at a safe distance in the forest.

Questions

1. Can you pick out an example of the superstitious fear felt by the Brahmins if the dead body was not properly cremated?
2. Notice that instead of deciding the question on his own, he asks Lord Maruti to give him a sign about what should be done. Later he recalls this moment when he is with Putta: 'When the question of Naranappa's death rites came up, I didn't try to solve it for myself. I depended on God, on the old law books' (106).

Chapter VIII: Dasacharya goes and eats at Manjayya's house in Parijatpura.

Dasacharya, dying to eat, flattered Manjayya for being as good a Brahmin as anyone else and criticized his own community for asking the Parijatpura brahmins to do what they wouldn't do themselves. He also criticized Garuda and Lakshmana for their greed. Manjayya offered him something to eat. At first he confined himself to uncooked food but later his appetite got the better of him and he ate whatever was offered, to his fill.

Comments

1. This chapter shows both Dasacharya's hypocrisy and the brahminical code breaking under the weight of hunger.
2. Note the slightly ironical tone of the narrator.

Chapter IX: The Brahmins, waiting for Pranesacharya in heat, hunger and dread come out of their houses trying to shoo away the vultures that descend on the agrahara.

The death of rats, which was a result of the plague that raged in Durvasapura, filled both the Brahmins and the outcastes with superstitious dread. Chinni, the outcaste girl, who came instead of Belli to collect manure from the Brahmin houses, feared that people were dying because of the Demon treading on them. A vulture on the roof was an omen of death. And when Garuda's wife spotted one sitting on their roof, she feared for her son and the couple prayed to the household god to forgive them for coveting the god's gold. Soon, numerous vultures were seen descending on the agrahara. It was as if the Last Deluge had come. Everyone in the agrahara came out struck dumb with dread. Then began the effort to drive the vultures away. At Dasacharya's suggestion they beat the bronze gongs and blew their conches as they did during the great offerings of flaming camphor making the vultures fly away. But they came back leading the Brahmins to beat their gongs and blow their conches again. This continued till nightfall when the vultures finally disappeared.

In the meantime, Chandri sat in the forest near the temple waiting for word from the Acharya. She blamed herself for causing all this trouble for him. But she did not forget to eat the plantains that she had brought.

Chapter X: Pranesacharya's prayers to Lord Maruti go unanswered – he returns through the forest at night – meets and mates with Chandri.

Pranesacharya came back from the temple disappointed. The Maruti God had given him no sign. It was night. As he moved through the dark forest, he met

Chandri. She felt compassion for him and embraced his feet in gratefulness and wept. He on his part bent down to bless her and caressed her loosened hair. She held him close, made him lean against her breasts and fed him plantains. 'Touching full breasts he had never touched, Pranesacharya felt faint. As in a dream, he pressed them' (62). Then they made love to each other.

Comments/Questions

1. The important sentence is: 'The Acharya's hunger, so far unconscious, suddenly raged, and he cried out like a child in distress' (62). The key word here is 'hunger' — physical hunger and sexual hunger, both of which Chandri satisfies. Chandri is all woman in one — both a mother and a lover. She feeds him like a mother and also satisfies his great sexual need.
2. The union between Pranesacharya and Chandri takes place amidst nature. He will revisit the scene of their lovemaking later. (See Part Two, chapter 5.) Can you think of any other similar union in literature that takes place in the forest? What about the union of Shakuntala and Dushyant in Kalidas?

Comments on Part One

Part One consisting of ten chapters gives us a picture of the Brahmin agrahara of Durvasapura and its decadent morality. They are top Brahmins, belonging to the Madhva group, followers of Madhavacharya. But they are extremely hidebound, stern believers in purity and rituals. The only member of the community who is a Brahmin in the real sense is their leader Pranesacharya who is not only highly learned but compassion incarnate. The novel is essentially his story — the story of his spiritual struggle, his self-awakening, his liberation, his re-birth. Even he has denied himself the pleasures of the flesh. His sexual union with Chandri doesn't really come as a surprise. The writer throws several hints along the narrative. The reference to Sankara's hunger for a full experience of sex and his entering the body of a dead king in order to enjoy himself with the queen anticipates Pranes's own repressed hunger for sex (6).

If the novel is a narrative centrally concerned with the spiritual evolution of Pranesacharya, the first part of it marks a definite and important stage in it. First, he is already a spiritually evolved character who is sensitive to the discomfort and pain of others. His compassion for Naranappa is responsible for his not excommunicating him. When he realizes that Chandri is sleeping in the verandah without a mat or a blanket or a pillow, he gives her these things. He also gives back all her gold ornaments that she had given to him for meeting the funeral expenses. In meeting and mating with Chandri, he comes in contact with someone who is entirely different from him and who stands at the opposite pole of the social spectrum. But it is she who gives him his first healthy experience of female sexuality, such as he has not had so far. She infuses a new life in him. This experience means the beginning of the breaking of all barriers for him. In a real sense he goes beyond the cloistered and unhealthy world of the brahmins in which he has lived so far. Significantly this contact takes place in the forest, which signifies a free space where nature reigns and where the only rules that apply are the rules of the human heart. A good encounter to remember is that between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in the forest in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. With

this initiation, questions of purity and rituals that seemed so urgent earlier are now no longer relevant. The Acharya has still to traverse a lot of distance but he must first shed the load of dead brahminism that has encumbered him so far. The next two sections deal with the next two stages in his spiritual evolution and rebirth.

Part Two (Chapters 1-6) (65-85)

Chapter I (65-68)

Pranesacharya and Chandri after the sexual union in the forest — Chandri cremates Naranappa with the help of Naranappa's Muslim friends, goes away to Kundapura.

Pranesacharya woke up in the forest at midnight, his head in Chandri's lap. At first he thought he was in a dream and wondered where he was and how he had got there ('I clean forget where I came from and where I should go from here [65]). When he was fully awake, he asked her to tell all the Brahmins what had happened in the forest. He said that he himself had not the courage to tell this to them. He also added that he was ready to perform Naranappa's funeral rites for he had lost all authority to ask anyone else to do it. Then they walked back together.

Chandri, however, did not want to do what the Acharya had asked her to do. She went to her master's house but finding that his dead body had changed beyond recognition, rushed out in fear to the farmer's section and approached Sheshappa to help her cremate the dead body. Sheshappa however refused. Then she went to the Muslim section where Abdul Bari, the fish merchant, agreed to do the job. They went and cremated Naranappa. The dead body, as she thought, was 'neither Brahmin nor Shudra. A carcass. A stinking rotting carcass' (68). Thereafter she collected her things and the gold ornaments that the Acharya had returned to her and set out for Kundapura without touching the Acharya's feet.

Comments

1. Note that Pranesacharya doesn't reproach either Chandri or himself for what happened during the night. There is no feeling of guilt in him for what has happened.
2. Notice also that the omniscient narrator withholds information from the Brahmins and Pranesacharya about the cremation of Naranappa. What purpose does this serve?

Chapter II: Plans of the Parijat Drama Group members to cremate their mentor Naranappa go awry.

Shripati and other members of the Parijat Drama Group were holding a rehearsal of a play in Manjayya's house. From the conversation we learn that Naranappa had been the prime mover of the Group, had donated a harmonium, was an expert drummer and was a source of inspiration for it. After the rehearsal, the five members of the Group went to the riverside and drank liquor. They acknowledged that Naranappa was a dear friend of theirs, that Chandri was a matchless beauty. The least that they could do was to take his

body and cremate it secretly. With this intention in mind they went up to Naranappa's house but found that the dead body had disappeared. They all ran away in fright. The sleepless Lakshmidevamma saw what she called 'demons' running away.

Comment

1. Here we have another, more positive side of Naranappa's personality. He was a theatre enthusiast, a good drummer and a source of inspiration for young boys. In contrast to the other Brahmins he had a more creative constructive interest.

Chapter III: Pranesacharya's new self-awareness – confusion in ideas – reports failure – the brahmins decided to consult Pt Subbannacharya at the Kaimar agrahara.

The Brahmins tormented by vultures, hunger and dread came to Pranesacharya but he admitted that he couldn't get Lord Maruti to say anything and asked them to do what they liked. At Dasacharya's suggestion they decided to go consult Pt Subbannacharya at the Kaimara agrahara. Since the journey would take them three days, they would send their wives and children to their in-laws.

Pranesacharya's world had changed suddenly. All old beliefs seemed topsy-turvy. At sixteen he had sought to achieve salvation through self-sacrifice and had deliberately married an invalid woman so that he could serve her and thus earn merit. But his unforeseen experience of sex with Chandri changed everything. He had lost the old certitude of brahminism. Instead of a clear path he saw only an abyss.

The experience also gave him a new self-awareness. While giving a bath to his wife, he became aware of her ugliness. 'For the first time his eyes were beginning to see the beautiful and the ugly' (74). Flowers, female beauty and sexual pleasure – all had earlier been associated in his mind with divinity but now he wanted a share in them for himself. He still looked for Chandri. He felt light that he was no longer the guru. Part of his mind wanted Chandri to confess but he was also relieved to find that she was not there to shame him. But he was still confused about his real identity. 'What manner of man am I?'

Comments/Questions

1. An important sentence here is this: 'Must forget all words learned by heart, the heart must flow free like a child's' (75).
2. Pranesacharya begins to experience all natural desires.
3. This chapter marks the second stage in his evolution.

Chapter IV: The Brahmins go to Kaimara without Pranesacharya.

But Subbannacharya is unable to help – then they go to the monastery. Two brahmins are taken ill on the way.

The Brahmins went to Kaimara without Pranesacharya. He stayed back because of his wife's periods. At Kajmara, Pandit Subbannacharya offered them food and they ate to their fill. But he had no clue to their dilemma. The monastery was their next destination. But at the insistence of the Kaimara

people they spent the night there and started the next morning. They had to leave Dasacharya there, for he fell ill. They walked twenty miles to reach another agrahara where they dined spent the night. In the morning they started for the monastery, which was ten miles away but without Padmanabhacharya who had also been taken ill.

Comments

1. We can guess the cause of the death of the two Brahmins – plague, of course.

Chapter V: Pranesacharya's self-examination – his visit to the river and the scene of his lovemaking in the forest – wife's death and cremation.

For a good part of the chapter we are inside the mind of Pranesacharya. He is all alone in the agrahara – except for his ailing wife and some crows and vultures.

The horrible stench in the atmosphere was unbearable. He saw a rat die and threw it out of the house. He felt extremely hungry and took some plantains with him, bathed and crossed the stream and sat and ate the plantains there.

He then tried to analyse his motives in taking Chandri. Did he take her out of compassion? No, he took her because the body's 'tigerish lust', long repressed', leaped to the surface. In this battle with his self, it was Naranappa who had won. He realized that it was he and not Naranappa who had turned the agrahara topsy turvy. He had heard that a young man, inspired by his description of Shakutala, had gone to the river and slept with a low caste girl. In his fantasy he did what he had never done before – he stripped all the untouchable girls and looked at them. Who could it be? Belli, of course. He urgently wanted to caress her breasts.

The meaning of experience changed for him. Experience, he realized, did not mean doing what one wanted but doing the unpredictable. 'Experience is risk, assault.' Given rainfall and the soft pressure of earth a hard seed breaks into sprout. 'But if one is willful, it dries into a hard shell'. He admits that he too had been a hard shell: 'Till I touched Chandri, I too was a shell...'(80). He then wonders if God would come and touch her unasked. The implication of this is that the individual must open himself to new experience and not set himself up against it.

Pranesacharya then enjoyed himself swimming around in the water and came out and dried himself in the sun. Later he went to the spot where they had made love. He abandoned himself to his surroundings and pulled out part of sarsaparilla creeper and smelled it, the smell 'sinking into his fivefold breath of life.'

Later he went into the stream again and swam some more. It was time for him to give food to his wife and he went back to the agrahara.

He found his wife to be hot and feverish. There was also a swelling on the side of her stomach. He gave her medicine but it did not go down her throat. He didn't know what to do. Soon his wife let out a shriek that struck him

dumb. He rushed headlong towards Naranappa's house, shouting for Chandri. Then he remembered that there was a corpse there and he ran back to his own house and found her dead.

He cremated her with the help of four Brahmins from Kaimar agrahara. His tears flowed unchecked till all his weariness had dropped from him.

Comments/Questions

1. The death stench is contrasted with the smell of sarsaparilla and the latter smell is described as sinking into his lifebreath.
2. We find him enjoying the ordinary pleasures of life – the pleasure of eating and swimming and of drying himself in the sun and of sitting amid grass and flowers and creepers and trees.
3. His wife was 'the field of his life's penance' and he watches the field burning down to ashes. The suggestion .s that his penance is over and he is ready to take on a new path.

Chapter VI: All Naranappa's property must go to the monastery, says the chief.

At the monastery, all the Brahmins ate the big meal prepared for the occasion. Later when they all sat around with the chief in the midst of them, he announced that Naranappa was still a Brahmin even if he had left brahminism and that it was their duty to cremate him. He also ruled that all Naranappa's property must go to the monastery. Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya both tried to press their claim to the property but the chief rebuked them harshly.They apologized and hurried back to the agrahara for the cremation.

Pranesacharya on the other hand after his wife's cremation didn't return to Durvasapura. He didn't think of either the fifteen gold lace shawls that he had won in arguments, or the basil bead rosary done in gold given by the monastery. He set out to go wherever his footsteps took him.

Comments/Questions

1. Pranesacharya has cut off his ties with his past. The shawls, the money and the gift given by the monastery do not matter to him any more.
2. In going along an unaccustomed path, Pranesacharya is undertaking an experience that involves risk taking. (Please see page 80)

Comments on Part Two

This section marks the second stage in Pranesacharya's spiritual evolution. In the first part he failed to lead the community aright and had a sexual experience with a prostitute that turned everything topsy-turvy. In the second part, his last palpable tie with the agrahara is snapped in the form of the death of his wife. Equally importantly, he realizes what all he has missed in life in terms of physical pleasure and sensations. So now he ventures forth on an un-planned journey, leaving all his learning and rituals behind. The last sentence is important: 'Meaning to walk wherever his legs took him, he walked towards the east' (85).

Part Three: (Chapters I-II) (87-135)

Chapter 1: Pranesacharya's self-analysis continues. A half caste young man Putta joins him in his journey.

We are inside Pranesacharya's restless state of mind. He had decided to go wherever his feet took him. His mind was overactive and he wanted to still it. Earlier, whenever he had to still his mind he would recite the name of Vishnu but now he had to stand alone, without god. He wanted to be like a kite in the sky – a mere awareness, floating still and self-content. He thought of the illiterate saint Kanaka for whom God was an urgent awareness, a wonder. But for him God had been a matter of routine, a set of multiplication tables, learnt by rote. So he tried to distance himself from god.

But he thought he was deceiving himself for he found himself going near the habitations of men. He sat under a jackfruit tree and tried to sort things out. Why had he left the village after cremating his wife? Because of the unbearable stench. But why didn't he want to meet the Brahmins waiting for his guidance? He was hungry and the question remained unanswered. If he met a farmer he would bring him fruit and milk. So he moved on. He met a young farmer herding buffaloes to the tank, his mouth full of chewed betel nut. He had one fear – fear of being recognized. Fortunately, the farmer had not recognized him. The farmer mistook him for a mendicant going around on his collection. This implied the loss of all his lustre and influence. This was his first lesson in humility. He asked the farmer to get him some milk and plantains, which the latter did. The farmer wanted him to give him something with a spell on it to bring round a new bride who sat sullenly in a corner but having left everything, Pranesacharya decided to make an excuse and not perform any more brahminical functions. The farmer told him of a three day car festival at Melige some ten miles away, where he could go for his collection.

The thought of Naranappa brought into focus how he came to make love to Chandri. It was an undesired moment. He had not sought it. The outstretched hands touched Chandri's breasts but having touched them, desire was born. It was at that moment that the desire to take Chandri was made. If he lost control, the responsibility was still his.

God had never been an urgent need for him as it had been for a fellow student at Kashi, Mahabala. For Mahabala God was a hunger. He himself had never experienced such love for God. But a time came when Mahabala changed the course of his life. One day he discovered him living with a prostitute. Pranesacharya then realized that he had seen Mahabala in Naranappa. He had lost in the case of Mahabala. He didn't want to lose again. He even doubted if the moment he united with Chandri came 'unbidden': 'It must have been the moment for everything within to come out of hiding like the rats leaping out of the storeroom'. He was still confused about where to go, he was a veritable Trishanku. So he decided to walk away, unseen, unidentified.

It was at this point that he was joined by a young man named Putta. At first he tried to shake him off but Putta wouldn't leave him.

1. Pranesacharya had decided to go wherever his legs carried him. But did he follow this? Pick out a line that tells us what he did in actual fact.
2. How did Pranesacharya's lesson in humility begin? (See page 92)

Chapter II: The story of the Durvasapura Brahmins – Pranesacharya arrives at a new equation with himself, decides to confess to his fellow Brahmins.

It is a long chapter that holds several different strands of the story together.

In Parijatpura, Manjayya realized that the deaths of Naranappa, Dasacharya and Praneschary a's wife indicated the outbreak of plague. He immediately went to the city to inform the municipality to send in doctors and take other measures to stop the epidemic.

The Brahmins, disappointed at the monastery, made their way towards Durvasapura. Gaurdacharya voiced the general reluctance of the Brahmins to cremate the decomposed body of Naranappa. Subbanacharya tried to put heart into them. They also realized that the cows were alone there, with none to look after them.

In Durvasapura, Belli lost her parents to plague. The neighbours set the thatched hut with the dead parents inside on fire. Belli, frightened, ran away from the village.

Putta stuck to the Acharya like sin. The Acharya wanted to be alone and think but Putta wouldn't leave him. Putta didn't know that he was Pranesacharya. He thought he was merely a mendicant Brahmin going on his beggarly rounds. He asked him a riddle. Pranesacharya was able to solve the riddle but he didn't want to tell him the answer, for that would mean becoming friendly with him. He chose to be called dull-witted, much to the amusement of Putta. Then Putta asked Pranesacharya to ask him a riddle in turn but the latter said that he didn't know any.

Putta then told him about the death of Shyama, an actor of the Kundapura troupe. They came to a place where the road branched. The Acharya saw a chance to evade Putta. When Putta chose one, he chose the other but Putta said that both roads led to Melige, one of them was a little longer than the other and stayed with him.

Putta started becoming more familiar with the Acharya. He asked him about his marriage and told him that he had two children. But his wife was always clamouring to go to her parents. He beat her but that didn't seem to have any effect on her. But for this one weakness, she was very clean and good in everything. They both laughed. Putta then compared the ways of women with the track of a fish darting in the water.

The Acharya fell into a reverie. The talk of the riddle reminded him of the riddle of his own life. The decisive moment in his life came when he chose to turn in the dark of the forest but his decision to lie with Chandri affected not only himself but the entire agrahara. 'That was the root of the difficulty, the anxiety, the double-bind of dharma.' That decision 'gouged [him] out [his]

past world, the world of the Brahmins, from [his] wife's existence, [his] very truth' (106). As a consequence he was shaking like a piece of string in the wind and wondered if there was a release from it.

The familiarity with Putta continued. Putta gave him coconut and jaggery. Then he asked him another riddle. The Acharya solved it but his mind was still on his own situation. He realized that he could free himself from the Trishanku-state by become responsible for himself only by an act of will. So he thought he would give up his decision to go wherever his legs took him and instead go to Kundapura and live with Chandri.

Meanwhile Garuda, Lakshmana and the other Brahmins returned to Durvasapura. Fortunately, there were no vultures on the roofs anymore. Performing the death rite for Naranappa was the first priority. But they didn't find Pranesacharya there. He had probably gone to the river. They were afraid to go into his house. So they decided to wait for him and started making a stretcher for the body.

Comments

While journeying with Putta, the Acharya keeps thinking things out. As a responsible person, he wants to take on the responsibility for his actions on himself. This marks an important stage in his spiritual development: 'I've become a mere thing, by an act of will I'll become human again' (107). He takes an important decision – not merely to go where his legs take him but to do what he wants. Going to Kundapura and starting to live with Chandri was one such idea.

Pranesacharya at the Melige Tank with Putta

Pranesacharya stopped at the Melige tank with Putta to wash his hands and feet.

The Acharya was afraid lest people in Melige should recognize him. But there was comfort in the thought that all the Melige Brahmins were Smartas and they were unlikely to notice him in the bustle of the festival. But fear dogged him still. He wanted to root it out completely. Naranappa had lived with Chandri fearlessly. But if he were to live with her, he would probably cover his face.

Putta disclosed that his father was a high class Brahmin who kept his mother better than he did his wedded wife.

At the Melige Festival

Melige looked quite a colourful place because of the festival. The temple chariot had been pulled by ropes and stationed in the middle of the town for offerings of coconut and fruit. Putta and Pranesacharya also bought coconut and bananas to offer to the god.

There were noises of reed-pipes and smells of camphor and joss sticks everywhere. A man showed various scenes in what he called the Bombay Box. Putta paid money to have a peep but told Pranesacharya not to go away

leaving him behind. The Acharya tried to slip away but Putta caught up with him. Pranesacharya wanted to get rid of him but he couldn't bring himself to scold a person who was offering him friendship unasked.

Putta seemed interested in everything he saw. He threw a coin at the girl performing a feat. He bought ribbon for his wife and coloured pipes for his children. At the soda shop while the Acharya declined to drink anything, Putta drank a bottle of orange soda. The whole thing was a round of 'expectation, experience and contentment'. But the Acharya stood outside this world of ordinary pleasures. It seemed that he was incapable of involvement in anything. 'To fulfil my resolution I should be capable of his [Putta's] involvement in living. Chandri's too is the same world. But I am neither here, nor there. I am caught in this play of opposites' (112).

They came to a coffee shop where Putta forced the Acharya to have some coffee. Since the Acharya was thirsty, he even enjoyed the drink.

Putta then suggested that he should go and have meals at the temple. He felt tempted to do so—he hadn't had any meal for days but the period of mourning was not over yet and he was afraid of polluting the temple. The belief was that if he did so, the temple chariot wouldn't move an inch. On the other hand Naranappa even ate the holy fish and no untoward result followed. His mind told him to fulfill his resolve to live with Chandri fully or else give up the whole thing.

Comments

The Acharya's brahminical fears assail him again. The point of comparison, as always, is Naranappa. He realizes that the only way to liberate himself from fear is to do a thing fully: "His mind mocked: 'What price your resolve to join Chandri and live with her. If you must, do it fully; if you let go, let go utterly.'"(113)

The Cock fight

The two went to see a cock-fight. There were two roosters leaping at each other with knives attached to their legs. People sat watching the bloody spectacle with absolute concentration. Pranesacharya felt as if he had suddenly dropped into a demonic world. It was 'A demon world of pressing need, revenge and greed' (117-118). This sent him into panic because he wondered if this cruelty was part of the world where Chandri lived. He felt himself to be unequal to the task of living in such a world.

The cocks were wounded but after stitches had been put on their wounds they were ready to fight again. Putta even wagered with a stranger and won the bet.

Pranesacharya suddenly felt a fatherly affection for Putta. If he had a son, he would have brought him up lovingly. *Ironically it was at this point that he asked Putta to let him go his way.* Putta felt disappointed but still offered to go part of the way with him. Pranesacharya then said he had to go to a goldsmith to sell the gold ring on his sacred thread. He needed the money to go to Kundapura. Putta said he knew one and took him there. There while he kept insisting that the goldsmith should not settle for less that fifteen rupees, the Acharya agreed to sell it for ten rupees.

Visit to Padmavati

Putta then took him to someone he knew who turned out to be a prostitute, Padmavati. The sight of her aroused his desire. But he wasn't ready to take the plunge. Putta suggested that he stay the night there and could leave for Kundapur the next day. But later, sensing his confusion, he said that they would come back after he had had his dinner at the temple.

Comment

1. The sight of Padmavati reminds the Acharya of the offering of full breasts in the forest, Belli's earth-coloured breasts and the death of his wife, Bhagirathi (120-21).

The Acharya's cogitations again

The Acharya was torn on the inside. 'In between he must decide, here, now. Decide to give up a quarter-century of discipline and become a man of the world? No. no. Naranappa's funeral comes before all else. After that come all other decisions' (123).

Comment

1. His sense of responsibility never deserts him.
2. The narrator continues to withhold information about the cremation of Naranappa. The idea is to enable the readers to get the reactions of different characters to this crucial necessity.

At meals in the temple

At the temple when Putta asked the Acharya to go in and have meals, the latter suggested that he should come in too and have his food. He needed his company. But Putta said that he was a Malera and he was likely to be discovered. So he sent the Acharya inside alone.

Pranesacharya's one great fear was of being detected. The discovery of his identity and that he was still in the pollution period after his wife's death would create a scandal. The festival might have to be cancelled. He felt dizzy and sat down quite reluctantly.

His mind was in utter confusion. What should he do to overcome his dread? Should he sleep with Padmavati? Or should he start living with Chandri?

The Brahmin who sat next to him was looking for a suitable groom for a young girl who was yet to reach puberty and he asked him to help him find a suitable match. One of those serving the feasting Brahmins said that he had seen him (Pranesacharya) somewhere, perhaps in the monastery. This alarmed him no end. The only way for him to overcome his fear was to take responsibility for the funeral and make a clean confession. He had to come to a final decision. If he didn't tell the agrahara Brahmins and didn't cremate Naranappa properly, he wouldn't be able to escape fear. If on the other hand he decided to live with Chandri without telling anyone, the decision wouldn't

be complete, wouldn't be fearless. Either way the decision was agonizing. He prayed God to take the burden of decision from him.

The man who had partially identified him, recalled his name and went in to tell the Sahukar about it. Pranesacharya saw his chance and ran out for his very life.

Putta thought that the Acharya was running away from the temple to answer an urgent call of nature. The Acharya thought of what he had to do at the agrahara. He would reach the agrahara by midnight and would come clean about everything without a trace of repentance or sorrow. 'In full view of the frightened Brahmins, I'll stand exposed like the naked quick of life; and I, elder in their midst, will turn into a new man at midnight' (134). So he told Putta that the real reason for his getting up suddenly from dinner was his decision to go to Durvasapura at once. Putta reminded him that Padmavati would be waiting for him. At this he lied to him saying that his brother was deathly ill in Durvasapura. At this Putta offered to go with him to meet Naranappa in Durvasapura for a business deal. Finding it impossible to shake Putta off, he resolved to confess to Putta and see the effect it had on him.

Just then, a covered wagon came along which was going to Durvasapura. The wagon had only room for one person. At Putta's persuation the Acharya agreed to go alone. The journey would last four or five hours. Pranesacharya was anxious, expectant.

Comments/Questions

1. Does the novel reach a definite end?
2. Does nature also reflect Pranesacharya's mood?
3. Will he go and live with Chandri?
4. Do you think the Acharya will be reborn 'a new man' at midnight? Is it an anticipation of the freedom of the country? Of *Midnight's Children*?
5. What is the new equation that Pranesacharya has arrived at with himself?

Self-check exercise

Who speaks the following? Or whose thoughts are these?

1. How can Brahmin eyes see anything, dimmed by looking for meals? (Part One, Chapter V)
2. 'After all we've received Brahmin births only to take on others'sins.' (Part One, Chapter IV)
3. 'I've become a mere thing, by an act of will I'll become human again. I'll become responsible for myself. That is...that is...I'll give up this decision to go where my legs take me, catch a bus to Kundapura and live with Chandri. I'll then end all my troubles. I'll remake myself in full wakefulness...' Part Three (107).
4. 'Understanding the way of a woman is just like tracing the track of a fish darting in the water – that's what the elders say' (106).
5. 'That decision, that act gouged me out of my past world, the world of the Brahmins, from my wife's existence, my very faith' (106).
6. Pranesacharya stood outside this world of ordinary pleasures and looked at the gathered crowd (112).

7. It became clear that he didn't have the skills to live in this world of sharp and cruel feelings. One part of lust is tenderness, the other part a demonic will (114).
8. 'O God, what's the root of this dread? Are these the first pains of a rebirth? Is it the kind of fear that will be quenched if I sleep with Padmavati tonight? Will it be quenched if I go live with Chandri? What's my decision worth? Am I forever to be a ghost of a man, hovering in indecision?' (125)
9. 'But if I don't tell the agrahara Brahmins, if Naranappa's body is not properly cremated, one cannot escape fear. If I decide to live with Chandri without telling anyone, the decision is not complete, not fearless. I must come now to a final decision. All things indirect must become direct. Must pierce straight in the eye' (129).
10. In full view of the frightened Brahmins, I'll stand exposed like the naked quick of life; and I, elder in their midst, will turn into a new man at midnight' (131).
11. Minute by minute his own responsibilities seemed to grow. Naranappa's challenge was growing enormous, like God Trivikrama who started out as a dwarf and ended up measuring the cosmos with his giant feet' (33).

2.3 THE NARRATIVE : THREE IMPORTANT FEATURES

The study of the narrative is an important critical activity and we expect that by the time you complete this postgraduate course successfully, you will have acquired a certain minimum skill in analyzing different examples of narratives. The best way to do this, would of course be to begin with simpler, shorter narratives like the short stories in this paper. You could concentrate on one short story, examine it closely and ask some basic questions about it. Some of these questions have been discussed in the study material on Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*. Please look up the discussion on analyzing narratives there.

Here we shall focus on two critical terms in connection with the narrative: focalization and intertexuality.

2.3.1 Focalization

(i) Following Gerard Genette in his *Narrative Discourse* (1972), it is important to distinguish between narration and focalization, between the person who tells the story **(the narrator)** and the person whose vision is being verbalized by the narrator **(the focalizer)**. The terms used earlier were *point of view* or *perspective*. These terms were found somewhat inadequate. The term **focalization** was preferred as being more abstract and more technical. Mieke Bal refined Genette's concept of 'focalization,' 'developing, for example, the difference between the subject and object of focalization and assigning an autonomous role to the focalizer.' (*Narratology: An Introduction*, 115) A most useful book to consult is *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983; rpt.1996).

(ii) The person who tells the story and the person who sees may be the same person but they need not be. As Rimmon-Kenan points out in her book, a person is perfectly capable of both speaking and seeing, and even of doing things at the same time. But a person, she says, is also capable of undertaking to tell what another person sees (72).

(iii) Focalization may be either external or internal. The focalizer may be outside the story or he may be one of the characters in it.

(iv) Similarly, the focalized may be viewed from the outside or from the inside.

So far as *Samskara* is concerned, the story is told by a fictive omniscient narrator who stands outside the action of the novel and who tells the story in the third person. He is omniscient because he has the godlike ability to enter into the minds of all the characters and know what their thoughts are. Naturally he is also the chief focalizer. We can call him narrator-focalizer.

Where do his sympathies lie? Though he stands outside the action, we are never in doubt about who the prime focus of the action is or where the narrator's sympathies lie.

What narrative strategy does the writer adopt? The writer's choice of an omniscient third person narrator-focalizer is very apt. It gives him enough flexibility and manoeuvrability. Since *Samskara* is a novel of changing, conflicting attitudes, it is important that the writer should have enough freedom to present the adversarial point of view as powerfully as possible.

His choice of an omniscient narrator allows him to probe the minds of all the characters and it particularly enables him to present Naranappa as a worthy opponent. Notice the two meetings between Pranesacharya and Naranappa that the former recalls. The Acharya had gone to plead with him not to separate Shripati from his wife. Naranappa replied with a guffaw and asked: "O Acharya, who in the world can live with a girl who gives no pleasure – he snarled" (20). Later, when the Acharya went to ask him not to present a rebellious example like fishing in the sacred pond with Muslim friends before the people, he offered him liquor and threw a challenge to him about who would win in the end. He in fact tried to turn the tables on the Acharya and accused him of corrupting the brahminism of the place and told him a story about how his (the Acharya's) story about Shakuntala had so excited a young listener that he had gone and taken an outcaste girl who was bathing at the river.

The omniscient third person narrator comes in handy in the opening scene of the novel where there is a kind of conflict and where varying viewpoints are presented. Pranesacharya is, of course, the chief character but we also get to know the points of view of other characters – Garudacharya, Lakshmanacharya, Dasacharya, Durgabhatta and the wives of Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya and Chandri.

The focalizer can view the represented events from outside or from the inside. A great part of the novel is concerned with the Acharya's thought processes and his reactions to others around him. Notice how the *narrator-focalizer enables us to see him seeing himself.* This begins early and lasts till the end. An early example of this is this passage in chapter one of Part One.

He would smile and pat his wife who was trying to get up, and ask her to try and go to sleep. Didn't the Lord Krishna say: Do what's to be done with no thought of fruit? The Lord definitely means to test him on his way to salvation; that's why He's given him a Brahmin birth this time and set him up in this kind of family. The Acharya is filled with pleasure and a sense of worth as sweet as the five-fold nectar of holy days; he is filled with compassion for his ailing wife. He proudly swells a little at his lot, thinking 'By marrying an invalid, I get ripe and ready' (2).

From the second sentence onwards we are in the mind of Pranesacharya. This kind of self-analysis occurs with greater frequency in the latter part of the novel. *One of your tasks should be to be alert to passages of his self-reflexivity, his constant need for self-analysis.*

We not only see Pranesacharya watching himself but also other characters like Naranappa, Chandri, Putta and Padmavati. That means he also serves as a focalizer, so far as these characters are concerned.

Another important character, who is also a focalizer is Putta. He remains with Pranesacharya and therefore with us through most of the third part of the novel and his view of the Acharya forms an important stage in the evolution of the Acharya.

So the narrator-focalizer's vision is supplemented by that of Pranesacharya and Putta. If the Acharya keeps a tab on himself, there is Putta who does so on behalf of common humanity. It hardly needs to be said that by the end of the novel Putta has emerged as a friend and companion of the Acharya, on whom he can depend.

The points could be summarized as follows:

1. The novel is a third person narrative, which is told by an omniscient narrator.
2. The narrator is also the agent who sees. He could be called the narrator-focalizer.
3. But the narrator-focalizer is not the only focalizer in the novel. Pranesacharya is the most important character and he is also the most important focalizer in the novel.
4. An important focalizer is Putta. The narrator doesn't take us much inside the mind of Putta but he views Pranesacharya in a manner that brings him down several steps from his precarious perch (Because he doesn't know this is Pranesacharya, Crest Jewel of Vedanta, etc. he is behaving as he would with a common mendicant brahmin on his beggarly rounds [104].)
5. We get to know other characters like Garudacharya, Lakshmanacharya, Dasacharya, Durga Bhatta, Naranappa but we don't stay long in their minds.
6. The narrator's tone is important. There is never a moment when Pranesacharya or Chandri aren't sympathetic figures. On the other hand, characters like Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya are shown up from the first to be guilty of the sin of greed.

7. The first chapter is a remarkable piece of writing. It is essentially a dramatic scene. It contains two crucial events – the death of Naranappa and also Chandri's offer of her gold to meet Naranappa's funeral expenses. While the first sets the novel in motion, the second exposes the greed of the Brahmins of the agrahará and shows how decayed the Brahmins are.

2.3.2 Intertextuality

The term, *intertextuality* coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966, refers to a textual practice that is quite old. Stated simply, it refers to the presence of one text in another. This is what Jonathan Culler has to say about it: 'Recent theorists have argued that works are made out of other works: made possible by prior works which they take up, repeat, challenge, transform. This notion sometimes goes by the fancy name of 'intertexuality'. A work exists between and among other texts, through its relations to them' (*Literary Theory:* 34).

Intertexuality appears to be a special feature of the narrative texture of *Samskara*, for there are many references to Indian tradition in the form of myths, parables and characters from epics. There are perhaps western references too.

So far as the writer is concerned, these references reflect a consciousness that is not only cultivated but is also soaked in ancient Indian lore. Naturally the text demands a similar consciousness among the readers who can understand the text in all its complexity.

What is the role of these references? These references help to root the novel in the Indian context and provide it a kind of scaffolding for its themes. These references serve a variety of purposes – they are used to anticipate, to mirror, to illustrate and generally to root the text in the Indian soil.

1. The central relationship in the novel is that between Pranesacharya and Chandri and is modeled on the union of the ascetic Parashar and the fishergirl, Matsyagandhi, mentioned in the Mahabharat. I suggest that this latter relationship serves as a kind of archetype of what Anantha Murthy apparently considers to be the most desirable sexual relationship and references to this and all other sexual relationships mentioned in the novel are an attempt to establish the authenticity and the centrality of this parallel.

A cluster of references connect the Chandri-Pranesacharya relationship to this archetype and to other relationships. The references in the first part of the novel help to anticipate the union between Chandri and Pranesacharya. Chandri as Matsyagandhi is held up as an example of erotic beauty that is irresistible. The first time this comparison is made is in the consciousness of Durgabhatta who hangs a picture of Matsyagandha by Ravi Verma (8). This is followed by Naranappa's reference to 'Quite a lusty lot, those sages' and then to 'the fellow who ravished the fisherwoman smelling of fish, right in the boat' (22). The story (told by Naranappa) of how Shripati, sexually aroused by Pranesacharya's recital of Shakuntala's beauty takes Belli on the river bank, is also meant to anticipate the sexual union between Chandri and Pranesacharya. Shripati himself thinks of Menaka the temptress who destroyed the penance of Vishwamitra (37).

There is another reference unrelated to the Matsyagandha myth that prefigures the Acharya's union with Chandri, namely the reference to Shankar who in order to experience sex entered the body of a dead king and had sex with the queen (6). As Bruckner suggests, Pranesacharya takes the place of the deceased Naranappa and has his first experience of sex with Chandri.

The references to Matsyagandha, Shakuntala and Menaka serve another purpose. As the Afterword to the novel suggests, 'Lowcaste and outcaste women like Chandri and Belli are hallowed and romanticized by references to classical heroines like Shakuntala and Menaka, the temptress of the sages' (142)

In Part Two, there is an allusion to yet another beauty – celestial in origin this time – to Urvashi, but the focus is on the Acharya. Pranesacharya is cogitating within himself and imagines asking Chandri to 'tell them' but he realizes that she wasn't there. His Urvashi has walked away (75). The reference is to the Urvashi-Pururuva story, said to be the first love story in the world, in which Urvashi disappears after spending some time of enjoyment with the king, leaving him desolate. Later the Acharya wonders if the ancient sages face such a conflict. He mentions two: Parashar and Vishwamitra (96).

The standard Indian image of man torn with conflict is Trishanku and the writer resorts to it several times. Looking within himself he tries to analyse the decisive moment when he took Chandri and his responsibility in the entire episode: 'In that moment, decisive of which way I should turn, the decision was taken to take Chandri. Even if I lost control, the responsibility to decide was still mine....What happened at the turning? Dualities, conflict, rushed into my life. I hung suspended between two truths, like Trishanku' (See Part III, 96). There are other allusions to Trishanku also. I wonder if the writer in his allusions to *turning* intends a reference to T.S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* also.

Exercises

1. Pick out all allusions to Pranesacharya-Parashar-Chandri-Matsyagandha in the text and figure out their narrative purpose.
2. Pick out the references to Trishanku, that depict the Acharya's state of mind after the sexual union with Chandri and state their purpose.

   The references to Parashar-Matsyagandha and to Shakuntala and by implication to Dushyant also help to strengthen the allegorical nature of the characters. (For a full discussion of intertexuality in the novel, read 'Dimensions of Intertexuality in Anantha Murthy's Novel *Samskara'* by Heidrun Bruckner in D. Chitre et al. (eds) *Tender Ironies, A Tribute to Lothar Lutze*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1994, 152-83).

3. In the conflict between Pranesacharya and Naranappa, the latter is presented as a formidable character in the novel and even though he is dead when the novel opens, his strength seems to Pranesacharya to be growing. In the Acharya's consciousness Naranappa's challenge appeared to be growing: 'Naranappa's challenge was growing, growing enormous, like God Trivikrama who started out as a dwarf and ended up measuring the cosmos with his giant feet' (33). The great irony is that by the end of the novel, Pranesacharya is of Naranappa's party and he knows it fully well. There are numerous other reference also.

One final point. These references and allusions also serve as a kind of shorthand for the writer and help him to condense his presentation. For a person well read in ancient Indian literature, no detailed explanation is necessary. The allusion to Urvashi is an example (Part II, chapter 3, 75).

Here is another exercise for you to do. Can you add to the list of references given below?

1. Reference to Gita – Didn't the Lord Krishna say: Do what's to be done with no thought of fruit (2)?
2. Reference to Shankacharya's hunger for full experience by entering the body of a dead king and enjoying with the queen (6).
3. Reference to Jagannatha the Brahmin poet who married the Muslim girl and his verses about the alien breasts (8).
4. Reference to Manu's texts (14).
5. He remembered the first maxim of yoga, 'yoga as the stilling of the waves of the mind' (89).
6. Reference to the illiterate saint, Kanaka (89-90).
7. All things direct must become direct. Must pierce straight in the eye (129).

One activity that the student can be asked to do is to hunt for intertexual references in the novel and find their significance.

2.3.3 Structure

We can now say a few words about how the narrative is organized. As you will notice, there are three parts in the novel and they coincide with important stages in the life of its principal character Pranesacharya.

1. **Part One** consists of 10 chapters and ends with the failure of his brahminical mission at the Lord Maruti temple and sexual union with Naranappa's mistress Chandri.
2. **Part Two** consisting of 6 chapters and ends with the death of Pranesacharya's invalid wife and his decision not to return to the agrahara but to walk wherever his legs take him.
3. **Part Three** consisting of 2 chapters, one short and the other long, sees a spiritually agitated Pranesacharya traveling with a half-caste young man Putta and arriving at a new equation with himself. The guided tour of the fair and the festival that he undertakes with Putta makes him aware of 'a demonic world of passion and sensation'. His uncertainty ends his decision to go back and confess to the Brahmins and hopefully, to begin a new life with a new identity for himself.

You will notice that as the narrative proceeds it withdraws itself more and more into the consciousness of Pranesacharya. His quest for a new identity is in a fair way of bringing fruit.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

Getting to know the narrative and all its details and their significance is the solid foundation on which a complete understanding of the novel is based. There is simply no substitute for it. The concept of focalization is a key

concept in the discussion of any narrative and once you master it, you will be able to use it in analyzing the other novels and short stories in and outside your course. Intertexuality is another important concept that will open up several other literary texts that you read.

2.5 QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the significance of the opening scene of the novel *Samskara.*
2. Discuss how the narrative of *Samskara* has been organized.
3. Write a note on the love-making scene in the novel.
4. Discuss the importance of Putta's role as a focalizer.
5. What is intertexuality? In what ways do the references help strengthen the theme of the novel?

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Anantha Murthy, U.R. 1976. *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man.* (A translation of U.R. Anantha Murthy's Kannada novel) New Delhi: OUP.

Culler, Jonathan. 1997. 'Narrative', *Literary Theory.* [A very short introductions series] Oxford: OUP, 83-94.

Bruckner, Heidrun. 1994. 'Dimensions of Intertexuality in Anantha Murthy's *Samskara*', in D. Chitre et al. (eds) Tender Ironies, A Tribute to Lothar Lutze. New Delhi: Manohar, 152-183.

The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory by J.A. Cuddon, London: Penguin Books, 1992. [See the term 'narrative' and other terms like 'allegory'. A most useful book to have on your desk.]

UNIT 3 *SAMSKARA* : FORM AND THEMES

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 *Samskara* as an Allegory
3.3 Themes
  3.3.1 Some Preliminary Considerations
  3.3.2 Quest for Identity – Journey towards a New Birth
  3.3.3 Asceticism and Eroticism
  3.3.4 Brahminism and Anti-Brahminism
  3.3.5 Tradition and Change
3.4 Let Us Sum Up
3.5 Glossary
3.6 Questions
3.7 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to enable you to get to know the allegorical form of *Samskara* and the thematic preoccupations of the writer in *Samskara*.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Samskara is a multi-dimensional text and has received varied interpretations from critics. This unit begins with a discussion of the allegorical form of the novel and then goes on to discuss the major themes in it.

3.2 *SAMSKARA* AS AN ALLEGORY

The term allegory is derived from Greek allegoria, from allos 'other' +-agoria 'speaking' 'speaking otherwise'. An allegory is a story, a poem, or a picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning. It is a mode of thought and its roots are ancient. Allegory has been considerably employed in literature, particularly in ancient and medieval literature, and it is sometimes used even now. For students of English literature, the best known examples of it are John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* (1589, 1596). The myth of the Cave in Plato's *The Republic* is another very well-known example. Nearer home, the Ramayana is popularly talked of as exemplifying the victory of good over evil, of punya over paap.

A.K. Ramanujan, the eminent translator of the novel, in his Translator's Note, has described it as 'an allegory rich in realistic details'. (ix) The question is: Why has the writer resorted to the allegorical form for his novel? What is it in

an allegory that appealed to Anantha Murthy. Let us find out and see which feature or features of an allegory *Samskara* has. If, as Ramanujan says, the novel is 'rich in realistic details', which are the areas where the novelist has made use of realistic details?

There is a hint of why Anantha Murthy chose allegory combined with realism for *Samskara* in the course of his remarks on the works of a Kannada writer – M.S. Puttanna. In his talk on 'Why Not Worship in the Nude?', he quotes from this writer's English preface to his novel *Madiddunno Maharaya,* wherein the latter disapproves of most Kannada works as being derivative ('either expansions or contractions') from our two great epics and goes on to suggest that 'these pitfalls' could be avoided 'by transferring the attention from those ideal heroes and heroines to a conception of characters of our daily life, which in their nature and in their deeds, more or less approach the ideal Rama and Sita, Yudhishtra and Draupadi' (*Literature and Culture*: 61-62).

'The impulse expressed here,' says Anantha Murthy by way of comment, 'is to absorb reality into myth. What he [Puttanna] wants to write is both allegory and novel, on the surface, a realistic story which is also deep down a fable.... The dual impulses – to mythify and to modernize – jostle together in an unexpected combination of allegory and realism – creative modes necessary for grasping the entire Reality of Indian life. As Puttanna can lead to Garcia Marquez, *he can lead to the writing of a novel like* Samskara *too'* (*Literature and Culture*: 62).

Obviously, the dual impulses that worked in Puttanna were working in Anantha Murthy too. He too wanted to capture the contemporary reality of Brahminical India and he chose to present this reality by foregrounding the old dichotomy of asceticism and erotocism. Allegory, says Cuddon 'appears to be a mode of expression so natural to the human mind that it is universal' (*Dictionary of Literary Terms* 23). The choice of this universal mode of expression must have appeared attractive to Anantha Murthy particularly, because the idea of asceticism and eroticism as being adversaries is ancient and is deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. In the words of the well-known anthropologist, T.N. Madan, 'This struggle is one of the abiding themes of Hindu classical literature, as it is of living folklore. It is also the very stuff of everyday life. Is there a Hindu villager, illiterate and unsophisticated though he may be, who is not familiar with the debauchee and the ascetic, with the life of sensuality as opposed to that of spirituality?'(*Non-Renunciation* : 5) So it was natural that Anantha Murthy should have chosen to present this ancient opposition through the use of allegory.

Allegory proceeds by illustration – it presents ideas through images that are illustrative. There is another way – through representation – in which the writer tries to evoke 'a total and convincing impression of the real world to us'. (Scholes and Kellog: 84) The latter is the more usual way employed by writers to convey meaning in literary narratives. In *Samskara* Anantha Murthy uses both the ways; he is at once illustrative and representational, allegorical and realistic. The effect of this dual treatment will be clear in the portrayal of the major characters in the novel.

Allegory permitted the writer to state his theme sharply, if somewhat in a simplified manner, and it enabled him to draw upon the wealth of associations

in myth and legend that it would have aroused in the mind of the Indian reader. This helped to strengthen the basic theme.

Besides, the allegory not only affected the presentation of major male and female characters, but also the kind of flowers grown in the gardens of the dissenter Naranappa and all the other Brahmins.

As in an allegory, the characters in *Samskara* are 'somewhat simplified and represent polar opposites'. The fundamental opposition posited is between the ascetic and the pleasure-seeker, between control and self-denial on the one hand and indulgence in sensuous pleasures on the other, between Pranesacharya and Naranappa. Two other characters, Mahabala and Naranappa's protege, Shripati could be grouped with the latter. Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya are guilty of the sin of avarice and greed and Dasacharya of the sin of gluttony. All the three of them are primarily illustrative.

However, the major characters don't remain simplified for long. For example, Pranesacharya's penance in having married the invalid Bhagirathi is an illustration of his asceticism. So is the fact that he recites sacred legends but himself remains completely unaffected by his own descriptions of beauty in them. But his concern about Chandri waiting in his verandah, awaiting his decision about Naranappa, is an example of conduct that humanizes his character and makes it representative. Later his self-analysis right till the end, makes him a very intense and intimate character.

Similarly, though Naranappa, is a pursuer of pleasure who belongs to the 'Hedonist School', he is not entirely an iconoclast. He has been a real source of inspiration for the young enthusiasts of Parijata Drama Group. He had donated a harmonium to the group and was a fine drummer himself. This drama group is a symbol of his creativity. This adds complexity to his character and makes him very life-like.

The women characters are similarly seen in binary terms: low-caste, voluptuous big-bosomed mistresses like Chandri and Belli on the one hand and the flat-chested, withered brahmin women on the other. The references to Matsyagandha, Menaka and Urvashi in relation to Chandri and Belli help to strengthen the allegorical opposition. Of the two characters, Chandri breaks the allegorical mould and because of her compassion and her motherly instinct and her perfect understanding of the Acharya's need, becomes a memorable figure. On the other hand, Padmavati too, like Belli, whom the Acharya meets in the company of Putta is a figure of temptation.

The allegorical split extends even to the flowers that grow in the gardens of the brahmins of the agrahara. In the agrahara homes the flowers were used for worship and never for beauty or fragrance ('The Brahmins went to each other's yards each morning to get flowers for worship....But the flowers that bloomed in Naranappa's yard were reserved for Chandri's hair and for a vase in the bedroom' [14]). As Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out, the basic polarity 'between direct involvement in the sensuous aspects of life and a detachment through the denial of the senses' is indicated as early as on page 14 (*Samskara: A Critical Reader*: 86).

The allegorical nature of the novel can be seen when this opposition is openly stated:

'As far back as he [Pranesacharya] could remember Naranappa had always been a problem. The real challenge was to test what would finally win in the agrahara: his own penance and faith in ancient ways, or Naranappa's demonic ways' (19-20).

In the novel, the opposition between asceticism and eroticism is part of a larger opposition between brahminism and anti-brahminism. A belligerent Naranappa says: 'Let's see who wins in the end – you or me. I'll destroy brahminism, I certainly will. My only sorrow is that there's no brahminism really left to destroy in this place – except you' (23).

When Naranappa accuses Pranesacharya of corrupting young minds by telling them sexually exciting stories like that of Shakuntala, the Acharya vocalizes the conflict in a third way: "With a sigh, he said: 'Only sin has tongue, virtue has none' (24): The opposition is thus not only between asceticism and eroticism and between brahminism and anti-brahminism, but also between virtue and sin.

The allegorical mould in which the principal characters have been cast does not, however, remain inflexible for long. For by the end of Part One, the Acharya has taken Naranappa's mistress, Chandri. This is the key moment in the book, the major turning point. This changes everything. The accuser becomes the accused. The opposition between asceticism and eroticism gets diluted. This is where the realistic details start coming in increasingly.

We are taken inside the mind of Pranesacharya and see how it works in view of the sea change that has taken place. The Acharya's journey is both real and symbolic, with the writer exercising control over what he is to see and where he is to go. So is the guided tour on which he is taken by Putta. Putta is a protean figure who performs so many multiple roles – 'he is riddle-master, expert bargainer, pimp without any samskara' – that it strains the readers'credibility. The last decision that the Acharya takes to travel alone is again symbolic: ultimately we are all alone and all our crucial decisions have to be our own.

At times, the allegory flies in the face of realism. As Ramanujan has pointed out, it was unrealistic that a learned Brahmin like the Acharya should not have been able to sort out the problem posed by the death of Naranappa (143). Secondly 'every villager is supposed to know that no crow or vulture would touch a plague-ridden rat' (143). However both these factual inaccuracies would have remained unnoticed without being pointed out.

The use of allegory and the numerous references in the book, serve as a means of economy as well. If the novel had been written without the allegory and these references, it would probably have been bulkier.

The old oppositions between asceticism and pleasure-seeking, between brahminism and anti-brahminism and between virtue and sin utterly change. Midway the novel converges on to the Acharya and his great need to evolve a new, more rational and more individual identity for himself. Firmly rooted in the Indian tradition, it becomes a modern man's quest for a new self.

Exercises

1. Pick out the thoughts of the Acharya that show that his valuation of Naranappa has changed after he has taken Chandri at the end of Part One.
2. What is in common among Chandri, Belli and Padmavati? Why does the writer keep comparing them with Matsyagandha, Menaka, Urvashi?
3. There is a Brahmin wife in the novel, who teaches her daughter to deny sex to her husband. Can you identify her? How would you characterize her?
4. In what ways were the low-caste women different from Brahmin wives in the agrahara?

3.3 THEMES

3.3.1 Some Preliminary Considerations

Having discussed the narrative of the novel thoroughly and having also discussed the novel as an allegory, it should be easy for you to answer the question: What is the novel about? What is its major thematic preoccupation?

The most obvious theme seems to be a quest for the right moral choice. The central character is an ascetic Pranesacharya, who is also the spiritual leader of a small Brahmin community. Initially, he is confronted with a situation in which he has to decide what he should do in regard to the cremation of a heretic Brahmin, Naranappa, who is a pleasure seeker. Should they cremate the heretic? And if yes, who should do it? Naranappa had no children of his own. So someone else would have to undertake the task. Later he accidentally meets and mates with Naranappa's mistress, Chandri. This experience turns all his ascetic and brahminical beliefs upside down and he is confronted with the need to find answers to new and bigger moral questions about himself and his relationship with Chandri and his erstwhile Brahminal followers. He is thus faced with the challenge of having to forge a new identity for himself.

Let us pause for a moment and consider this question of identity which has become crucially important in modern times. How is this identity to be defined? Is this identity determined by the caste or the community of the individual? Or whether the individual carves out an identity of his own? So far as this novel is concerned, the central character's identity as an ascetic and scholar has been given to him by the Brahmin community of which he is the leader. But later this identity proves unsatisfactory and he tries to forge a new identity for himself as an individual.

How would you like to define yourself? Would you like to define yourself in terms of a particular religion? In other words, would you like to be described as a good Hindu, a good Muslim, a good Christian, a good Sikh? Would any of these descriptions be adequate? Or would you like to describe yourself in more secular, more humanistic terms? When you begin to ask questions like these, you will perhaps discover that the novel deals with concerns that are very real, very Indian, and also, very universal. Is the central character in the novel a rebel against tradition? In what sense does he move towards modernity?

As for the theme of asceticism and eroticism, it is an ancient theme in Indian myth and thought. As T.N. Madan, the well-known anthropologist says in his book called *Non-Renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture* (1987; 2001), 'this struggle [between asceticism and eroticism] is one of the abiding themes of Hindu classical literature, as it is of living folklore. It is also the very stuff of everyday life. Is there a Hindu villager, illiterate and unsophisticated though he may be, who is not familiar with the debauchee and the ascetic, with the life of sensuality and as opposed to spirituality" (5)? In the third chapter of the book he deals with three literary representations of the moral dilemma involved in grappling with 'the contrary and powerful pulls of asceticism and eroticism' (5). The novels chosen are *Chitralekha* (Hindi: 1933) by Bhagwati Charan Verma, *Samskara* (Kannada:1965; English trans. 1976) by U.R. Anantha Murthy and *Yayati* (Marathi:1959; Hindi trans. 1977) by Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar. It will be interesting to find out how these modern novelists have treated this ancient dichotomy between the two. It would be very good if besides *Samskara* you can find time to read at least one novel listed above.

Questions to ask

1. The brahminism depicted in it is in a state of decay – except of course its leader, Pranesacharya. Is it then a religious novel? Or, does the novel address larger issues?
2. Related to this question of religious identity is also the question of the place of asceticism and physical pleasure in human life. Is this an either/or question? Is the relationship between the two simple or complex?

The writer has his own way of dealing with the question. And you don't have to agree with what he is saying in the novel. But you will, I hope, grant that these have been questions that have been crucially important to Indian culture and are still highly relevant.

Of course you are not to forget that what you are to read is a work of fiction, one of the best that India has produced, a work of which, I need hardly say, we can be justly proud. I would suggest you reading the novel at one go – if possible. But at least you must figure out the story of the novel *from the novel* and see how the writer has treated the events in it and what he wants to say in it.

3.3.2 Quest for Identity – Journey towards a New Birth

As suggested above, the salient theme of the novel is quest for identity. This quester is of course, the central character of the novel, Pranesacharya. This quest for identity takes the form of a journey and it is a journey of self-discovery.

In his play *The Zoo Story,* Edward Albee says: 'Sometimes one has to go a long way to come back a short way.' This is so very true of *Samskara.* Pranesacharya, after his experience of sex with Chandri in the forest finds himself in a spiritual turmoil. Following the death of his wife he thinks there is nothing to hold him back in Durvasapura and he sets himself adrift and is ready to go where his feet take him.

In the course of the journey he experiences what he had not experienced so far in the cloistered Brahmin community of Durvasapura. He has his lessons in humility for he is taken to be an ordinary mendicant Brahmin on his beggarly rounds. He meets a half-caste young man Putta, who offers him a bidi (which he refuses) and later offers him some eatables, which he accepts. He moves around with his young companion in the car-festival in Melige, is persuaded to drink coffee, watches a fight between two roosters who get bloody in the process, and also visits a prostitute, barely managing to get away with the promise to return later, and finally sitting down to meals among the poor Brahmins in the temple. The last three experiences that are particularly frightening are the cockfight, the visit to the prostitute, and sitting down to meals in the temple. In the cockfight he has his first brush with life in the raw, with violence and cruelty in the ordinary world and in the second he experiences the stirrings of lust when he is face to face with Padmavati. The third experience that proves the most frightening and that precipitates matters is the experience of being identified in the temple.

This journey also gives him an opportunity to analyze himself or rather to continue his self-analysis that had begun after mating with Chandri. He seeks answers to several questions: Why did he not go back to agrahara after the death of his wife? Was it because of his fear of being caught? Then, what was the extent of his responsibility for making love to Chandri? Initially he believes that his union with her was 'undesired, as if it was God's will' and that he was 'absolutely not responsible for making love to her' (95). But he keeps wrestling with himself and feels himself to be in a Trishanku-state till he has finally decided to accept full responsibility for his sexual union with Chandri ('In that moment, decisive of which way I should turn, the decision was taken to take Chandri. Even if I lost control, the responsibility to decide was still mine. Man's decision is valid only because it's possible to lose control, not because it's easy' [96]). He also agonizes over his realization that his individual action affects others also (...there's this deep relation between our decisions and the whole community [106]).

He realizes that he can free himself from this Trishanku-state through a free, deliberate wide-awake, fully willed act (107). Earlier he had decided to go where his legs took him (85). But now he decides to act and to 'remake myself in true wakefulness' (107).

In the course of his musings, he thinks of going to Kundapura and living with Chandri. And he comes back to this thought many times during these spells of self-analysis (See pages 107, 109, 112, 113, 114, 122, 125, 127 and 129). This suggests at least the possibility of his finally going to live with Chandri.

Pranesacharya has no sense of regret and naturally no feelings of guilt. But he is constantly haunted by the fear of his old identity as the spiritual leader of Durvasapura Brahmins being discovered. In the temple he is recognized but before he is exposed, he runs away from the temple and decides to proceed to Durvasapura in order to make a complete confession before the Brahmins and to cremate Naranappa's dead body. 'Only then will he be free from fear and be really free to do whatever he wants to do'. 'In full view of the frightened Brahmins, I'll stand exposed like the naked quick of life; and I, elder in their midst, will turn into a new man at midnight....When I tell them about myself, there should be no taint of repentance in me, no trace of any sorrow that I am a sinner' (132).

It is very natural that the writer should use the metaphor of rebirth or remaking while talking of Pranesacharya's new identity. Witness his musings on page 107 quoted above. Near the end when he has taken the final decision of confession, he imagines that he 'will turn into a new man at midnight' (131). The rebirth motif reminds us that the title *Samskara* not only means a rite for a dead man but, as Ramanujan suggests, also transformation 'The rite for a dead man becomes a rite of passage for the living' (137).

Another related metaphor that Pranesacharya uses to describe his uncertain spiritual state is that of a lost soul, a ghost. After the loss of his wife, he says, he 'entered limbo, a lost soul' (120-21). But he also dreads entering the real world, the demonic world of cock-fights, a world of cruelty and violence and passion. 'I dread it. It's the dread of being transformed from ghost to demon' (118). The encounter with Padmavati also offers him another chance to leave 'the ghostly stage' behind and 'move to the next stage of soul' (121) but he still dreads the moment of transition and goes away for the temple. It is only in the temple that he decides to take the final plunge and be a fully autonomous person.

We can see Pranesacharya moving out of himself and undergoing experiences that he had not dreamt of but significantly he finally decides to come back home. Clearly the movement is from the identity given by a moribund, closed, god-driven community to the identity as a fully responsible individual. When the novel ends, the confession is still several hours away and so is the new identity that he will make for himself. But though he is autonomous, he feels himself to be accountable to his community. Hence his decision to go back to his agrahara. Pranesacharya could be called an insider-rebel but he is not an iconoclast of the kind Naranappa is.

Exercises

1. Can you chart out the stages in Pranesacharya's journey towards self-discovery? Begin with his quest for salvation through penance.
2. Look for other examples of the use of the metaphor of rebirth or its variations in the text.

3.3.3 Asceticism and Eroticism

We have already talked of the theme of asceticism and eroticism at some length.

It is hardly necessary to emphasize that the Hindus believe in four ashramas or four distinct stages of life: that of the student, the householder, the hermit and the ascetic. A related concept is that of the four ends (pursharthas) of life: *dharma* or righteousness, duty or virtue, *artha* or material gain, *kama*, love or pleasure, and finally *moksha*, liberation from worldly life. Clearly pursuit of asceticism is but one stage of life and sexual pleasure is an important goal of it. But in popular imagination, asceticism, other worldliness and a life-denying ethic have been over-valourized. Witness the veneration that the ascetics once enjoyed in common life as in the courts of kings. *Samskara* represents a society where asceticism is prioritized and valorized beyond what is due to it and is opposed to the pursuit of pleasure. But I suggest that we need to

interpret the term 'eroticism' broadly to include not only pursuit of sex and pleasure but also the whole engagement with the affairs of the world.

The following points may also be kept in mind:

1. Asceticism and eroticism are represented allegorically and in opposition to each other. The novel presents the inadequacy of asceticism and the growth of the central character to a new awareness of the need to go beyond the duality of asceticism and eroticism.
2. The opposition between the two ideals is stated in extreme terms. Pranesacharya is a householder in name only because at sixteen he married an invalid wife who was incapable of bearing children and has been living the life of an ascetic. So great is his self-denial that even though he tells sexually exciting stories from puranas and other ancient books, he himself remains unaffected by them. On the other hand, Naranappa is a heretic Brahman who has rejected his own wife, who has broken every known Brahman taboo and who has been living with a whore for ten long years.
3. The turning point comes when Pranesacharya has his first experience of sexual pleasure with a low-caste voluptuous woman. This is a key episode in the novel. It marks 'the fall' of Pranesacharya, but it is a fortunate fall. His long-suppressed hunger for sex – 'tigerish lust' as the writer calls it – leaps up and bewilders him. He becomes aware of his physical needs of pleasure and of hunger and those of the other senses. His gaze turns this worldly and he now wants a share in all the good things of life. This mating marks the beginning of a transformation in him – the end of the old self and the birth of a new one.
4. We are given a close-up of the interior monologue of Pranesacharya as he comes to terms with his past and as he endeavours to deal with the real world around him shown by Putta. He owns complete responsibility for his mating with Chandri and is possibly thinking of living with her.
5. Pranesacharya emerges as a fully autonomous human being who accepts complete responsibility for his actions – his responsibility to cremate Naranappa and also explain his liaison with Chandri to his community of Brahmins. But he also recognizes the difficulty of making moral choices without infringing the autonomy of other individuals. He wants to transcend the duality of asceticism and eroticism so that he is not faced with the necessity of having to decide.
6. The Acharya's confrontation with Naranappa loses much of its meaning. In a very real sense, Pranesacharya of Parts two and three, belongs to Naranappa's party and he knows it.

3.3.4 Brahminism and Anti-Brahminism

1. Brahminism and anti-brahminism is another important thematic strand in the novel.
2. Anantha Murthy is himself a Madhava Brahmin reared in an agrahara.
3. The writer's presentation of brahminism as being decadent is almost savage. The Brahmins are greedy and gluttonous, and lead a parasitic existence. They are ignorant and grossly superstitious. The only exception is Pranesacharya. Naranappa is a lapsed Brahmin who knows the different sins the Brahmins are guilty of and who brazenly indulges in all those things that are held sacred by the Brahmins.

4. The life of Brahmins is circumscribed by taboos and the fear of pollution.
5. The inability of their leader Pranesacharya to find a solution to the question: who will cremate the heretic Naranappa? – brings the entire agrahara to a halt.
6. Several questions arise. First, is the novel a complete repudiation of brahminism? Is the writer viewing brahminism as a critical outsider or is he viewing it as a critical insider? Naranappa's defiant anti-brahminism is clearly stated in the novel. But how far does his opposition go? Does he suggest an alternative to the system that he rejects? In what other ways does the writer express his criticism of Brahmins or Brahminism? A related question is : who is a Brahmin?
7. Anantha Murthy's views about brahminism and related issues:

   i. *Feelings towards Brahmin orthodoxy*: 'Now I had a strong kind of feeling against Brahmin orthodoxy. But I also had a fear of losing myself, getting myself torn away, from my community. Nobody can get out of the hold of community easily....I wasn't anti-brahmin. Nor was I able to say that everything was fine.' ('Tradition and Creativity', in *Literature and Culture*: 118-19.)

   ii. *Different responses to Samskara*: 'In my village everyone thought Samskara was a totally realistic novel and they identified every character with a living person in the agrahara. And when I went back to my village the woman next door said, 'O Anantha, you have created Chandri perfectly.' Each and every character was real. And the novel was considered against some people in the village. Now you come to Shimoga, the district headquarters, and see how the novel is read there. There it was seen as a novel against the Madhava Brahmins. It became a little abstract. Not against some characters, but against one set of characters. They said it was anti-Madhva. In Bangalore it was anti-Brahmin. It became more abstract. When Naipaul read it, he found it anti-Hindu. Again more abstract'. ('Tradition and Creativity', 121-22)

   'And now many of my radical friends say that it [*Samskara*] is a Pro-Brahmin novel, that I have really championed the cause of the Brahmins' (122).

   iii. *On Tradition*: To me tradition does not mean something of the past....Tradition is a kind of continuity of memory which makes you human, which makes it possible for you to interact within a certain context, thereby adding something significant to that context. It has to be a living tradition. For, let us not forget the fact that whatever tradition we could have had has been lost to us through a certain amnesia because of our terrible attraction to the modern world system.' ('Tradition and Creativity' 125).

3.3.5 Tradition and Change

The title of this section is another way of putting the preceding theme of brahminism and anti-brahminism; only it is broader.

Like a large number of post-independence Indian novels, *Samskara* captures a moment in India's long, ongoing struggle with tradition and change. Anantha Murthy had 'a strong kind of feeling against Brahmin orthodoxy' and in this novel his critical gaze is directed towards the brahminical tradition represented by a set of Madhav Brahmins in a remote Karnatak village during the thirties or the forties. The vitality of a tradition depends, to use the words of R. Radhakrishnan, on 'the ability or otherwise of any system or worldview to deal with a crisis effectively and legitimately.' The moribund community fails this test. The brahminical tradition embodied in the inhabitants of the small Brahmin colony of Durvasapura is in a state of decay, except its ascetic and scholarly leader, Pranesacharya. The colony is faced with a grave crisis, which even its learned leader fails to resolve. What are they to do? Brahminism doesn't seem to offer a solution. Yet there is a solution, which is a product of fresh thinking and it comes through the low-caste but clear-eyed Chandri. While the Brahmins are busy debating about who should cremate the childless heretic Naranappa, Chandri finding that the body has started rotting, takes the matter in her hand, treats the dead body as a dead body and with the help of a Muslim friend of Naranappa cremates it in the darkness of the night ('Only one thought burned clear: it's rotting there, that thing, it's stinking there, its belly swollen, ...It's neither Brahmin nor Shudra. A carcass. A stinking rotting carcass' [68]).

The suggestion is that the brahminical society has lost its capacity to question itself and to adapt itself to changing circumstances, which implies that it has lost its capacity to renew itself and needs the re-vitalizing touch of someone who lives on the periphery of the brahminical world.

This touch that will revitalize the best Brahmin in the agrahara, Pranesacharya, also comes through the low-caste Chandri. Chandri, through her mating with him, is a source of new life for him and acts as a catalytic agent for change. The writer has invested the sexual union with allegorical significance and has made it centrally important. By doing so, the writer is suggesting the need for a paradigm shift in the caste relationships. The archetypal model so often alluded to in the novel is the union between Parashar and Matyagandha.

If Chandri reawakens all his senses, Putta continues Pranesacharya's education by opening up the sublunary world to him in all its varied hues, including the world of ordinary pleasures, passion and violence and cruelty. And Putta is a half-caste Maler.

When the novel closes, Pranesacharya's confession is still several hours away. What his new relationship with his agrahara will be, no one can say. The heretic Brahmin Naranappa is dead and gone. In the changed circumstances, the only hope for change lies with Pranesacharya, who is an insider and who with his new orientation can be a harbinger of change. But will he be a changed man? And will he be the harbinger of change? The novel ends on an uncertain note: 'Pranesacharya waited, anxious, expectant.'(135)

The novel's message seems to be that change can come in tradition through a critical insider.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

Samskara is Janus-faced. It looks back at Indian tradition and makes full use of its resources and patterns; and at the same time it looks forward to modern times and focuses on the modern man's search for his true self, true identity. A sensitive individual living in a culture such as ours, which is in a stage of transition has necessarily to face the crisis of identity that Pranesacharya had to face. Ours is also an age of evasion and it takes some strength of character to own up our responsibility for what we have done and its consequences. Moreover, when values are in a state of flux, decision-making becomes even more difficult. All this is well and truly reflected in our novel.

3.5 GLOSSARY

Allegory: The term allegory is derived from Greek *allegoria,* from *allos* 'other'+*-agoria* 'speaking', 'speaking otherwise'. Cuddon in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1992 edition) defines an allegory 'as a story in verse, or prose with a double meaning: a primary or surface meaning; and a secondary or under-the-surface meaning. It is a story, therefore, that can be read, understood and interpreted at two levels. It is thus closely related to the fable and the parable. The allegory could be literary or pictorial or both' (22).

Illustrative and Representational: 'The connection between the fictional world and the real world can be either representational or illustrative. The images in a narrative may strike us at once as an attempt to create a replica of actuality just as the images in certain paintings or works of sculpture may, or they may strike us as an attempt merely to remind us of an aspect of reality rather than convey a total and convincing impression of the real world to us, as certain kinds of visual art also do. That kind of art, literary or plastic, which seeks to duplicate reality we will designate by the world "represent' in its various forms. For that kind of art which seeks only to suggest an aspect of reality we will use the world "illustrate'....The illustrative is symbolic; the representational is mimetic' (Scholes and Kellogg: 84).

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. Which is the major theme in the novel – asceticism and eroticism or brahminism and anti-brahminism? Discuss.
2. In what sense do you think the author is rooted in the Indian tradition?

3. Allegory often has a didactic intent behind it. Do you think this applies to *Samskara*?
4. Do you think the novel is a complete repudiation of brahminism and therefore of Hinduism?

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Anantha Murthy, U.R. (1976), *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man.* A translation of U.R.Anantha Murthy's Kannada novel by A.K. Ramanujan, New Delhi: Oxford.

Cuddon, J.A. (1992), *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.* Third Edition, London: Penguin Books.

Thirumalesh, K.V. (2005), 'The Context of Samskara', in *U.R. Anantha Murthy's Samskara: A Critical Reader,* eds. Kailash C. Baral, D. Venkat Rao, Sura P.Rath, 79-80.

Scholes, Robert and Robert Kellogg (1966; 1968; rpt.1971), *The Nature of Narrative,* New York: Oxford.

Anantha Murthy, U.R. (2002), *Literature and Culture* [collection of lectures and papers], comp., ed. A.J. Thomas, Calcutta: Papyrus.

This section is based on Prof. K.V. Thirumalesh's article entitled 'The Context of Samskara' in the anthology U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara : A Critical Reader* (2005), 79-80.

UNIT 4 *SAMSKARA*: CHARACTERS, TITLE, LITERARY CRITICISM AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Characterization and Characters
4.3 The Title
4.4 Literary Criticism of *Samskara*
4.5 Contemporary Relevance of *Samskara*
4.6 Let Us Sum Up
4.7 Glossary
4.8 Questions
4.9 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This final unit is meant to introduce you to yet another aspect of the study of *Samskara*, namely, characterization and characters and other issues like the title, literary criticism of the novel and the contemporary relevance of it.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will discuss the characters and characterization in *Samskara* and how the allegorical mould in which the writer has put the novel has influenced his presentation of characters. It will also deal with its title. A summary of important critical views expressed on the novel will follow. The unit will close with a brief note on the contemporary relevance of *Samskara* in our times.

4.2 CHARACTERIZATION AND CHARACTERS

Since Anantha Murthy has used the allegorical form in his novel, we cannot expect *Samskara* to have drawn fully-fledged realistic characters. As discussed in the previous unit, the characters in *Samskara* are 'somewhat simplified and represent polar opposites' [141]. This statement is generally true for most of the major characters in the novel. Pranesacharya and Naranappa are polar opposites as are Bhagirathi and Chandri. If Pranesacharya is the Brahmin ascetic who takes his asceticism to extremes, Naranappa is the pleasure seeker who is out to destroy brahminism-root and branch. There are other characters who we could call satelite characters who we could group with either of these characters. Mahabala and Shripati among the males and Belli and the unnamed prostitute who cohabits with Mahabala and Padmavati

would fall among the pleasure seekers/pleasure givers. And Naranappa's discarded wife and Lilavati, Shripati's sex-denying wife and the other Brahmin wives would fall in with those who deny themselves/others sexual pleasure.

There are those like Dasacharya who is guilty of the sin of gluttony and Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya and their wives who are guilty of the sin of avarice and greed.

Notes on Major Characters

i. Pranesacharya

Pranesacharya represents asceticism carried to an extreme. He is also an example of the distortion in values that takes place when asceticism is overvalued as it has often been in the Indian tradition. He is a householder but in name only, because for twenty years he has dedicatedly looked after his invalid wife and practiced asceticism in order to gain merit and achieve salvation. That he has done so out of routine becomes clear later on, after his sexual union with Chandri.

The Acharya is a learned man, the Crest Jewel of Vedant Philosophy and has won many awards in recognition of his learning. But he has no solution to the crisis facing his agrahara. Instead of trusting his instincts, he has tried to go by the books and the books fail him.

His compassionate nature is evident in his concern for Chandri as she sits outside waiting for his decision. The Acharya's concern for Naranappa, however, doesn't originate in compassion alone. His attitude is a blend of his egotism and willfulness and compassion. Trying to reclaim Naranappa has been a kind of challenge for him. If he is allowed to get away with his rebellious ways, the Acharya thinks, 'how will fair play and righteousness prevail' (21)? His belief – that 'common men follow the right path out of fear', shows the strain of antiquated thinking in him. When the books fail to provide him with a solution, he resorts to an act that shows the Crest Jewel of Vedant in an unflattering light — he entreats the Monkey God Maruti to give him a sign by making the flowers place on either side to fall, but nothing happens. Even if one doesn't agree with Naipaul and call it a resort to magic, the entire episode doesn't do any credit to him.

The Acharya is highly introspective both before and after his centrally important sexual union with Chandri and his self-analysis is characterized by complete transparency and a rare honesty. If he has been harsh with his adversary Naranappa, he is even more unsparing about himself.

The entire process of soul-searching and self-analysis is painful and bristles with uncertainty and anxiety and fear. He thinks of himself as a lost soul in limbo, a ghost who dreads being becoming a demon (117-118, 120-21, 125). We see him turning his back on his brahminical past; moving away from god and into the world of ordinary men and women and realizing the need to stand alone and finally taking a decisive step. He becomes aware of his physical needs of pleasure and hunger and those of other senses and he wants a share in all the good things of life. He has also had a close look at the violence and cruelty and passion in ordinary life. At the end there is a sea change coming in his thinking. He overcomes his fears about his exposure and starts back to

his agrahara in order to make his confession. He hopes to give up his public identity and is at the threshold of forging a new identity for himself. But there is one thing that is common to both — his consciousness that he belongs to the community and is fully responsible to it for his actions.

ii. Naranappa

If Pranesacharya stands for asceticism, Naranappa stands for pleasure-seeking. This is how he once expressed his hedonistic doctrine to the Acharya: 'Just keep your dharma to yourself — we've but one life — I belong to the "Hedonistic School" — Borrow, borrow and drink your ghee, as they say' (20).

Naranappa was a sworn enemy of brahminism and didn't consider the brahminism as practised in Durvasapur as worth anything. The only person he made an exception of was the Acharya. And he had broken every known taboo — he kept a low-caste mistress, he drank, he caught sacred fish and ate its meat with Muslim friends and much else. Not satisfied with defiance, he challenged Pranesacharya: 'Your Garuda, he robs shaven widows, he plots evil with black-magic men, and he is one of your Brahmins, isn't he?...All right, let's see who wins, Acharya. You or me? Let's see how long all this Brahmin business will last. All your Brahmin respectability. I'll roll it up and throw it away for a little bit of pleasure with one female' (21).

But he wasn't just an iconoclast. He had a creative side to his personality also. He was the inspiration behind the founding of the Parijata Drama Group and he donated a harmonium to the group and he himself was a good drummer.

While Naranappa was alive, he was troublesome. But he was more troublesome when he was dead. What is said about Shakespeare's Julius Caeser — that he was more powerful dead than when alive — is also true of Naranappa to quite an extent. The major problem that proved insoluble so far as the Brahmins were concerned was: who should cremate him? This was a problem to which the Acharya with all his learning had no answer.

Naranappa also causes the Acharya to introspect. At times he begins to wonder whether there's a route to salvation other than the route of dharma and 'whether the quickest way to salvation was through conflict' (47). The second occasion when he pondered over Naranappa's words was when he told him about how his description of Shakuntala had excited a young listener and made him go and take a woman on the river bank ('Could it be that he himself was responsible for such awful things?') [25] Later, after his sexual union with Chandri, the Acharya thinks of him in a more positive context. He recalls his fearlessness and finds himself wanting ('How fearlessly, how royally Naranappa lived with Chandri in the heart of the agrahara!) [109] Still later, while fears of polluting the temple assail him, he thinks: 'But didn't Naranappa manage to eat the holy fish in the Ganapati tank and get away with it? He would never have the courage to defy brahmin practice as Naranappa did' (113).

iii. Chandri

Chandri is Naranappa's voluptuous, low-caste mistress who later mates with Pranesacharya and initiates a process of radical change in him. In accordance

with the allegorical scheme of the novel, she and Belli are pitted against the Brahmin wives.

She is described as a perfect beauty ('A 'real' sharp type, exactly as described in Vatsyayan's manual of love' [8]), 'the choice object' that Naranappa had brought from Kundapura, and is compared to Matsyagandha painted by Ravi Verma. This reference to the classical heroine is repeated in the text several times and is meant to hallow and romanticize Chandri.

The lovemaking scene in the forest brings out her femininity to the full. The mere touch of her full breasts triggers off a union that brings out all her tenderness and compassion and mother love and that also opens up the beautiful world of the senses to the Acharya. No words are spoken, but then no words are needed. The writer has made this sexual union centrally important. But if Chandri is hallowed and romanticized, she is also 'earthly and amoral'. While the Acharya agonizes over who made the first move in lovemaking, she remains untroubled by her sexuality.

Chandri is also shown to be generous. In contrast to the avaricious Brahmin wives, she hands the gold that Naranappa had given to her to the Acharya to meet the cost of her lover's funeral.

The cremation of Naranappa illustrates yet another feature of her personality — her commonsense. As soon as she realizes that his body has started rotting she decides to cremate it and proceeds to do so with the help of a Muslim friend of her lover. Next morning, she packs up her belongings and leaves for her home in Kundapura.

Chandri may be physically away from the Acharya but she is never far from his consciousness. Time after time as he wanders around the fair in the company of Putta, he recalls her. The suggestion is that joining her is one of the options open to him.

If the Acharya represents culture, she represents nature. As nature, Chandri is undefileable. She is compared to a running river which can never go dirty (Born to prostitutes, she was an exception to all rules. She was ever-auspicious, daily-wedded, the one without widowhood. How can sin defile a running river? It's good for a drink when a man's thirsty, it's good for a wash when a man's filthy, and it's good for bathing the god's images with; ...Tunga river doesn't dry...'(43).

iv. Putta

Putta is a special creation. How did the novelist create Putta? In one of his talks entitled 'Tradition and Creativity', Anantha Murthy answers Eric Erikson, the great psychologist, about how he had created Putta: 'It is of course a mystery, the way I created Putta. *Putta is a half-caste, he has none of the inhibitions of a Brahmin, and he is a free man too.* That also is possible within the Indian structure, you see, as some of these people are born out of what you call varnasankara, or the hope of mankind in India. ...Putta appears at a particular point precisely because *without him the novel seems to be incomplete.* I sit down and say "Acharya is walking. I write. He hears footsteps. Whose footsteps? What happens now? And then Putta appears' (*Literature and Culture*: 119).

If Chandri revitalizes Pranesacharya through her 'touch', Putta ushers him into the ordinary world and he is able to do so because he has no hang-ups of the kind that a Brahmin like Pranesacharya has. ('*Putta is a half-caste, he has none of the inhibitions of a Brahmin, and he is a free man too.*') He is a man for all seasons and he takes the Acharya on what Ramanujan calls a 'guided tour through temple-festival and fair, whorehouse and pawnshop' where he sees 'a demonic world of passion and sensation' and violence and cruelty. This is an essential part of the Acharya's transformation.

How does the Acharya view Putta? At first he wants to get rid of him and makes an attempt to do so several times. But finally the Acharya comes to look at him with affection — 'fatherly affection' [115] — and later treats him like 'a bosom-friend of the present'. He in fact contemplates making a trial confession before Putta, before his final confrontation with the Brahmins. This change of feeling suggests that the process of transformation is on.

Putta seems a holdall character. In the words of Ramanujan, 'Putta is riddle-master, expert bargainer, pimp without any samskara; he is so completely and thoughtlessly at one with this world that he is a marvel.' (Afterword: 140) But if he appears 'a marvel', we need to remember that he has to fit in the overall allegorical mould of the novel. He has to carry on the process of redirection of Pranesacharya's life, a task that Chandri had begun. As Anantha Murthy himself says, the novel would be incomplete without him. The final responsibility is, of course, the Acharya's.

4.3 THE TITLE

The word *samskara* in the title has multiple meanings. So has the title in the novel. The dictionary meanings of the word are explained before the novel begins. It reproduces the different meanings taken from *A Kannada-English Dictionary* by Reverend F. Kittel (1832-1903), Mangalore, 1894 as follows:

Sam-s-kara.

1. Forming well or thoroughly, making perfect, perfecting; finishing, refining, refinement, accomplishment.
2. Forming in the mind, conception, idea, notion; the power of memory, faculty of recollection, *the realizing of past perceptions.*
3. Preparation, making ready, preparation of food, etc., cooking, dressing.
4. Making sacred, hallowing, consecration, dedication; consecration of a king, etc.
5. Making pure, purification, purity.
6. A sanctifying or purificatory rite or essential ceremony (enjoined on all the first three classes or castes).
7. Any rite or ceremony
8. Funeral obsequies.

The subtitle of the novel — *A Rite for a Dead Man* makes use of what Ramanujan calls 'the most concrete meaning' of the word given above. Ironically the dead man, Naranappa, is disposed of unceremoniously by his

mistress Chandri with the help of a Muslim friend of his. This unceremonious disposal of the dead remains unknown to the person who is most concerned with it — Pranesacharya. As the novel proceeds, the title acquires other meanings and other connotations till it has gathered to itself a rich resonance.

Obviously, the most important of these meanings of the title is the transformation of Pranesacharya, a kind of rebirth. The novel begins with a frantic search for an answer to the question of whether the community of Brahmins should perform the funeral rites of the heretic Brahmin and if so, who should do it. The attempt fails but the accidental mating with Chandri in the forest as he makes his way back to the agrahara begins the process of his rebirth. 'A rite for a dead man becomes a rite of passage for the living.' Like any birth, it is a most painful process and it is not complete when the novel ends. But there is hope.

Moreover, ironically, the rite of initiation begins with an illicit deed — the mating with Naranappa's low-caste mistress. This implicitly interrogates the traditional notion of sanskara as refinement through traditionally pious means.

The title *Samskara* acquires a further dimension of meaning when Naranappa's professed anti-brahminism is contrasted with the unbrahminical conduct of the Brahmins of the agrahara. They are guilty of the sins of avarice and gluttony and are superstitious. In this, the novelist questions the notion of brahminism itself. While Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya covet Naranappa's gold, Naranappa's mistress Chandri offers all her gold to pay for the funeral expenses of her lover. She has no learning nor any inherited samskaras but she shows a greater refinement of spirit than either Garuda or Lakshmana.

On the other hand Putta is a favourable character in the novel and he initiates the Acharya into the ordinary world of passion and cruelty and sensation, but he is a half-caste and is without samskaras. In this way, Anantha Murthy interrogates the entire idea of samskaras or an inherited refinement of spirit.

Ramanaujan suggests yet another significance of the word samskara. He says that the novel is structured like a samskara — it has three stages of 'separation', 'transition' and 're-incorporation'. These three stages can roughly be seen in the Acharya's passage through life. He goes away from his agrahara (separation), travels through the forest and the fair where he has a new orientation (transition), and is finally shown moving towards re-incorporation.

The novel thus resonates with several meanings of the word samskara.

Exercise

1. In your view how important are samskaras/inherited virtues in life?
2. Is the writer rejecting brahminism altogether or is he merely questioning it?

4.4 LITERARY CRITICISM OF *SAMSKARA*

According to its translator A.K. Ramanujan, Samskara was 'popular with critic and common reader alike since its publication in 1965'. One hopes that that is true or so we would like to believe.

The first critic of the English translation was the translator himself and he has added a fine Afterword to the translated version that forms part of the book and that first appeared in 1976. In a sense, Ramanujan has set the lines along which criticism of the novel was to take place. He called it a religious novella, 'a contemporary reworking of ancient themes' (141) and drew attention to the allegorical form of the novel and also the ancient dichotomy between asceticism and sensuality, saying that the characters were 'somewhat simplified and represented polar opposites' (141). The novel, he pointed out, sometimes sacrificed realism to enforce its allegory. He also talks of the several meanings of the word *samskara* and goes on to suggest a threefold process of initiation or a rite of passage — separation, transition and re-incorporation through which Pranesacharya is passing.

Dissent came very early and it came very strongly, for in 1976, V.S. Naipaul in his comments on *Samskara* that later on formed part of his *A Wounded Civilization* (1977), dismissed *Samskara* as a portrayal of what he called 'a barbaric civilization'. It was a civilization 'where the books, the laws are buttressed by magic, and where a too elaborate social organization is unquickened by intellect or creativity or ideas of moral responsibility.' These people's, he goes on, are all helpless, disadvantaged, easily unbalanced; the civilization they have inherited has long gone sour; living instinctive lives, crippled by rules...*they make up a society without a head.* (*Vagartha* 15: Oct 1976, 21) The obvious reference was to the decadent Brahmin agrahara. Naipaul concedes that it is 'a difficult novel', and even that 'the narrative is hypnotic' and also that 'the brilliance of the writing in the original Kannada can be guessed'. But he charges Indians to have an 'underdeveloped ego' and believes that the Acharya even after he enters 'the demon world' would continue to be self-absorbed. 'A changing society,' he holds, requires 'sharper perception'.

Not long afterwards, in 1981, an anthropologist, T.N. Madan published a paper (written in 1978) entitled 'Moral Choices: An essay on the unity of asceticism and eroticism', which is reproduced with minor changes in his book entitled *Non-Renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture* (1987; 2001). The revised title of the paper simply is 'Asceticism and Eroticism'.

Madan's essay, it should be made clear, is not exclusively on *Samskara*: it discusses three literary texts on the theme, the other two being Bhagwati Charan Verma's Hindi novel *Chitralekha* (1933) and Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar's Marathi novel *Yayati* (1959). Recognizing it as 'the fundamental moral dilemmas' treated for very long in Hindu traditions, he tries to develop 'the notion of the tension between the two extremes of asceticism (*tapas*) and eroticism (*kamukta*) which the life of the householder has to overcome" (12). The ideal Hindu solution is not a simple harmonization of opposites,' but 'the cultivation of a moral sensibility which carries one beyond having to make moral choices and coerce oneself into a particular course of action' (13).

Madan examines the three texts in the context of culture-nature dichotomy. 'The human being as a fully conscious or autonomous moral agent (a Socrates-like figure) is...the ideal Samskara puts forward; but it is an ideal difficult to realize, for no human being living in society may hope to make all his or her own moral choices without taking away from the autonomy of

others. Moral choices thus generate moral dilemmas with no easy solutions' (*Non-Renunciation*: 96).

Rajagopal Parthasarathy's essay on '*Samskara*: The Passing of the Brahmin Tradition' (1998), written in a sympathetic vein, is 'an elegy for the passing of the once resonant Brahmin tradition' (190). He suggests that the novel in which the writer has tried to come to terms with 'his own oppressive Madhava Brahmin past', could be read 'as an initiation story focusing on an individual's movement from innocence to maturity through contact with experience' (191). Like the Rishyashringa of the Mahabharat, Pranesacharya enters the real world after his baptism of passion with Chandri. But the central question of his spiritual regeneration, the author says, is left unresolved and with it 'the question of the regeneration of Brahman India.' He ends his paper by saying that the questions that the Acharya asks of himself are 'the questions Brahmans must ask themselves if they expect to continue to preserve their identity' (198).

Meenakshi Mukherjee's lucid essay (1985) begins by repudiating Naipaul's charge that *Samskara* dealt with 'a barbaric civilization,' saying that the significance of the novel lies in the attempt to exploit the tension between an ethos 'where identity is determined by *karma* and *varna* on the one hand and 'a new awareness of self.' (*Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*: 167)

In the course of her long essay she offers a very perceptive critical commentary on the novel, noticing the use of allegory and also of the metaphors of the serpent and the tiger and that of the journey. She also draws attention to Lukacs's useful distinction between the epic hero and the problematic hero of the novel, saying that the epic is always about 'the destiny of a community' and the epic hero is 'never an individual' (170). The Acharya, she says, moves from being the epic hero to the problematic hero of the novel. Also, she does not think that the novel is 'a repudiation of Hinduism and refers to the character of Putta who though unreflective and unphilosophical, is a Hindu and whose acceptance of the caste hierarchy has not hampered his 'zest for living' (180).

Heidrun Bruckner's 30-page long essay (1994) on intertexuality in *Samskara* is intended to pay attention, among other things, to an area neglected so far, namely the intertextual dimension of the novel. He tries to show that this dimension constitutes a kind of 'mythological subconscious' of the novel. 'The novel is pervaded by images and comparisons stemming from ancient and medieval Indian mythology and literature, which do not serve a limited function in their respective context but provide an alternative conceptual framework' (154).

A useful volume of criticism on *Samskara* has come out recently. Entitled U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara:* A Critical Reader (2005), it offers a critical survey of the criticism on the novel and also selected essays by different scholars following a variety of approaches. You will do well to sample it.

For a change let us now hear what the author has to say — not about his own work but his report of how others have responded to his novel. Here is what he said in Part II of his lecture on 'Tradition and Creativity' (1990):

'In my village everyone thought *Samskara* was a totally realistic novel and they identified every character with a living person in the agrahara. And when I went back to my village the woman next door said, 'O Anantha, you have created Chandri perfectly.' Each and every character was real. And the novel was considered against some people in the village. Now you come to Shimoga, the district headquarters, and see how the novel is read there. There it was seen as a novel against the Madhava Brahmins. It became a little abstract. Not against some characters, but against one set of characters. They said it was anti-Madhava. In Bangalore it was anti-Brahmin. It became more abstract. When Naipaul read it, he found it anti-Hindu. Again more abstract And to Eric Erickson the novel was a representation of the crisis of middle age. It became totally universal.' (*Literature and Culture*, 121-22).... 'And now many of my radical friends say that it [*Samskara*] is a Pro-Brahmin novel, that I have really championed the cause of Brahmins' (122).

Anantha Murthy's comments don't end there. In an interview in 1996, he reported much the same things and added the following questions: "What I want to ask here is this: Which is my novel? Whose response is truer from the point of view of the printed text — my own people in the agrahara who read it literally, or the people from other cultures who read it symbolically? (Meenakshi Sharma, ed. *Wordsmiths* [1996], 58)

Anantha Murthy's are valid questions. But these questions in turn further raise the question of the reader response theories. As Vanamala Vishwanatha, the co-translator of *Samskara* into Swedish says, 'meaning is not something that inheres 'as truth' in the text but something that is tenuously created by the active mediation of readers, who deconstruct the text based on their own location and ideological make-up.' (***Samskara:* A Critical Reader:** 235) So if you find yourself disagreeing with what has been suggested in the study material or by any of the critics, take heart. Only be prepared to buttress your reading with arguments and examples from the text.

A final word. As adults you should be able to devise your own strategy of reading and coming to grips with the text. But whatever you do, remember that a thorough grounding in the text is indispensable for any independent understanding of it.

4.5 CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF *SAMSKARA*

The plain question is: what is the relevance of Anantha Murthy's novel *Samskara* today? The novel is grounded in a small orthodox Madhav Brahmin colony in a remote Karnataka village. The timing of the events is the 1930's or the 1940's. Much of the caste rigidity depicted in the novel is perhaps gone. But caste hierarchy is still far from being extinct and Brahminism, though not as predominant as before, still enjoys enormous prestige. That being the case, it is good to see the wholesome spectacle of a Brahmin writer subjecting a decadent brahminism to a ruthless, sometimes even savage criticism. Such ruthless literary self-examinations need to continue if we are to keep moving towards the idea of equality of castes. *Samskara* provides an excellent example.

The novel is relevant also because the vision that its writer has seen, which is glimpsed in this novel but articulated sure definitely in another novel *Bharthipura* (Eg. Transl 1996), still remains unrealized today. I am referring to the ideal of a casteless society envisioned by its leading character, Jaganatha Rao, in *Bharthipura*. Giving details of his dreams, the character says: 'An Indian would attain real dignity only when it became possible for a Brahmin boy to desire a dark-skinned untouchable girl with flowers in her hair, only when a Brahmin girl longed to be hugged by coarse-haired and dark-skinned untouchable boy' (203-04). In *Samskara* we see a preview of this dream in the union between the ascetic and learned Brahmin Pranesacharya and the low-caste Chandri in the forest. As has been pointed out earlier, this sexual union, modeled on the union between sage Parashara and fisherwoman Matsyagandha, has been given central importance in the novel. It has in fact been romanticized and valourized and the suggestion is that unless such a paradigm shift takes place, the desirable change will still be far off.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Samskara captures a moment in India's transition from tradition to modern times. This is a subject in which we are all interested and in which all of us have a stake. Moreover, here you are on your home ground and it should engage your attention as most non-Indian texts may not. The novel is grounded in brahminical India. It attacks it fiercely and the attack is at times savage but the question to ask is : Does do you think the novel repudiate Hinduism?

Ponder over the other problems raised in the novel and try and connect the characters you come across in it with those around you. In fact one exercise that you could undertake is to make a list of those social evils that stand in the way of modern India. Do you think Putta is a character whom you may meet in real life? And what about the Acharya? Are their people of his kind even today? This exercise should help you fix these fictional characters clearly in your mind and even fetch you good marks in the examinations.

4.7 GLOSSARY

For glossary please consult the notes provided by A.K. Ramanujan to the Oxford edition of the translated text, pages 145-53. These notes explain all the references that a reader is likely to need while reading the novel and will help him/her to understand the text better.

The translator has retained a few local and Sanskrit words in his translation.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the title of the novel with particular focus on those meanings that have been used in the novel.

2. Are you satisfied with the way the novel ends? Discuss with concrete arguments.
3. What is the importance of the sexual union between the Acharya and Chandri?
4. Why has the writer chosen Chandri and Putta to catalyse the change in the Acharya? Discuss their role in the Acharya's efforts to redefine himself as an individual.
5. What are your personal views about the contemporary relevance of the novel?
6. What are the major things that the Acharya thinks of during his journey?
7. Which character(s) do you like most in the novel? Why?
8. Do you agree with the view that the novel is a complete repudiation of the brahminism? Give arguments in favour of or against the proposition.

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MAEN-116

Contemporary Indian Literature In English Translation

Block

3

TAMAS : Bhisham Sahni

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The course **Contemporary Indian Literature in English Translation** exposes you to the literatures written in Regional Languages and available in English translation. In Block 3 we are discussing *Tamas*, one of the greatest novel ever written in Hindi on the theme of partition. Partition, as you know has been a cataclysmic event in the destiny of India with far reaching consequences that continue to affect our lives even today.

Five units make up Block 3. In the first unit we introduce you to the author Bhisham Sahni and *Tamas* as a **partition novel**. The second unit provides you chapter wise summaries of Part 1, 2 and 3. The third unit contains aspects of the narrative and the theme and language of *Tamas*. The fourth unit is on characters and characterization and finally the fifth unit overviews the novel also high lighting literary criticism on *Tamas* and *Tamas* as a TV serial.

You must however *get hold of a copy of the novel and read it*. You could then come to this Block and read the novel again with the help of summaries.

Here is a typical conversation that a teacher often has with students.

Teacher: Have you read the novel?
Student: Yes, sir, I have read it.
Teacher: You mean you have read a summary of the novel?
Student: Yes, sir, I have read only a summary of it.
Teacher: And you have read the summary of it in Hindi?
Student: Yes, sir, I have read the summary in Hindi.
Teacher: And you have not read the summary of it in English?
Student: No, sir, I haven't.

This is how the conversation usually goes. Some students tend to assume that reading a summary of the novel is equivalent to reading the novel itself. This of course is fallacious. There is no other way but to read the novel.

We hope that having read the novel you find reading the Block enjoyable and an interesting experience. We have also provided you with a list of novels and short stories in Hindi and Punjabi in English translation dealing with the theme of partition. We hope that this will further motivate you to read more on partition literature.

Acknowledgement of help rendered by Mrs. A. Malathy, Lecturer in Editing, IGNOU

UNIT 1 THE WRITER AND THE PARTITION

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Life and Work of Bhisham Sahni
1.3 How the Novel *Tamas* Began
1.4 The Partition of 1947
1.5 Partition Novels in Hindi
1.6 Let Us Sum Up
1.7 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to familiarize you with essential facts about partition and about the author of *Tamas* and about some other partition novels in Hindi. After reading the unit you should be able to understand the basic facts of Partition and its consequences and the treatment of Partition by Hindi writers.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Tamas ('Darkness') can broadly be called a novel of partition. I say 'broadly' because it doesn't deal with partition as such but with events that occurred in 1946 and the forces underlying them that prefigured partition. Originally written in Hindi in 1974, the novel was published by Vikas Publishers in an English translation by Jai Rattan in 1981 under the title *Kites Will Fly*. A revised English translation was published as *Tamas* by Penguin in 1988 with an introduction by Govind Nihalani who had made the novel into a very popular and, as it turned out, a controversial serial. The author's own translation of the novel appeared in 2001. For the purpose of discussion in this Block we have referred to the Penguin 2001 edition. The novel has been translated into several Indian languages also and is now studied in many Indian universities as part of courses of study and has become a classic.

The novel received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975. "*Tamas* is considered an outstanding contribution of Hindi literature for its artistic control, a firm grasp of reality, excellence of characterization, and its humanity and authenticity of experience," says the Akademi citation. So closely did he come to be identified with *Tamas* that one TV announcer said on his death: "Tamas Bhisham is no more".

1.2 LIFE AND WORK OF BHISHAM SAHNI

Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003) lived in Rawalpindi and later in Lahore before partition and the novel, *Tamas*, he says, is partly based on his experiences there. Here are the details of his career.

Born:	Rawalpindi, 8th August, 1915.
Died:	11th July, 2003.
Education:	M.A. (Eng) at Govt. College, Lahore, 1937; Ph.D.
Career:	Joined his father's business at Rawalpindi and worked there for several years; taught at a local college in an honorary capacity.

Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003)

After partition came to Bombay and then to Delhi and started teaching at Delhi College (later Zakir Hussain College), Delhi.

First collection of short stories, *Bhagya Rekha*, published in 1953; second anthology, *Pahla Paath* (1956).

Worked as a translator in Moscow for about seven years from 1957, translated some twenty books including Tolstoy into Hindi.

Edited *Nai Kahaniyan*, 1965-67; third anthology of short stories, *Bhatakti Raakh* (1965).

Tamas (1973); was awarded Sahitya Akademi Award (1975); also received the "Shiromani Lekhak Award" from the Punjab Government the same year.

Won the Lotus Award from the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, 1980; won several other awards also. Nine short story collections, seven novels, six full-length plays, a book of essays, a collection of short stories for children; *My Brother Balraj*, a biography of his brother, Balraj Sahni and an autobiography, *Aaj ke Ateet*.

Has been connected with IPTA and the Progressive Writers' Association. Perhaps the most important thing about Bhisham Sahni is that his writing springs from deep social commitment.

1.3 HOW THE NOVEL *TAMAS* BEGAN

Tamas was written some twenty-five years after partition. In an interview with Pankaj K.Singh in 1995, Bhisham Sahni said: 'It was not the Partition alone, it was the continuance of that atmosphere of separatism, charged with communal tensions which became a disturbing factor.' (*Indian Literature*, [167], 90) In another interview with Alok Bhalla, the writer was more specific: 'I wrote the novel because when I went to Bhiwandi, I suddenly remembered the Rawalpindi riots [of 1926]. I happened to see the riots in Bhiwandi. Some of the things I saw there were so similar to what I had experienced at Rawalpindi that I started writing. And then one thing suggested another...I myself figure in my novel—in scenes where I describe the activities of the Congress. I participated in *prabhat pheries*.' When asked if he had actually participated in them, he said he had: 'As a matter of fact, when the first stone throwing took place I was there...I mention that in my novel....You know the Congress *tameeri* programme used to take us to certain localities to clean gutters...I used to go along with my comrades, the Congress people. We also used to visit predominantly Muslim areas.' Later he said that '*part of the novel is autobiographical. But the center of it is not about my own experiences. It is concerned with more general experiences*' (*Pangs*, II, 90-91).

No wonder that Bhiwandi acted as a catalytic agent that made him write a novel on the theme of communalism and its disastrous consequences for a multi-religious, pluralistic country like India. The novel is thus Janus-faced: it looks at the events that prefigured partition in his home town in 1946 and it is relevant for modern India where the problem of communalism threatens to disrupt the secular, democratic fabric of the country.

1.4 THE PARTITION OF 1947

A few points could be made about the partition.

1. Partition is one of the two cataclysmic events that have shaped the destiny of India during the last 150 years. The first was the Great Indian Uprising of 1857.

2. India got divided into two parts. The new India became free on 15th August 1947; Pakistan carved out of India came into being a day earlier. It comprised the Muslim majority provinces of erstwhile India and also the Muslim majority areas of Bengal and Punjab.

   There were at least three major political forces at work in pre-partition India. These were: the British rulers with their policy of 'divide and rule', the Indian National Congress with its nationalistic secular

agenda and the Muslim League with its two nation theory and its mind set on the goal of a separate homeland for Muslims particularly after 1940.

3. The human cost of partition was colossal. Nearly 12 million people gave up their home and hearth and crossed the newly formed frontiers. Of these more than 10 million people crossed the Punjab border. A million people were slaughtered or died of malnutrition and diseases. Inevitably sexual savagery was widespread. According to Urvashi Butalia's estimate, about 75 thousand women were probably abducted and raped by men professing religions other than their own. A large number of abducted women were recovered and sent back to their families but there were also cases where the families refused to own the 'tainted women'. Besides, there were cases of women who refused to go back to their families.

   As for Indian Muslims, thousands of Indian families got divided with some members of the family crossing over to Pakistan. The refugees travelled in all sorts of ways including walking to their destination on foot in great columns called *kafilas*. The writer of this unit saw one such *kafila* that comprised Meos from the Mewat area of what is now Haryana. His own teacher of Mathematics probably formed part of this *kafila*. The tragedy was that this *kafila* had to return to India.

4. There were conversions galore but there were also those who chose to die rather than accept the other faith.

5. Partition was a multi-dimensional tragedy. What compounded the tragedy was the total failure of the government to foresee the disastrous consequences of the decisions that had been unleashed on unsuspecting people.

6. There is no dearth of material on partition and huge tomes have been written discussing the factors that led to it. Inevitably the names of leaders like Nehru, Jinnah and Mountbatten have come under close scrutiny. But these political discussions miss the human dimension of the tragedy. This human dimension has been made available to us largely through literature and memoirs.

7. We are not done with partition yet. I need hardly say that the cataclysmic event of partition has had a strong effect on our psyche. It may be a part of our history but it is also a part of our consciousness and it continues to exercise a powerful influence on the values that we cherish. It is a subject that is extremely sensitive and emotional, and arouses strong reactions, particularly among those who have suffered or whose parents have suffered in partition.

In north India it is lodged in individual and collective memories. Urvashi Butalia has produced a whole book based on individual memories of how ordinary people have viewed partition, what it means to have lost one's home and country and friends and how they have coped with the trauma of dislocation and rebuilt their lives. Partition is still with us in another, more dangerous sense. Events like the Sikh massacre of 1984, the Sabarmati

Express burning and the Godhra **massacre** that followed it are painful reminders of the fact that communal passions are still highly volatile and can flare up any time. In other words we still need to come to terms with it. How can we? Literature perhaps offers us a hope.

Clearly the interest in a novel on partition is not merely academic. It involves a large number of us emotionally. In such a situation, a writer on partition has a double responsibility. First, s/he must be true to himself/herself and to his/her subject. But he must also ensure that s/he is authentic and balanced and compassionate and in the ultimate analysis non-judgmental. S/he cannot afford to be partisan; s/he cannot afford to be seen taking sides. Above all s/he must have an abiding faith in human goodness.

It has been suggested that we should erase the wounds of partition from our minds, that we should induce a state of amnesia and forget the painful memories of partition. **But can we?** The noted Hindi writer Krishna Sobti once said that **partition was an experience that was difficult to forget but dangerous to remember**. Indeed, however painful and dangerous, the reality of partition is inescapable and one cannot wish it away. Neither, for that matter, would it do to romanticize the relations between the communities, as is sometimes done. This is particularly evident in a stereotypical motif that is resorted to in Indian fiction on partition: love between a Hindu/Sikh girl and a Muslim boy or vice versa. Witness *Train to Pakistan*. It is imperative for us to realize that since we cannot erase those painful memories, we need to come to terms with them, face them in all their brutal reality. Only then perhaps would we be able to exercise the ghost of those times. There is absolutely no reason to whitewash these memories. We all know what Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims did to each other. In general, I think we have been less than honest and open about partition. Writers sometimes say what they think is politically correct. Hence we take resort to comfortable stereotypes. But we don't need to. For if we have been barbaric, there are perhaps other memories that are more human and that reinforce our faith in the essential goodness of man and that promote the ideal of communal living and the idea of a plural society. One cannot of course be prescriptive about what one should write and what one should not but I think we can certainly say with Mushirul Hasan that we need literature that does not apportion blame ('What political debate will never fully do — and the reason we so badly need literature — is to defeat the urge to lay the blame, which keeps animosity alive.') (*Pangs* II, 184) Literature that does this is more likely to heal our wounded and fragmented society than otherwise. The question to ask about *Tamas* is: Does our novel do that or does it not?

1.5 PARTITION NOVELS IN HINDI

Partition novels in Hindi could be grouped into two broad categories—those that deal with events and forces that presage partition and those that deal with partition itself and its consequences. The first category includes novels like **Nishikant** (1958) by Vishnu Prabhakar, **Sati Maiyya ka Chaura [The Platform of Sati Mother]** (1959) by Bhairav Prasad Gupt, **Laute Huve Musaafir [The Migrants Who Came Back]** by Kamleswar (1971), **Tamas [Darkness]** (1974) by Bhisham Sahni and Yashpal's **Meri Teri Uski Baat[Between you him and me]** (1974). Of these writers, Bhisham Sahni and

Yashpal lived in undivided Punjab while the others present a preview of partition from this side of the border.

The other category includes **Aur Insaan Mar Gayaa** [And Man Died] (1948) by Ramanand Sagar, **Dharmaputra** (1954) by Acharya Chatursen Shastri, **Jhootha Sach [The False Truth]** (Part one) (1960) by Yashpal and **Aadha Gaon[Half the Village]** (1966) by Rahi Masoom Raza. There is a third category also consisting of those novels that deal with much later events. In this category fall two novels: **Tat ke Bandhan [The Bonds of the Bank] (1955)** by Vishnu Prabhakar and **Jhootha Sach [The False Truth]** (Part two) by Yashpal.

Besides, there are a large number of short stories on the theme of partition. Some of the well-known writers and their stories are: Agyeya ('Sharandataa' [The Refuge-giver]), Badiuzzaman ('Antim Ichha' [The Last Wish]), Krishna Sobti ('Sikka Badal Gaya') [The Coin has Changed], Bhisham Sahni('Amritsar Aa Gayaa Hai') [Amritsar has Arrived.] and Mohan Rakesh ('Malbe ka Maalik') [The Owner of the Debris]. There are others too.

Of the novels in the first group **Nishikant (1958)** by Vishnu Prabhakar covering a span of 19 years from the advent of Gandhi to the beginning of the Second World War in 1939 probes the causes of the communal divide between Hindus and Muslims. The immediate cause of it is the communal riot over the issue of an illegally constructed mosque. The outbreak leads to increasing distrust, uncertainty and hatred between the communities. Religion plays a major part in causing this divide. However, there is another character Riyaz who attributes the Hindu-Muslim conflict not to religion but to economic disparity. There is a third diagnosis also. Habib Sahab holds that Hindus of whatever complexion and Muslims are competing to wrest power. The idealistic youth Nishikant who is the central character, however says that there are several aspects of it — religious, economic and communal. But in spite of the increasing animosity, there are people like the Muslim fruit-seller who, while trying to rescue a Hindu neighbour, throws himself on his body. The rescuer is described a Muslim but is actually a *man*.

Taking a Marxist viewpoint, Bhairav Prasad Gupt in his novel **Sati Maiyya ka Chaura** (1959) considers economic inequality to be the chief cause of the communal conflict. So the most important remedy for it, he believes, is in raising the class consciousness of the people. Communal conflict, he says, is a gift of feudalism. At one time the fights, always aimed at wresting power, were between Hindu rulers and Muslim rulers; with the coming in of the English, they became fights between Hindu rajas and capitalists and Muslim rajas and capitalists. It was always the poor, whether Hindus or Muslims, who were exploited. At one place Gupt suggests that the problem was political, not religious and that the right kind of politics would finish off the problem.

Bhairav Prasad Gupt locates his novel in a village somewhere in U.P. and the central character in his novel is an enlightened Muslim landlord Manne. His friendship with Munni who is a communist provides the author with an excuse to discuss communal problems and the problem of partition. Sati Maiyya's chaura, which gives the book its name, is used as a pretext for intensifying Hindu-Muslim conflict, so much so that it becomes a symbol of it. But ultimately the chaura or the platform is dug up because it is no longer

considered necessary. This is a sign of the rise of a new consciousness that the author wishes to see inculcated among the people.

Laute Huve Musafir [The Migrants Who Came Back] (1971) by Kamleswar is a novella that focuses on how the communal virus brought in by League activists from Aligarh and later by Hindu fanatics in the mid 1940's vitiates the peaceful atmosphere of a small unnamed basti inhabited by people of the lower, middle and labouring classes. Starting as a spark, the communal fire becomes a conflagration that devastates the entire place. Kamleswar delineates the subtle psychological changes that take place among the people under the impact of the forces of separation. The advocates of Pakistan raise hopes of a new dawn of prosperity for Muslims but the basti Muslims either do not go to the promised land — and if they do, some of them come back disillusioned. Like other novels, this novel too upholds human values through characters like Naseeban who looks after the motherless children of a Hindu neighbour.

In Yashpal's Sahitya Akademi award winning novel **Meri Teri Uski Baat** [Between You Him and Me] (1974) the growing Hindu-Muslim divide in 1944 and 1945 appears as a backdrop to the relationship between Amar and Usha. The writer hints at the causes of the divide and holds the English chiefly responsible for the partition. Jinnah is shown explaining to the 'Hindustan Times' correspondent Durgadas that he did not sign the Simla Agreement because he had been promised Pakistan.

Tamas [Darkness] (1974) by Bhisham Sahni has been dealt with in detail in this Block.

Now a few words about the novels that depict the partition itself and its horrors.

First among these is Ramanand Sagar's novel **Aur Insaan Mar Gayaa [And Man Died]** that appeared in 1948. Written in Urdu first and then translated into Hindi, it is the first novel to appear on partition and also perhaps the most heartrending. As suggested by its title it presents a picture, at once realistic and gruesome, of the horrors perpetrated on both sides of the border, which are enough to put humanity to shame. But the darkness is redeemed by examples of humanity and spirit displayed by characters such as Anand, Maulana and Nirmala. This is one of those novels that are based on first hand knowledge. Sagar was in Lahore at that time.

Dharmaputra (1954) by Acharya Chatursen Shastri exposes the hollowness of religious fanaticism. At the center is a young man who is a fanatical Hindu in the troubled times of partition but when he discovers that he is a Muslim by birth, he is deeply repentant for his past madness.

In **Jootha Sach** [The False Truth] two parts *Watan aur Desh* [The Native land and the Country] in 1958 and *Desh ka Bhavishya*[The Future of the Country] in 1960, Yashpal comes close to writing a novel of epic proportions. In Part One he presents a most realistic, vivid and moving picture of what partition meant to the people of Lahore during a crucial period in the life of the country, the months from March to August 1947. He works on a broad canvas and though the central narrative principally moves round the figures of the young journalist Jaidev Puri and his sister Tara, — there are of course numerous other important characters — he succeeds in capturing the sights and sounds

of life in pre-partition Lahore. Since Yashpal is a Marxist, there is in the novel a communist party worker Asad to whom Tara feels drawn but nothing comes of their romance and she is forced into a disastrous marriage. Tara's brother goes to Nainital in search of a job and there is rioting in the city. At the end of Part One we see a shattered Tara, who, separated from the family, moves in a refugee bus to Amritsar 'leaving behind her native land and entering a country of her own.'

In Part Two which is much less engaging, the writer touches upon several things including the plight of refugees and condition of women in refugee camps but most of all on political leaders who misuse the system to their own advantage. The last scene in the novel shows the self-serving Sood losing in an election, with the author saying through one of the characters that the future of the country lies not in the hands of its political leaders, but its people.

Like Kamleswar, Rahi Masoom Raza in **Aadha Gaon** (1966) focuses on village Gangauli in Ghazipur district in U.P., half of which is inhabited by Shia Muslims. Raza demolishes the myth that all Muslims on this side of the border supported Pakistan. He shows how the simple minds of the villagers react to the idea of Pakistan. So fiercely are they attached to their land that the propagandists for Pakistan find it hard to convince them of the need for a separate home land for Muslims. The only people who supported the Pakistan demand were the Muslim zamindars. Raza also shows how partition had disrupted the lives of Muslim families.

Among other novels on partition is Badiuzzaman's **Wapsi** (1980), which focuses on the plight of Bihari Muslims who came back from Pakistan. This brief survey, though far from being exhaustive, does give you an idea of the lines along which Hindi novelists viewed the colossal tragedy of partition.

A few general points could be made:

1. All the Hindi writers referred to above generally write from a settled belief in secular and human values that go beyond religion, region and community.
2. The writing is imbued with a sense of great loss and despair and bewilderment at the unprecedented tragedy. The writing also gives redeeming examples of the triumph of human spirit and also human values cutting across all categories of religion and class.
3. The writing also demolishes the myth held by some people that Muslims on this side of the border were *en bloc* in favour of the creation of Pakistan. The plight of those Muslims who chose to go over to Pakistan or those who stayed back has also been dealt with in some novels.
4. The writers also brought into sharp focus the atrocities committed on women on both sides of the border. The issue of the recovery and rehabilitation of abducted women during partition also figures in some of the novels. The short Punjabi novel **Pinjar** [Skeleton] by Amrita Pritam (which was made into a film recently and is also available in an English translation by Khushwant Singh) and Urdu writer, Rajinder Singh Bedi's story 'Lajwanti' deal with the human issues involved in such rehabilitation. Do find time to read them or at least see the film.

A useful collection to consult would be Alok Bhalla's three volume anthology entitled *Stories about the Partition of India* (1994).

Finally, whatever else you read, do read Urdu writer Sa'dat Hasan Manto's short stories like 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Khol Do' [Untie It] and Siyah Hashiye [Dark Borders].

1.6 LET US SUM UP

The partition of the country in 1947 on the basis of the two-nation theory and the bloodbath that accompanied it has been a most traumatic event in the history of the subcontinent. Though it took place more than fifty years back, the partition is still with us in the form of lacerating memories and in the social and political domain in the form of communal flare-ups and we need to come to terms with it. Literature that is compassionate and non-judgmental and that upholds the ideal of a pluralistic society perhaps offers the only hope to bind old wounds and give a healing touch. *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni based partly on his own experiences in Rawalpindi is a fine attempt in this direction. It is on this text that the students are advised to focus.

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. What are the two most important events that have convulsed India during the last 150 years?

2. Reflect on the problem of communalism, discuss it with your friends and write your own perception of it in a brief essay.

3. How do you think we as a nation can tackle this problem? Suggest concrete steps.

UNIT 2 GETTING TO KNOW THE TEXT

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Detailed Summaries
  2.2.1 Part-I
  2.2.2 Part-II
2.3 Let Us Sum Up
2.4 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit gives you a critical summary of each chapter of *Tamas* followed by some questions and /or comments that would help you to get to the heart of the novel. We hope that after first reading the novel and then reading the novel again with the help of the summaries you will be able to critically analyse the novel.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Tamas is a novel in 3 Parts. The novel is set in motion by Nathu's act of killing of a pig at night at the behest of Murad Ali and its being thrown at the entrance of a mosque in a large town of West Punjab. This leads to eruption of violence and arson and looting in the town and in the neighbouring villages. The administration finally decides to take action and law and order are restored and there is an uneasy peace in the area.

2.2 DETAILED SUMMARIES

2.2.1 Part-I

Chapter 1 (first day, early morning) *Nathu is commissioned by Murad Ali to kill a pig for the veterinary surgeon.*

The novel opens with Nathu, a skinner, trying to kill a pig at the behest of Murad Ali. The carcass of the pig, said Murad Ali, was needed by the veterinary surgeon and Nathu must finish the work by four o'clock in the morning. He had been told to wait for a pushcart to come and pick the carcass up. He had never killed a pig before and he had told this to Murad Ali but he wouldn't listen. There were many pigs wandering around and he was asked to entice one into his hut and kill it. Murad Ali had given him five rupees for it. Murad Ali was a useful man. He was a man of contacts, particularly in the Municipality and often helped Nathu get dead animals to skin. So he couldn't refuse him.

The work of killing the pig proved very tough. He tried all possible ways to kill it but failed. He felt himself to be entrapped and regretted accepting the assignment. Finally, in desperation he picked up a slab of stone and threw it on the pig. Thereafter he went outside for a breath of fresh air.

The cool air brought him some relief. He longed to be with his buxom wife but he had come away without telling her anything.

When Nathu went back into the hut, the pig started moving again but died soon after. Soon he heard the sound of a jolting pushcart approaching. It was apparently coming to take the pig to the veterinary surgeon. Nathu was greatly relieved.

The next we hear of the pig is later in the morning when the pig is found at the entrance of a mosque.

Comments/Questions

- In this chapter we are in the mind of Nathu: his feelings, his incomprehension of why he has been asked to do the deed and the inextricable situation he finds himself in.

- Do you think that the narrator has added anything to the narrative by way of comments or remarks? No, he hasn't. This, you will find, is characteristic of most of the novel. The writer leaves it to us the readers to draw our own conclusions. This requires you to be active and alert as readers.

- What impression do you form of Nathu, the skinner?

Chapter 2 (first day, early morning) *The Congress prabhat pheri starts for its usual round.*

It was about 4 o'clock in the morning when Congress activists, both young and old, stood outside the Congress office waiting for their compatriots to join them for the *prabhat pheri* that they took out every day in different localities of the town. Among those who were present were Mehtaji, President of the District Congress Committee, Bakshiji, Secretary of the District Congress Committee, Aziz, Kashmiri Lal, Shankar, Master Ram Das who led the singing and Jarnail, a middle aged Sikh who was fanatically devoted to the cause of freedom and was ever ready to make speeches.

Much of the conversation was marked by needling, taunts and leg pulling.

The first to suffer satiric needling was the thickset, elderly Bakshiji who had spent 16 years in jail, at the hands of Aziz who recited a couplet on his late coming. Mehtaji, always immaculately dressed, was Shankar's target. Shankar had a pique against Mehtaji because the latter had not included his name among the district representatives to a conference to be addressed by Pandit Nehru. Shankar in turn was instrumental in getting Mehtaji's favourite, Mr. Kohli's name deleted from the list of district representatives to the Provincial Committee for not wearing khadi. Eccentric Jarnail, ever ready to make a speech, was asked by Kashmiri Lal to make one. It was with great difficulty that he was made to stop.

Master Ram Das came panting for breath and informed them that instead of the *prabhat pheri*, it had been decided to do 'constructive work' that day. Brooms and shovels and iron pans were already in Sher Khan's house.

Bakshiji then asked Ram Das to lead the singing, Kashmiri Lal picked up the tricolour, Jarnail started to shout 'Left, Right', and their round started and headed towards Dhok Qutab-ud Din.

Comments/Questions

- The origin of the Mehta — Shankar tiff, mentioned briefly in the summary, comes to us in a flashback. Keep a note of other episodes that come to us through flashback.

- Is the presentation of the Congress activists favourable or unfavourable? Which words or sentences tell you?

- Bakshiji's entry is announced through this sentence: 'The light of the lamp fell only on the man's legs so it seemed as though only a pair of pajamas was walking along' (12).

- Do you think this is an objective description? Is the narrator being ironical?

- Keep notes on characters like Jarnail, Bakshiji and Mehtaji.

- Comrade Dev Datt is first mentioned by Jarnail on page 16. Keep track of him because he will play an important part later in the novel.

Chapter 3 *Nathu roams the streets, witnesses a confrontation between Congress and Muslim League activists.*

Meanwhile, Nathu freed from the obnoxious task, heaved a sigh of relief and passed through the different lanes of the town. He was keen to reach home. The atmosphere was calm and peaceful. People were getting ready for a new day. The sights and sounds were familiar. Women were waiting for water at the municipal tap or going to the temple or the gurdwara. He saw a fakir with an *ektaara* singing a song to rouse the people from their sleep. He gave him a *paisa* and earned his blessings in return. He then heard the chiming of the Sheikh's tower-clock and the temple bells and the *azan* from the mosque behind Imam Din Street.

He came across a spell placed by an unfortunate woman to shift her misfortune to someone else. But since he was childless, the spell did not bother him. Later he found his foot in a pitcher containing cow dung and horse urine placed outside the house of a miser to induce rain.

He suddenly started wondering in which direction the pushcart would be going! Towards the cantonment? But what did the veterinary surgeon need the pig for? Then he dismissed the whole thing from his mind.

He walked along the railing of the municipal grounds opposite the Imam Din Street. The municipal grounds were the hub of activities of the town. Dog

fights, pegging contests, circus shows, Muslim League meetings — all were held here. The Congress meetings were held in the Grain Market.

He didn't have a clear idea of the developments taking place around him. He witnessed a confrontation between the Congress activists and the Muslim League members. The latter were insisting that the Congressmen should admit that the Congress was a party of the Hindus, which was contradicted by the Congress activists. Nathu also spotted Murad Ali but slinked out lest the man should ask him why he was loitering there. Murad Ali's instructions were for him to wait for him in the hut but he had come away.

Comments/Questions

- Do you think the presentation of the morning scene realistic? List the details that make you think so.

Chapter 4 (first day, morning) Richard tells his wife, Liza about the British Policy towards Indians.

Richard the young Deputy Commissioner of the district and his wife Liza were out riding their horses. Liza had rejoined her husband after six months' stay in England. Richard was interested in art objects and history and had a huge collection of Buddha heads and other specimen of Indian folk art and tried to make her interested in these things. He also suggested that as the wife of the Deputy Commissioner she should take the lead in social work but all this didn't interest her at all. So she spent her time sleeping or drinking beer. Richard told her about the communal tension in the town. He said that while Hindus and Muslims fought against them for freedom, they fought each other in the name of religion. Liza corrected him to say that it was they (the Englishmen) who made them fight each other. Richard said that they left it to the two communities to resolve their differences and added that if the subjects fought each other, the ruler was safe.

Comments/Questions

- A major focus of the novel is the British ruling class. Richard and Liza appear several times later also. Why does the writer give them such a lot of attention in the novel?

- What is the core of the British rulers' policy in India?

- Is Richard's interest in Indian civilization genuine or is it divorced from sympathy?

Chapter 5 *Congress activists engage in constructive work in a Muslim mohalla. Bakshiji and Jarnail remove the carcass of the pig from the entrance of a mosque.*

When the Congress activists reached the Imam Din Mohalla where they were to do constructive work, dawn was brightening into day. They had picked up brooms and shovels and *taslas* from Sher Khan's house and started cleaning the place.

It was a poor Muslim locality, which was almost like a village with only one kachcha drain. The 'constructive work' they had started doing elicited varied

comments from the residents. A tonga driver seeing Bakshiji sweep the ground insisted on Bakshiji's giving his broom to him. On the other hand an elderly person commented that by taking the filth out they were spreading disease. Another elderly pious-looking person praised them for their 'goodness of heart' and their 'nobility of purpose'.

While they were busy cleaning, there was a sudden tension in the air. Stones started flying. A man came running and talked to the local residents with violent gestures. The elderly man who had been effusive in his praise for their work also came back and asked them to clear out at once if they didn't want to be skinned alive. They were all bewildered and stopped all work. Then they saw the carcass of a pig lying at the entrance of a mosque.

They were all nonplussed. Mehtaji was against their trying to remove the carcass from the mosque. But Bakshiji was firm. Finally he and Jarnail removed the dead pig from the entrance of the mosque and dragged it down and concealed it from view.

Just then a cow came running towards them in terror being pursued by a young man.

Bakshiji stood still with anxiety, pale and gloomy. He said: '*It seems kites and vultures will hover over the town for a long time.*'

Comments/Questions

- Which character or characters appear in the most sympathetic light in the scene? Why?

- Why does Bakshiji insist upon removing the dead pig from the mosque? What does it show about his character?

Chapter 6 (late morning) *Hindu steps for self-defense; Ranvir's initiation.*

The weekly *satsang* ended with the chanting of Vedic mantras by Vanprasthiji in impeccable Sanskrit. In the mantras he wished every living being to lead a happy and contented life. Then followed the *Shanti Path*, which also sought the well being of every living being. He didn't favour reciting the traditional *aarti* because it contained self-deprecating sentiments such as "I am a fool, a lout, O Lord' which had a demoralizing effect on the singer. Later there was another meeting of core members to which representatives of another Hindu organization and of the local Gurdwara Committee were invited to discuss preparations for self-defense. Vanprasthiji set the tone by reciting a couplet that condemned the Muslims. He straight suggested that each house should store a canister of linseed oil and coke and charcoal. Boiling oil could be thrown on the enemy from the roof. A suggestion to train young men in *lathi*-wielding was made for which the well-known merchant, Lala Lakshmi Narain offered to pay for purchasing 200 *lathis*. An insistent demand to send a delegation to the Deputy Commissioner to explain the Hindu viewpoint to him was also made. It was also suggested that the alarm bell installed at the Shivala temple after the riots of 1926 be repaired. It was decided to circulate the decisions regarding the storage of oil and coal to all the members and also to take a delegation to the Deputy Commissioner.

The absence of Ranvir, the 15-year old son of Lala Lakshmi Narain from home caused much unease to his father. Ranvir was at that time walking behind his preceptor, Master Dev Vrat, the organizer of the Youth Wing. He was going to be initiated.

As a child he had heard Masterji tell him stories of Rana Pratap and Shivaji. The latter had taught him to tie different kinds of knots and about fire/rain-producing arrows. He had also told his disciple that the technique to make bombs and aeroplanes was there in the Vedas.

To pass the initiation test Ranvir was directed to slaughter a hen with a knife and thus prove that he was mentally tough. Ranvir failed in his first attempt but on the second attempt was declared to have passed the test. Then Masterji dipped his hand in the blood and put a *tilak* on his forehead.

Preparations of the Youth Wing for self-defense were seriously afoot. They had collected several weapons — knives, a dagger and a *kirpan*. They also had a can of oil but no cauldron. It was decided to borrow one from the *halwai*'s shop. Luckily, though the shop was closed, the door was open. Ranvir went in along with another young man, Dharmadev. He asked his companion to pick up a cauldron. When the shopkeeper tried to resist, Ranvir struck him on the face, which made him bleed. Afterwards Ranvir felt that killing was not difficult. 'It is fighting that is difficult, particularly when the other person stands up against you. To stab a man to death is far easier.'(96) When his companion questioned Ranvir why he had hit him, he threatened him too.

Comments/Questions

- Do you notice any change of tone when the narrator is talking about Vanprasthiji and Ranvir's initiation? Earlier his tone has largely been objective and neutral?

- What attitude does the Vanprasthiji have towards Muslims? What is the term used for them? Compare it with the term used by a Muslim character for Hindus in Chapter 8(130).

Chapter 7 (first day) *Citizens' Delegation to the Deputy Commissioner for peace.*

The delegation, consisting of representatives of different organizations, was organized by Bakshiji, who was agitated because of the increasing tension in the town. Besides Bakshiji, it included Hayat Baksh of the Muslim League, Mr. Herbert, the American Principal of a local college, Prof. Raghu Nath and others. Bakshiji said to the Deputy Commissioner that they had come to talk to him about the tension in the town and wanted him to exercise his authority and take steps to ensure law and order in the town. But Richard said that power rested in the hands of Nehru. Hayat Baksh said that if the police was alerted, the situation could be brought under control in no time. When Bakshiji suggested patrolling by the police and the setting up of army pickets at different places, Richard replied that the army was not under his control. He was also not in favour of clamping a curfew for he feared that it would make the people more nervous. Instead he proposed that leaders of the town take a round and make a joint appeal for peace, which he felt would be more

effective. Bakshiji, however, said that the situation was critical and called for immediate action and suggested that if an aeroplane were to fly over the city, it would serve to warn the people and prevent rioting. But Richard replied that he had no authority over aeroplanes either. But he supported the American Principal's proposal to go round the city in a bus and make a joint appeal to the people. At this point news was received about the breaking out of rioting in the city and the meeting broke up and the delegation dispersed.

It was Sunday noon and Liza was alone on a scorching hot day. This time she had come back from England resolved to take interest in Richard's work and also in welfare activities. But nothing seemed to work. She was hugely bored. She tried to divert herself by playfully interrogating a babu, Roshan Lal who worked in the office but she finally gave up and went in.

Comments/Questions

- This chapter needs to be read together with Chapters 4, 8 and 21.
- Why does Richard turn down every single suggestion made by Bakshiji and others to bring peace to the city?
- What is Liza's state of mind?

Chapter 8 (first day) *The general atmosphere in Shivala Bazar calm and stable — communal relations harmonious — Tailor Khuda Baksh's dealing with Sikh women customers — old Karim Khan's story about Musa and Khizr — Jarnail's announcement of a Congress meeting — Pir of Golra Sharif passes by — Nathu's restless wanderings, his drinking, meeting with the unresponsive Murad Ali, Nathu finds relief in the arms of his wife — riot begins, the Grain market in flames, Nathu distressed.*

The shops in the Shivala Bazar were crowded. Tailor Khuda Baksh — Bakshe to Hindu and Sikh women customers — was assuring Hukam Singh's wife that he would sew the wedding dress of her daughter in time. The tailor also noticed the installation of the alarm bell of the temple that was damaged during the 1926 riots and said that he trembled hearing its sound.

At Fazl Din, the nanbai's shop, old Karim Khan was telling his listeners the story of Musa and Khizr to illustrate his point that a ruler was able to see what ordinary people could not. That was why a handful of *firangis*, he said, were able to rule over us because they were 'very wise, very subtle and very far-sighted'.

Nathu was drinking tea at the shop. In the beginning he wanted to go home. But the news of a dead pig being thrown at the entrance of the mosque made him fearful and restless and he roamed the different lanes of the town. Once he thought of going to Motia, the prostitute and spending the night there but later changed his mind. He heard an announcement of a Congress meeting to be held in the evening to make an appeal for peace.

Soon everyone in the shop stood up for a holy man, Pir of Golra passing through and everyone paid obeisance to the Pir. Old Karim Khan remarked

that Pir Sahib could cure any disease and gave a personal example of it. Earlier even kafirs could go to him — he didn't touch them and felt their pulse with a stick — but now he hated them and didn't examine them.

There was another turn in Nathu's mood. He felt good. When he passed by the Jama Masjid, he saw an unusually large number of people coming out of the mosque. Probably the Pir had delivered a sermon there. In the Bara Bazar he ate kababs and drank country wine and bought a flower garland and put it round his own neck. In this drunken state he saw Murad Ali for the second time that day and tried to talk to him but was unable to extract a word out of him.

When he reached home, it was night. Nathu's wife had been waiting for him all these hours and was hugely relieved to see him back. She hadn't eaten anything. The news of the killing of a pig and its being thrown at the entrance of a mosque had made her nervous and she had cried all day. Nathu then made love to her. But he still didn't share his secret of the pig with her.

Soon they both heard loud noises and the Muslim slogan of Allah o Akbar and the Hindu reply — Har-Har Mahadev and above all the insistent ringing of the alarm bell. They also saw an unnatural glow of light in the distance — probably the Grain Market was on fire. All this made Nathu tremble and he sat on the cot stone stiff, holding on to his wife.

The confused mixture of sounds woke up Liza also. She roused Richard from his sound sleep but he dismissed her fears and asked her to go to sleep. When she insisted, he told her that a riot had broken out between Hindus and Muslims. In effect he told her that the Britishers best safety lay in their fighting among themselves.

Comments/Questions

- What metaphor does the writer use to describe the relationship evolved through centuries of communal living? Pick out the lines that describe the relationship. Whose sentiments are these?
- What term does the Nanbai use to refer to Hindus while talking about the Pir of Golra? See page 130. Also compare it with the term used for Muslims in chapter 6, pages 81-2.
- What is the point of the story of Musa and Khizr narrated by Old Karim Khan?
- There is a comment about characters with an inner balance. Who is making these remarks? And who is being talked about?

Chapter 9 *Lala Lakshmi Narain's growing anxiety about family safety in a Muslim mohalla — Grain Market fire — Ranvir's absence — the decision to seek Muslim help to shift to a safe place.*

It was night and the Grain Market was on fire. The alarm bell was ringing. Slogans were being raised. The rioting had broken out. Lala Lakshmi Narain was very anxious about the safety of the family living in a Muslim mohalla. His neighbour, Fazl Din, had assured him of safety. Earlier Hayat Baksh, President of the District Muslim League — they had grown up together — had

also assured him. But he felt that Muslims were not to be trusted. Ranvir too was absent from home but the family had received word that he was with Master Dev Vrat. The only weapon in the house, a small woodchopper, was missing, having found its way through Ranvir to the Youth League's arsenal. Lalaji was greatly upset and he wanted to send his servant, Nanku, to his in-laws to seek the help of their Muslim friend, Shah Nawaz, to take them to a safer place. But his wife, concerned with the safety of the servant, persuaded him to wait till the following morning.

To add to Lalaji's anxiety he heard the sound of running feet and of someone being chased but to his great relief, the person was not Ranvir.

Comments/Questions

- Do observe the sudden distrust of Hindus for Muslims in a neighbourhood in which the communities lived harmoniously as a fallout of the incident spelt out in the beginning.

Chapter 10 *The riot-torn city — Shah Nawaz escorts Lala Lakshmi Narain and family to safety; retrieves his friend Raghu Nath's wife's jewellery box from his old house but kicks their servant Milkhi.*

The following day the city woke up only half-alive. All business and other activities had come to a standstill. Many persons had been killed. Shops had been looted. Overnight a dividing line between Hindus and Muslims had been drawn. Rumours were rife. Jarnail, however, reached the Congress office for the prabhat pheri and condemned his colleagues for their cowardice and the British for their mischief and appealed to all to maintain peace.

Shah Nawaz came and escorted Lala Lakshmi Narain and family to a relative in the cantonment. Then he went to his bosom friend Raghu Nath's house. On the way he stopped at a Muslim locality where Maula Dad told him that a poor Muslim had been killed by some kafirs. But he added that they too had killed five kafirs. Soon after he saw a funeral procession of the Muslim being taken out.

Shah Nawaz was on intimate terms with the entire Raghu Nath family. He affectionately called his friend 'yabu' and his friend's wife didn't observe purdah from him. It was Raghu Nath's boast that his closest friend was a Muslim. But when Raghu Nath lamented that things were bad and brother was killing brother, they both became conscious of the fact that their political perceptions were different from their personal relationship. To change the subject Shah Nawaz told him of his chance meeting with an old schoolmate of theirs, Bhim, the previous day.

Raghu Nath's wife then requested Shah Nawaz to retrieve a jewellery box that contained all the family ornaments from their old house. The latter immediately agreed. On the way he encountered the hostile eyes of Feroz Khan, the hide-seller and his friend Maula Dad. His friend's house evoked fond memories of his long association with the family. He also noticed the chutia on the Garhwali servant Milkhi's head. While taking the box out, he happened to look out of a window and saw a crowd of mourners in a mosque. Whether it was the *chutia* on Milkhi's head, the grieving crowd of mourners,

the funeral procession, or all that he had heard during the past few days, something snapped in him and he kicked Milkhi viciously which broke his spine and killed him.

Back at his friend Raghu Nath's house, he handed the box to his friend's wife but told them that Milkhi had fallen from the staircase and had broken a bone or two. He assured them that he would arrange for medical help for him. At this moment Shah Nawaz seemed a saint to Raghu Nath's wife.

Comments/Questions

- Shah Nawaz is a member of the Muslim League but this does not interfere with his being helpful to his Hindu friends. Why does he kick Milkhi viciously?

- What is your attitude towards Shah Nawaz? The writer does not romanticize Shah Nawaz's character. Is he a simple character or a complex character?

Chapter 11 (*same day*) *Comrade Dev Datt's peace effort in riot-torn city — defies parents — Congress-Muslim League meeting imperative — Jarnail killed while speaking for peace.*

Comrade Dev Datt proceeded to continue his efforts for peace systematically. Also, the riots must not spread to villages. Arranging a meeting between the Congress and the Muslim League was imperative. His parents vociferously opposed his venturing out on such a day but he still went out with his bicycle, assuring his mother that he would return. There were dead persons or persons nearly dead on the road but he went straight to the party office for a meeting. Only three members were present. A fourth member had been sent to the villages. The fifth member, a Muslim, had left the commune because a dead pig had been thrown outside a mosque and three Muslims had been killed before his very eyes. So he felt that it was wrong to blame the British for the riots. Dev Datt vainly tried to argue that he should not get emotional and that viewing things emotionally could be very misleading for a communist. It was reported that working-class areas had so far been free from rioting. But Comrade Jagdish's hands in the labour colony at Ratta needed to be strengthened.

The Congress-Muslim League meeting was held at Hayat Baksh's house. Dev Datt had succeeded in bringing Bakshiji along with two other Congressmen. At first there was an exchange of angry words and accusations between them. Hayat Baksh was insisting that Bakshiji should first admit that the Congress was an organization of the Hindus. But ultimately Dev Datt's appeal for peace prevailed and both sides signed the joint Appeal for Peace.

While he was leaving, news came that rioting had broken out in Ratta also. So he decided to go there at once and went to the Party office to pick up his bicycle. There he again confronted his father who was furious with him for staying out in the deteriorating situation. But he remained unmoved and sent Comrade Ram Nath to escort his father home.

That very afternoon Jarnail was killed while delivering one of the several appeals for peace in different localities. He was saying: 'We are brothers, we

Comments/Questions

- What is the author's attitude to Comrade Dev Datt's efforts for peace?

- What do you think about Jarnail?

Chapter 12 *Ranvir and his band of 'warriors' watch for mlechha quarries—Inder trails an elderly Muslim selling oil and scents, and kills him.*

Ranvir and his band of 'warriors' were stationed in a double-storeyed house, itching for action. The other 'warriors' were Shambhu, Manohar and Inder. They cast themselves in the style of the Rajputs of old. Ranvir, supremely confident after being initiated, liked to think of himself as Shivaji. He was addressed by others as 'Sardar'. The idea of boiling oil was given up for want of coal. At the behest of the Sardar, Inder gave a demonstration of his skill in the use of his knife. All his movements ended with his knife aimed at Ranvir's back. Ranvir shook his head in disapproval saying, as Master Dev Vrat had said, that one should not aim at either the enemy's chest or back. The best place to plunge the knife was the waist or the stomach, he said.

Then Ranvir spotted a mlechha, an elderly oil and scent seller walking down the street. At a hint from Ranvir, Inder leapt into the lane and followed the scent seller for some time. At the turn of the corner the scent seller saw the boy for the first time and started talking to him. He thought the boy was afraid and was walking with him for protection. He was telling him about the sales that he did. Suddenly Inder swung into action and stabbed the old man remembering to give a twist to the knife as the Sardar had said, and ran away. It was after sometime that the old man realized that he had been stabbed. He collapsed saying 'O, I have been killed.'

The number of kites flying in the sky seemed to increase.

Comments/Questions

- This chapter needs to be studied with Chapter 6. Do you think the narrator has used the same tone here also?

- The writer has shown Shah Nawaz in Chapter 10 as a complex character. The same thing could be said about Ramzan in Chapters 16 and 17. Do you think the author has dropped his objectivity while dealing with these Hindu young men and oversimplified their character?

Chapter 13 (*second day*) *Nathu's guilt and deep distress at the killings and burning caused by his act; his final confession to his wife; Nathu's wife's attempt to cast out the spectre from their house.*

Nathu was deeply distressed. He held himself guilty at being the cause of the killings and burning taking place in the city. But he didn't know the purpose for which the dead pig was to be used. Sometimes he would join his fellow skinners but would feel restless and go back to his house. Sometimes he would wish to take a glassful of country liquor and forget everything. He wanted to tell everything to his wife but he feared her revealing the secret to others in an unguarded moment. And then no one would believe him that Murad Ai, a Muslim, had asked him to kill a pig and have it thrown on the steps of the mosque. And maybe it was not the same pig. Couldn't there be two pigs of the same colour? One impulse was to go to Kalu, the scavenger, and ask him where he had delivered the pig or go to Murad Ali. But Murad Ali might even blame him and have him arrested. Then he told himself that what he had done was done in ignorance. But those who were killing and burning were doing so with wide, open eyes. He recalled his father's words that a man whose hands are clean, will never do an evil deed.

He saw a man walking along the road stop and look at the skinners' colony. He feared that the man was looking for the person who had killed the pig. Again he felt like telling her everything. He was restless and was behaving oddly. Finally after a lot of dilly-dallying he told her that it was he who had killed the pig and that he had been paid five rupees for it. But it was Kalu who had thrown it on the steps of the mosque, not he. Kalu was a Christian, not a Muslim. He told her the whole story.

At first his wife was deeply upset at the horrible thing he had done and had actually trembled while listening to Nathu's account but she said that he wasn't to blame. Earlier she had refused to touch the tainted money but later said that it was his hard-earned money and she would buy dhotis with it. She said that their hearts were clean and they didn't need to fear anyone. But she cautioned him not to tell anyone else.

Later they heard someone say that a riot had broken out in Ratta. Nathu's wife felt that the shadow of some dreadful omen had fallen on their home. And though she asked her husband to go out and join other skinners, she herself tried to cast out the phantom by sweeping and then washing the room thoroughly.

Comments/Questions

- Like Chapter 1, this chapter is entirely concerned with Nathu.
- Why does he feel guilt-ridden?
- Why does the writer give so much attention to Nathu? What is his purpose?
- Who does Nathu represent?

2.2.2 Part-II

Chapter 14 *Harnam Singh and his wife Banto leave their home and hearth.*

The riots had spread from the city to the countryside. Among the villages affected was Dhok Elahi Baksh.

Old Harnam Singh and wife Banto were forced to leave their shop-cum-home in the evening of the third day of rioting. A pious god-fearing couple, they were the only Sikhs living in the village where Harnam Singh had a teashop running. A local wellwisher, Karim Khan, had warned them of grave danger to their lives from marauders from outside the village and urged them to leave at once. At first Harnam Singh with an unshakeable faith in human goodness was most reluctant to leave but Karim Khan's words had left them no option. Banto took some of her jewellery in a small packet and Harnam Singh took his gun along with him. Before going Banto opened the cage and let their little pet myna fly away. The myna repeated the sentence — 'God be with you Banto! May God be with everyone' that it had learnt from Harnam Singh. At this Banto's throat choked and she repeated the words of the myna. The myna obviously followed them part of the way for they continued hearing the myna's words for quite some time.

Harnam Singh and Banto could hear the noise made by the advancing marauders even before they had left their place. As they made their way into the unknown, they could hear the attackers break open their shop and loot their house. Later they saw flames in the sky, which told them that their shop was on fire. From residents they had become homeless outsiders in no time.

They thought of the safety of their children, Iqbal who had a cloth shop at Nurpur and daughter Jasbir at Syedpur. They were more worried about Iqbal for he was alone while Jasbir lived in a village, which had a large Sikh community. Possibly the community had gathered together in the gurdwara.

At daybreak they were sitting on the bank of a brook, close to village Dhok Muridpur. 'They had spent the whole night praying, brooding and dragging their feet.' They washed themselves, prayed and went towards the village and knocked at the first door they came to, to seek shelter.

Comments/Questions

- The figure of Harnam Singh is based on a real Sikh whom the author had met in a refugee camp where he had worked for some time.

- Obviously the fate of Harnam Singh and his wife Banto who are forced to leave their home and hearth is not an isolated one. Which lines give you this information? Harnam Singh is thus a representative figure

- Why does Harnam Singh want to continue to live at Dhok Elahi Baksh in spite of Karim Khan's warnings? What does his reluctance tell you about his character?

Chapter 15 *The Sikhs of Syedpur, assembled at the gurdwara, prepare to fight the Muslim marauders.*

Syedpur was another village to be affected by rioting in the city. The scene shifts to the local gurdwara to which the Sikh residents of the village had moved for reasons of greater safety. The chapter opens with the description of a congregation plunged in frenzied exaltation by the singing of a song that expressed sentiments of supreme sacrifice. The song was reminiscent of the sacrifice demanded of the Sikh soldiers known as the Khalsa some three

hundred years ago. Everyone there felt himself or herself to be a link in the long chain of Sikh history, ready to lay down his or her life.

Muslims were spoken of as Turks, the traditional enemy of the Khalsa. Preparation for a possible fight with them had been made. Jathedar Kishen Singh, a World War Two veteran, was in charge of the defense. Besides seven double-barreled guns and five boxes of cartridges, there were lances, swords and lathis. Armed pickets were set up and more arms were sought for from Kahuta. Since yellow was the colour of selfless sacrifice, they all tired to wear something that was symbolic of the old tradition.

The Muslims too had been preparing for the fight and had cast themselves in the role of *mujahids*, ready to launch a jehad against the kafirs.

S. Teja Singh, the chief of the congregation came and exhorted the Sikhs to be ready to make sacrifices. He told the assembly that they had informed the Deputy Commissioner of the Muslim efforts to collect arms. When he said that they had tried to contact Sheikh Ghulam Rasul and other Muslims of the village, and that they couldn't be trusted, he was contradicted by a frail, young Sikh, Sohan Singh, who said that it was all a lie. Among interruptions and threats, he said that Sikhs and Muslims were being incited against each other and that rumours were adding to the tension. He advocated the need to maintain contact with Muslims and peace in the village. Sohan Singh ascribed the rioting to the mischief of the rulers and said that if the Muslims from outside attacked them, it would be difficult for them to defend themselves.

At this Teja Singh said in a trembling voice that that very morning Ghulam Rasul had assured him that nothing untoward would happen in the village, but soon after the Brahmin peon of Khalsa School was killed and his wife abducted. Sohan Singh again stood up to say that the peon was only injured and that his wife was with him. He also told the assembly that the attackers had come from outside and that the situation had been saved by Comrade Mir Dad from the city. Some people derided his efforts to intervene and wondered who Mir Dad was. The atmosphere was so tense that a Nihang Sikh gave Sohan Singh a blow.

A somewhat similar scene was being enacted in another part of the village between Mir Dad and some butchers. Like Sohan Singh, Mir Dad also attributed all the trouble to the Britishers, a position that was hotly contested by the locals. He was challenged to go to the gurdwara and to ensure that the Sikhs did not collect arms. If they did that and dispersed, the Muslims too would go to their homes.

Mir Dad had come from the city to meet his brother Allah Dad who lived in the village and also to open a school that could develop into a community centre. Though some people did listen to him, he did not make much headway because he had no land or property. At the moment he had been sent along with Sohan Singh to prevent rioting from spreading.

While Mir Dad was engaged in arguing with the butchers, an incident took place that was ridiculous but that was interpreted by both Muslims and Sikhs to reinforce their suspicion of the other. Gopal Singh who had been sent to find out Muslim plans saw someone coming from the other side and taking out what he thought was a dagger. The man was actually old Nura [old, bald and toothless and almost blind] who was sitting down to relieve himself. Gopal

Singh thought that he was about to attack him. In his confusion he ran and collided with him. When they heard the sound of running feet, one of the butchers ran after the man and threw his lance at him. Gopal Singh escaped unhurt. But his misadventure resulted in the hardening of the attitude of the communities to one another. While Mir Dad was shouted down, Sohan Singh received another blow for his pains.

Among the women in the gurdwara Jasbir stood out for her piety and religious fervour. A short kirpan hanging from her waist, she was known in the congregation as 'the daughter of the Guru'. She had inherited her intense devotion from her father, Harnam Singh and she went about performing tasks like washing the steps of the gurdwara, cleaning the shoes of the people, fanning the congregation, and serving them cool water with a radiant face.

Just then a cloud of dust was sighted in the distance. Soon after the muffled sound of drumbeats was also heard. This was obviously an attack from outside the village. The situation had taken an entirely unexpected and dangerous turn. The news electrified the entire congregation. 'Turks! Turks have come. Turks are here.' Everyone was asked to go to his or her post. Jasbir's hand immediately went to her kirpan. The Muslim slogan of Allah-0-Akbar was answered with Boley So Nihal! Sat Sri Akal!

It was dusk. Like many others, Baldev Singh had left his old mother unprotected at home. When the Muslim attackers came, he realized what he had done and thinking that the attackers would have killed her, he ran shouting 'blood for blood' with a naked sword and killed the old blacksmith Karim Baksh to avenge her 'murder'.

Night was deepening over the village but the noises had become louder and sharper. The attackers had started their destruction.

Comments/Questions

- This chapter needs to be studied with Chapter 18. Both talk about the defense of the gurdwara at Syedpur.
- Is the narrator critical of the Sikh attempt to link their fight against Muslims to the struggle of the Khalsa against the Turks? How do you know?
- What is the writer s attitude towards religious frenzy?
- Do you think that this religious frenzy can be linked with the frenzy which Master Dev Vratt instills in young Ranvir and his friends in Chapter 6?

Chapter 16 *Harnam Singh and Banto receive shelter in a Muslim home in Dhok Muridpur.*

This chapter is a continuation of Chapter 14 dealing with the uprooting of Harnam Singh and his wife Banto from their village Dhok Elahi Baksh.

When Harnam Singh and Banto sought shelter in the first house they knocked at, the woman of the house, Rajo let them in and bolted the door again.

Harnam Singh narrated their tale of woe to her. She heard Harnam Singh tell his tale of woe and offered them a glass of lassi. They hesitated for a moment but finally drank it.

Rajo told them that the men folk were away and were about to return. Her husband, she said, was a God-fearing man but her son was a member of the League and she couldn't say how he would behave towards them. Harnam Singh was completely resigned to his fate and said that if she wanted them to leave, they would go and moved to the door. Rajo watched them for a moment and then told them not to go. The younger woman, Rajo's daughter-in-law objected but Rajo could not bring herself to turn out those who had sought shelter from her. She hid them in the loft. Harnam Singh had decided that in case of an emergency he would shoot Banto first and then kill himself. At Akran's suggestion Rajo asked Harnam Singh to hand his gun over to her. Harnam Singh hesitated but realizing that he had no choice, gave it to her. He felt even more defenseless than before.

When Rajo's husband came with a big black trunk, she told him that she had given shelter to an old Sikh couple. Meanwhile Akran was busy breaking open the lock. At that moment Harnam Singh looked out from his hiding place, recognized Ehsan Ali and asked them not to break open the trunk — it was their trunk — and offered them the key. Ehsan Ali felt embarrassed. Later the same drama was enacted as had happened earlier with Rajo. Ehsan Ali told them that the people were looking for them and that if they came to know that they were hiding here, they would get into trouble. Harnam Singh, resigned as before, came down the loft and prepared to leave but Ehsan Ali had second thoughts and hid them in the godown. Sometime during the day Rajo gave them chapattis and buttermilk. The thoughts of their children, Iqbal and Jasbir came to their mind.

When Ehsan Ali's son Ramzan came home and was told of the situation, he went wild with rage, broke open the door of the godown and asked the kafirs to come out. But when it came to killing him, he couldn't, for he too had recognized Harnam Singh.

It was nearly midnight when the tall and stately Rajo escorted the Sikh couple out of the village. She handed Harnam Singh his gun and Banto the packet of jewellery that she had found in the trunk and wishing them well, sent them off to an uncertain future.

Comments/Questions

- What is the author trying to bring out in this episode?
- There is a comment made by the narrator, which explains the behaviour of Rajo, Ehsan Ali and Ramzan towards Harnam Singh. What is it?
- Bring out the great irony in this scene.

Chapter 17 *Iqbal Singh is hunted, humiliated and is forced to get converted to Islam.*

The story of the pursuit and capture and conversion of Iqbal Singh almost runs parallel to the incidents in Chapter 16. It is only after Ramzan has finished with Iqbal that he comes home and is wild with rage at Harnam Singh seeking shelter in his own house.

Ramzan and his friends — some 20 or so of them — were returning from looting in Dhok Elahi Baksh and Muridpur when they spotted a young Sikh running for his life in the distance. He had a cloth shop at Mirpur (Or is it Nurpur?) and was probably going to join his father, Harnam Singh at Dhok Elahi Baksh. The marauders saw him and pursued him. Ramzan was in the lead. At one stage he hid himself in a deep hole. But they pelted him with stones relentlessly and finally succeeded in ferreting him out. They told him that he must embrace Islam or he would be stoned to death. Iqbal, bruised and battered and completely broken in spirit came out on all fours. He had no other choice but to assent to being converted.

At this they led him in triumph to the village for conversion. But his agreeing to conversion did not mean the end of his torture or derision at the hands of the marauders. In the village his hair was cut off and his beard given a Muslim cut; he was asked to suck a piece of raw meat thrust into his mouth; and he was made to recite the kalma. Then everyone embraced him as his new brother. Thereafter he was bathed and dressed in new clothes, was circumcised, and finally given a new name and a new identity as Iqbal Ahmed.

Thus all marks of Sikhism were wiped out, replaced by the marks of the Muslim faith. He was now no longer an enemy but a friend, not a kafir but a believer.

Comments/Questions

- The writer doesn't spare us a view of any brutality perpetrated during the partition. For sheer animality it would be hard to match this scene.
- This again is an example of religious frenzy which tramples over the rights of other human beings.
- What is the narrator's view about religious conversions?

Chapter 18 *Sikh women's heroism amid fierce fighting at Syedpur. Government finally intervenes and the rioting stops.*

The fight between Sikhs and Muslims was bitter and lasted two days and two nights. Each community looked upon the other as its traditional enemy. Among the many people who died was Sohan Singh. He had earlier been sent with a peace proposal and his death was the Muslim answer to the peace proposal. Shops and houses had also been set on fire.

The ammunition on both sides was nearly exhausted, though each side shouted their war cries more vociferously to appear strong.

The gurdwara was virtually under siege. The morale inside was pretty low. It was realized that they had blundered by assembling at the gurdwara and by snapping ties with Ghulam Rasul. The Sikhs now tried to buy peace. Mir Dad's services were sought but when he learned that money was involved, he dissociated himself from the process. The choice of the negotiator then fell on Mehar Singh, the younger brother of the granthi. The Muslim demand was said to be two lakhs. But Mehar Singh was asked to settle for any amount up to one lakh rupees.

Meanwhile some 'mujahids' were narrating their experiences at Ghulam Rasul's house. One 'religious warrior' said that several of them had assaulted a Hindu girl. But when his turn came he found that the girl he was assaulting had died. Another case was of a bagri woman who pleaded with them not to kill her and all the seven of them could have her as their keep. But one of them stabbed her to death.

Suddenly the fighting flared up again. While the younger granthi was going to the Muslims for peace negotiations, the Nihang posted on the roof of the gurdwara shouted that the attackers had come. Alarmed at this, the elder granthi shouted to his brother to stop and come back but he continued to move forward. When the elder granthi realized that Mehar Singh had been killed, he rushed out barefoot and was brought back with difficulty. War cries were heard and heavy firing started. The Sikhs responded with fighting with their swords — there was no ammunition left. The situation was, however, desperate. The marauders had reached the lane leading to the gurdwara. The Sikh women led by Jasbir Kaur went to the well outside the gurdwara and jumped into it. Some women jumped along with children while others went alone.

By the time the day broke, the fighting had ceased. Dead bodies were littered all over. Kites and vultures and crows arrived in large numbers and hovered over the village and particularly over the well. The rioting had ceased but not quite, for a young Muslim was in the process of spilling kerosene oil on the windows of the gurdwara and setting fire to them. He gave up his idea only when he saw an aeroplane flying overhead.

When the aeroplane came towards the village, people came out in large numbers. At times the aeroplane flew so low that one could see its white pilot with goggles on smiling and waving to the people below. Kishen Singh, his spirits suddenly uplifted, thought the pilot had actually saluted him and he clicked his heels and saluted him in return. He shouted: 'God save the King, Sahib, God save the King'. When the pilot flew over Ghulam Rasul's house, it seemed to Kishen Singh that he (the pilot) did not return the salutations of the people there. This thrilled him no end and he shouted defiance at the Sheikh's men to fire now.

All hostilities came to an end and life began to return to normalcy.

Comments/Questions

How do you rate the scene of Sikh women jumping into the well in order to avoid being captured by Muslim marauders in terms of its heroism? Does it remind you of Rani Padmavati's famous *johar*, jumping into fire along with other women at the fort of Chittore?

- Contrast this with Allah Rakha — Prakasho episode in chapter 20.

- After letting them destroy each other for three days, the British rulers intervene in the Hindu/Sikh — Muslim rioting and stop the fighting.

- The episode of Sikh women jumping into the well is based on a real incident, which happened in village Thoa Khalsa in Rawalpindi District in 1947.

Chapter 19 *The District Administration reestablishes law and order and provides relief to riot victims.*

The narrative shifts back to the city again.

On the fourth day of rioting the situation in the city and the surrounding area was brought under control. An eighteen-hour curfew was imposed which was later relaxed to twelve hours. Army pickets were set up and police patrolling arranged. The Deputy Commissioner's reputation as being firm was established on the basis of his having shot a young man who didn't heed his warnings. Refugee camps were set up and arrangements made for treatment of the wounded and the disposal of the dead. The Congress too set up a relief office. The D.C. came to enjoy the reputation of being 'sympathetic and capable'. He took personal interest and went to the house of the Health Officer and instructed him to go to Syedpur and take steps to prevent the spread of diseases.

Later he gave a resume of government efforts to provide relief to a gathering of prominent citizens. As always there were some people who were critical of the government. Manohar Lal was harsh on both the Congress and the government. Bakshiji, though unhappy with Manohar Lal for being over-critical, had also been feeling uneasy. He felt that the Government first incited riots and then controlled them. It was they who had had the last word.

At home, Liza feeling extremely bored and unhappy, in her husband's absence, became dead drunk with beer. When Richard came around eight, he found her asleep on her sofa. When he lifted her to take her to the bedroom, he realized that she had wet the sofa on which she had been sitting. She had now woken up and was somewhat sober.

He told her that the grain market had gone up in flames and that one hundred and three villages had been razed to the ground. "So many villages burnt down, Richard and you still have work to do?' This made Richard wonder if she was being ironical. His relations with Liza were becoming more and more estranged. The thought of snapping the marital tie also came to him but he was considered a sagacious and efficient officer and for the sake of his career it was imperative that he keep Liza by his side. So he invited her to accompany him on his tour of Syedpur where women had jumped into a well. From there they could go to Taxila. The whole area was lovely, he added. He had heard a lark and seen many new birds there. This shocked Liza who wondered how he could see new birds and hear a lark in such places. In response Richard said that as an administrator, he had to be emotionally uninvolved whatever be the scale of the tragedy. Before leaving for his office,

he asked her to lend a helping hand in collecting clothes and other things for refugees.

Comments/Questions

- Ponder over the remarks of the omniscient narrator regarding Bakshiji, the District Congress Committee Secretary:

  Ever since the riots had broken out, *Bakshi's mind had been in a sort of mist.* He kept saying to himself again and again that the British had again the last word, had again had the better of them while *his own hold on the situation had been feeble all along.* (307-08) (italics added)

  Do think in the light of the work done by Bakshiji, this is a fair comment on the man? Has the comment anything to do with the author's attempt to show communists like Comrade Dev Datt and his friends in a more favourable light?

- What is the point of showing the estranged relationship between Richard and Liza?

  Richard is reminded of the case of the wife of a fellow administrator whose wife, Mrs Lawrence, also drank beer out of sheer boredom and who would wet her clothes and her sofa. Eventually Mrs Lawrence left her husband and married a young army officer. Coincidentally Richard had purchased the sofa from Lawrence. *Is the author suggesting something general about the fate of young British wives whose husbands are posted in India?*

Chapter 20 *The Scene at the Relief Committee Office.*

The narrative here gives a glimpse of the different hues that constitute the variegated scene witnessed at the Relief Committee Office.

One of the functionaries at the Office was the Statistics Babu whose task it was to collect figures of those who had died, of those who were wounded and the losses suffered. But the refugees who came to him tried to pour out their heart to him. Each had a different story to tell. Harnam Singh, the teashop owner of Dhok Elahi Baksh, wanted his gun to be recovered from the person who had given shelter to him at Adhiro. Another Sikh hoped that his wife Sukhwant and their son Gurmeet might not have jumped into the well and could be traced somewhere. A third, in his desperation, even tried to offer bribe to the Statistics Babu to help him recover the gold chain and bracelet that she was wearing when she jumped.

The statistics collected showed that the number of Hindus and Sikhs killed was more or less equal to the number of Muslims killed. The material loss suffered by the former was of course higher. Comrade Dev Datt wanted another category to be included — how many of those killed were well-to-do persons and how many poor.

At another place there was a heated argument among Congress activists about what to do in case of physical attack. Should one offer one's neck to be chopped off? Bakshiji replied to Kashmiri Lal who had first raised the issue: 'Jarnail did not suffer from any such mental conflict....Jarnail was eccentric,

unlettered, crazy, but he was never worried about what he should do in the event of his being attacked...' (327) Later: 'Listen. You yourself should not indulge in violence. That is number one. You should persuade the fellow to desist from using violence. That is number two. And if he does not listen, fight him tooth and nail. That is number three.' This reply however didn't end the discussion.

Another group of refugees were laughing over something. In the midst of them on the ground lay an elderly Sikh who had clasped his hands tightly between his thighs and who moved from side to side. He refused to go to his village for fear of being circumcised. This response made everyone laugh loudly.

At another place sat a Brahmin pandit and his wife. At first they had wanted the Babu to help them in recovering their abducted daughter, but later they apparently realized that she must have lost her caste — 'They must have already put the forbidden thing in her mouth.' — and also that they were too poor to feed her. So they gave up their idea of her recovery.

We are also shown how easily Parkasho, the abducted daughter comes to accept her new destiny and makes peace with her abductor, Allah Rakha, the tonga driver.

The chapter ends on a sombre note.

Comments/Questions

- Parkasho's story comes to us in a flashback. Do you think that the ease with which Parkasho makes peace with her abductor Allah Rakha is natural and convincing?

- In an interview with Lalit Mohan Joshi in 2002, Bhisham Sahni said he had worked in a refugee camp and that his task was to prepare reports of the experiences of the refugees.

- What image does the narrator use in the last paragraph of the chapter that suggests that people were in the grip of forces beyond their control? Quote the sentence and point out the significance of it.

- Is there an example of grim humour in the chapter? Forcible circumcision is no laughing matter. Witness the circumcision done on Iqbal in *Chapter 17*. But the way in which the matter is presented here is grotesque.

- In Gandhi's country is it not surprising that there should be a discussion on how to respond to violence. Do you think Bakshiji gives a fitting reply to the question raised by Kashmiri Lal?

Chapter 21 *Peace Committee meeting and its results.*

A meeting of eminent citizens belonging to different political parties to elect a Peace Committee was held at a neutral venue, the Christian College. The meeting was the result of the efforts of Comrade Dev Datt who felt that it was

imperative to bring all political parties under one roof and bring peace to the city.

The conversation among the invitees before the meeting began avoided reference to the recent riots. Also a polarization between the communities was already visible — Muslims were keen to move out of Hindu localities and vice versa. On the political front too it was felt that if a Hindu candidate stood for election he would need the support of the Congress and a Muslim candidate the support of the Muslim League.

The proceedings of the meeting reflected the deep divisions brought about by the riot in society. The College Principal, Mr Herbert who was an American was elected chairperson of the meeting. His proposal to set up a Peace Committee consisting of representatives of all political parties was greeted with loud applause. The members of the Committee were to spread the message of peace in every *mohalla*. He also suggested a joint appeal to the people for peace through a bus fitted with a microphone and a loudspeaker going round the city. Shah Nawaz offered to pay for the petrol.

At Dev Datt's suggestion three vice-presidents, one each from the Congress, the Muslim League, and the Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, were elected. Dev Datt himself was elected the General Secretary. For the Working Committee the election for which was less easy it was decided to have 15 members — seven Muslims, 5 Hindus and 3 Sikhs.

There was a brief discussion about who should sit where, who should speak first and which slogans should be raised. Finally both the Congress and the Muslim League presidents sat side by side. And the person who had the mike in hand and who raised the slogans for peace and Hindu-Muslim unity with full passion was none other than Murad Ali. If Nathu had been there, he would have recognized him but Nathu was dead.

Though Bakshiji sat in the bus with the President of the Muslim League, he was deeply despondent. His recurrent thoughts were: 'Kites shall hover, kites and vultures shall continue to hover for long...' (351).

Richard and Liza sat in their drawing room in a more relaxed frame of mind. He told her that his transfer to some other place was imminent. Liza had wanted to know about the developments that had taken place but now when Richard was ready to tell her about them, she wasn't interested anymore.

Comments/Questions

- Bakshiji's prophetic sentence about kites and vultures hovering over the city is repeated in the novel. In which chapter does it appear first?
- The words 'Kites will fly' appeared as the title when Jai Ratan's English translation appeared first.
- Do these words suggest that the novel is pessimistic?
- Note that Richard and Liza are farther apart from each other than ever before.

2.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have dealt with detailed summaries of the Chapters with comments/questions provoking you to think on the story line of *Tamas*. The first thirteen chapters dealing with the town are loosely tied together with the presence of Nathu. The remaining eight chapters carry the story of violence over into the villages till order is restored. The focus is principally on a Sikh couple, Harnam Singh and his wife Banto, their son Iqbal Singh and their daughter Jasbir.

2.4 QUESTIONS

1. Make a list of the places and the people and groups that come in for significant mention in the novel.
2. Which are the characters that are treated sympathetically in the novel and those that are not?
3. If you were to choose the best scene in the novel, which one or ones would you choose? Why?

UNIT 3 MAKING SENSE OF THE NARRATIVE

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Understanding the Narrative
  3.2.1 Who Speaks?
  3.2.2 Who Speaks to Whom?
  3.2.3 Who Speaks When?
  3.2.4 Who Speaks What Language?
  3.2.5 Who Speaks with What Authority?
  3.2.6 Who Sees?
  3.2.7 Function of the Narrative
3.3 How is the Narrative Organized?
3.4 Omnipresent Narrator
  3.4.1 Comments of the Author/Omniscient Narrator
3.5 The Theme of Communalism and its Treatment
3.6 Use of Language
  3.6.1 Use of Spoken Language
  3.6.2 Irony
  3.6.3 Some Metaphors used in *Tamas*
3.7 Let Us Sum Up
3.8 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to discuss the novel in terms of its narrative and various aspects of it, its function and its organization. It also discusses the main theme of the novel and the use of language . After reading the unit you will be able to discuss its narratology, theme, language and style.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

After giving you the detailed storyline of the novel in the previous unit, in this unit we take you to another important aspect of the novel — its **narratology**, to make you aware of the various ways available with the writer to narrate the story and be visible or not visible as the case may be. Another significant aspect of the novel — its preponderant theme will be the topic of our next discussion followed by a critique on language and style.

3.2 UNDERSTANDING THE NARRATIVE

I think it would be helpful to begin this discussion of **narrative** in this novel with the necessary distinction between the writer and the narrator. Bhisham Sahni is the writer of *Tamas* but who is the narrator? Who is telling the story?

The narrator may be a major character or a minor character, or he may not be a character at all but a mere observer. He may be someone who stands outside the novel or may be a character within it. There is another way of looking at the question. Is someone telling his/her own story, in which case it would be a first person narrative or is the narrator one who stands outside the story but who knows the minds of all the characters. In this case we would call him an omniscient narrator. It all depends upon what the writer intends to do in the novel and how best he thinks he can marshal the resources of the novel to fulfill his objective. There are many possibilities.

In his discussion of the narrative Jonathan Culler has raised several general questions that could help us understand the narrative in this novel and how it affects us and of course other narratives as well. These questions are:

1. Who speaks? Or whose voice do we hear in the novel?
2. Who speaks to whom? In other words, who is the audience the narrative is addressed to?
3. Who speaks when? The timing of narration is important: how long after the occurrence of the events does the narration begin?
4. Who speaks what language?
5. Who speaks with what authority?
6. Who sees? Or who is the focalizor?
7. And finally what function does the narrative perform?

We shall briefly discuss each of these questions as they apply to the novel in hand.

3.2.1 Who Speaks?

In *Tamas* the story comes from an all-knowing, third person narrator, someone who knows everyone and everything and who can go where he likes. The narrator is not a character in the novel and refers to all the characters in it in the third person either by name or as 'he' or 'she'. As we said before such a narrator is called an **omniscient narrator**. We call such a narrator **omniscient** because he has the godlike ability to go everywhere and enter the mind of any character, and possesses power and control that come from unlimited knowledge. Here is a sample from the first chapter:

Nathu could not refuse either. How could *he*? *He* dealt with *Murad Ali* every day? Whenever a horse or a cow or a buffalo died anywhere in the town, *Murad Ali* would get it for *him* to skin. It meant giving an eight-anna piece or a rupee to *Murad Ali* but *Nathu* would get the hide. Besides, *Murad Ali* was a man of contacts. There was hardly a person, connected with the Municipal Committee, with whom *he* did not have dealings. (*Italics* added)

Notice that in this brief excerpt we are in the mind of Nathu who has the unwelcome task of killing a pig, on his hands. Notice also that Nathu and Murad Ali are referred to by their names, or by 'he' or 'him'. In the following chapter we move on to the Congress *prabhat pheri,* and then to Richard and Liza the same morning taking a ride together and thereafter to other scenes and people.

The choice of an omniscient third person narrator is appropriate, indeed crucial, for a novel that seeks to present an objective picture of a town in the grip of communal frenzy. It enables the all-seeing narrator to take his camera over the entire city and beyond and move from place to place, from scene to scene and from people to people. S/he can go inside a character's head and also go above and beyond the events in the narrative. The last paragraph of Chapter 20 is essentially a view of the human scene of 1946-47 from the vantage point of the present.

But of course, the narrator has to be selective. As Paul Cobley suggests in his useful book *Narrative*, 'in the act of representation he is forced to select areas of knowledge for narration and to deselect others. S/he is able to allow some characters' voices to be heard and not others.' This is true of *Tamas* too.

In the first thirteen chapters, for instance, we have *selective* glimpses of or hear about the entire district town (in West Punjab) — its geography: the spacious municipal grounds, the Grain Market, the Shivala Bazaar, the Imam Din Mohalla, the Naya Mohalla, and other lanes, Khailon ki Masjid and Jama Masjid and Mai Satto dharmashala and the cantonment where the Deputy Commissioner lives; its history of harmonious living with different communities mostly living in mixed mohallas; prominent Muslims like Hayat Baksh and Shah Nawaz, and Hindus like Bakshiji, Lala Lakshmi Narain, Raghu Nath,Vanprasthiji and Master Dev Vrat and his disciples, Ranvir and Inder, and the indefatigable Comrade Dev Datt , the mysterious Murad Ali and finally poor Nathu who unwittingly becomes the cause of all the mayhem let loose; its sounds: the sound of the tower-clock of the Sheikh's garden, the *azan*, the temple bells, the dreaded alarm bell of the Shivala temple, *prabhat pheri* songs, the Congress and the Muslim League slogans; its holy men: the fakirs and the Pir of Golra; and its superstitions and beliefs. The remaining eight chapters come in with more details.

At times the narrator gives such intimate glimpses as the conversation of two children defecating outside their house and the obscene game that Shah Nawaz finds the children playing unconcernedly on the day after the outbreak of rioting. All this is meant to help re-create the district town in which the events narrated occurred. The narrator's roving camera shows a wide range of pictures and scenes and individuals and he depicts the major 'actors' who were to play their part in the partition drama. The narrative is thus meant to narrate into existence a pre-partition West Punjab district town in undivided India caught in the whirlpool of communal strife in 1946.

The narrator's selection is also clear not only in what s/he includes but what s/he leaves out. For instance, though we hear the Muslim League slogans shouted and their *idée fixe* about the Congress being an organization of Hindus only, reiterated time and again, we are not allowed to have a close-up of Muslim League thinking or discussing an issue just as we have of the Congressmen or the Hindu organization. One reason for this could be that the separatist agenda of the Muslim League is well known.

Complete objectivity of the narrative is of course an impossible ideal, for the medium of language itself is not neutral and the writers own perception is bound to colour the narrative. Even so, objectivity is crucial in a novel that deals with the highly sensitive and emotive, even volatile issue of partition. The work as a whole must carry conviction with the readers or at least with most of them. Since it also deals with historical facts, it must also be authentic. Or else, the writer's efforts have been in vain.

The omniscient narrator may be intrusive and make his presence felt in the novel as, for instance, in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, or he may confine himself largely or wholly to objective re-presentation. If you have read *Tamas*, you will have realized that the novel leans towards objective re-presentation and lets the readers draw his or her own conclusions from the evidence that the narrator, presents. There are of course occasions when the narrator speaks in his own person, which we shall note later.

3.2.2 Who Speaks to Whom?

Every fictional narrator has an audience in mind. Who is the target audience of this novel? In other words, who is the narratee? Indians, of course. Naturally, everyone else is free to read it but its most likely audience would be knowledgeable Indians — all those who share a concern with the results of partition and are impacted by it. The reaction of the audience may be very different in Pakistan. Even here the reaction to the TV serial made on the novel, if not the novel itself, was somewhat divided. But its direct appeal is to Indians for it tries to give an impartial picture of the communal situation in the town and indirectly tries to warn them of the dangers of communal thinking in secular India. Embedded in the novel is the writer's belief in secularism as the bedrock on which the edifice of the country stands and he expects Indians to share that belief.

3.2.3 Who Speaks When?

The narrator may narrate the events soon after they have happened, or, as is more common, talk about them after the final event is over. When the latter is the case, the narrator actually looks back at the entire train of events.

In *Tamas*, the narrator is talking of events long after they have occurred. The events in the novel are supposed to have happened in the chosen city in 1946 whereas Bhisham Sahni's novel was completed in 1974, nearly thirty years later. Nehru's Interim Government was in place and partition was a certainty.

Obviously the narrator is looking back at past events but he is doing so in the light of the communal situation today. He has said that the riots in Bhiwandi revived the memories of partition events and he started writing the novel. The question is: Does the distance between the time of the events and the time of narration enable the narrator to look at the entire complex of events in a more objective manner and to gain a maturer perspective on them? It does. As evidence, one example should suffice. Read para 1 of chapter 18 where the omniscient narrator is talking of the psyche of the Sikhs besieged in the Syedpur gurdwara (The 'warriors' had their feet in the twentieth century while their minds were in medieval times.) (282). *Here the narrator is looking at the scene of 1946 from the perspective of the present.* **Look for other examples yourself.**

3.2.4 Who Speaks What Language?

We hear several voices in the novel. We do so because the narrator not only tells but also shows and while showing makes us hear different voices. For instance, we see (and hear) Nathu cogitating within himself and finally disclosing his secret to his wife. We hear Congressmen squabbling while

going on a round of *prabhat pheri*. Similarly we hear fundamentalists, both Hindus and Muslims, talk their language — to Hindu fundamentalists, Muslims are *mlechhas*, and to Muslims, Hindus are *kafirs*. We see a fundamentalist Hindu youth organization at work and are a witness to how a 15-year recruit is enticed into stabbing an innocent, poor old Muslim to death. Adversity often brings out the best in us and we see young Sikh women with or without children in their arms jump to their death rather than face capture at the hands of Muslim marauders. We also have Comrade Dev Datt who calls himself a professional revolutionary trying to bring peace between the embattled communities. Finally we have the British rulers' point of view voiced strongly through Richard and his deliberate policy of playing off Muslims against Hindus in religious matters. The novel is polyphonic.

The novel ultimately upholds the ideal of communal amity and valorizes the active part that the communists played in promoting communal harmony in those fateful days. Theirs is one of the main voices that we hear in the novel. Whether or not this is historically true is another matter.

3.2.5 Who Speaks with What Authority?

'To tell a story is to claim a certain authority, which listeners grant,' says Jonathan Culler. In other words, we want our narrator to be **reliable**. This is true of all novels. In a partition novel the responsibility of the narrator is much greater because it has to have a ring of authenticity. While the writer is free to invent, he must also ensure that the historical events narrated are true and that the invented events are credible. Or else, the entire project of writing a partition novel will misfire and fail.

3.2.6 Who Sees?

Ordinarily we talk of the 'point of view' from which the story is told. The person who *sees* may be the same as the person who *speaks* but not necessarily. They may be different. The person who *sees* is the person whose vision is presented.

Jonathan Culler puts the question in another way: Who is the **focalizor**? Through whose consciousness are the events brought into focus? The focalizor may be external, 'an anonymous agent' who exists outside the story. Such a focalizer could be called the narrator-focalizor. Or he may be a character, which participates in the action as an actor, in which case he would be an internal focalizor. Let us take an example: the story 'Kabuliwalla' by Tagore. If you remember the story, you will recognize that the narrator in the story is Mini's father but he is not the focalizer. The focalizor is Rahman, the kabuliwalla who brings dry fruit for Mini.

What can we say about *Tamas*? Here we have external focalization, a task that is accomplished by an omniscient narrator-focalizor. But focalization has both a subject and an object: someone who focalizes, *the focalizor*, and someone or something that is *focalized*. How is the focalized person or thing perceived? From outside, or from inside? For instance, in *Tamas* , Nathu is perceived from inside, as perhaps no one else is focalized in the novel. We remain in his consciousness for long in the novel. He is the unwilling doer of an act, which sets off the whole series of events. Later we remain with him as he moves about restlessly in the lanes and bazaars of the city battling against

the feeling of guilt for a crime that he did not commit. And we know him as don't know anyone else.

But, while Nathu is perceived from inside, he himself perceives or focalizes Murad Ali from the outside. In other words, we view Murad Ali through him but the latter remains an enigma to him as he remains to us. Later when Nathu is no longer needed, he is discarded. We are told (in Chapter 21) that he is dead. Or who knows!, he may have been eliminated. Nathu emerges as the symbol of a commoner who is exploited by powerful groups to serve their own ends.

What about the other characters in the novel? Do they also serve as focalizors? Who are the other focalizors? Make a list.

Hint: Richard is another important character who we see more fully than many other characters. We learn much about his attitude to Indians and to Liza.

3.2.7 Function of the Narrative

Stories, we are told, are man's chief way to make sense of things.

Narratives give us pleasure. But the pleasure of narratives is also linked to the desire for knowledge: 'we want to discover secrets, to know the end, to find the truth.' (Culler: 92) Narratives enable us 'to see things from other vantage points, and to understand others' motives that are opaque to us.' (93)

What about *Tamas*? *Tamas* makes interesting reading or to put it in the current jargon, it is an interesting read.

But it also tries to make sense of the complex reality of partition, of what happened during partition and immediately before and after it, and why; and it also suggests how we could avert a communal holocaust today. It exposes the designs of British rulers to exploit religious differences among the communities and shows what unbridled passion and frenzy could lead us to and the subhuman levels we could all descend to. But the novel is also a warning, a warning against narrow, sectarian thinking and religious bigotry that claims an exclusive place for itself. It also emphasizes the need for rational, balanced thinking without being swayed by outdated traditions and prejudices.

Tamas also gives us insights into complex human motivation and behaviour, which are far removed from our stereotyped thinking.

Narratives can also provide social criticism. In *Tamas* this is applicable to the plight of Nathu, Milkhi and Nanku, and other characters, who are at the lowest rung of society. They are always at the receiving end in any public tragedy.

3.3 HOW IS THE NARRATIVE ORGANIZED? (STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL)

The core of the novel is the communal frenzy in the town, what led to it and what it led to and how it was contained. Since the writer's roving camera goes

over the entire town and beyond, the structure inevitably appears loose. But of course it is well planned.

The original Hindi narrative is divided into two parts. (The English translation by the author does away with this division.) **Part One** comprises thirteen chapters and begins and ends with Nathu and shows the disastrous results of his innocent act of killing a pig. This part occupies some 213 pages of a novel of 352 pages.

In these thirteen chapters we are introduced to all the major forces in the town: the Congress, the Muslim League, the British administrator, Hindu fundamentalists and the communists. We pass through the lanes of the town and also its Bara Bazar, both before and after the rioting. Much of this comes to us through the consciousness of Nathu. Part one of the novel ends, with Nathu confessing his sin to his wife.

Part Two consisting of 8 chapters could be divided into two sections. The first section comprising 5 chapters (Chapters 14 to 18) takes us to the surrounding villages where the violence has spread, and focuses mainly on the Sikhs living there, particularly on one family — of Harnam Singh and his wife Banto, their son Iqbal Singh, and daughter Jasbir.

The last three chapters from 19 to 21 take us back to the town and show the efforts of the administration and the people to restore peace and also give us an idea of relief work being done for the victims of violence.

3.4 OMNIPRESENT NARRATOR

An important point to be made about the narrative is that the narrator is not only omniscient but also omnipresent. He knows what happens in several places at the same time. Notice that several chapters start in the morning itself. Here is what happens in the first nine chapters, the action in all of them starting on Sunday.

Chapter 1	Saturday evening till dawn on Sunday morning — Nathu kills a pig.
Chapter 2	Sunday morning 4 o'clock outside the Congress office.
Chapter 3	Sunday morning — Nathu wanders about around the lanes of the city; encounters the Congress *prabhat pheri*.
Chapter 4	Sunday morning — Richard and Liza are out taking a morning ride.
Chapter 5	Sunday late morning — *prabhat pheri* continued. Bakshi and Jarnail remove the dead pig from the mosque.
Chapter 6	Sunday around noon or a little later. Vanprasthiji holds a meeting at the *satsang*.
Chapter 7	Sunday afternoon — Citizens' delegation to the Deputy Commissioner
Chapter 8	Sunday afternoon to evening — the Shivala Market and Bara Bazar etc. in the evening; Nathu reaches home at night after daylong wandering.
Chapter 9	Sunday night — Lala Lakshmi Narain's house; Grain Market on fire.

You can see that some of these scenes run concurrently or partly overlap in their timing. For instance, the Congress activists in Chapter 2 probably start gathering outside the Congress office before Nathu leaves his hut after killing the pig in the opening chapter. Chapters 3 and 4 probably start almost at about the same time. Again Chapters 4 and 5 overlap in their action. Chapters 6 and 7 also overlap in their action. This is clear from a reference in Chapter 6 that a delegation has already gone to meet the Deputy Commissioner. This meeting is described in Chapter 7. The last part of Chapter 8 deals with events on the night of the first day. When Nathu goes home at night, he notices flames rising from the Grain Market. In Chapter 9 Lala Lakshmi Narain also notices the flames of the Grain Market, which indicates overlapping.

Similarly, in the second part there are three strands of action, that is, in five chapters from 14 to18 — Harnam Singh and Banto seeking shelter in Dhok Muridpur, Sikhs of Syedpur gather together in the gurdwara and fight a pitched battle with the Turks, and Iqbal Singh is hounded out by a Muslim mob and is converted to Islam. Apparently all the three episodes run concurrently, or at least overlap and happen on the third and fourth days of rioting. Certainly the Harnam Singh episode in Chapter 16 takes place at Ehsan Ali's house in the absence of Ramzan who, we are told, has gone for Tabligh, for conversion. This conversion takes place in Chapter 17. Also the Sikhs' preparation and fight with the Muslim marauders is one action but the writer has divided it into two — Chapter 15 dealing with the preparation and Chapter 18 with the fight and the Sikh women's heroism and the cessation of rioting. The last three chapters cover two days after the rioting has stopped.

3.4.1 Comments of the Author/Omniscient Narrator

Generally the narrator's presentation is objective and he allows the readers to draw his own conclusions but there are occasions when he intrudes upon the attention of the readers with comments on the scene or character or the situation. Here is a list of some of these comments.

1. 'How calm and peaceful were the beginnings of the day's business.' (Chapter 3, 29)
2. 'It appeared as though the sound was coming from the sky.' (Chapter 3, 31)
3. 'Every activity in the business of life appeared to be moving as rhythmically as part of a symphony. When Ibrahim the pedlar selling scents and oils with the bag on his back full of bottles big and small and another bag hanging from his shoulder, went from lane to lane shouting about his wares, it appeared as though his movements too were in keeping with that rhythm... So were the movements of the women with their earthen pitchers going to the water taps, tongas plying on the roads, children going to school. Every activity gave the impression of having combined to create an inner harmony to which the heart of the town throbbed. It was to the same rhythm that people were born, grew up and became old, that generations came and went. This rhythm or symphony was the creation of centuries of communal living, of the inhabitants having come together in harmony. One would think that every activity was like a chord in a musical

instrument and if even one string snapped the instrument would produce only jarring notes.' (Chapter 8, 115)

4. 'There is a quality of character which some people possess, an inner balance which strikes an equation with any situation, and does not make any demands on life that are beyond their reach. Such people are always cheerful and are like flowers that have blossomed fully.' (Chapter 8, 138)

5. 'As the day dawned, the town, as though stung by a cobra, bore a half-dead half-alive appearance. (Chapter 10, 161)

6. 'Overnight, dividing lines had been drawn among the residential localities. No Muslim now dared to go into a Hindu locality, nor a Hindu into a Muslim locality. Everyone was filled with fear and suspicion.' (Chapter 10, 162)

7. 'A woman has a keener insight into things.' (Chapter 14, 214)

8. 'Argument can counter argument, but argument is helpless against faith.' (Chapter 14, 215)

9. 'It is one thing to kill a kafir, it is quite another to kill someone you know and who has sought shelter in your house. A thin line was still there which was difficult to cross, despite the fact that the atmosphere was charged with religious frenzy and hatred.' (Chapter 16, 269)

10. 'Hostility and hatred cannot turn into sympathy and love so suddenly, they can only turn into crude banter.' (Chapter 17, 278)

11. 'A person clinging to life can only grovel and cringe. If you tell him to laugh, he will laugh, if you tell him to cry, he will begin to cry.' (Chapter 17. 278).

12. 'By the time evening fell, all the marks of Sikhism on Iqbal Singh's person had been replaced by the marks of the Muslim faith. A mere change of marks had brought about the transformation. Now he was no longer an enemy but a friend, not a kafir but a believer; to whom the doors of all Muslim houses were open.' (Chapter 17, 281)

13. The Turks had come, but they had come from one of the neighbouring villages. The Turks too mentally viewed their attack as an assault on the citadel of their age-old enemy, the Sikhs. In the minds of the Sikhs too they were the Turks of the bygone medieval times whom the Khalsa used to confront in battle. This confrontation too was looked upon as a link in the chain of earlier confrontations in history. *The 'warriors' had their feet in the twentieth century while their minds were in medieval times.* (Chapter 18, 282) (italics added)

Activity

1. *Now find out other examples of significant comments of the author and state their significance.*

2. *Which of the above remarks, in your opinion, are closely connected with the theme of the novel?*

3.5 THE THEME OF COMMUNALISM AND ITS TREATMENT

The theme of communalism as the major concern of the novel has been referred to. We shall now discuss the novel's treatment of it in some detail.

The following points could be made.

1. As suggested earlier, the novel's treatment of communalism is Janus-faced. It reconstructs the picture of a small town in pre-partition West Punjab in the grip of communal frenzy and through this picture, alerts us to the dangers posed by communal forces to the multi-religious, pluralistic culture of our country.

2. The writer's belief that for centuries the different communities had lived together in communal harmony is expressed thus.

   'Every activity in the business of life appeared to be moving as rhythmically as part of a symphony. When Ibrahim the pedlar selling scents and oils with the bag on his back full of bottles big and small and another bag hanging from his shoulder, went from lane to lane shouting about his wares, it appeared as though his movements too were in keeping with that rhythm. So were the movements of the women with their earthen pitchers going to the water taps, tongas plying on the roads, children going to school. Every activity gave the impression of having combined to create an inner harmony to which the heart of the town throbbed. It was to the same rhythm that people were born, grew up and became old, that generations came and went. This rhythm or symphony was the creation of centuries of communal living, of the inhabitants having come together in harmony. One would think that every activity was like a chord in a musical instrument and if even one string snapped the instrument would produce only jarring notes...' Chapter 8 (115).

   This is obviously a key statement of the omniscient narrator's, that expresses the conviction of the author. Notice the writer's use of the metaphor of symphony for harmonious communal living. The eruption of communal violence shattered that symphony and replaced it with cacophony and led to final separation.

3. The writer's project of giving a comprehensive picture of the riot-torn town has apparently prevented him from exploring the question of the origins of communalism in any depth. But he does hint at a couple of sources. He traces the source of communal antagonism to old prejudices and out-dated traditions and warns us against the danger of cherishing them and making them the basis of our actions. He pleads for greater realism and for sane and rational thinking. Two examples could be cited.

   (a) The Sikhs assembled together in the Syedpur gurdwara had come together for reasons of greater safety. But, instead of being realistic and negotiating with sensible elements among

Muslims of the village, they thought of them as Turks of old against whom Guru Gobind Singh had fought two centuries ago. Through congregational singing they worked themselves into a frenzy and were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the panth. Ironically, while they could go centuries back and link themselves with the Khalsa who had fought against the Turks, they were completely oblivious of the presence of the English just twenty-five miles away and their machinations. A good example of the killing in frenzy is furnished by Baldev Singh who alarmed at the imminent attack by Muslims comes to the conclusion that his old mother must have been killed and rushes out to avenge her 'murder' and comes back after killing old blacksmith Karim Baksh.

(b) A much bigger target for Bhisham Sahni is narrow sectarian thinking and religious bigotry among certain sections of Hindus. People like Vanprasthi believe that Muslims have been the despoilers of the land. This settled antipathy to Muslims is expressed in a couplet that he recites in an anguished voice at the congregation:

> Much blighted has this land been by
> the sins of the Muslims, even the
> Divine has refused us this grace
> and the earth its bounty (73).

To such Hindus Muslims are mlechhas and 'mlechhas are unclean people, they don't bathe, don't even wash their hands after toilet, eat from one another's plate, they have no regular hour of going to toilet,...' (82) Along with this is the self-glorifying belief that that the technique of making a bomb or an aeroplane was inscribed in the Vedas. This agenda of hate becomes even more dangerous when young innocent teenagers like Ranvir and Inder are indoctrinated into believing that killing a mlechha is the mark of 'a warrior'. The mentality of the 'warriors' when one of them killed the poor Muslim scent seller was like that of the besieged Sikhs:

'All the four 'warriors' were itching for action. Time had come to enter the battlefield and show one's feat of valour. Standing on the balcony they felt the same way as the Rajputs of yore did, who, taking cover behind rocks and dunes waited for the mlechha hordes to enter Haldi Ghati before they pounced upon them' (192).

Bhisham Sahni does not spare Muslim communalism either and the incident of the hounding and humiliation of Iqbal Singh by a gang of mujahids led by Ramzan and his conversion to Islam is frightening in its barbarity.

But curiously while Ramzan has a spark of humanity left in him and cannot bring himself to kill Harnam Singh, nothing redeems Vanprasthiji or Master Dev Vratt till the end. Obviously Bhisham Sahni does not think they deserve any quarter.

What are we to conclude from this? Who is to blame? We leave it to you to judge. We only need to remember that Hindu and Muslim communalism live in a symbiotic union. The problem of communalism is far too complex and Bhisham Sahni's diagnosis leaves several questions unanswered.

4. The writer devotes a lot of attention to the divisive role played by the British rulers. As Richard tells Liza, 'the rulers have their eyes only on differences that divide their subjects, not on what unites them' (51). And the suspicion is that the carcass of the pig was thrown outside the entrance of the mosque at his instance. The British raj is over but the suggestion is that we need to be wary of the ruling class or powerful groups even today for they could resort to the same policy of exploiting the religious sentiments of the people to further their own ends.

Comments

Bhisham Sahni has brought a new awareness by bringing the poor and underprivileged Nathu from the periphery to the centre of his narrative. In a sense Nathu is the conscience of the novel. It is person like him who are exploited and who suffer most. Dev Datt rightly suggests to the Statistics Babu: 'Add another column to your tabulations indicating the number of poor people killed as against well-to-do people' (325).

3.6 USE OF LANGUAGE

Bhisham Sahni's Hindi in *Tamas* is a fine amalgam of several languages. This shows how people of different religions, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs lived peacefully together. It is indeed a reflection of the composite culture of the area. Besides Hindi, there is a fair sprinkling of Urdu words in the language. Punjabi too has been used on occasions, particularly the dialect of Punjabi prevalent in the area. For instance, the freedom song sung by the Congress volunteers in the morning (Chapter 2) is a Punjabi song. The wake-call sung by the fakir is also in the same language. The verse from the scripture recited by Harnam Singh is naturally in Punjabi. When Shankar gets up to announce the holding of a public meeting (Chapter 9), he recites an Urdu couplet.

3.6.1 Use of Spoken Language

The writer's use of spoken language in the novel is a principal way to give a local, realistic flavour to it. An important fact is that all the folk and commonplace items used in the novel are in Punjabi and make full sense only to a person who knows the local variety of the language.

Here are some examples:

i. **Chapter 2** — Congress activist Aziz needling Bakshiji, Secretary, D.C.C., for coming late for the *prabhat pheri* with a Punjabi couplet apparently current among the people. (17 Hindi; 13 English)

ii. **Same chapt** — As the Congress activists start to move for the constructive programme, they sing a common patriotic, Punjabi song. (26-7H; 26E)

iii. **Chapter 3** — has a fakir exhorting people to leave their bed and be up and about through a familiar song that he sings. (28H; 29E)

iv. **Chapter 7** — Mehtaji to Bakshiji while coming back from the Deputy Commissioner. When Bakshiji reprimands him for traveling in two boats, Mehta fires back using a local Punjabi idiom. The words in Hindi are: 'Tumhara kya hai, tum to sadhu, bairagi ho, *tumhari na rann, na kann.*' The English translation reads: 'You are a sadhu, without a wife or family. What will a fellow gain by killing you?' (81H; 103E)

v. **Chapter 8** — Old Karim Khan relates the Khizr-Musa folktale to listeners assembled in the nanbai's shop. (120-24)

vi. **Chapter 14** — Harnam Singh keeps reciting verses from Guru Granth Saheb.(161 H; 215E) He also talks to his wife Banto using the local Punjabi idiom.(162H; 215E)

vii. **Chapter 16** — Ehsan Ali's wife Rajo who gives shelter to Harnam Singh and Banto responds to Harnam Singh's gratitude using Punjabi. (189H; 256E)

viii. **Same chapter** — Rajo's daughter-in-law Akran expresses her fear of men's disapproval of the women's action in sheltering the Sikh couple and Rajo's replies to it, in the local variety of Punjabi. (191H; 260E)

All these are evidence of the fact that the novel is firmly rooted in the life of the people.

If you are a Hindi speaking person, look for other examples of the use of the local idiom in the novel. Note also that the writer has made plentiful use of Urdu words.

3.6.2 Irony

Irony is a very potent weapon in the armory of the writer of *Tamas*. There is very little direct criticism in the novel. The writer describes the scene objectively withholding direct comment and leaves it to us to draw inferences. One could find examples of irony in situation and also irony in the use of words.

Examples:

1. Addressing Vanprasthiji as *Punyatma,* a saint.

   This word is used three times in the Hindi original(58). In the author's own English translation the word used is 'the Vanprasthi' or 'Vanprasthiji' once. Also, the closing words of the section dealing with Vanprasthiji in the chapter mock at his hypocritical abstention from the so-called mundane affairs. ['The other members of the core group except the Vanprasthi, would forthwith get into tongas and proceed to the bungalow of the Deputy Commissioner. The Vanprasthi, however, being a spiritual man, could not be expected to concern himself with mundane matters of the worldly householders.'] (Chapter 6, 79) Curiously the word *punyatma* is omitted in the author's own English translation.

2. The narrator-focalizor's use of the word 'daanvir' or 'philanthropic' for Lala Lakshmi Narain for giving five hundred rupees for purchasing lathis for the Youth Organization (Chapter 6,64H, 79E); the narrator-

focalizor's treatment of Ranvir and his fellow 'warriors' (Chapter 6, 86); in Ranvir's use of the word **'arsenal'** for the paltry collection of arms. (same page), the irony turns into mockery.

3. In Chapter 10 Shah Nawaz appears to Raghu Nath's wife to be 'a saint' for having retrieved her jewellery box from their old house, even though we know he has come back after giving an almost fatal kick to their servant Milkhi. Curiously the word used for Shah Nawaz in the Hindi original is *punyatma*, the same as used for Vanprasthiji (178E; 134H).

4. Similarly, the marauders who force Iqbal Singh to get converted to Islam are described as *mujahids* in the original Hindi version. (Chapter 17, 201H, 273E) *The writer wishes to present the dangers of religious frenzy, whether it appears among Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs.*

5. The crowning irony is that those who are really guilty are not at all conscious of what they have done but poor Nathu who is guiltless feels guilty all the time.

6. In the final chapter, Chapter 21, the person who was sitting in the Peace Bus in front, next to the driver was Murad Ali, the person who had the pig slaughtered and then had it thrown outside the entrance of the mosque. Similarly the Muslim League activist Shah Nawaz whose blue Buick was seen moving about in the villages offers to pay for petrol. *The obvious implication is that the peace achieved through such insincere efforts is hardly likely to last any length of time.*

7. The change of religion forced upon Iqbal Singh evokes an ironical comment from the narrator-focalizor: 'A mere change of marks had brought about the transformation. Now he was no longer an enemy but a friend, not a kafir but a believer; to whom the doors of all Muslim houses were open'. (Chapter 17, 281) *Here is a fine comment on religious identity, which the author considers to be skin-deep.*

3.6.3 Some Metaphors Used in *Tamas*

Bhisham Sahni writes in a plain, simple, unadorned style. But he has used some metaphors at significant moments.

(i) **Symphony** (Chapter 8, 115)

Bhisham Sahni has used this musical metaphor to indicate the harmonious communal living over the centuries. The paragraph in which this metaphor occurs has been quoted twice but here is the sentence in which it occurs.

'Every activity in the business of life appeared to be moving as rhythmically as part of a symphony ... This rhythm or symphony was the creation of centuries of communal living, of inhabitants having come together in harmony. One would think that every activity was like a chord in a musical instrument, and if even one string snapped the instrument would produce only jarring notes.'

In terms of the novel one heard the azan as well as the temple bells and of course other sounds. The dissonance is indicated when the alarm bell installed on top of the wall of the Shivala rings insistently (142), as it does on the fateful night of the breaking out of the riots. Liza's instinctive response to the sound is right: 'The sound makes one feel as if there was a storm on the sea and some ship was sounding the alarm bell' (144).

(ii) **Tide** [of the riots] (Chapter 20, 328)

The riots are compared to a tide that has receded leaving a lot of rubbish behind. Like the receding tide of the sea, the tide of the riots had subsided, leaving behind all kinds of litter and junk and garbage. Do you hear an echo of Matthew Arnold's poem, 'Dover Beach' here?

(iii) **Whirlpool and puppets** (Chapter 20)

The writer compares the political forces responsible for partition to a whirlpool that will inevitably suck everybody into it.

'It appeared as though a remorseless whirl of events would occur into the vortex of which they would all be sucked, none having either the capacity to stay out, that no one would be able to take into his own hands the reins of his life. They moved like puppets ...' (335).

These observations of the omniscient narrator attempt to capture the state of hopelessness and powerlessness that everyone found himself in during those troublous times in 1946. The partition came inevitably. In those days everyone felt like a puppet whose movements were decided by forces much greater than his or her own.

(iv) ***Tamas***

The biggest metaphor of all that the writer uses is the metaphor of *tamas* used as the title of the novel. *Tamas* means darkness, the darkness of ignorance and blindness to reality. The title has been explained elsewhere.

Activity 1

1. Now pick out other examples of irony in the novel and explain the use of irony in each case.
2. In what sense is the novel's treatment of the theme of communalism Janus-faced?
3. How objective is the writer's presentation in *Tamas*?

3.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit discusses the narrative in its finer details including the writer's choice of an omniscient and omnipresent narrator to tell his story and how the writer achieves objectivity in his presentation. The theme of communalism is discussed and also the writer's use of language including irony and metaphors.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the different ways in which the writer has achieved objectivity in his presentation.
2. Discuss the use of metaphors in the novel.

UNIT 4 CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Some General Considerations
4.3 Mode of Characterization
4.4 Subalterns in the Novel
  4.4.1 Jarnail
  4.4.2 Murad Ali
  4.4.3 Richard – The Imperial Representative
  4.4.4 Liza
  4.4.5 Dev Datt and Comrades
4.5 Some Important Episodes
4.6 Let Us Sum Up
4.7 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit focuses on Bhisham Sahni's mode of characterization: 'telling' and 'showing'. It discusses not just the major characters but several characters briefly and also gives an analysis of some important episodes that affect the poor and the exploited.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

There is no sacrosanct way of making an assessment of a character. However, the subtleties of characterization in terms of presentation, that is the mode of telling and showing is discussed in this chapter. You as mature students are expected to make your own observations/assessments. You might not agree with the observations made in this unit. However we request you to undertake the activities given which will help you to logically support your view point.

4.2 SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

A few observations about characters and characterization would be in order here: One that **Bhisham Sahni's characters and characterization have to be understood in the light of his purpose.** The purpose, ostensibly, is to present a comprehensive view of a district town in a Muslim majority region on the eve of partition and give a glimpse of the communal holocaust that partition was and the forces responsible for it. Assuming that that is his overall aim, he necessarily has to introduce us to a large variety of characters, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. Among these are: Nathu, Bakshiji, Jarnail, Shah Nawaz, Lala Lakshmi Narain, Dev Datt, Murad Ali, Harnam Singh, his son Iqbal and daughter Jasbir, and Rajo and her son Ramzan. There are numerous other

characters also. Besides, there is an American Christian missionary and of course Richard the Deputy Commissioner and his wife Liza. Our aquaintance with them is necessarily more or less brief, though some of these characters we know more intimately than the others. For instance, we know Nathu more closely than we know any other character. Richard and his wife Liza also we know rather well. But whatever the degree of our familiarity with them and their individuality, *most of these characters tend to be representative figures also*. Nathu for all his individuality represents the poor and the underprivileged, who are exploited by powerful people for their own ends. His sudden disappearance suggests how these same powerful people can have persons like him eliminated once their utility was over. Richard represents the ruling class. Harnam Singh is one of those innumerable villagers who, as the text says, 'were knocking about in search of shelter" (225).

Let us also not forget that we remain with these characters for a maximum of five days. **This means that the characters do not develop, cannot develop.** And yet they must be alive in their presentation if they have to have any meaning for us. The brief encounters thus place a great degree of constraint on the writer. He must have the ability to capture them in their most significant moments, in mid-gesture as it were without much or any commentary. When this happens, the characters get etched in our memory. This is very clear in the writer's presentation of Bakshiji, Jarnail and Shah Nawaz and even Ramzan, among others.

However, these more or less brief objective glimpses of characters generally prevent the readers from getting to know them more fully and also to identity themselves with the sympathetic characters among them. This brevity tends to create a big gap between the character and the reader and makes him more of a distant spectator rather than a participant. Besides Nathu, the nearest one comes to sympathize with is perhaps Harnam Singh, but even with him we remain for not much longer than two chapters. The writer wants the readers to view each scene and each character and each speech dispassionately and critically. He is against frenzy of any kind. But this detachment robs the narrative of much of its warmth.

Also, **I feel that the writer in depicting characters has tried to demolish certain stereotypes that we have in our minds.** After the outbreak of communal frenzy the dividing lines between Hindus and Sikhs, and Muslims became sharp and clear. Mutual distrust was rampant. Like several people, Lala Lakshmi Narain held this stereotype — that Muslims were not to be trusted. But Bhisham Sahni gives examples that suggest the opposite. The best example that comes to mind is that of Harnam Singh's encounter with a Muslim woman Rajo, her husband and their fanatic son. First, the person who comes to warn them to leave their home at once is a Muslim, Karim Khan. Rajo is the wife of Ehsan Ali and mother of Ramzan both of whom have gone on a looting spree but when she is presented with a situation that is entirely new, she hesitates for a moment, and then crosses the religious barrier. Her essential humanity comes out and she agrees to shelter Harnam Singh and his wife. The same drama is repeated when Rajo's husband Ehsan Ali comes and asks them to leave and yet when they are ready to go out, he asks them to stay. But the biggest example of human compassion triumphing over religious bigotry comes when though he raises his pickaxe to strike, Ramzan just cannot bring himself to kill the fugitive Harnam Singh in his own home. When

Harnam Singh and Banto go away, Rajo escorts them part of the way and gives them back their gun and jewellery.

Another person who breaks the stereotype is Shah Nawaz. He is a staunch member of the Muslim League and during the period of rioting his blue Buick is seen doing the rounds of villages ostensibly to carry arms and ammunition to Muslims in their fight against Hindus but the same person is a great friend of Raghu Nath's and helps him when help is needed most. Moreover he retrieves his friend's wife's jewellery from their old house. Sheikh Nur Elahi and Lala Lakshmi Narain have been class fellows and though the narrator describes them as 'fanatics', Nur Elahi helps to shift his bales of cotton to a safe place during the rioting.

4.3 MODE OF CHARACTERIZATION

In a well-known injunction, Henry James laid down: 'Dramatize, dramatize.' Following him, Percy Lubbock said: 'The art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shown*, to be so *exhibited* that it will tell itself.' (Italics added) Dramatizing or showing is thus of crucial importance.

There are no long analyses of characters, for the novel doesn't focus on any one individual or family. The writer depends upon both **telling** and **showing**. The accent is always on showing, on dramatizing. When we meet Shah Nawaz first, he is already escorting Lala Lakshmi Narain and family to safety and the very first sentence introduces him as 'a trusted friend among friends'. His later conduct more than confirms this trait in his character. But the kick that he gives Milkhi *reveals* the staunch prejudiced Muslim in him, something that the writer wants us to infer from his conduct.

The great merit of Bhisham Sahni is that he is happy presenting the scene or character in action and keeping his own comments or remarks to the minimum. *The novel can take you in by its apparent simplicity but it places a great responsibility, on the reader, the responsibility to read with an alert mind and draw inferences and see comparisons and contrasts.*

Activity 1

Keeping these observations in mind can you find out how Nathu is characterized, or how the character of Vanprasthi is presented and whether the writer is making use of irony in characterization?

4.4 SUBALTERNS IN THE NOVEL

The novel highlights the part played by the poor and the deprived in the communal rioting in the city and its environs and their sufferings during communal violence.

Nathu's role as the unwilling killer of the pig that triggered off the riots has already been referred to. From the periphery the writer has brought him centre stage. Moreover, he could also be called the conscience of the novel.

An important category of those who suffer is the domestic servants like Milkhi, Raghu Nath's servant, and Nanki, Lala Lakshmi Narain's servant. Both are left behind to look after their masters' property after they themselves have shifted to safer places. Lala Lakshmi Narain's wife shows some concern about Nanku's safety when she opposes her husband's idea to send him with a message to their relative of theirs during the rioting at night: '*Nanku too is the son of some mother.* Don't push him into the jaws of death' (158). (italics added)

Similarly, while others moved to the safety of the gurdwara, the peon of the Khalsa School at Syedpur was asked to do his duty guarding the school and he died doing it (283).

The omniscient narrator also lets us listen to two important conversations. In the first a coolie is reporting to another coolie his dialogue with a babu. When the babu whose load he was carrying told him that India was about to be free, he said, 'Babuji, what is that to me? I am carrying loads now and shall continue carrying them then. Our lot is to carry loads' (127-28). This remark gives an indication of how little the poor expect their lives to be touched by what we consider to be most important events.

In the other conversation, two college peons are talking to each other before the start of the Peace Committee meeting in the college attended by the elite of the town. One of them said to the other: '*We poor people are such ignorant fools, we go breaking each other's heads.* These well-to-do people are so wise and sensible. They are all here, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs. See how cordially they are meeting one another' (343). (italics added) This shows a certain rise in the consciousness of the common man.

Besides, the poor constitute the most vulnerable section of society in any emergency and probably they die in greater numbers than the rich and the powerful. This was the assumption behind Comrade Dev Datt's suggestion to the Statistics Babu to add another category to the statistics he was collecting– how many of those killed were poor, how many rich (325). As he says, this 'important aspect' would reveal 'quite a few things'.

All these examples show how the author enables us to hear some of those voices, which we would otherwise never have heard.

4.4.1 Jarnail

He is a middle-aged Sikh activist of the Congress who is absolutely fearless and is passionately devoted to the cause of freedom. Somewhat eccentric, he is always in the thick of things: making the announcement of a meeting, taking part in the constructive programme, giving a speech, or courting imprisonment. During his younger days he had attended the Congress session at Lahore in 1929 and since then has always worn the volunteer's uniform. When a pig's carcass is spotted at the steps of a mosque, it is he who helps Bakshiji to remove it. During the riots while everyone else is sitting in the

safety of his home, he is out making a speech to spread Gandhiji's message of peace. It is during one such speech that he falls to the lathi of a Muslim zealot.

4.4.2 Murad Ali

Murad Ali is a Muslim League sympathizer whose action of throwing the pig's carcass at the entrance of a mosque precipitates the whole riot. Whether or not he has done so at the behest of the authorities is not clear. In other words we do not know whether he himself has been made use of just as he has made use of Nathu. But the mysterious way he conducts himself afterwards and the way in which he avoids talking to Nathu suggest that he is a part of a well-laid conspiracy. After the rioting is over and a joint Peace Bus is to go round the town, he sits in front and shouts the slogans for peace most passionately. This is highly ironical and is meant to suggest how poor the chances of success of such attempts are.

4.4.3 Richard — The Imperial Representative

A very important focus of the novel is the exposure of British imperialism and how it works to exploit the religious differences between Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs to alienate them from one another.

The writer's exposure of the British rulers and their machinations to foment communal trouble in India is competently done. If the suspicion that Richard is the mastermind behind the riots is correct, then the whole operation has been planned very meticulously. As it is, there is only a suspicion and nothing can be said with certainty, Murad Ali remaining an enigmatic figure. But there is nothing new or startling about this exposure. What is new is the introduction of Liza, wife of the Deputy Commissioner who by being presented as a contrast to Richard, serves the purpose of exposing him and his imperialistic designs. The clearest statement about the imperialistic designs comes from the naïve Liza when she says: ' In the name of freedom they fight against you, but in the name of religion, you make them fight against one another' (50). This draws the confession from the hard-boiled Richard: 'Darling, rulers have their eyes only on differences that divide their subjects, not on what unites them' (51).

This is in essence the British policy of 'Divide and rule' and his defense of his inaction in controlling the possibility of riots in the town in the name of letting the communities resolve their differences themselves is a perfect illustration of this policy.

An important aspect of Richard's personality is his interest in ancient Indian history and culture. He has a huge collection of Buddha heads and statuettes and Indian folk art and is a great admirer of them. But he has kept his private interest and his administrative responsibility in watertight compartments. The result is that as an administrator he does not have a human face.

4.4.4 Liza

Liza is a perfect foil to her husband Richard, the administrator. She comes through to us as a sensitive individual who wants Richard's love and human company but has had neither. All day long she has to pass her time surrounded by Buddha heads and books that Richard has collected. She feels

ignored and emotionally unfulfilled and also aggrieved. The threat that the Buddha heads seem to hold towards her is actually an expression of her own emotional insecurity, more particularly because these heads take away those hours of leisure that Richard is left with after attending to his official work. She feels hugely bored and has sought a route of escape through drinking beer. In her drunkenness she even wets her dress.

Since she has no colonial hang-ups, she can see British designs for what they are. When Richard says that while in the name of religion Indians fight one another, in the name of freedom they fight against the British, she corrects him: 'Don't try to be too clever, Richard. I also know a thing or two. In the name of freedom they fight against you, but *in the name of religion you make them fight one another. Isn't that right?*' (50) (italics added)

Liza is not able to differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim and a Sikh, which I think is the writer's way of suggesting that the differences between them are superficial. Also since as Richard says that both Hindus and Muslims belong to the same racial stock, she feels that they have little reason to fight. In fact she asks Richard to point this fact to them (53-4).

Her interaction with Richard highlights his callousness as much as it brings out her own sensitive nature. When later Richard tells her that 103 villages have been burnt down and that he is busy, she cuttingly says: 'So many villages burnt down, Richard, and you still have work to do? What more is there for you to do?' (312) Later when he unfeelingly offers to take her to the countryside where he has heard a lark, her reply is even more indignant: 'What sort of a person are you Richard, that in such places too you can see new kinds of birds and listen to the warbling of the lark?' (314)

4.4.5 Dev Datt and Comrades

Comrade Dev Datt is a young communist who is shown engaged in bringing the warring communities together. He makes his appearance rather late in the novel in Chapter 11. Earlier he is mentioned only once when Jamail points out that he has seen Kashmiri Lal in the company of a communist, Dev Datt (16). He and his friends are perhaps the only characters towards whom Bhisham Sahni's attitude is wholly laudatory.

A clue to this attitude could perhaps be found in the writer's reply to a query made by Alok Bhalla in an interview.

When asked about his attitude towards the Communist Party for its support to the Muslim League and its demand for Pakistan, he frankly admitted that he had been very much confused at that time. But it seems that his personal fondness for a communist friend prevailed. The prototype for Dev Datt was a fellow lecturer in Rawalpindi, who, Bhisham Sahni said, was a very good organizer, who gave him books to read and who he liked very much ('I liked him because he was a very sincere and a very active man.') (*Pangs*, II, 105-06) But ideologically, he said, he was not convinced by him.

In the face of this confession one can only say that his later ideological compulsions made him present Communist characters in an entirely favourable light.

Activity 2

The following are some of the key lines in the novel that are typical of one or the other important character in the novel. Identify the character and the context and then comment on them. ***This exercise will help you to fix your attention on important aspects of characters and help you to understand them better.***

- A passion had gripped his soul, and on the strength of that passion he was able to bear the troubles and tribulations of life.
- 'All I can say to them is that their religious differences are their affairs and should be resolved by them. The administration can render any help that they may want.'
- 'If you cannot set up army pickets you can certainly clamp curfew on the town. Police pickets can be set up, too.'
- 'What sort of a person are you Richard that in such places too you can see new kinds of birds and listen to the warbling of the lark?'
- 'It seems kites and vultures will hover over the town for a long time.'
- 'Shall I push out a person who has come seeking shelter? Everyone has to go into God's presence one day.'
- 'May God be with you! May God be with everyone!'
- 'To put a stop to the riots, it is imperative that we bring together leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League, to arrange a meeting between Hayat Baksh and Bakshiji.'
- Coming down the staircase, as he passed by Milkhi's body, he felt like lifting his foot and hitting Milkhi on the face so as to crush the centipede.
- 'I would rather lay down my life than see any harm come to him. If anyone dare so much as touch him, I shall skin him alive.'
- 'Whatever I did, was done in ignorance. What about those who are setting fire and killing innocent pedestrians and committing such heinous crimes? Why are they indulging in such foul acts with wide open eyes?....If I am a criminal, aren't they worse criminals?'
- 'Ranvir, you slaughter this hen. This is your initiation test. You have to prove how mentally tough you are.'
- 'Killing is not difficult. I could have killed this man easily. One has only to raise one's hand and it is done. It is fighting that is difficult, particularly when the other person stands up against you.'
- 'Won't it be worse if we walk away from it? Do you think the Muslims will remove the pig's carcass from the steps of the mosque?'
- 'In the name of freedom they fight against you, but in the name of religion you make them fight one another. Isn't that right?'
- 'We are not the tail of the Congress. We are professional revolutionaries.'

4.5 SOME IMPORTANT EPISODES

As we stated earlier in our objectives, the episodes discussed in this section will help you to understand the plight of the poor and the exploited. These are:

The Citizens' Delegation to the Deputy Commissioner (For details of the visit, read the summary of Chapter 7 together with the summary of Chapter 4 given earlier.)

Richard's handling of the delegation is a perfect illustration not only of the British policy of divide and rule in actual operation but also of British callousness.

Bakshiji, the Secretary of the District Congress Committee, who has got this delegation together, is deeply apprehensive — and rightly so — that rioting is imminent and that unless steps are taken precipitately, hell will break loose on the city. But Richard is immovable. To disarm criticism, he begins offensively saying that they had little faith in the British government and they wouldn't care to listen to what he had to say. Then he proceeds to shoot down every single proposal that Bakshiji makes to prevent rioting. Ironically these are the very steps finally taken but not before he has let the communal fire blaze for full five days and the communal gulf has become unbridgeable. These steps are:

i. patrolling by army/police and posting army/police pickets at sensitive spots;

ii. imposing a curfew;

iii. an aeroplane flying over the city as a warning.

Whether or not Richard is personally responsible for the throwing of the carcass of the pig, he wants the rioting to take place before stepping in to restore law and order. He wants to reap the bitter harvest of communal antagonism.

In Chapter 12, **Inder stabs a poor old Muslim scent seller.** It needs to be read together with chapter 6 dealing with Vanprasthi and Master Dev Vratt and Ranvir's initiation as an Aryavir by Masterji.

Lala Lakshmi Narain's 15-year old son, Ranvir is a very keen member of the Hindu Youth Wing, apparently a fundamentalist Hindu organization and has passed the initiation test administered by Master Dev Vratt, which is chopping off the neck of a hen. He is now the leader of the small band of Hindu warriors or Aryavirs as they are called in the original Hindi version of the novel. They are: Inder, Dharmadev, Manohar, Shambhu and of course Ranvir.

Ranvir is short-statured and follows the ideals instilled in him by Masterji. He cast himself in the role of Shivaji in his confrontation with Aurangzeb.

They plan to kill their first Muslim prey. The details are all given in the summary of Chapter 12 given elsewhere and need not be repeated. Still it is important to recall some important points of this event.

You remember that on the fateful day several persons enter the lane and the choice of the group falls on an old Muslim scent seller. He is a stranger, burdened with bags, he cannot run away and looks tired. All these are favourable factors that make him an ideal victim.

We are then told how Inder follows him and then catches up with him. At a suitable opportunity he stabs him and doesn't forget to give a twist to the knife, as his mentor had told him to.

This incident shows Hindu fanaticism at its worst. Several things make it horrific. First, it is a cold-blooded murder, which is entirely unprovoked. Moreover it is done to a man who cannot defend himself and more than anything, because he is a Muslim. It is particularly dangerous because it proceeds from the belief that India is a land that has been blighted by the presence of Muslims who, inferentially, have no right to be here. It is even more dangerous because the perpetrator of the murder is a teenager Inder who has imbibed this lesson of extreme intolerance from people like Vanprasthi and Master Dev Vratt.

The original Hindi version of the novel uniformly calls him Vanprasthiji but the English version eliminates the respectful suffix *ji*. *Vanprastha* is the third stage in the scale of spiritual ascension of man among Hindus. So Vanprasthi or Vanprasthiji indicates a person who has given up worldly interests and has gone to the forest. But the Vanprasthi in the novel is presented as a hypocrite. He mouths mantras that speak of concern for all life but in his actual thinking considers Muslims to be the evil doers on this land. The murder is meant to be an exemplification of the ideology of hatred preached by people like him. Bhisham Sahni mocks at him by giving him the name of Vanprasthi and by calling him a *punyatma* in the beginning. As such the incident is both an exposure and a warning.

Then there is **Old Karim Khan's story of Khizr and Musa.** You will recall that the story of Khizr and Musa is told by old Karim Khan. It is afternoon and he is sitting in a group at a nanbai's shop in the Shivala Bazar before the outbreak of riots.

Old Karim Khan says that once Musa approached Khizr to accept him as his disciple. Khizr was already a prophet. Musa too was to be a prophet but that was later. Khizr agreed but he said there was one condition. The condition was that Musa should not make comments on whatever he did. Musa said he would keep quiet.

Once Khizr and Musa were to cross a river. They saw a boat tied at the bank of the river and sat in it. As the boatman rowed the boat across, Khizr started making holes in the bottom. This shocked Musa. He burst out in alarm: 'What in God's name are you doing? We shall all be drowned.' Khizr put his forefinger on his lips. It seemed a new boat and it was getting flooded. After he had made holes, Khizr put stoppers in them. Soon they reached the other side safely.

Then they came across a young boy. Khizr saw the boy playing on the ground. Khizr went up to the boy, picked him up and without saying a word, wrung his neck. Musa shrieked: 'What! You have put an innocent boy to death.' But Khizr again gestured to him to keep quiet. But Musa couldn't keep back his outrage and asked how the boy had offended him.

They started walking on. Soon they came to a village. They came across a dilapidated boundary wall. Khizr stopped and started putting the bricks lying on the ground one on top of the other on the wall in order to repair it. Musa was again non-plussed. He told him that he had put a young boy to death and

here he was repairing an old wall. But since he had given his word to Khizr, he kept quiet.

Khizr then explained everything to Musa. About making holes in the bottom of the boat, he said that the ruler was a tyrant and his men would certainly have taken his new boat away for his pleasure if he had not bored holes in it. He didn't want the boatman to lose his livelihood.

Second, he had killed the boy because he was a bastard and the son of a very wicked and cruel man. Khizr was able to foresee that he would grow up into a heartless man who would torment innocent people. He said: 'Now tell me, was my conduct right or wrong?

What about the repairing of the old wall? Under the wall lies a buried treasure. He wants the villagers, who are poor and needy, to discover it and become prosperous. This they will do when they plough the land. Finding the wall in their way, they will demolish it and discover the treasure.

Old Karim Khan draws a moral from the story: 'A ruler can see what you and I, ordinary folk, cannot.' He goes further: 'The British ruler has all-seeing eyes, otherwise how can it be possible that a handful of firanghis coming from across the seven seas should rule over so big a country? The firanghis are very wise, subtle, very far-sighted...'(124)

What is the point of the story? The story, a Muslim friend has told me, is taken from the Quran and is meant to enforce the moral that God's ways are inscrutable and indecipherable. Here it has been used to illustrate a secular point. But the question still remains: 'What is the point the writer wants to make.'

In the context of the novel the story has an ironical application. In the original story Khizr foresees all the three mischiefs and takes steps to stop them. Here the irony is that though the British ruler is definitely far-sighted, he takes no steps whatsoever to put a stop to the rioting that takes place even when he is requested to do so. Old Karim Khan's telling of it uncritically itself amounts to a worshipful attitude towards the British rulers. Such an attitude was not uncommon in the days of partition. Witness the attitude of S. Kishen Singh, a veteran of World War Two, who salutes the British pilot circling over the riot-torn Syedpur and bringing the violence to a stop. He almost goes overboard and shouts: 'God save the King Sahib, God save the King!'

Finally the episode of the **Sikh women's sacrifice.** This episode is described as part of the Sikh response to the attack by Muslim marauders in Syedpur in Chapter 18. So it should be read together with Chapter 15, which deals with the state of mind of the Sikhs assembled in the local gurdwara.

A few important points could be recalled: One that the Sikhs assembled in the gurdwara were one in their resolve to fight to the last for the sake of the panth. They were all in an ecstatic state of mind. The Sikh congregationists saw themselves as being pitted against their traditional enemy, the Turks of long ago when the panth was in danger and when the Khalsa army had

confronted them. They saw their present confrontation as a link in the same tradition.

One such ecstatic soul was Jasbir, daughter of Harnam Singh, who had a tea stall at Dhok Elahi Baksh. She stood out among the Sikh women present in the gurdwara: by her sharp, high-pitched voice, her small kirpan that hung by her side, and the sparkle of sacrifice in her eyes. She had inherited her piety from her father and she served the congregation in all sorts of ways.

It is also important to know that Bhisham Sahni is critical of the Sikh attitude towards the Muslims as being romantic and unrealistic. This is clear from what is said through Comrade Sohan Singh and the omniscient narrator. The points of criticism are the following: First, the Sikhs distrusted all Muslims who they imagined to be their traditional enemies, the Turks, just as the Muslims distrusted them. ('The warriors had their feet in the twentieth century while their minds were in medieval times.') Second, the Sikhs were being instigated against Muslims as they were being instigated against the Sikhs. Third, the Sikhs were unrealistic, indeed blind to the presence of the English and their manipulations. ('If anything was not there [in their minds], it was the British presence.) Like Dev Datt and Mir Dad, Sohan Singh kept insisting that it was all a mischief of the English. But his plea was ignored.

The episode of the Sikh women jumping into the well to save their honour must be seen in the light of this background.

As you will recall, this incident occurred when the second attack on Sikhs by Muslim marauders was imminent. Sensing danger, women and children got together and led by Jasbir made their way to a well outside the gurdwara. They tied their dupattas round their waist and wore no shoes. Some of them shouted: 'The Turks have come.' They seemed to be under a spell. They didn't know where they were going or why. Jasbir was the first to jump. She just uttered 'Wah guru' and jumped into the well. She was followed by other women, who jumped with or without children. By the time the marauders actually came, there was not a single woman left inside the gurdwara.

Now the TV version of this incident is celebratory. Jasbir's role was played by Uttara Baokar and the jumping-into-the-well scene is accompanied by the chorus singing of Guru Gobind Singh's well-known song. I suggest that Bhisham Sahni's attitude is more complex. One commentator has described his attitude as ironical, which is nearer the mark. In any case the heroism of the scene in the novel seems underplayed. There are no laudatory words used by the writer.

What is your own reaction? Read the scene carefully and decide for yourself.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

The writer uses both modes of characterization, telling as well as showing. Because of the writer's intention to present a comprehensive picture of a town in the grip of communal frenzy the attention given to characters is necessarily brief. He has drawn specific attention to the poor and the exploited who suffer most on occasions like the riots. He has tried to break stereotypes and has pleaded for a sane and rational approach.

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the two modes of characterization, telling and showing. Which one does the narrator prefer?

2. Do any of the characters surprise you at any stage in the novel? Who are they?

3. Give at least two examples to show how characters behave in extreme circumstances.

UNIT 5 AN OVERVIEW

Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

This concluding unit is meant to give you an overview of the novel and raise several questions relating to the meaning of the novel and its artistry. Besides, it succinctly presents some of the important criticism of the novel. Finally, it also talks about Govind Nihalani's hugely popular and controversial TV serial based on the novel and briefly refers to the legal battle fought about it.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

After having sojourned together on our journey of having explored, analysed, seen *Tamas* thread bare in the previous four units, we now come to the finale. We shall talk about the positions and perspectives taken by the writer in his delineation of characters and events, the literary criticism available on *Tamas*. However we shall leave you to seek for yourself whether the writer is partisan or objective? Is he balanced? And finally, is he non-judgmental?

As thinking adults you should be able to wrestle with these questions yourself and reach your own conclusions.

5.2 A PANORAMIC VIEW

Tamas is the portrait of a West Punjab town in the grip of communal frenzy in pre-partition India. The narrator's camera moves over the city giving us more or less brief glimpses of scenes and people and the goings-on in the town. Assembled together, the novel presents a composite picture that is

comprehensive, harmonious and vibrant. The eruption of the riots shatters everything.

5.2.1 The Writer's Objectivity

I think that the major strength of the novel is its objectivity and the evenness of its tone. This objectivity results in the writer's general reluctance to intrude into the narrative. There are occasions when he does so but such occasions are not many. Even the few that are there are in a low key.

The writer's objectivity is deliberate. He is against frenzy of any kind. Witness the congregation scene in the gurdwara and later the chase-and-conversion scene involving Iqbal Singh. The whole novel is a strong plea for sanity and rationality in the matter of religious and political issues and asks us not to get swayed by outdated traditions and beliefs. The writer's objectivity is reflected in his style also, in the choice of the words he uses. So in a very real sense he is practising what he sets out to say.

A good example of the writer's objective style could be seen in his presentation of the character of Shah Nawaz. He maintains his temper and his equanimity even while talking about Shah Nawaz's great hatred for Milkhi.

...Shah Nawaz gave a sharp kick to Milkhi on his back. Milkhi stumbled and fell head downward. As he went tumbling down, his head struck against the wall at the turn of the staircase; his forehead split and his spine broke. When Shah Nawaz came down the staircase, Milkhi's head was hanging downward from one of the last steps in the staircase. Shah Nawaz was still in a rage, the spurt of anger had not subsided. Coming down the staircase, he felt like lifting his foot and hitting Milkhi on the face so as to crush the centipede (177).

Notice that Bhisham Sahni avoids using adjectives. The only adjective he uses is 'sharp' in 'sharp kick'. The word 'centipede' carries a strong emotional charge but the concentrated hatred that it conveys is Shah Nawaz's, not his own. The writer is merely reporting. This objectivity combined with the complexity of his character makes him a memorable character and the writer's presentation extremely effective. The scene becomes ironical when Shah Nawaz goes and delivers the jewellery box to his friend's wife and she thinks of him as 'a saint', a 'punyaatma' (in the Hindi version). This is Bhisham Sahni at his best.

Even Ramzan who is one of the cruelest characters in the novel shows that he has some humanity left in him.

But how does Sahni present his Hindu fundamentalist characters? It seems — and this is my personal opinion — that when he comes to Vanprasthi and Ranvir's Master Dev Vratt, his usual objectivity seems to desert him and is overtaken by mockery and stinging satire. As a result they are both painted in dark colours. In the case of Shah Nawaz, the narrator discovers his character and the discovery is not complete until the end. But when he comes to Vanprasthi, he knows all that he needs to know about him and he begins with mockery. He does not discover, he merely uncovers. The question is: Why does he lose his temper? And why does he oversimplify their characters? Is it

that his ideological compulsions drive out his artistic objectivity, which is one of the strong points of the novel?

Every writer has his or her predilections, his own point of view, and his own beliefs. Bhisham Sahni has his and he is entitled to them. But if his being a communist interferes in the process of his artistry, it is a matter for concern. His presentation of Congressmen is rather unflattering. They are presented as a squabbling lot, needling and mocking at one another. Bakhshiji and Jarnail are the two most sincere Congressmen in the town but notice how Bhisham Sahni introduces Bakshiji:

> A man with a hurricane lamp had turned the corner of the Bara Bazar and was coming towards the Congress office. The light of the lamp fell only on the man's legs *so it seemed as though only a pair of pajamas was walking along* (12). (italics added)

The question is: why this jocularity? What has Bakhshiji done or will do to deserve this mockery? He is the first person who suggests that the dead pig should be removed from the mosque and proceeds to do so with the help of Jarnail. He is the prime mover of the delegation to the Deputy Commissioner. While the rioting is on, he goes to the house of Hayat Baksh at great personal risk and the two sign a joint appeal for peace. His prophecy of death and destruction — "Kites will fly" — ultimately proves true. Yet at the end Bhisham Sahni writes him off: 'Ever since the riots had broken out, Bakshi's mind had been *in a sort of mist.* He keeps saying to himself again and again that the British had again had the last word, had again had the better of them while his own hold on the situation has been *feeble* all along' (308-09). (italics added) This unceremonious dismissal of Bakshiji doesn't carry conviction, not to this reader at least.

On the other hand Bhisham Sahni projects Comrade Dev Datt, Sohan Singh and Mir Dad as being indefatigably active in bringing peace to the villages and the town. Sohan Singh loses his life doing so. All this is praiseworthy. But why should it be necessary to deflate and denigrate one set of characters in order to be able to praise another? In a mood of self-congratulation, he even makes Dev Datt describe himself and his friends as 'professional revolutionaries'. Listen to Dev Datt speaking to Manohar Lal who does not want to sit in the peace bus in which a communist is sitting:

> 'Manohar Lal, we don't mince matters. We are not the tail of the Congress. *We are professional revolutionaries.* We are working to bring about peaceful conditions in the town and to that end it is necessary to bring together the leaders of all the parties, including your party of which you are the sole follower' (350-51). (italics added)

This assertion remains uncontested in the novel and also unsubstantiated.

5.2.2 Focus on the Poor and the Underprivileged

Another important dimension of the novel is its focus on the poor and underprivileged who are exploited and who suffer most in the event of rioting. Nathu's portraiture is truly a triumph of the creative imagination. This character remains etched in our memories long after the book has been put aside.

5.2.3 Dispersal of Interest

The writer's project of depicting a whole town in the grip of communal frenzy has had its disadvantages. We never get to know any of the characters in any great depth. There is a certain dispersion of interest in the novel. The only character that we get close to is Nathu. Richard and Liza come next with Shah Nawaz, Jarnail and Bakshiji coming a distant third.

5.2.4 Polyphonic Voices

We hear several voices in the novel. Whose is the dominant voice in the novel? I think the chief concern of the novel is the maintenance of communal amity and the avoidance of religious and political frenzy and the necessity of viewing issues sanely and rationally. (One wonders if that is why the writer has avoided introducing the stereotype of love across the religious barrier.) If the novel has a mouthpiece, it apparently consists of the trio of Comrade Dev Datt, Sohan Singh and Mir Dad. Their entire effort in the novel has been to bring the different communities together and facilitate the establishment of peace. But while doing so, they also repeatedly assert that the riots are all engineered by the British. In saying this they seem to be absolving the communities of any responsibility for the mayhem. If this is Bhisham Sahni's view also, it seems to be an oversimplification of a complex reality.

The British are able to bring the riots under their control when they want to and to that extent they are culpable but the religious antipathies between Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs were patent. And the British exploited them to the full. It was at best a fragile togetherness that existed, so fragile that it crumbled under the slightest pressure. So, when the writer asserts in his key statement (115) that 'the rhythm or symphony was the creation of centuries of communal living, of the inhabitants having come together in harmony', he is romanticizing the situation a bit, saying what is politically correct or desirable, not what is real. What really existed could be called, in the words of another writer on partition, Krishna Sobti, 'a working harmony'. The hiatus between the communities had been growing. The Pir of Golra is said to be blessed with healing powers. But this is what one of his admirers says about him:

'But the Pir Saheb does not touch kafirs with his hands. He hates infidels. *Earlier*, it was different. Anyone could go to him. Only, if an infidel came for treatment, he would feel his pulse with a stick—putting one end of the stick on the pulse and the other to his ear, and thus diagnose his disease. *But now he does not permit any kafir to come near him.*' (italics added)

And he is 'a pir with very high spiritual attainments.' The reference to earlier times is not to yesterday or the day before but to quite sometime back.

Another important 'voice' that we hear in the novel is that of Nathu and through him of the poor and the deprived section of society. Throughout the novel we don't hear him speak a word, except to Murad Ali who does not recognize him, and to his wife. And the 'voice' that we hear is the voice of his evolving consciousness and this voice is silenced at the end.

Yet another voice that we hear in the novel is the voice of true religious piety represented by Harnam Singh. It has nothing to do with religious texts and

scriptures but of kindness and love in actual conduct and faith in human goodness. The writer, as we said earlier, is against religious frenzy but this is different. Along with Harnam Singh is the small voice of humanity heard through the tall and stately figure of Roja who gives shelter to Harnam Singh and his wife saying: 'Shall I push out a person who has come seeking shelter? Everyone has to go into God's presence one day' (258).

Besides the above voices, we hear yet another voice, not as loud and clear and rational as that of Comrade Dev Datt and friends but the voice of a character who may be poor and ill-dressed and eccentric but whose commitment to the nationalistic ideal is complete. The history of the freedom struggle is full of figures like Jarnail who gave their all for their country but remained on the margins, and died unsung and unmourned.

5.2.5 Question of Optimism or Pessimism

The novel as a whole doesn't sound very optimistic. An idealist like Jarnail is dead. Bakshiji, alone among the Congress activists after Jarnail, is committed to nationalism heart and soul but he is presented as being full of despair. **His sentence prophesying death and destruction in the city — 'Kites will fly' — becomes his signature.** Moreover those like Dev Datt, Sohan Singh and Mir Dad who are honestly and actively engaged in promoting peace are only partially effective.

The last scene in the novel shows us the elite of the town belonging to different political parties talking among themselves. Knowing them as we do, does the novel raise any hope that the peace will be lasting? Not if there are people like Murad Ali in the forefront. The peace achieved there seems a patchwork peace, very fragile and likely to break under the slightest pressure. The bus for peace seems more like a charade. This pessimism is vocalized at the end of Chapter 20 in the form of comments from the omniscient author who is doing duty for the author:

'Every person coming to the Relief Office had, as it were, brought with him, his bag of experience. But no one had the ability to assess these experiences or to draw inferences from them. They stared into vacancy and listened, with their ears pricked to whatever anyone said.... No one knew in which direction to turn, or what lay in store for him or her, or the kind of future it would be. It appeared as though a remorseless whirl of events would occur into the vortex of which they would all be sucked, none having either the capacity or the option to stay out, that no one would be able to take into his own hands the reins of his life. They moved like puppets...'

Whether or not the writer's pessimism is the result of hindsight—the novel was written twenty-five years after the partition — it reflects the reality that must have stared everyone in the face in those dark times.

The choice of the metaphor of a whirlpool to refer to political forces let loose, that will suck everyone into it and puppets for individuals is entirely appropriate for partition was effected the following year.

But since the novel has two faces and one of them looks forward to the future, it is hopeful — that is, if we come out of the 'tamas' of outdated traditions and prejudices and behave calmly and realistically.

5.2.6 The Title *Tamas*

Tamas means darkness, the darkness induced by communalism, by our refusal to see things in the right perspective. It means our blindness to view things sanely and rationally. The word also takes us back to the ancient Sanskrit adage 'Tamasoma jyotirgamaya' [Let darkness be dispelled by light!], in the light of which the darkness referred to is the darkness of ignorance, the ignorance caused by our not knowing enough. Along with this is the unspoken hope that out of this darkness will emerge knowledge and enlightenment.

5.2.7 *Tamas* in Translation

As stated earlier there are two translations of **Tamas** available: one by Bhisham Sahni which has the same title as the Hindi version and an earlier translation by Jai Ratan with the title **The Kites Will Fly**. Bhisham Sahni has been a teacher of English in a college in Delhi and his translation of the Hindi text makes a felicitous reading. I am not sure if he has left an account of the problems he faced while translating his own novel. But on the basis of the translation, the following points could be made.

- The distinction between Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi is naturally lost in the English translation.
- Even so, the writer has retained some of the local terms and with them their associations. These culturally loaded terms used for Hindus by Muslims are karar and baniya. The Hindu term of contempt mlechha and the Muslim term of contempt for Hindus kafir are also retained.
- The writer has also made some minor alterations in the text. For instance, the Punjabi abuse used for Parkasho by Alla Rakha – *soore niye bachiye* (the daughter of a pig) — is changed in the translation to another abuse in Urdu — *haramzadi*. (Chapter 20).
- The writer obviously feels the need for explaining. This is clear from the Hindi text also where the songs and couplets and idioms and abuses in Punjabi are explained in Hindi within brackets.

Surprisingly there is an example of this in the English translation also. Witness the writer's report on Aziz's reaction to Bakshiji's arrival for the prabhat pheri: 'As he drew near, Aziz greeted him by reciting a *satirical* couplet ...' (Chapter 2).

Anyone interested in more examples of alterations and/or additions of this kind could do so. The only thing that could be said here is that the changes made are insignificant.

5.3 LITERARY CRITICISM ON *TAMAS*

The novel has received a lot of attention from critics who have looked at various aspects of it. Some of the points raised are as follows:

According to Prayag Shukla, an early critic of *Tamas*, the novel brought out the fact that "communal riots were not the culmination of just the political issues, fought with vehemence at the time, but were the outcome of the so-called 'age-old values' and false prestige and pride, cherished in the name of religion by the communities, and 'divide and rule' policy of the British". He quotes a key sentence from the text which says (in translation) that 'these men who were fighting each other, had their feet in the modern times, and had their minds stored (*sic*) in the medieval ages.' This critic also makes the point that women characters in the novel were less communal than the men, though he felt that Liza was treated like a puppet, with no scope for what he called 'the complexities of life' (*Indian Literature*, XVI 3-4, 1973, 220-22).

To my knowledge, by far the most illuminating comments on *Tamas* have come from the well-known Hindi writer Rajendra Yadav. In his interview '*Tamas*: Rachnatmak Dabaavon ki Khoj' ['*Tamas*: Search for Creative Pressures'] given in September 1976 reprinted in *Alochana*, April-Sept. 2004 issue, Rajendra Yadav concedes that *Tamas* is a neat, well-organized novel in which situations don't develop but are only introduced, much like detective stories, and that there is a peculiar freshness about it. It has several great scenes that shine like lamps in the novel — the scene where Nathu kills a pig is one of the most unforgettable scenes in Hindi literature, like the nightmarish effect of scenes from Dostovesky or Kafka. Similarly the scene of mass suicide by women in the gurdwara gets imprinted on the consciousness like a painting of Amrita Sher-Gill. Other memorable scenes that he mentions are: the initiation of Ranvir, the old Sikh couple on the run, and Shah Nawaz's retrieving of Raghu Nath's wife's jewellery and his giving a deadly kick to the servant Milkhi while doing so. He points out that Bhisham Sahni is at his best when he is not documenting remembered or heard events but envisioning them with the help of his own creative imagination.

However, he feels that because of the dispersion of form, it is able neither to recreate the contemporary anguish nor produce the full impact of its horror. This would probably have been possible if instead of anthologizing a number of episodes, the author had focused on one individual or one family, something that he did with the whole family of Harnam Singh in a small way. Thus despite the book possessing all the potentiality of greatness and despite Bhisham Sahni's great writing ability, *Tamas* has just remained a neatly-crafted, well-organized, and a very good novel, a relevant document but not a book endowed with the warmth of creativity and shared emotions. Rajendra Yadav repeats his views on *Tamas* in his editorial in *Hans* of September 2003 written after Bhisham Sahni's death.

Rajendra Yadav traces the paucity of Hindi writing on partition to the dilemma that the writer faces. Those who have suffered in partition run the risk of being pushed into communalism in their thinking. The risk is there because the problem of communalism is both alive and delicate. This compels the writer to try to present a picture in which one Hindu killing is balanced against a Muslim killing and human kindness is evenly divided. "Those who caused the vast conflagration have gone away and we have not yet settled our attitude towards them". With remarkable candor, he says that in our hearts we don't accept them as our brothers but are not able to say so openly. We keep convincing ourselves that they are our brothers, not enemies. This compels us to keep repeating stock situations in our writing. He says that deep faith in man alone can help determine the writer's attitude. That is why he considers

the writing of Sa'adat Hasan Manto's writing on partition to be the best. The whole article is worth reading.

Govind Nihalani considered the book to have been written with an approach that was 'very reflective and non-judgmental'. The writer, according to him, was 'extremely compassionate'.

Several articles recognize the central role that Richard plays in the novel in respect of fomenting communal trouble in the novel. The continuing relevance of the novel in the context of the recurring communal riots has also been noted. So also, the pessimistic ending of the novel (*Alochana,* 44-52).

One charge against *Tamas* is that the novel has been written from the point of view of Congress nationalism. But this has been contested and evidence adduced to show that the Congress nationalism is shown to be hollow and the contradictions within it are present from the beginning to the end. The same critic also contradicts the view that Richard has been depicted as the sole mastermind behind the rioting (*Alochana,* 57).

5.4 *TAMAS* AS A TV SERIAL

Tamas was made into a TV serial by the well-known filmmaker Govind Nihalani in 1986. When he read the book, he decided there and then to turn it into a serial. Bhisham Sahni himself played the part of an old Sikh on the run (Harnam Singh in the novel). Dina Pathak acted as his wife, Banto. The writer said that this role was drawn from a real Sardar whom he had met and whose report he had prepared while serving in a refugee camp in those troubled days. Om Puri played the part of Nathu and Deepa Sahi that of his wife. One of the changes made in the serial is that the person who asks Nathu to kill a pig is named Chaudhri who is a *thekedar* (contractor) and not Murad Ali. The Masterji who initiates young Ranvir into the Hindu Youth Organization is called 'Guru'.

It was a six-hour long film that was broken up and shown on six Saturday nights from 10 p.m. onwards beginning from 9th January 1988.

The serial proved highly controversial and was accused of 'being lop-sided in implicating the Hindus alone in the scenes depicting violence' (Ravikant: 163). The matter was raised by one Javed Ahmed Siddiqui, a practising advocate of the Bombay High Court through a writ petition in the Bombay High Court in January 1988. Later the matter went up to the Supreme Court but both the courts refused to intervene in the matter.

The accusation was that 'there was a real danger of the film ...inciting people to violence and to commit other offences arising out of communal disharmony.' But the Supreme Court said: 'If some scenes of violence, some nuances of expression or some events in the film can stir up certain feelings in the spectator, an equally deep, strong, lasting and beneficial impression can be conveyed by scenes revealing the machinations of selfish interests, scenes depicting mutual respect and tolerance, scenes showing comradeship, help and

kindness which transcend the barriers of religion.' The film, the judgment said, attempted to 'expose the motives of persons who operate behind the scenes to generate and foment conflicts and to emphasize the desire of persons to live in amity and the need for them to rise above religious barriers and treat one another with kindness, sympathy and affection.'

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this concluding unit we have given you a panoramic view of *Tamas* summing up various issues raised earlier in our discussion. We have also provided you with literary criticism and comments on *Tamas* as a TV serial.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. 'It seems kites and vultures will hover over the town for a long time.' Do you think this sentence conveys the overall mood of the novel?

2. What part does religion play in *Tamas*?

3. In what sense could Nathu be called the conscience of the novel?

4. Write short notes on

   i. Shah Nawaz
   ii. Ramzan
   iii. Harnam Singh and Banto
   iv. Murad Ali
   v. Bakshiji
   vi. Jarnail
   vii. Comrade Dev Datt

5. 'The novel is a severe criticism of British imperialism in India.' Discuss.

6. Are women characters in *Tamas* more compassionate than men characters? Discuss with reference to Liza, Lala Lakshmi Narain's wife and Rajo.

7. 'After Nathu, Bakshiji is the most socially sensitive character in the novel.' Do you agree? Discuss.

8. Discuss the writer's treatment of the theme of communalism in *Tamas*.

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MAEN-116

Contemporary Indian Literature In English Translation

Block

4

SHORT STORY - I

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Short Stories come to you in two Blocks, Block 4 and Block 5. In this Block we introduce you to five of the best short story writers in the field. Each of them is a great writer with an established reputation.

Unit 1 deals with Mahaswta Devi's Bengali story, *Salt*. The next unit is concerned with Basheer's Malayalam story, *Birthday*. Nirmal Verma's Hindi story, *Birds* forms the subject of the third unit. The next unit deals with Ismat Chaughtai's Urdu story, *Tiny's Granny*. The last unit studies Gopinath Mohanty's Oriya story, *Tadpa*.

UNIT 1 MAHASWETA DEVI : *SALT* TRANSLATION : SARMISHTA DUTTA GUPTA

Structure

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  1.2.1 Origins
  1.2.2 The First Phase
  1.2.3 Later Phase
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall examine Mahasweta Devi's short story *Salt* and place the author in the context of themes and issues, form and content, in the Bengali short story, having surveyed the Bangla short story. After reading the unit, you will be able to appreciate Mahasweta Devi's contribution to this important genre.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

With this unit we begin introducing you to the classical contemporary writers of short story in Indian literature. Mahasweta Devi is one such writer. To begin with you will gloss through the origins and development of the short story in Bengali over the years in different phases, touching on themes and issues and important women writers as well. We shall then introduce you to Mahasweta Devi's life and works and then take up a detailed discussion on her short story *Salt*.

1.2 A SURVEY OF THE BENGALI SHORT STORY

1.2.1 Origins

The short story is the youngest literary genre in Bengal, the creation of the modern age. But its origins have a long history, in the oral traditions of Bengal. Written in verse, the ancient legends, folktales and fairy tales of

Bengal are full of earthy vitality; they deal, not only with the lives of kings and queens and the magic of the spiritual and the supernatural, but also with the emotions and experiences of ordinary mortals. The characters are vividly drawn; love, often unrequired, is the usual theme. The origins of the short story may also be traced back to written sources such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and other narrative poems such as Mangalkavyas, which deal with ordinary people.

In Bengal, the impact of colonial culture made itself felt from the late eighteenth century onwards. The printing press became a major instrument of this transformation, for it made knowledge accessible to everyone, and provided diverse avenues for creative self-expression. The birth of literary journals and the rise of prose also facilitated the emergence of a new literary tradition in Bengal. The novel made its appearance, and was soon followed by the rise of the novella or short novel. Here, we find several antecedents of the short story as a genre: the *churnak* or anecdote; the *akhyan* or fable; the *naksha* or portrait; and the short novel or novella.

A major precursor of the Bengali short story was novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterji. The first edition of his novel *Indira*, published in 1872, was a brief narrative hailed by later critics as one of the earliest examples of the Bengali short story. The fast-paced narrative is concise, the plot focuses on a single story-line with very few events, only the major characters are developed in detail. *Jugalanguriya* (1874) and *Radharani* (1875) are similar in structure and conception.

Bankim Chandra's brothers, Purnachandra and Sanjeevchandra Chatterji, also experimented with the form of the short story. In 1873, Purnachandra Chatterji published a story titled "Madhumati" in *Bangadarshan*. In the following year, Sanjeevchandra published two stories, "Damini" and "Rameswarer Adrishta" ("Rameshwar's Destiny"), in the periodical *Bhraman*. In 1877, Rabindranath published "Bhikharini" ("The Beggar Woman") in the journal *Bharati*. "Madhumati" was described as a novel when it appeared. The structure is simple, though the narrative focuses on melodramatic action rather than character, evoking a mysterious atmosphere. "Bhikharini," written in Tagore's early years, conjures up the mystery of a far-away, unfamiliar world, reminiscent of the tales of Edgar Allan Poe.

1.2.2 The First Phase (1873-1890)

This period begins with the publication of "Madhumati" and ends with the appearance of the periodical *Hitabadi* in 1891. During this period, there was great public interest in the short story in Bengal. The subject-matter of the short story also acquired greater range and diversity, focusing on the joys and sorrows of life. The form of these early short stories was in part determined by the requirements of the periodicals in which they appeared. Dinabandhu Mitra's stories, "Yamalaye Jibanta Manush" ("Live Humans in Hell") and "Pora Maheswar", display a strong humorous vein. "Kusumkumari", anonymously published in *Bangamihir* (1280 in the Bengali calendar) is one of the first Bengali stories to develop a closely woven plot. "James Bramton", (anonymous; *Masik Samalochak*, 1286) anticipates the adventure story and detective fiction. "Nidrita Pranay" ("Dormant Love") (anonymous; *Bangadaarshan*, 1282) is an allegory. Several stories rewrite myths and legends in a comic or satiric vein. "Chanchala" ("The Restless One")

(anonymous; *Nalini*, 1286) and Taraknath Gangopadhyay's "Lalit O Saudamini" ("Lalit and Saudamini") (*Gyanankur O Pratibimba*, 1288) focus on the secret anguish of a woman's heart, and the issue of women's freedom. Two early stories by Tagore, "Ghater Katha" ("The Tale of the Riverside") and "Rajpather Katha" ("The Tale of the Highway") (*Nabajiban* 1291) also belong to this stage in the development of the short story, because of the descriptive quality that distinguishes them from Tagore's later, more mature short fiction.

From 1884 to 1890, the Bengali short story made great advances. Stories like the anonymous "Boro Galpo Noy" ("Not a Long Story") (*Nabajiban*, 1291) satirize the Brahmo Samaj. Others, such as "Bhajaharir Biye" ("Bhajahari's Marriage") and "Bhuter Galpo" ("Ghost Story") are humorous pieces that anticipate the writings of Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay. "Jamini" combines humour with suspense. Many of these stories have happy endings.

1.2.3 Later Phase

Swarnakumari Devi (1855-1932) and Nagendranath Gupta (1861-1949) also took great interest in this new literary form. Swarnakumari's writing is tasteful and distinguished. All her stories express a hidden pain. Her narrative style is strongly influenced by Bankim Chandra. Some of her well-known stories are "Kumar Bhimsingha", "Sanyasini" ("The Female Ascetic") "Amar Jiban" ("My Life") and "Gahana" ("Jewelry"). Nagendranath Gupta was Tagore's contemporary. A prolific writer of short stories, he paid little attention to craftsmanship, favouring the short descriptive tale or fable. He also wrote fairy tales for children. His well-known stories include "Churi Na Bahaduri" ("Theft or Bravery") (1294, Bengali year), "Duibar" ("Twice") (1296 B.yr), which describes a woman's love for a sanyasi or ascetic, "Bhairavi" (1296 B. yr), set in the time of the Mutiny, and "Shyamar Kahini" ("The Story of Shyama"), dealing with female psychology in a way that anticipates the writings of Sharatchandra.

Rabindranath Tagore: Tagore published six of his mature short stories in the journal *Hitabadi*, launched in 1891. "Dena Paona" ("Dues"), "Postmaster", "Ginni" ("The Housewife"), "Ramkanaier Nirbuddhita" ("The Foolishness of Ramkanai"), "Byabadhan" ("The Separation") and "Taraprasanner Kirti" ("The Exploits of Taraprasanna") have none of the artificial, laboured quality of his earlier efforts. The style is natural, the structure carefully created. Tagore was the first to use the term *chhotogalpa* for the short story. His stories are brief, with few characters, usually focused on a single protagonist. Most stories emphasize nuanced emotion, rather than external events. In the three volumes of *Galpaguchchha*, 84 of his short stories have been compiled. The last story in the third volume, "Chorai Dhan" ("Stolen Treasure"), was published in 1340 (B. yr). Some of his stories deal with contemporary realities, while others are set in the remote past. The characters range from kings and queens to workers and peasants. Nature in Tagore's stories is not just a backdrop but an active participant in the human narrative. Major themes include love in its various manifestations, intricate family relationships, social customs, and the supernatural. Tagore wrote chiefly about the urban and rural middle class. But he revealed a deep sympathy for the sufferings of the impoverished. His stories are particularly notable for their representation of the female psyche, as in "Nashtaneed" ("Broken Nest"), "Maanbhanjan" ("Pacification") or "Pratihimsa" ("Revenge").

Humour and satire: Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay (1847-1919) was a patriotic writer who expressed his strong social conscience through the use of humour and satire, in his four collections of short stories, "Bhut O Manush" ("Ghosts and Men") (1817), "Muktamala" ("The Pearl Necklace") (1901), "Majar Galpo" ("A Funny Story") (1905) and "Damaru Charit" ("The Character of Damaru") (1923). Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay (1873-1972) wrote perfectly-constructed stories on sentimental themes, avoiding the complexities of human emotion. Some of his stories are notable for their humour, such as "Bou-Churi" ("Stealing the Bride"), "Sachcharitra" ("The Good Man", a satire) and "Kurono Meye" ("The Foundling"). Other writers known for the comic element in their works are Surendranath Majumdar, Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay and Parashuram.

Pramatha Chowdhury and Saratchandra Chatterjee: The stories of Pramatha Chowdury (1868-1946), collected in a volume entitled *Galpasankalan* (1941), have two chief narrators, Nillohit and Ghoshal, both liars; for it was Pramatha Chowdhury's conviction that imagination, which people often mistake for falsehood, is the raw material of literature.

Saratchandra's genius as a novelist reveals itself also in his short stories, which are teeming with characters, seeking plenitude rather than brevity. There is an excess of sentiment, bordering on melodrama. He deals with familiar social and family situations, especially with woman as the centre of provincial Bengali society, and middle-class life. He wrote from his own intimate knowledge of a conservative, exploitative society. Some of his well-known stories include "Mandi" ("Temple"), "Kashinath", "Mamlar Phal" ("The Verdict"), "Mejdidi" ("The Second Sister"), "Abhagir Swarga" ("Heaven for the Unfortunate Woman"), "Mahesh" and "Poresh".

Major themes: A host of minor writers also produced a large number of short stories on a variety of themes, such as rustic life, the complexities of human relationships, child psychology and the lives of people located outside Bengal. The detective story, the ghost story and the historical narrative were popular sub-genres.

Tradition and modernity: Writers belonging to different coteries, through short stories published in certain reputed journals, engaged in a war of words over the relative merits of tradition and modernity. The journals *Sadhana* and *Manasi O Marmabani*, for instance, championed the extreme orthodox position endorsed by Jogendranath Chattopadhyay, Sarojnath Ghosh and Manik Bhattacharya. In the early twentieth century, writers of the *Bharati* group (Tagore, Swarnakumari, Hiranmayi and Saraladebi) opposed such conservatism, wishing to connect Bengali literature to world literary traditions. Saratchandra's stories also dramatize the struggle between the moral law and the emotions of the heart. The periodical *Sabujpatra* was launched in 1321 (B.yr) at the instance of Tagore, who urged the editor Pramatha Choudhury to attack the Hindu conservatism of Bipinchandra Pal, who had criticized Tagore in the journal *Narayan*. Other periodicals, such as *Bangiya Musalman Patrika* (1325) and *Moslem Bharat* (1327) attempted to represent the Muslim experience. Kazi Nazrul Islam began his career as a short story writer in the *Bangiya Musalman Patrika*.

Women writers: After Swarnakumari in the nineteenth century, numerous women writers distinguished themselves in the craft of the short story. Nirupama Debi wrote of the sufferings of women and Anurupa Debi described the glory of Hindu culture. The stories of Shanta Debi and Sita Debi dramatise the conflict between the female psyche and the demands of modernity. Other important women writers included Sushila Sen, Kanchanmala Debi, Suniti Debi, Jyotirmoyee Debi, Mrinalini Sen, etc.

The Romantic wave: After World War I, there arose a wave of romanticism in the Bengali short story, exemplified in the short stories of Nazrul Islam. The periodical *Kallol* (1923) was launched by a group of young writers led by Achintyakumar Sengupta, who targeted Tagore's followers, labeling them old-fashioned. The *Kallol* group proclaimed the advent of a new age in Bengali literature.

Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: Bibhutibhushan (1894-1950) published his first short story "Upekshita" ("The Neglected One") in *Prabasi* in 1921. Subsequently, he published several volumes of short stories that testify to his longing for harmony between the human and natural worlds: *Meghamallar* ("The Meghamallar Raga", 1931), *Yatribadal* ("Change of Passengers" 1934), *Janma O Mrityu* ("Birth and Death"), *Asadharan* ("Extraordinary"), etc.

Tarashankar (1898-1971) wrote primarily on rural themes; his stories are full of working-class characters, such as gypsies, patuas (folk-artists), garland-makers, lathiyals (wielders of the lathi or stave), etc. He published several anthologies of short stories, including *Pashanpuri* ("The Stone Palace"), *Nilkantha* ("Shiva"), *Chhalanamayi* ("The Deceitful Woman"), and *Teenshunya* ("The Three Zeroes").

World War II and after: The impact of World War II and the turbulence preceding Partition and Independence, changed the course of the Bengali short story, generating narratives scarred by the harsh reality of conflict. Writers such as Narayan Gangopadhyay ("Itihaas"), Subodh Ghosh ("Fossil", "Ajantrik"), Narendranath Mitra ("Rasa"), Jyotirindra Nandi (*Khelna* or "The Toy"), Samaresh Basu ("Adaab") and Bimal Kar ("Angurlata" or "The Grapevine") wrote stories that demonstrate this change of approach.

Post-Independence narratives: From the 1950s to the 1970s, the short story also acquired greater formal sophistication, as writers began to pay as much attention to the craft of fiction, as to the subject matter and content of their stories. During this period, there was growing disenchantment with the administration, exacerbated by military encounters with neighbouring countries, creating a mood of alienation, frustration and pessimism amongst the youth. These developments also left their mark on the short story in Bengal, which began to focus increasingly on introverted protagonists. Writers such as Debes Ray, Mati Nandi, Shyamal Gangopadhyay, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Kabita Sinha, Syed Mustafa Siraj, Atin Bandopadhyay and Dibyendu Palit voiced the angst and despair of this historical moment. Themes included the refugee issue (Ratan Bhattacharya's "Pinjar" or "The Cage"), prostitution (Sunil Gangopadhyay's "Biswasghatak" or "Traitor"), the political turbulence of the early seventies (Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's "Nilur Dukkha" or "Nilu's Grief," Samaresh Basu's "Bibek" or "Conscience"), love (Jyotirindra Nandi's "Jouban" or "Youth," Sandipan Chattopadhyay's "Mirabai") loneliness (Debes Ray's "Kolkata O

Gopal"), rural life (Syed Mustafa Siraj), middle-class life (Dibyendu Palit's "Hariye Jaowa" or "lost," Mati Nandi's "Behular Bhela" or "Behula's Raft"), the morbidity of death (Atin Bandopadhyay's "Sada Ambulance" or "The White Ambulance"). A number of women writers, such as Kabita Sinha, Lila Mazumdar, Mahasweta Devi, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Bani Basu, Joya Mitra and Anita Agnihotri, have made their mark in the field of the short story. The emergence of Bangladeshi literature constitutes a parallel tradition of Bengali writing, where the work of major short story writers such as Syed Waliullah, Akhtaruzzaman Elias, Showkat Ali, Syed Shamsul Haq, Selina Hossain, Jyotiprakash Dutta and Nasreen Jahan is of central importance.

Mahasweta Devi: Mahasweta Devi is perhaps the best-known living writer of the Bengali short story. A staunch critic of the literary establishment, and radical in her social and political views, she writes from a determination to arouse the conscience of her readers. She challenges the writers of our time for their narrow focus on the lives of the urban elite and the middle-class, turning her gaze, instead, upon the plight of the poor and deprived, especially the tribals in India, who, according to her, have consistently been excluded from the discourse of nation. In the Preface to *Bashai Tudu*, she accuses the writers of her time for "an atrophy of conscience" (xviii). She insists that "in a country bedeviled with so many problems — social injustice, communal discord and evil customs — . . . a conscientious writer has to take a firm stand in defence of the exploited" (xviii). All her stories testify to this commitment. In the short story "Bayen", for instance, she presents the suffering of a woman who is branded a witch and ostracized by her own community of *doms* or cremation-attendants. "Draupadi" depicts the defiance of Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal woman gang-raped by the police as a punishment for her activism as a Naxalite. In "Stanadayini", the wet-nurse Jashoda is employed by the well-to-do family of *babus* as long as her breast-milk is of use to their infants, only to be abandoned by her foster-sons when she is old and terminally ill. In all these narratives, class, caste, gender and ethnicity are represented as forms of marginality that deny voice and agency to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the "subaltern". A burning anger animates Mahasweta's works. In her hands, the Bengali short story becomes a vehicle for powerful social comment, without losing any of its aesthetic sophistication. In her style, too, she is revolutionary, for she breaks away from the usual chaste or colloquial Bengali to create a disruptive idiom in which different forms of language jostle with each other, combining versions of Bengali with Hindi, English and tribal dialect.

1.3 MAHASWETA DEVI : LIFE AND WORKS

Mahasweta Devi was born in Dhaka in 1926. From 1936 to 1938, she studied in Shantiniketan, after which she moved to Beltola School in Kolkata, where her family lived from 1938 to 1944. In 1942, after her Matriculation, she joined Ashutosh College, where she worked actively for famine relief as a member of the Girl Students' Association. In 1944, they moved to Rangpur, and later in the same year, she joined Shanitniketan as a B.A. student. In 1946, she graduated from Viswabharati with an Honours degree in English, and enrolled for an M.A. in English at Kolkata University. Her studies, however, were interrupted by communal riots.

In 1947, she married Bijon Bhattacharya, and in 1948, their son, Nabarun, was born. For a couple of years, she taught at Padmapukur School and at Ramesh Mitra Balika Bidyalaya, and published features and short stories in *Sachitra Bharati* under the pseudonym Sumitra Debi. In 1949, she joined the Post and Telegraph Department, but in 1950, was dismissed on suspicion of being a communist. In 1952, she accompanied her husband to Mumbai for a brief period. Her first book, *Rani of Jhansi* was published in 1956, followed by *Wali* and *Noti* in 1957. In 1961, she divorced her husband, and in 1963, received her M.A. (English) degree from Kolkata University. In 1964, she joined Bijaygarh Jyotish Ray College as a lecturer in English. In 1965, she married Asit Gupta. In 1975, they divorced. She continued to write and publish, and received several awards, including the Amrita Puraskar in 1968, the Saratchandra Memorial Medal in 1978, and the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Aranyer Adhikar* in 1979.

From 1980 onwards, Mahasweta engaged herself actively in the tribal cause. She founded the Palamau Jila Bonded Labour Liberation organization in 1980, and became editor of *Bortika*, a journal devoted to the lives of tribal in India. From 1982 to 1984, she worked as a reporter for the daily *Jugantar*. In 1984, she became President of the West Bengal Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samity.

Today, Mahasweta continues to work tirelessly for the welfare of tribals in India. She remains a prolific writer, with novels, short stories, plays, essays and journalistic writings to her credit. She has won numerous honours and awards, including the Bharatiya Jnanpith Award in 1995, the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1997, the "Officer des Arts et des Lettres" in France in 2003, the Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration in 2005, and the Padma Shri in 1986 and again in 2006.

In the field of Bengali letters, Mahasweta has always been a radical figure, castigating political authorities for exploiting the poor and marginalized, and criticizing the literary establishment for failing to raise their voices against social injustice. According to Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Mahasweta champions the cause of the "subalterns", the poorest of the poor, who are excluded from the mainstream and denied their rights by an oppressive and exploitative society. Mahasweta perceives herself as a pan-Indian writer, addressing a countrywide readership in order to raise the national conscience about the plight of the lowest segments of our society. Her works reveal an intimate knowledge of the history, politics, lifestyle and mindset of the tribals. In her fiction, she combines different registers of language, including chaste, Sanskritized Bengali, the colloquial idiom with localized flavours, tribal dialect, as well as snatches of Hindi and English. Her characters are drawn

mostly from the poor, oppressed classes, although she has also written about middle-class life and historical personages. History, myth, folklore and contemporary reality combine to create the ethos of her novels, plays and short stories. Many of the stories are located in the tribal regions of Bengal, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

1.4 INTRODUCING THE STORY

The story *Salt* is translated in English by Sarmishta Dutta Gupta and was published by Sahitya Academy, New Delhi. Mahasweta Devi's story *Salt* (1981) is set in Jhujhar, a tribal village along the Palamau Reserve Forest, in the years following the Emergency and the defeat of the Congress in the subsequent elections. It represents the plight of the tribals, deprived of arable forest land by the Hindu traders who came there after the Kole Revolt (1831). When the story begins, the entire village is shackled into forced labour without wages by the landowner Uttamchand. The tribals live off the forest, unaware of their right to a share of the crops on the land they till, until a new minister takes power after the elections in 1977.

The "organized youths", with Purti Munda, challenge Uttamchand and decree that the tribals must receive half the share of the crops. By way of revenge, Uttamchand decides to deprive the tribals of salt, a basic though cheap commodity:

> The people of Jhujhar come for their weekly market to Palani or Muru. All the grocery shops of these two markets belonged to Uttamchand. He said, "Let them have a taste of saltless gruel. Such ingratitude after being fed by me for so long!" (102)

The narrative traces the long-term effect on the tribals of this vindictive strategy. The tribals resort to all kinds of strategies to cope with the problem. They go to the forest contractor, barter crops for salt, pray to Haram Deo and exchange hens for salt. The youth committee asks the medical representative about the importance of salt for the human body, but the answer is bewilderingly technical:

> Generally, the functions of salt in the human body are, regulation of the osmosis level; maintenance of the balance of water and blood volume; maintenance of the acid-base balance; supply of the basic essential elements to bones and teeth and maintenance of proper irritability of muscles and nerve cells. It was also essential for coagulation of blood . . . All this seemed Greek to him . . . (104).

When confronted, Uttamchand claims that the tribals are liars. Eventually, the youths forget the issue.

Meanwhile, Purti discovers another source of salt: the salt lick for wild animals. He also witnesses the mischief wrought by Ekoya, the lone elephant:

> Ekoyas are generally unpredictable. Their behaviour and attitude becomes irresponsible as a result of being overthrown and driven out

> of the herd. The loner wet the salt lick before he left. Purti realized the animal's wicked brain behind its mischievous act (107).

The headman warns the tribals not to annoy the elephants, who are known for their vengefulness. The salt-lick is shifted. But Ekoya is suspicious, and changes his habits. At first, the tribals are careful not to be seen when steal salt from the lick. Then they get bolder, and are seen by Ekoya. Near the Palamau Fort, Ekoya attacks the culprits and tramples them to death:

> The elephant is the largest terrestrial animal. But if an angry elephant decides to outwit man it could tread more softly than an ant. Taking care not to crush dry leaves under its feet. Being unbelievably cautious. So when Purti turned around it seemed the old Palamau Fort was approaching them. An elephant looks much bigger than its size as it gets nearer though. The elephant silently used its trunk and feet but the three men screamed madly (112).

An official probe yields puzzling results. Nobody believes that someone could die stealing salt, unless drunk. The "crime" is labeled an irrational act, and taken to prove the need for human intervention in preserving wildlife. Ekoya is declared a rogue, and killed. But the headman is uneasy. Three men and an elephant would not have died if salt was available. He does not have the words to express this insight. He can only say that it is not fair. He returns to his own habitat, knowing that urbanites will never understand how salt could cause a life-and-death battle.

What is the purpose of the story? Who is really to blame for the deaths of three tribals and an elephant? What is Ekoya's role in the narrative? What is the significance of salt in the context of this story? Let us examine the text in detail.

1.4.1 Themes

Exploitation is the major theme of this story, highlighting the predicament of the innocent tribals who are taken advantage of, not only by Uttamchand, but also by everyone in a position of power. One of Mahasweta's major concerns, in her fiction as well as in her activist writings, is the denial of land rights to tribals. In her essay "The Slaves of Palamau" (1983), she describes the disastrous effects of "development" in the Palamau area: "At one time the district boasted of great jungles. Today, the jungles are largely destroyed and the district can be described as dry upland" (11). She recounts the growth of the bonded labour system in the region, after the downtrodden people's revolt against the British and the jagirdars was crushed in 1857. "After 1857, zamindars and the moneylenders usurped all the land. The *kamiauti-seokia* or the *bandhua* system or debt-bondage system was born" (12). The villagers in *Salt* suffer the long-term effects of this system:

> The entire village is shackled by Uttamchand into forced labour without wages. For genrerations, year after year, they walk twelve miles to Uttamchand's village Tahar to repay the unwritten debts of their forefathers. For just a few morsels a day and a meager share of the harvest they till his land without pay. Their share of the crop too is added to their debts (100).

The story demonstrates the nexus between politics at the macro- or national level, and power-structures at the local level, represented by the landowner, the trader, and the youth committee. The authorities are portrayed as deliberately blind to what they do not wish to perceive. The law, it seems, exists in name only, where the poor tribals are concerned. When under pressure from tribals demanding a fair arrangement, Uttamchand finds a "legal" but inhuman mode of retaliation.

The narrative has a strong didactic element, problematizing the issue of justice and making a strong appeal to the reader's social conscience. Purti's role in the tragedy highlights the impossibility of making black-and-white moral judgements in certain situations. The headman accuses Purti of endangering the lives of his entire community through his carelessness in allowing the elephant to see him stealing salt:

> "Purti, I wonder what punishment you deserve. Those tribals who leave the village for mines or cities to work as porters remain there. But you came back. You failed and thought that you knew the world much better. So you took up cudgels against Uttamchand. He is a tiger. Besides, you have now earned the wrath of the elephant" (111).

Yet, after the deaths of "three men and an elephant", the headman feels that "[s]omeone else was responsible" (113). Where life is reduced to a bare struggle for survival, conventional morality ceases to apply. Purti violates the law, but the text suggests that the actual blame lies elsewhere. The story constructs a parallel between Ekoya and Purti, each a loner, struggling for survival, each destroyed by "rule" and "the system". The law of the jungle is juxtaposed against human law, to suggest, ironically, that the latter is not necessarily more just.

1.4.2 The Ending

The last two paragraphs of the story are crucial to this didactic theme. Thinking about the unnecessary deaths of three tribals and Ekoya, the headman feels uncomfortable with the official version of the story:

> Apparently it was clear that the elephant had killed men and got killed in turn. But the indirect cause seemed to lie elsewhere (113).

He wonders who is responsible:

> Three men and an elephant wouldn't have had to die if salt was available. Someone else was responsible, someone else. The one who didn't sell salt? Or some other rule? Some other system? The rule and the system which allowed Uttamchand to go scotfree for not selling salt? (113)

Although he does not have the sophisticated vocabulary to analyze the implications of this perception, he senses that "[t]his has not been fair at all" (113). A grave injustice has been done, but it would be futile to convince the authorities of this. The headman leads the villagers back across the sandy river-bed to Jhujhar, realizing that they could not hope to have their problems understood by urbanites:

> They walked fast. They would feel at ease only after returning to their own way of life which is bereft of mistrust, which does not try to simplify Purti's death and does not attempt to use such oversimplification to deny the reality of their existence. To that life (114).

1.4.3 Characterization

Purti, in many ways the central figure in the narrative, belongs to the tribal community, but remains a loner, all the same. In his ingenious and tenacious efforts to circumvent the scarcity of salt, he demonstrates the human will to survive.

Uttamchand is projected as a "villain", but to blame him solely for the problems of the tribals would be to misread the text. The rhetoric of the text, in fact, places the blame on the system that empowers Uttamchand to exploit and torment the tribals.

The youth committee is well-meaning and altruistic, but its members lack commitment and true understanding of the situation at the grassroots level.

The headman exemplifies practical common sense. He has an intuition of the message the story is meant to convey, but lacks the words to articulate it: "'This has not been fair at all'. He could toss only these few words at the babus present there and left the place with his villagers . . ". (113-114).

Ekoya, though an animal, is almost a character in the story, invested with human traits. He seems more human than the inhumane Uttamchand.

1.4.4 Narrative Technique

Though the story is about simple folk, the narrative is not simple. It uses elements of satire, myth, history and science, to construct a scathing critique of social irresponsibility. The altruistic but shallow idealism of the youth commission representative is subjected to scathing satiric scrutiny:

> The young man returned home defeated and made a noble vow to open cooperative stores in the Jhujhar belt at the first available opportunity. Later he became busy in resolving a dispute over an illegal liquor shop elsewhere and forgot about Jhujhar (107).

The elephant Ekoya is mythified, identified with the ancient Palamau Fort in the depths of the forest, suggesting a primordial landscape that casts modern human history in a reductive light:

> The scene was very symbolic. Palamau Fort in the backdrop, river, sands, sky, night, lonely elephant. Very peaceful and eternal. The only difference was that the thoughts crossing the elephant's mind weren't particularly conducive to flying white pigeons (110).

Uttamchand's ancestry and his exploitation of the tribals is linked to the history of the region:

> The land belongs to Uttamchand. His ancestors were among those Hindu traders who came into the region after the Kole Revolt of 1831. It was extremely easy then as it is now to evict these tribals by buying off their land (99).

There is an elemental quality to the representation of Ekoya. The wild elephant stands for the forces of nature, simultaneously strong and under threat from human "civilization", dependant on human largesse but capable of acting as an agent of violent, primitive retribution. The identification of Ekoya with Purti pitches the struggle for survival at a primordial, elemental level: the loner, in each case, is singled out for elimination, suggesting that in a normative structure, transgression comes at a price. The tribals have a close affinity to nature, but are apparently less important to human society than animals, as the rhetoric of wildlife conservation would suggest.

The most salient formal characteristic of the story is its use of irony to comment on social discrimination. The gap between the real experience of the tribals and the way the situation is officially reported and handled highlights the vast distance that separates the empowered from the powerless:

> They went to steal salt from the elephants' lick and died! The words of the inspector became an epitaph for the dead proving that the tribals of Jhujhar were not trustworthy at all. Herbivorous animals needed salt. What if men began to steal that too! This unnatural act of Purti and his kinsmen again emphasized the difficulty of preserving wildlife without human interference (113).

That salt, such a humble thing, could become a matter of survival for an entire community, is incomprehensible to "civilized" society: ignorance sanctions indifference and incredulity. The Ekoyas and Purtis of this world have no scope for survival in such a system.

The text is also notable for its sophisticated use of point of view. The omniscient narrator reports the thoughts and feelings of the human actors in the drama, but he also seems to understand animal psychology.

1.4.5 Language

In the Bengali original, the language of the text is a highly sophisticated blend of different registers of Bengali, combined with tribal dialect, Hindi spoken in the idiom of this region in Bihar, and a smattering of technical English terms used to describe the scientific and medical value of salt for the human body.

The story is notable for its use of figurative language. The central image of **sa;t,a simple but vital** ingredient for human survival, is identified with the **lives of the tribals.** The quest for forbidden salt demonstrates the basic, **primitive level of the struggle** to stay alive in a world where even animals are better cared for. Salt, though a humble, ordinary substance, is essential for life. To deny it to the tribals is to deny their right to live.

The tone of the narrative is matter-of-fact, even when recounting disastrous events. The style is spare and minimalistic. Very few adjectives are used. The clipped language in which the deaths of Purti and Ekoya are reported indicates the callous attitude of the authorities towards the plight of tribals as well as animals.

The Ekoya was declared a "rogue" without its knowledge. Since it's a loner the elephant-herd wouldn't be enraged if it was killed. A commissioned hunter came and shot it dead (113).

1.5 TRANSLATION: SOME PROBLEMS

In the English translation, much of this deliberate linguistic dissonance is impossible to retain, resulting in a dilution of the story's stylistic impact. Salt, for example, is referred to as *nun* (standard Bengali), *laban* (local/colloquial) and *nimak* (derived from Hindi) by different characters in the narrative, as a marker of social stratification and cultural difference. In the English translation, these differentiations are lost, and the word used uniformly throughout the text is, simply, *salt*. Such loss of nuance is, to an extent, inevitable in all translations, but particularly significant in the case of Mahasweta Devi's works, because of the rich linguistic layering of the original texts. As Minoli Salgado points out, "her stories, written in a distinctive style, pose particular challenges for the translator. Not only is the surface realism of her stories destabilized by mythic and satiric configurations, but the language used is itself unfixed, incorporating a mixture of folk dialects and urbane Bengali, slang and Shakespeare, Hindu mythology and quotations from Marx" (132).

There are some grammatical errors in the English translation of the story, such as the use of words like "spitted" and "extortioners". The phrase "eight bucks" (103) in the mouth of a tribal strikes a false note. Elsewhere, references to Uttamchand's "defeats" (102), the "utter darkness" in which "Purti and his folks" are condemned to remain (107) and the "discontent elephants" (109) are instances of similar awkwardness of translation.

The transition from source text to target language is not always smooth, and Mahasweta's narratives are especially difficult to translate. All the same, translations of Mahasweta's works remain valuable as a means of accessing the writings of one of the major Indian writers of our time.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

To sum up: in this unit, we have acquainted ourselves with the salient features of the Bengali short story, learned about the life and writings of Mahasweta Devi, and attempted a close reading of her short story *Salt*, in order to appreciate the importance of her contribution to the development of Bengali literature. In our reading, Mahasweta emerges as a writer with a strong social conscience, who is also deeply aware of the aesthetic aspects of the craft of the short story writer. Clearly, she deserves the position she enjoys today as a writer of national stature and international repute.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Kamaldaha: a famous lake in the Palamau region

Koel: a river in Jharkhand

Kole Revolt: During the Kole Birodh, the Larka Hos raised their voices against the British. Other groups joined the protest. The rebellion was suppresse and pacified by Wilkinson's Law, now prevailing in the Kolhan area of Jharkhand

Maroa: a kind of gruel

Palamau Fort: a sixteenth century fort built by the Adivasi king Medini Ray. Palamau is in the Daltonganj district of Jharkhand

Tari: a very cheap country liquor

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. How does Mahasweta Devi use salt as a metaphor for the process of exploitation as represented in the story?
2. Discuss the significance of Ekoya in the critique of contemporary structures of power in Mahasweta Devi's *Salt*.
3. Comment on the deployment of history as an instrument of social criticism in the narrative.
4. *Salt* combines stringent political comment with sophisticated literary technique. Discuss.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 VAIKOM MUHAMMAD BASHEER : *BIRTHDAY* TRANSLATION: THE AUTHOR

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Vaikom Muhammad Basheer: Life and Works
  2.2.1 Basheer as a Writer
  2.2.2 Major Novels
  2.2.3 Works by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer
2.3 *Birthday*
  2.3.1 Structure
  2.3.2 The Narrative
  2.3.3 Atmosphere
  2.3.4 Characterization
  2.3.5 Humour, Irony and Contrast
  2.3.6 Meaning
2.4 Let Us Sum Up
2.7 Glossary
2.5 Questions
2.6 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is intended to introduce you to a writer considered by many as the greatest Malayalam fiction writer of the 20th century — Vaikom Muhammad Basheer. This is followed by a discussion on *Birthday*, the short story by Basheer prescribed for your study. When you finish reading this lesson, you would have taken a peep into the life of an idealist writer who was active in our freedom movement and who lived the life of a selfless Sufi, through an autobiographical story in the realist mode. Through this story, you would also be acquainted with the social life in an urban area in Kerala six decades ago. The story is strikingly modern in form and content; except a few details of that era, the story has a contemporary appeal. The aesthetic strength of Basheer's narrative art becomes manifest to the student through this story.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Malayalam literature and Basheer are inseparable. A discussion on the life of Basheer will serve to encompass major issues of Malayalee fiction and Basheer's domineering presence, the times he lived through and the works he created. The story *Birthday* was originally written in Malayalam, and later translated into English by the author himself. Those of you who can read and understand Malayalam can compare the translation with the original and gain

an understanding of the process of transferring the linguistic features of one language to another, and see how the creative space offered by one language can be recreated in another language.

The Story *Birthday* is selected from Contemporary Indian Short Stories — Series 2, Ed. Bhabani Bhattacharya, 1967, published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

Birthday, when subjected to detailed analysis, yields the following elements:

a. Structure: The story is made up of different happenings in the span of a single day. The author has made it into an hour-by-hour account.
b. Atmosphere: Where and how the story takes place, as described in the narrative using simple words and expressions, leaves us believing that it actually happened.
c. Characterization: The story is narrated in the first person singular. The narrator the main character himself and the other characters help in holding together the narrative.
d. Humour, irony and contrast: Employed sparingly in the narrative, in the most natural way, these elements etch the story in bold relief against the dark background of the realistic theme.
e. Meaning: The human predicament in which idealism and integrity come under constant suffering, is projected through this story.

2.2 VAIKOM MUHAMMAD BASHEER : LIFE AND WORKS

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1908-1994)

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer hailed from a community which did not produce prominent literary figures. Basheer's was not a literary upbringing at all. He who wasn't sure of the rudimentary grammatical elements like 'subject' and 'predicate' in Malayalam (according to a joke he directed at himself), revolutionized the narrative art in that language. He wrote in the simple spoken language of the ordinary people, or so it seemed. He rather created a

language which resembled the colloquial language, seven decades ago, anticipating modernist and even post-modernist innovations.

Basheer himself says that there is an uncertainty regarding his date of birth. He believes it to be January 20, 1908. He was the eldest of the six sons and daughters of Kaayi Abdur Rahiman Sahib and Kunjuthaachumma of Thalayolaparambu, near Vaikom town, situated on the north-eastern fringes of the famed Vembanaad Backwater of Kerala. After early education in a local school, he attended the Vaikom English School. It was during one of those days that Gandhiji visited Vaikom in connection with the satyagraha that was going on there to establish the right of entry into the famed Vaikom Mahadevar Temple, for the lower caste people including the untouchables. Basheer who hero-worshipped nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and others, was overjoyed. He even managed to 'touch' Gandhiji from among the jostling crowd, and exclaimed to his mother that evening, "Umma, I touched Gandhiji". That was the year 1924

It is this nationalist fervor that made Basheer run away to Calicut (now Kozhikode) — a town really far away for a IX Standarad student — to get in contact with Congress workers and active freedom struggle. He had thus plunged headlong into the nationalist movement and had to discontinue his studies. In 1930, he went to Calicut again to participate in the Salt Satyagraha, in the company of the legendary Muhammad Abdurahiman and others. He was eventually arrested, mercilessly beaten up in the police lock-up in Calicut and sent to the Cannanore (now Kannur) Central Jail. The torture he suffered at the hands of the police made him mull over the choice of extremism. Thus Basheer had at a very young age woken up to life's harsh realities. Upon being released after a brief stint of imprisonment, he joined the extremists and began to attack the government through fiery pamphlets. He dumped the Gandhian ahimsa and became an ardent admirer of Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad, Rajguru, Sukhdev and others. As he began to write revolutionary pieces in *Ujjeevanam*, the mouthpiece of the extremists, the police tried to arrest him. More than three years passed thus. Finally he did a vanishing act, dodging the police.

To escape imprisonment, he left Kerala and travelled all over India during the next seven years (1934-41). He moved from place to place and even went as far away as the Gulf countries. Basheer lived many roles during these peregrinations — that of an astrologer, a magician's assistant, a physician's apprentice, a tuition teacher, a tea vendor, a khalasi (deck hand) in a ship, a hotel waiter, a cook and several others. He lived a couple of years as the disciple of Hindu sadhus and sufis, leading an ascetic's life.

Finally he returned home in 1942, when a sports goods factory owner he befriended on one of his journeys, appointed him an agent of his products in Kerala. This brief stint back home too ended, when he met with an accident and was laid up for a long time, losing the agency in the bargain. His acute financial condition led him to write for money.

He wrote stories for the paper *Jayakesari*. It was in this paper that his first story "Ente Thankam" (My Thankam) was published between 1937 and 1941. In the midst of the sweetly sentimental Malayalam romantic fiction of those

days, this story stood out for its heroine — a dark, hunchbacked woman. The tenor of Basheer's writing as a realist was set with this first story.

Basheer, who was deeply into the nationalist movement could not brook the tyranny of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan of Travancore. Soon, the police began to shadow Basheer yet again. This could be the background of the present story, *Birthday* which was possibly written around 1942-43. Basheer started a weekly, *Pauranadam,* in which he wrote — besides his protest pieces against the authorities — political and social satire as well. The government banned the weekly and an arrest warrant was issued against him. He went underground. The police resorted to intimidating Basheer's parents to pressurize him into surrendering. Ultimately, he surrendered to the police. He was first kept in the Kasba Police Station lock-up at Quilon (now Kollam), illegally, for a considerable period of time before he was shifted to the Central Prison at Trivandrum (now Thiruvananthapuram). His experiences in this police lock-up are narrated in stories like "Tiger" and "Ittiyan Panikker", which portray the inhuman treatment meted out to prisoners. However, his manner is objective as if it was happening to someone else, and has a deep understanding of human nature. Life in the Trivandrum Central Jail produced his novella, *Mathilukal* (Walls, 1965) later in life, which the renowned film-maker Adoor Gopalakrishnan made into an award-winning film. The long story with six chapters, *Premalekhanam* (Love Letter), which he wrote while in prison for the amusement of co-prisoners, looks like a love-story, but is much more than that and far ahead of its time. It is a critique of the communal divide — its hero Keshavan Nair, is an upper caste Hindu and Saramma, the heroine, a Christian, and the child to be born to them when they would get married eventually, would be called 'Aakaashamithai' (Heaven's Sweet), a name Keshavan Nair coins, probably to imply that such a combination is too otherworldly for the existing pragmatic society — and a declaration of the republic of lovers in a mock-heroic vein. Even after more than six decades, that story is as postmodern as any story written in the 21st century.

After his release from jail before the completion of the full term (1943-45), he moved to Trichur, serving the reputed magazine *Mangalodayam*, which was the mouthpiece of the eponymous publishing house which brought out many of Basheer's books eventually. Here he had as his friend the greatest Malayalam romantic poet of all time, Changampuzha Krishnapillai.

The leading literary critic of the day, M. P. Paul, mentored Basheer, guiding his writing with editorial suggestions and accelerating his creative impetus. *Baalyakaalasakhi* (Childhood Friend), Basheer's early masterpiece published in 1944, carried Paul's uniquely appreciative Foreword. This work of less than 55 pages inaugurated the era of realist fiction in Malayalam. *Baalyakaalasakhi* is a good example of stark realism. This work launched him into unprecedented fame.

During the period 1947-48, Basheer lived in Madras and worked for the weekly *Jayakeralam.* He wrote prolifically for this journal. Drawing from his vast and chequered experiences during his wanderings over the years, Basheer wrote stories the likes of which were hitherto unseen in Malayalam literature. Themes varying from the metaphysical, transcendental and at times paranormal experiences, to the desperate lives of the penniless millions were dealt with in his stories. Life in city slums, the loss of individual dignity induced by the social and economic upheaval caused by the Second World War — all these can be seen in the short work *Shabdangal* (Voices, 1947).

This work was as brilliant as any post-war fiction born in Europe or America, and was far ahead of its time in Malayalam at least by a decade, in its anti-war content and universal outlook — it was truly a harbinger of modernist writing. The honest treatment of topics like homosexuality and prostitution in this work attracted the charge of obscenity from conservative literary critics who were at best pond-frogs who shut themselves away from the experience of reality in the wide world outside.

Returning to Kerala, he started the Circle Book House in Ernakulam, which he renamed Basheer's Book Stall. He maintained a column *Nerum Nunayum* (Truth and Falsehood) in different journals, which discussed everything under the sun. This was later compiled into a book of the same title.

The bookstall was closed down when Basheer had to fight the bouts of insanity that visited him. For six years, from 1953 to 1958, he was treated in an Ayurvedic Mental Clinic in Trichur. He celebrates this experience in his Foreword to *Paattumma's Goat*.

Once out of his illness, his friends convinced him of the need for getting married and settling down. In 1958 he married Fatima Bi, from Calicut. In 1962, the Basheers left Thalayolapparambu for Beypore near Calicut, and began living in a house on two acres of land. For the next 32 years of his life, this "Vylalil House" was Basheer's castle. He was celebrated as the "Sultan of Beypore" and a fan following slowly gathered around him. He used to sit in the yard, under the shade of his beloved mangosteen tree, listening to his favourite Hindustani music, western classicals and pop music. This was the Sultan's way of holding court. The best and the foremost in Kerala's culture for three decades as well as the commonest of the commoners, (the present writer included), would visit and converse with him, seeking advice, inspiration and blessing. Leading fiction writers like M.T. Vasudevan Nair, N.P. Muhammad and others remained in the inner circle of his younger friends and confidantes.

Honours came in search of this sage-like figure. Sahitya Akademi elected him its Fellow in 1970, conferring its supreme honour on him. Basheer was awarded a tamrapatra from the Government of India for his active part in the freedom struggle, in 1972. Kerala Sahitya Akademi made him its Fellow in 1981. Padma Shri followed in 1982. A number of important awards follow.

After a prolonged illness, Basheer breathed his last on 5 July 1994.

2.2.1 Basheer as a Writer

Basheer is a writer who lived among innumerable friends from all walks of life. Early in his career, he began with writer-friends such as Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Ponkunnam Varkey, P.C. Kuttikrishnan (Uroob), Changampuzha Krishnapillai, Joseph Mundassery, S.K. Pottekkat and several others. He wrote during the heyday of other greats like Lalithambika Antharjanam, P. Kesava Dev and the master storyteller Karoor Neelakanta Pillai, all of whom were realists. Progressive writing, which found its votaries in Malayalam along with other Indian literatures in the early 1930s, inspired Basheer too. But the 'committed writer' of the socialist-realist mode of the later decades was anathema to him. While the others idealized the

underprivileged and championed their cause. Basheer wrote about poverty and the travails of the underdog; in doing so, he was writing about himself, and from first-hand experience. The present story *Birthday* is one such. In his sole play *Kathaabeejam* (The Seed of a Story, 1945) and in his Preface to *Vishappu* (Hunger, 1954) and in countless other stories he wrote, the recurring theme is the acute penury he suffered. One can see a sufi in the making, in Basheer's self-abnegation and resignation to his own plight.

Basheer epitomized the new Malayalam writer in the making. As against the traditionalist, who was a product of the feudal ethos in which life was an extended leisure, like that of a drone bee drawing on the labour of others and indulging in pleasures; as against the modernist, who wrote about the disillusionment induced by the breakdown of the social fabric; and the socialist realist, who dealt with an utopia where all were equal; Basheer wrote about the real world, first and foremost, as a patriotic and humanist Indian and as a Keralite who didn't have any formal training in the art and craft of writing. Basheer was fortunate enough to begin with no model to work on either by way of language and style or tradition — he could thus create a language and style of his own and rise to world-class. Almost all later major Malayalam fiction-writers who are remembered for their pan-Indian vision, like Kovilan, O.V. Vijayan, Kakkanadan, M. Mukundan, M.P. Narayana Pillai, Anand, Paul Zacharia, N.S. Madhavan and others, owe a great deal to Basheer as the earliest role model.

Basheer's humour and satire, more often than not, directed at himself, was the most potent weapon the author used to shake up the individual ego, leading readers to introspection. Facing life's tragedies clad in the armour of humour was his way. Many of the above-quoted writers too, followed this path.

Basheer was a strong advocate of women's rights. In his novel *Ntuppuppakkoraanentaarnnu*, (Me Grandad 'Ad An Elephant), we see the prototype of the modern-day feminist in the character of Ayisha, the sister of the idealist Nisar Ahmed. In fact, it was Ayisha who acted as the conscience-keeper of Nisar and indirectly directed his 'reform' activities. In almost all his later stories, Basheer would invariably come around to mention virtues of the 'Kosraakkolli' — the endearing term he coined for the woman who is loving, intelligent, independent and maintains integrity and dignity.

His unique sense of sibling-relationship with all of God's creation gave rise to a rare concept of compassion. He would always invoke in all his stories, either in the beginning or in the end, 'Allah the Most Compassionate', and dwell on all creations — the honeybee, the cat, the crow, the cobra, the jackal and even amoeba and bacteria as his brothers and sisters. Stories like his "Bhoomiyude Avakaasikal" (The Heirs of the Earth) are best samples of ecological fiction. His essay, "Nammude Bhoogolam Marichukondirikkukayaanu" (Our Planet is Dying) in the collection *Ormayude Arakal*, reveals his concerns of eco-degradation.

Though a prolific writer, after 1962, his output began to taper off. None the less, he kept bringing out occasional pieces and collections at greater intervals in between recurrences of insanity and steadily failing physical health. His most important works, however, still remain *Baalyakaalasakhi* ("Childhood Friend"), *Ntuppuppaakkoraanentaarnnu* (Me Grandad 'Ad An Elephant) and *Paattummaayude Aadu* ("Paattumma's Goat"). All three have been translated by Ronald. E. Asher with Achamma Coilparambil Chandersekaran and

brought out under the title "*Me Grandad 'Ad An Elephant!*": *Three Stories of Muslim Life in South India* by Edinburgh University Press in 1980 under the UNESCO's Indian Series. The blurb reads:

> "There are not so many living writers with something new to say that we can ignore any on grounds of language. Vaikom Muhammad Basheer writers in Malayalam, a language of South India, but what he writes transcends linguistic barriers. This first English translation of three of his stories introduces a writer of great originality, charm, and fun to the English-speaking world".

Asher, a Scotsman, besides being a linguist of international renown, is an enthusiastic translator from the South Indian Languages. He is something of a crusader in his service to Tamil and Malayalam language and literature, and his tenacity and perseverance brought some of the best Malayalam works of fiction, notably of Basheer and Thakazhy, into national and international attention.

2.2.2 Major Novels

Given below are brief introductions to the three novels. All quotes are from Asher's translation.

i. *Childhood Friend*: This is a very slim volume of less than 55 pages published in 1944. Even now this book remains one of the best-loved novels in Malayalam. Basheer began writing it in English during his wanderings. That fragment in English was the basis for the Malayalam book. Basheer has said that if the completed manuscript were to be published as it was, it would run into more than 500 pages! This is a very revealing statement. We subsequently learn that this manuscript was subjected to constant revision and chiselling for over five years and is reduced to more than one-sixth of its original length. This is the secret of Basheer's art. Basheer himself has revealed that more than ninety-five percent of it is autobiographical. And this is his first major work. A lesser mortal would have certainly hurried it through publication, especially after getting cent percent endorsement from the greatest of the literary critics of the times — M. P. Paul. But Basheer would not do that. He waited patiently till he was satisfied with the work. And this work rightly got the highest critical acclaim. M. P. Paul wrote: "*Childhood Friend* is a page torn out from life. Blood oozes from its edges. Some feel acute phobia and revulsion when seeing warm blood. They may even faint. Such people should read this book cautiously...". Paul's swipe was at the academic critics of those times who clung to age-old canons and suppressed any genuine creative voice. Basheer had to put up with such critics throughout his life — critics who would not base their criticism on the work, but on the religion, caste or community of the writer.

   Childhood Friend is uncommonly beautiful and pure. It is not stained by carnal love or any material consideration of its protagonists. Its beauty consists in its incandescent expressiveness. The hero's love for the heroine is unwavering throughout — both when she is a pretty

young girl and when she has lost all her charm and has turned into a skeleton-like apparition. Majid and Suhra are capable of only love. Poverty, the real villain of the piece, strikes down both the hero and the heroine. Reflects Majid: "Poverty is a dreadful disease. It destroys the body, the mind and the soul" (31). The state of Majid's mind after he gets to know about Suhra's death, through his mother's letter, is described below:

> For a while Majid was stunned.
> It was as if all had become silent.
> The world was full of emptiness.
> No! Nothing had happened to the world. The hubbub in the town was still there.
> The sun was shining. The wind was blowing. It was just that Majid was soaked in perspiration that had come out through all the pores of his skin. There was no help left. Had life then lost its meaning?
> Majid began once again to wash the dishes and stack them carefully. Where would his parents and his sisters go?
> Suhra! (49)

Realism of the rarest kind is witnessed here. This pure flame blazed forth, at a time when all sorts of twisting and turning plots, placing heroes and villains in out-of-the-world situations seriously compromised the art of realist fiction in Malayalam. Or committed literature failed to look at humankind as a whole. What this little book established in Malayalam literature is not surpassed till date. *Childhood Friend* established Basheer firmly as a great writer.

ii. '*Me Grandad 'Ad an Elephant!*' is a work based more on imagination than historical facts. This is the work Basheer employed to put in reformist content for the uplift of the Muslim community. This novel contains basic information even for the lay reader about true Islam and the Islam professed by narrow-minded, ignorant adherents; what Islam really means and what negative potential it has in the hands of bigoted practitioners. Basheer says that the Grandad's elephant stands for the past glory and the present gloom of the Muslim community. Vanity, ignorance, and intolerance are on Basheer's hit-list in this work. As a refreshing change from the poignant tragedy of *Childhood Friend*, this novel is a hilarious comedy with a strong lyrical content. No one can help feeling the fondest love for the heroine, Kunjupattumma. Though the characters of Nisar Ahmed and Ayisha occasionally turn into mouthpieces for reform propaganda, this can be overlooked against their counterpoints, Vattanadima and Kunjutaachumma, who are the real autobiographical characters inhabiting Basheer's novel. This one single work is perhaps the most successful novel in Malayalam, having sold over one hundred thousand copies.

iii. *Pattumma's Goat*: This particular Basheer novel is unlike all others in many respects. First, this is the only one of his works that has not been revised at all after the first draft was over. It is entirely autobiographical, as far as the characters are concerned. Fiction enters the scene only in the action. Then it has got the seemingly dubious distinction of getting written in a mental asylum. Basheer wrote this rare masterpiece while under the ministrations of the Ayurvedic physician specialising in mental diseases, Sri P. C. Govindan Nair, in

his Vallappuzha Nursing Home, near Trichur, recuperating from a bout of madness. Articulating all these facts and especially what he felt as his sanity, was ebbing away, he has left a rare record for posterity in his "Introduction" to *Pattumma's Goat*:

> I completed the story *Pattumma's Goat* on 27th April 1954. I thought I would copy it out and publish it with an introduction. Days passed by as I kept it off till tomorrow..
>
> Five years!
>
> Yes...at that time my mind...like a tiny island that is starting to sink into a bottomless ocean ...I don't know whether that makes any sense or not. Anyway the mind gets drowned in darkness filled with frightful dreams. I myself am the mind. When I look up there is only a small patch of light ... Oh God! Where am I? What is true? What is false? Light!...Light....I want only light. But, ... darkness filled with terrible dreams ... is approaching from all the eight directions, roaring and booming.
>
> Will I drown in this forever?
>
> Don't lose your reason; find out the cause. Everything has a cause. Courage...courage to try to find out. Superstition is comfortable. If you take refuge in that...! This is nothing like that. All the beliefs you now have — from childhood...from days gone by ... from before history began — analyse them all, and accept only what is good. Evil is a sickness. If you treat it, you can cure it. There is no sickness that you cannot cure. If you think there is one, it is through ignorance; never make ignorance a permanent abode.
>
> What happened? Hopeless heartache. Talking incoherently. That's how I came under the treatment of P.C. Govindan Nair....
>
> ***
>
> It was during this period of treatment that I wrote the story....
>
> (124-131)

R. E. Asher considers Basheer "a literary figure who stands apart from his contemporaries". He also feels that the three novels presented in the book "are very different, having in common little more than their Kerala Muslim setting". Citing statements of Basheer in a volume of reminiscences, Asher further clarifies that Basheer has made a conscious attempt in the course of his literary career to produce an Islamic literature in Malayalam. Whatever Asher means by Islamic literature, and the way Basheer is supposed to have consciously gone about creating one, are open to discussion. We can safely assume that Asher only meant well by raising this somewhat ambiguous issue, because earlier in the Introduction he characterizes Kerala Muslims as unique, and remarks, citing a 16th century historian, that they had peacefully settled in Kerala as early as during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, by virtue of the conversion of Cheraman Perumal, a good five hundred years *before* the first

Islamic conquests took place in northern India! He also highlights Basheer's efforts at reforming the Muslims through enlightening them. Now Asher makes a very interesting statement, which indirectly points to one of the possible motives in translating Basheer. He says that Basheer's writing being Islamic literature does not mean that it "will hold no attraction for non-Muslims. It is part of the appeal of his work that what is to most of us a rather exotic background helps rather than hinders our appreciation of the universality of the emotions he depicts". It is a fair enough statement, albeit quite revealing. The "most of us" Asher mentions is the target audience, (westerners, to be precise) and the "exotic appeal of Muslim life in South India" has been, among many other considerations, one of the most compelling, that led Asher to choose the three novels of Basheer for translation into English as a single volume, in the Unesco Indian series. Achamma Coilparampil Chandersekaran, about whom biographical details are missing in the volume referred to, is the co-translator. It has to be surmised that her role would have been mostly to advise Asher specially on culture-specific points, as no mention is seen made about her role in the translation process.

As in the case of Thakazhy's *Chemmeen*, recently acquired insights into post-colonial translation provide us new vantage points from which we can now have glimpses into some hitherto unnoticed aspects of the present translation of Basheer's works. However, all said and done, one has to concede that this translation of Basheer's works stands out as possibly the most original, undiluted and balanced of all translations of modern Malayalam fiction into English in the twentieth century. And this is the most faithful translation the present writer has come across so far. The translators do not suffer from an anxiety to explain Basheer to the West and paraphrase his works in the guise of translation, unlike Dumergue did with O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* or more conspicuously, B. K. Menon did with C. V. Raman Pillai's *Marttaandavarma*. Neither did they attempt at selective editing of the originals, pruning them to make them "presentable" to the West, like Narayana Menon did with *Chemmeen*. In short, Asher and his co-translator have consciously resisted the temptation to appropriate the works for western readers.

To end this section about the author, it may be safely reiterated that Vaikom Muhammad Basheer is synonymous with the heights of perfection that Malalyalam literature has achieved in the twentieth century. At a time when literature was confined to certain sections of society and academic circles, he took it out to the open world and adjudicated with words in his own right. The realism he experimented with was not the Socialist Realism of the early Thakazhi or Kesava Dev. Neither was he under the sway of the Progressives. His realism was tempered by his own personal experiences, acquired over long years of travel among the masses of India and its neighbouring countries, doing all kinds of jobs that enabled him to mix with people of different stratas of society. He believed that while recording everything realistically, the good points had to be given emphasis and the reader should be imbued with an affirmation of life. Hope and despair, ecstasy and disillusionment, privation and plenty, comforts and hardships he experienced at first hand, like the paradox of the extreme heat and cold of the climatic conditions prevalent in the northern regions of our country. He was educated at the University of the World; his teacher and mentor was none other than the Creator of the Universe. Basheer would never acknowledge any influence of world writers in his creative writing. Says Asher:

> It is a common pursuit in certain critical circles to seek western influence in Asian prose fiction, as if a novel or short story written by anyone other than a European or an American must necessarily be derivative. It is true, admittedly, that some of Kerala's most original writers acknowledge their debt to Zola, Maupassant, Chekov, and others. Basheer, however, is conscious of no such influence and it will be a fruitless task to try and find one. In fact, there is in all respects no neat way of pigeon-holing his writings. (pix)

As Asher rightly pointed out, categorizing his works is difficult. Even placing it in literary history as belonging to particular movements is tricky. For example, his story *Premalekhanam* ("The Love Letter") published in 1943, which is already referred to, defies time. It can easily be classified as post-modern by any definition. If a person who has not heard of Basheer and his works reads it now, he/she would certainly take him for the latest of the avant garde of the present. Except for the internal evidence like references to out-dated coins like "annas", it is impossible to date this story. Genre-wise too, Basheer's works defy definition. The question whether it is autobiography, fiction, novel, novelette, novella or short story, travelogue or none of these, that Basheer wrote, has been debated threadbare by the academic circles in Malayalam. Although some very short stories can be termed as "short-story", most of the longer stories resist classification. However, the above three stories are termed 'novels' for conveniences sake, For the rest, in the table provided below of Basheer's works, long works have been merely marked as 'long story'.

As we have already seen, he created his own inimitable language and style. What he wanted to communicate, he did in a very intimate, conversational language that appeared deceptively simple. But to arrive at that way of expression, Basheer would chisel and prune his works repeatedly over a long period. To cut out or replace a word that he wrote would snap the spell; such is the magic he weaves with words. No one before or after could accomplish what Basheer did with language.

No wonder then, many celebrated Malayalam fiction writers, like M. T. Vasudevan Nair and Paul Zacharia, would acknowledge their indebtedness to the inspiration Basheer generated, in pursuing their craft.

2.2.3 Works by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer

In Malayalam

1. *Premalekhanam*	(Love Letter)- Long Story	1943
2. *Balyakaalasakhi*	(Childhood Friend)-Novel	1944
3. *Kathaabeejam*	(The Seed of a Story)-Play	1945
4. *Janmadinam*	(Birthday)-Collection of Stories	1945
5. *Ormakkurippu*	(Memoirs)-Collection of Stories	1946
6. *Anarghanimisham*	(The Precious Moment)-Collection of Stories	1946
7. *Shabdangal*	(Voices) Long Story	1947
8: *Viddhikalude Swargam*	(Fools' Paradise) Collection of Stories	1948

9. *N'tuppuppakkoranenta-arnnu*	(Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant), Novel	1951
10. *Maranattinte' Nizhalil*	(In Death's Shadow), Long Story	1951
11. *Mucheettukalikkarante Makal*	(The Card-sharper's Daughter), Long Story	1951
12. *Paavappettavarute Veshya*	(The Prostitute of the Destitute), Collection of Stories	1952
13. *Sthalathe Pradhaana Divyan*	(The Chief Godman of the Locality), Long Story	1953
14. *Anavaariyum Ponkurissum*	(Anavari and Ponkurissu), Long Story	1953
15. *Jeevita Nizhalppaadukal*	(The Shadows Fallen Across Life), Long Story	
16. *Viswavikhyaatamaaya Mookku*	(The World-famous Nose), Long Story	1954
17. *Visappu*	(Hunger), Collection of Stories	
18. *Paattummaayude Aadu*	(Paattumma's Goat), Novel	1959
19. *MathiIukal*	(Walls), Long Story, 1965	1965
20. *Oru Bhagavad Gitayum Kure Mulakalum* (A *Bhagavad Gita* and a Few Breasts), Collection of Stories		1967
21. *Taaraaspecials*	Long Story	1968
22. *Maantrikappoocha*	(The Magic Cat), Long Story	1968
23. *Nerum Nunayum*	(Truth and Falsehood), Collection of Questions and Answers and Features	1969
24. *Ormayude Arakal*	(Cells of Memory), Memoirs	1973
25. *Aanappooda*	(The Elephant's Hair), Collection of Stories	1975
26. *Chirikkunna Marappaava*	(The Wooden Doll That Laughs), Collection of Stories	1975
27. *Bhoomiyude Avakaashikal*	(The Heirs of the Earth), Collection of Stories	1977
28. *Anuraagathinte Dinangal*	(A Phase of Romantic Love), Autobiographical Novel	1983
29. *Bhaargaveeniayam*	(Bhaargavi's House),Screenplay	1985
30. *M P Paul*	(M.P. Paul), Commemorative Essay	1991
31. *Singiti Mungan*	Collection of Stories	1991
32. *Cheviyorkuka, Antima Kaahalam*	(Hark, the Final Clarion), Long Story	1992
33. *Basheer: Sampoorna Krithikal*	(Basheer: Complete Works)	1992

2.3 *BIRTHDAY*

2.3.1 Structure

So, here is the story. Can you figure out what this story is about? Who is the narrator of this story? The story is in the form of diary entries by the hour, in

the span of a single day, about the happenings in the life of the author on a birthday of his. He sits down around midnight and records the events of the day right from the moment he gets up in the morning. The narrator interrupts the flow of narration on the second page, using brackets, to inform the reader that he is writing his diary at the end of the day, around midnight, implying that the story encompasses all the happenings of the day. What would be the advantage of adopting this diary form in writing the story? The story begins with an introductory section and goes on into the diary form, in flashbacks. Basheer's style is mostly the autobiographic mode — as if writing about himself. Most of the stories would contain a very high percentage of autobiographical elements, going by Basheer's own admission, which render a distinction between fact and fiction almost impossible. Written in a seemingly simple style using everyday, conversational language, the story goes straight to the heart of the reader without encountering even the semblance of a barrier put up by language.

2.3.2 The Narrative

Almost all of Basheer's stories are written in the first personal singular, autobiographical mode, making the author the speaking subject. This is a device that brings in total immediacy to the narrative. The reader is invited, to share the inner workings of the intellectual and emotional world of the author. Or is it? There, of course, is a difference. Like the difference between a live individual and that individual's portrait or photograph. The outer features of the body get imprinted on a photograph, or are copied by a master portrait painter. But that is all. The real person who lives from moment to moment is nowhere near the portrait or photograph. So too, a story modelled on the inner workings of a person's psyche need not be the true picture of the person's personality, or how that person lives every moment. What can be accurate to a certain degree is the portrayal of experiences of the past. There too, all need not be said. A lot of self-editing goes into it, before it is put down on paper. In other words, only those details that make up the virtual reality of a story will be culled from the person's memory of his own actions and thoughts, to be used in the making of the story. Therefore, the first person singular narrator and the author of the story as an individual person, are two different entities. However, the controlled tone of the narrative of this story is reflective of the austere, disciplined life of the author induced by penury. Starkness is the hallmark of the story.

2.3.3 Atmosphere

The atmosphere that pervades the story is that of the penury that the author is undergoing, in a very trying time of his life — when he is under surveillance for alleged treason. The callousness with which a shopkeeper — a phoney writer who uses Basheer as his ghost-writer — doesn't even invite the author to share a cup of tea; the innate goodness of a child-labourer who empties his month's savings, two annas, in front of the author so that he may eat something; an idealist youth — a disciple of the author — who devours a major share of that pitiful loan; the casualness with which an affluent young friend reneges on his promise to treat the penniless author by serving him lunch on his birthday, forgetting that he had invited him to his house and leaving station without informing him; and returning on an empty-stomach late in the evening, the author confronting the celebrations of the merry young

rich: these are the salient features that conjure up the atmosphere of the story. Darkening it further are the unscrupulous and rapacious landlord constantly after Basheer's life for rent arrears, the hotel-keeper who refuses to give him food for non-clearance of past dues, the undercover agent shadowing Basheer and the haughty Deputy Police Commissioner's interrogation of him. The theme of the author's all-consuming hunger fills the story like evening mist. Apart from the boy's magnanimity and the youth's idealistic zeal, the silver lining consists also in the author's success in restraining himself from indulging in lust, resisting a refugee woman's inviting gestures and, on another occasion, in dreaming of man's liberation from the chains that tie him down.

2.3.4 Characterization

The main character in the story is the narrator/protagonist. The delineation of the inner workings of his mind, the thought processes and reflections, make up the story. The narrator is a much suffered, widely travelled young man who does not seek to achieve anything apart from the chance to write from the core of his soul. His stoic suffering and uncompromising idealism appear to inspire the younger generation, though the powers that be and vested interests are not at all mindful of his existence. The pathetic plight the author has been plunged into, without even being able to eat a full meal on his birthday, the oppression from all around — by the state, by the benumbing materialism that surrounds him, by the insensitivity of harmless, ordinary individuals that affects him adversely — the tragedy of being alive in a society which appropriates excellence without paying for it, the drudgery of living from moment to moment on the one hand and the corrosive self-denial on the other — all this serve to polish the author's character to a rare sheen. He is a patriotic Indian who has friends in all corners of the country; the mere memory of them is enough to ward off the difficulties he faces in real life, in the present. Thinking positively, giving emphasis to goodness in life even in the face of evil, being optimistic even in the most adverse situations — all this sets the character of the protagonist apart.

The young student Matthew is portrayed as a flamboyant, rich scion of a typical Christian family, who has been privileged to have his own suite of rooms in the city to enable him to attend college. He is a good-natured boy, but like most of his class, cannot even imagine the sufferings of the poor and the needy. He is generous in his own way, and the author depends on his magnanimity for an occasional loan.

The characters of the landlord and the hotel-keeper have been dwelt on in the 'atmosphere' section. There is not much to add to these stereotypes.

Mr. P., the former editor and phony writer turned shopkeeper, is an interesting character. He ridicules the author for his advocacy of revolution; he pretends to be hurt that the author doesn't give him copies of his new books and cunningly angles for the author's continued support of his literary efforts; yet he isn't ready even to offer him a cup of tea.

Gangadhar, the political leader, is an idealistic young man, though equally penniless. It is the optimism of the likes of him, and the readiness to fight the evils of society that inspire the author to live on. The author shares with him half of the amount he took as loan from the servant boy, in appreciation of the young leader's human qualities.

2.3.5 Humour, Irony and Contrast

Basheer brings poignancy to the story by the use of these elements.

The first instance in which humour appears is when Basheer indulges in typical self-mocking: "I'm the only person whom the landlord does not want. The reason is that I do not pay rent regularly. There are two other parties who do not like me; the hotel-keeper and the Government. I do owe some money to the hotel-keeper, but I owe the Government nothing. Still, the Government cannot bear my sight. I have spoken of my residence, food and country; now I have to speak about my clothes, shoes and my lamp...". Elaborating on his outward appearance further ahead in the story, Basheer describes how he has borrowed his dresses, shoes, and other personal effects from friends and keeps up the appearance of being a 'gentleman', while in actual fact he is a pauper. He is cultured, good-looking and carries the bearing of a 'somebody', and others address him 'sir'. Two boys hawking some domestic ware are scandalized when the author is compelled to reveal to them that he has no money. A young woman, a refugee from some other state, who comes to the author's room and tries to entice him into dalliance presumably for monetary considerations, also gets the shock of her life when she is bluntly told of the real poverty around him.

The sequence with P, the editor turned shopkeeper, is laced with subtle irony. An eloquent statement of the real nature of many of the so-called intellectuals of the day is made possible through the person of P.

The paradox of having to share with Gangadhar, the idealistic youth leader, half of the loan of two annas the author took from the lowly servant boy to eat a square meal, is driven home to the reader. How truly selfless public servants and volunteers of the nationalist movement were surviving pre-independent India is revealingly portrayed through a few deft strokes.

Birthday is not a story that carries the hilarious humour of the later Basheer; it is a grim, razor's edge kind of story which is redeemed by stray strokes of humour.

2.3.6 Meaning

What is this story about? This is about an individual who cannot compromise with society and the state in diluting human qualities and ideals. This story takes place probably around 1942-43. The narrator who is a freedom fighter, a revolutionary and a creative artist of very high achievements, finds it difficult to eat a square meal even on his birthday. Not only that; on that particular day, he is preyed upon by the landlord and the hotel-keeper for defaulting payments. He is let down by a friend who has promised him lunch. He is not even offered tea by his acquaintance who goes on drinking tea in front of him. He is harassed by the C.I.D. and the Deputy Police Commissioner. Yet his incurable optimism buoys up the author. He is inspired by the innate goodness of the servant boy who loans him two annas, and the innocent idealism and principled zeal of the youth leader Gangadhar. The narrator looks at the picture of a man standing erect against the backdrop of a city filled with skyscrapers in the horizon; though he is bound down to the earth by chains, but he is looking up in hope. even in an apparently hopeless condition. The

caption of the picture runs: "Although bound to the earth by chains, he looks beyond time and space to the splendid progress to come". This seems to be the message of the story.

This story is an example of stark realism, and its tone is set as such from the very opening, as the protagonist unravels the details of a day's happenings in the confessional mode. The turn at the end of the story is wrought by the contrast of the highly idealist hero going to sleep on an empty stomach on his birthday, when the mediocre, middle-class people who are going about minding their petty selfish lives, gather together making merry, smoking cigarettes. The poignancy the reader feels at the end, stings like cigarette smoke in the eye. The accomplishment of the narrator is brought home to the reader, who would certainly be heaving a deep sigh of sympathy.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

This story is typical of the early Basheer, the idealist who was at odds with a society full of vested interests and selfishness. The suffering of deprivation and hunger that the protagonist undergoes is symbolic of the travails a pure soul who is not prepared to compromise with status quo must face in a world dominated by crass pragmatism and deceit. Vicissitudes of life do not harden him; they only tend to make him more aware of the human condition. We see the image of a yogi or fakir given to self-abnegation in the persona of the author.

The delineation of the character of the main protagonist is marvellously accomplished using sparse touches. The image of an upright individual who is undaunted by suffering and who prevails against all odds, yet experiences everything through a high level of sensitivity, without turning his face away from life, is vividly portrayed by the author in this story.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Makaram: a month of the Malayalam Era, from mid-January to mid-February.

Anna: a coin, now obsolete, the equivalent of $1/16^{th}$ of a rupee.

Mundu: a long cloth wrapped around the lower torso by men and women alike, of all communities in Kerala, until a few decades ago; even now prevalent mostly among the older population.

Umma: the kinship term 'Mother' used by the Muslim community; used as term of address too.

C.I.D.: Crime Investigation Department of the police; the secret police.

Dosai: a particularly South Indian eatable made with leavened rice flour.

Pappad: a light, crunchy item taken usually along with a main meal, and occasionally as a snack.

Bidi: local version of cigarette, made of dried tobacco shavings rolled in a specially cut leaf.

2.5 QUESTIONS

1. Basheer comes through as an advocate of optimism in the face of adversities all around, in this story. Elaborate

2. Use of subtle irony and contrast enliven an otherwise grim narrative. Substantiate with illustrations from the story.

3. Trace the character of the protagonist.

4. What are the adversities the protagonist has to undergo in the span of a single day, on his birthday?

5. Bring out the silver lining in the story.

6. *Birthday* is typical of the stark realism the early Basheer practiced. Substantiate.

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Voices/The Walls, trans V Abdulla, Sangam Books, Madras, 1976.

"Me Grandad 'Ad an Elephant!": Three Stories of Muslim Life in South India, trans R. E. Asher and Achamma Coilparambil Chandersekaran, University of Edinburgh Press, 1980, and Penguin India, 1992.

The Love Letter and Other Stories, trans. V Abdulla, Sangam Books, Madras, 1983.

Poovan Banana and Other Stories, trans. V Abdulla, Orient Longman, Madras, 1994.

UNIT 3 NIRMAL VERMA : *BIRDS* TRANSLATION : JAI RATAN

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Bio-Sketch
3.3 Development of the Hindi Short Story : A Brief Account
3.4 Contexts and Settings in Nirmal Verma's Fiction
3.5 Nirmal Verma's Beliefs, Convictions and His Critics
3.6 Discussions of *Birds*
  3.6.1 The Title
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    3.6.2.1 The Extrover Approach of the Male Characters
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    3.6.2.3 Role of Setting and Locale in the Creation of Mood
    3.6.2.4 The Realistic Method
    3.6.2.5 Julie and the Girls in the Hotel
    3.6.2.6 Affirmation of Life
    3.6.2.7 The Role of Hubert
    3.6.2.8 The Importance of Hubert and Mukerjee in *Birds*
  3.6.3 Some Points on the Narrative Technique of *Birds*
3.7 Glossary
3.8 Questions
3.9 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to acquaint you with the works of a major literary figure of our times, Nirmal Verma, through a close study of his story *Birds*. As the story contains the vision and life attitudes that animate his writing in general, we shall abstract, examine and contextualise these traits with reference to *Birds*. We hope, thereby, to rouse a deep and more active interest in his writings

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Nirmal Verma is considered one of the leading Hindi writers of the times, both in India and abroad. He has written both novels and short stories. We start this Unit with a brief sketch of his life, followed by a broad account of the Hindi short story. We shall follow it up with contexts and settings in Nirmal Verma's fiction and his beliefs and convictions. This will be followed by an analysis of the story *Birds*. Nirmal Verma has been widely translated into English. A list of his books is included at the end of the Unit. Those translated into English have been listed separately.

3.2 BIO-SKETCH

Nirmal Verma was born in 1929. A love for literature and the arts ran in the family. His elder brother, Ram Kumar, the well-known painter, woke in him a

love for painting. This has led to the strong pictorial quality notcable in his writing. His paternal grandfather actively encouraged him to read. He gave him four annas (twenty five paise) for each page he read of the monthly periodical of those days, "Kalyani". Often, enthralled by the first page, he would go on to the second and third pages, reading more than the required four annas' worth. His elder sister was the other family member who spurred him further into the literary life by talking to him about books and writers. She was a top student in her studies. The books she won in school as prizes and awards, were always read by Nirmal before anyone else. She also subscribed to magazines of repute such as *Veena*, *Saraswati*, and *Madhuri*, thereby grounding him more into the literary life.

Nirmal Verma (1929-2005)

Nirmal Verma came to fiction via poetry — a route common for many fiction writers. His earliest writings were poetry — in English. He'd filled two whole notebooks with verse, he would recall with amusement. He was sure, however from the beginning that his poetry was for his own satisfaction, no more.

His first stories were written for the Hindi magazine that was being brought out by his college, St. Stephen's College, Delhi. Misfortune dogged these efforts. First the editor of the magazine died. And then a few years later, the magazine closed down. His first successful professional debut was in *Kahaanee*, of Allahabad, edited by Bhairav Prasad Gupta. A second story appeared in *Kalpana* in 1954-55.

In 1959, by which time he was an established writer, he went to Prague on an invitation from the Oriental Institute to learn Czech and translate the writings in that language into Hindi. He finished the course in 1961-62, and participated in the lectures on Czech literature at Charles University.

He travelled extensively in the two Europes of the times, and also went to England. He returned to India in 1972. He became a fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla, and worked on the theme of mythic consciousness in literature.

His story "Maya Darpan" (Magic Mirror) was made into a film in 1970. It was judged the best film of the year. In 1959 he won the Sahitya Akadami Award for his collection of stories 'Kavvey Aur Kalapaani' (Crows of Deliverance). In 2000 he won the Jnanpith Award for his life time contribution to Indian literature.

A list of Verma's writings has been given at the end of the study material.

3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE HINDI SHORT STORY: A BRIEF ACCOUNT

The advent of the short story form on the Hindi literary scene marks an interesting and definitive departure from the traditional forms of literary representation towards new, non-traditional forms. Perhaps this is so in all the languages of India. The main feature of the traditional forms was oral transmission. The story -teller told his story to his listeners by means of the spoken word, gesture, and frequently, song. His stories were retellings of stories told down the ages — stories of gods, beasts, birds and men, inanimate nature and miraculous happenings. This vast mass of oral expression lies embedded in the Panchatantra, in innumerable tales contained in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Jatakas, even in the Upanishads and Vedas, despite their predominant temper of abstract philosophical inquiry. It has arisen from the innate human urge to tell stories, fabricate a reality over and above the reality lived in. Everyday reality is magnified. It is infused with the awe and wonder of religion, and made sacred. The ordinary is made extraordinary. In other words, the extraordinary is a given premise in the katha, or the tradition of oral presentation.

In the short story, on the other hand, the extraordinary is not a given premise. The given premise is the ordinary, everyday events and feelings and emotions that the man in the street experiences or tackles in the course of daily living.

The question now arises, why and how this change of premise occurred. The immediate reason was the impact of the West. The end product — the short story — that took shape from this impact, was of course, totally Indian. The characters, the events, the situations and the animating urges of the stories were Indian. The specifics, so to say, were Indian. But the triggering force came from the West, bore the stamp of western thinking. The West was perceived as an enemy on political grounds. But on intellectual and cultural grounds, it represented a challenge that had to be met and somehow contained in the Indian field of awareness. Two major concepts, originating from the West, impacted strongly on traditional Indian beliefs, and led to far-reaching, permanent changes in our art of story telling. One was the concept of individualism. The source of all action — this concept holds, broadly — the spring from which rises the impetus for all effort and endeavour, is the individual: a being like you and I, indistinguishable from other individuals.

Second, the individual's area of action was the environment in which he lived. That is to say, the philosophy of all human effort and enterprise was defined in purely earthly terms. This of course clashed with the traditional Indian ideal of linking human effort to a divine will beyond human reach.

But the Indian intelligentsia could not afford to be sceptical of these concepts and take refuge in smug denials. Sweeping technological changes accompanied the new intellectual ideals, giving them force. Objects like the railway and telegraph revolutionized not just the physical modes of travel and transport, but also the perspectives on the act of communication. Space shrank, quite simply. Places and destinations miles off and several days' hard trek away suddenly moved up close. A new and exciting proximity with relatives, kin and fellow men came about. It was a kind of re-discovery of man

by man, a confirmation of common latitudes between man and man. The mystique of space, the mystery associated with it, disappeared: the dimension of divinity and godhead seen in it fell away. Space lost longitude, became predominantly latitudinal in its spread.

This reshaping and re-tailoring of space had its effect on the spirit of story telling too. Over and above all this, was the effect of print technology. It brought about decisive changes in the setting for the conveying and communicating of the story, and the distribution of literary drives and urges. The setting was no more made up of the story-teller and his listeners face to face with each other, seated in their distinct sections. The story was available in print. Like a bird flying away from its cage it had flown clear of the chambers of the story-teller's mind and imagination. It had taken abode now on the flat, white surface of paper. No longer was it at the mercy of the story-teller to be given voice. The story-teller was supplanted by the story-writer. Of course the story-writer is also a story-teller, even if he is not doing so orally. But he is a figure away from the public gaze, functioning in the privacy of his room. Likewise, listeners were replaced by readers, who too, carried out their function of reading in privacy, away from the press of fellow listeners.

The whole art of telling a story, thus, underwent a dispersal. From a community art form it became an individualized, solitary activity.

Technology, thus, re-enforced the intellectual in-roads into Indian literary traditions made by Western modes of thought, chief among which were individualism and realism.

The Indian literary vision now turned earthward. It linked itself to man and his interactions with fellow men, women, children, and the strivings of these in the world they inhabited. Gods, demons, miracles and all extraordinary phenomena were kept out of this vision. Ordinary men and women and everyday happenings became the bases of the story. To sum up then: the Indian literary vision made a passage from the extraordinary to the ordinary, from the community to the individual, from non-realism to realism.

Initial Effects

This momentous, far-reaching change of vision came about in the beginning of the nineteenth century. But some seven decades of the century elapsed before the vision and its implication concretized into actuality. In the first flush of this intellectual re-ordering and technological facilities, the literary output consisted mainly of either printed versions of orally prevalent stories, or translations of existing oral texts in Sanskrit, Persian and English. An example of the first category was 'Rani Ketaki Ki Kahaanee', by Inshaullah Khan in 1803. Its format closely follows that of the Sufi romances of the times. The big difference is that it was written in prose, unlike the Sufi romance which was told in verse. But in all other respects it was a close copy. Like its parent, it begins with a prayer to god. It gives the reasons for its composition, and precedes each section with a long title — all in the presentation techniques of Sufi love stories.

In the second category of the writings of this interim period, as mentioned before, were translations from old Sanskrit, Persian and English. Of the

English works translated, interestingly, was Daniel Defoe's adventure story, *Robinson Crusoe*.

None of these was as yet a story as defined in the new, post-katha sense. Supernatural events and characters made up their contents. They were significant because they were set in prose, not in verse, as in the oral, recitative tradition. This led to the rise of a new class of readership, able to relate to literature without the lulling aids of rhyme and lilt.

The first story that was not only in prose but free of supernatural elements was 'Devraanee Jeththaanee Kee Kahaanee' by Pandit Gauridatt in 1870. It was a story of two middle class women, wives of two brothers. Its setting was realistic, as required by the post-katha sensibility. But it was written in the format of a katha. The story-teller is a conspicuous, recurring and binding presence throughout the story, as in the katha tradition. Therefore it does not fully qualify as a modern story. It merits attention, however, as an immediate precursor to the modern story.

The nineteenth century, thus, was important mainly because of the widespread usee of prose it ushered in. This, as pointed out before, helped build up a new readership that could respond creatively to the stories that were to pour out from the beginning of the twentieth century. An available, even if small, readership is necessary for any emergent writing.

First Fruits

The twentieth century began with three firsts in the history of the Hindi short story. In its first decade and first year — 1901 — came the first story in Hindi letters, a story of an unmistakably modern temper and spirit. This was 'Ek Tokreebhar Mittee' (A Basketful of Earth) by Madhavrao Sapre. It is constructed entirely on the force and strength of symbols. It is the story of an old widow, living in a mud hut with her little, orphaned granddaughter. The zamindar wants the land on which her jhonpdi stands. So he drives her out. Her granddaughter goes off food. 'I will eat only at home', she says, meaning the jhonpdi. The widow goes to her old jhonpdi with a basket. She will carry back a basketful of the earth with which her jhonpdi is built, and make a cooking hearth with it. She will make roties on this hearth, and coax her granddaughter to eat. She now fills her basket and asks the zamindar to help her raise it to her head. The zamindar, for whom the old woman is just a quirky, beaten old woman, consents, however unwillingly, and tries to hoist the basket on to her head. He cannot. The basket doesn't rise off the ground. The widow says, hands folded: 'Maharaj, thousands of baskets of earth have gone into the making of that jhonpdi. You can't cope with even one basket. Can you bear for life the load of a thousand baskets?'

The zamindar wakes to his excesses, and returns the jhonpdi to the widow.

The basket of earth is the central symbol of this story. It symbolizes the motherland, and its usurpation by outsiders, namely, the British. British rule had not long been established in the country, and sentiments opposed to it were astir, even though they were not yet harnessed into a nationalist upsurge. The zamindar symbolizes the usurping British. The widow stands for Mother India — Bharat Mata — doughty and cornered, pleading for her people, her children.

She is pitting her wits and imagination against the far superior strength of her oppressor. Some scholars call this a symbolic representation of non-violence. But this seems somewhat far-fetched. For one thing, the non-violent struggle and Gandhi's advent were still some thirty years away. At the same time, the political overtones of the story cannot be overlooked, nor the fact that non-violence as a strategy and thought was not unknown before Gandhi. Possibly then, the old woman's clever and resourceful non-militancy can be traced to the prevalent lore and practice of such tactics.

What explanation can be given to the immense strength that comes to the basket of earth? Isn't this unnatural, even if not supernatural? And as such, is it right to see the story as the first example of the modern short story in Hindi?

Initially it is, indeed, difficult to accept this episode in the story. But several factors enter and play in the reader's reactions to the story and neutralize the disbelief. The image and idea of patriotism that the story sets off in the reader's mind, stays on as a dynamic force that persuades the reader to believe the unbelievable. It is, in the words of Wordsworth, 'a willing suspension of disbelief'. Since it is a willing suspension, it is different from the simple credulousness assumed for the supernatural by the katha tradition.

The other stories listed as modern in this first stage of the evolution of the Hindi short story are 'Indumati' and 'Gulbahar' by Kishoreelal Goswami in 1900 and 1902, 'Plague Kee Chudail' by Master Bhagwandas in 1902, 'Gyarah Varsh Kaa Samay' by Ramchandra Shukl in 1903, and 'Dulaaee waalee' by Banga Mahila in 1907.

But none of these is as simple, as evocative and direct as 'A Basketful of Earth'. 'Indumati' indeed, is just a re-telling of 'The Tempest'. 'A Basketful of Earth' undoubtedly laid the foundation of the modern Hindi short story.

The Maturing of Realism

In the second decade of the twentieth century, this modern, reality-based form of the story flowered fully, putting down firm roots. Some of the famous, enduring names of Hindi letters made their appearance in this decade. Among these was Premchand, whose first story in Hindi, 'Saut' came out in 1915, in the journal *Saraswati*. (Premchand wrote in Urdu before taking to Hindi.) Jayashankar Prasad, also a doyen of Hindi letters, preceded Premchand with his first story 'Graam' in 1911, in the journal *Indu*. Acharya Chatursen Shastri's 'Grihalakshmi' came in1914, Radhika Raman Prasad Singh's 'Kaanon Mein Kangan' came in 1913, and Bal Krishna Sharma Naveen's 'Santo' in 1918.

But according to critics it is Chandradhar Sharma Guleri's 'Usney Kahaa Thaa' published in 1915 in *Saraswati*, that was the truly path breaking story of the decade, scoring over even Premchand's story 'Saut', published in the same year in the same journal. 'Usney Kahaa Thaa' is an anti-war story, cast in the mould of a love story. It is about a man parting with his life for the sake of his beloved's husband. To this unusual story and theme, was added unusualness of craft. The flashback technique, in which the writer breaks the sequence of time in his story and goes back to an earlier phase in the events being narrated, was used for the first time in Hindi letters.

The other notable writer of this decade, Jaishankar Prasad, broke new ground by portraying the complexities in the make-up of relationships. After his first story, 'Graam', his collection of stories, 'Chhayaa' appeared. According to critics Prasad's stories are an uneven blend of poetry and drama. His theme is mostly love, examined with subtlety. But a marked streak of melodrama enters the events and characterisations. 'Aakaashdeep', a well-known story of his, reflects this trait in a strong way. Despite the overstatements, however, there is a hard core of sincerity in his stories that touch the heart, and go home. 'Puraskaar', 'Gundaa' and 'Madhuaa' are some of his well known stories.

Premchand

Despite the brilliance of 'Usney Kahaa Thaa' and the strong presence of writers like Jaishankar Prasad, this decade of the century definitely belonged to Premchand. In temper and outlook he was an unusual combination of tradition and modernity, realism and idealism, simplicity and subtlety. Equipped with this recapitulative as well as forward-looking cast of mind, he broke the frontiers of descriptiveness, narration and time-sequence in story writing. These creative energies of his found supreme expression in stories like 'Poos Kee Raat', 'Kafan', 'Sadgati'.

From the point of view of development, the years from 1916 to 1929 are considered his most creative period. His exploring mind led him to diverse sections of society, such as women, the untouchables, and rural India. As his vision expanded, his courage of conviction took deeper root. Up to the end of the twenties, he felt the need for an idealistic underpinning to his realistic stories. It looked as though the reality he wrote about, seemed too stark to him, too open, and that he had doubts about its being accepted by the reader. This now changed. He could now show the harsh and unlovely edges of realism without softening them in any way. One of the finest portrayals of this raw, unapologetic realism is in the story 'Sadgati'. The zamindar in this story drives the starving peasant to exert all his feeble strength into digging a well, to the point when the peasant falls dead with the effort. The story ends there. No elaboration is given, no comments made on either the zamindar's callousness or the peasant's helplessness. But everything is said — without being stated.

The realistic form, indeed, reached its farthest limit in Premchand's hands. He defined realism and reality as social phenomena in clear, unambiguous terms. He located them in society. Even in stories like 'Sadgati', in which the characters are brought to the foreground and the social realities are made to reverberate without being described, the ground on which the story is founded is objective and can be seen as a dimension apart from the characters.

New Turns to Realism: Jainendra Kumar Jain, S.S. Vatsyayan

This clear, objective dimension to the realistic mode was ignored by the next important figure that appeared in Hindi short story writing — Jainendra Kumar — roughly in the late twenties. His first story 'Hatyaa' appeared in 1927. For Jainendra the seeds of a story lay in the characters' minds, at their conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious levels. The story rose from the conflicts set off in these psychological depths of the individual's mind.

This intense involvement with the inner workings of the mind led him, eventually and inevitably, to probe the mind of woman. For it is on woman on

whom falls the brunt of the conflict-prone pressures of subordinating personal inclinations to social regulations. Her personality has to adapt to drastic and often severe tailoring, to conform to models set by society and tradition. Woman, thus, represented for Jainendra a perennial and primordial sphere of conflict.

He was among the earliest writers to portray woman as an individual in her own right, not dependent on her derived standings as mother, sister or wife. He was the first woman-friendly Hindi writer, definable as such by present-day feminist standards.

Some questions can be asked here. Wasn't Premchand, too, woman-conscious, woman-friendly, deeply alive to the rigours imposed on her? Also, didn't the first modern story in Hindi, 'Ek Tokribhar Mittee' have a woman as its central character, and was it not sensitive to the powers latent in the female personality?

Premchand's approach to and understanding of women sprang from an ideological commitment to reform. He was a champion of women's rights, was explicit about them. Jainendra does not write about reforms, or about waking the conscience of society to the condition of women. He wants to wake women to the truths of their lives, empower and energise them through this inner awakening, and thus, gear them for fashioning identities for themselves. Coming to 'Ek Tokribhar Mittee', it is built around the ideas of maternal power always prevalent in Indian society. Here again, Jainendra differs markedly. He does not speak or proxy for his women characters. He enters their minds so totally and wholly that his voice becomes theirs, almost erasing distance and difference. In thought and approach both, thus, Jainendra not only departed from the path set by Premchnd, he also raised the art of the story in Hindi to new heights. 'Khel', 'Paazeb', 'Ek Din' are among his memorable stories.

'Agyeya' — Satchidanand HiranandVatsyayan — was the third figure comprising the trinity of Hindi writers – Premchand, Jainendra and himself — who dominated the literary scene in the twenties and thirties of the century. His first collection of stories *Tripaththaga*, came out in 1931. Agyeya served in the army, afterwards became a militant freedom fighter, and was given to a wandering mode of life. These experiences found expression in his stories, of course. 'Haariti', 'Akalank' 'Drohee' and 'Vipathaga' are some outstanding examples of this expression. But a more important and more significant relationship can be established between these experiences, the characters he created, and the feel and texture of his stories. The 'enemy', or the entity to be confronted and thwarted, in his stories, is more clearly defined, is more of an articulated and analysed factor in the characters' stances of rebellion.

In a way, this can be said of Premchand's stories too. The social setup, society as a whole, is a clearly discernible antagonist in his stories. The difference is that Agyeya's characters have re-defined the setup and made it a live presence in their minds. They interact and dialogue with it in an ongoing process that gives an intellectual edge to their behaviour. Agyeya was the first writer in Hindi to have intellectual central characters. They are self-conscious, aloof, and selective in their choice of friends or partners. His men characters are sensitive to the feminine principle of life, and are attracted to women who are

as thoughtful, inquiring and intense as themselves. In Premchand's stories, in contrast, this critical-analytical edge is not present. The social setup with its ills and recommended cures are brought in, in accordance with the general reformist and remedial outlook of the times.

In one respect, perhaps, Agyeya's characters bear a similarity to those of Jainendra: they too labour under a sense of anguish. But the similarity goes no farther. The anguish is of two different kinds, producing different sensations in the readers. Jainendra's characters suffer from what can be called 'extreme anguish'. It has a knife-like cutting edge. They seem prepared to give up their lives, if need be. They seem driven by a kind of death wish. Their conflicts with tradition rise to a sharp pitch as a cry of despair, a state in which they seem to be saying that pain is the only reality of life, and that all argument is therefore, futile. Agyeya's characters almost never reach this point of the suspension of speech. To speak, to articulate, are proofs of being for them. They may lose, but they remain speaking beings, translating avidly their states of mind into words, assimilating them into the veins and arteries of their being.

Two other writers of stature in these years before Independence were Ilachandra Joshi and Yashpal. Like Jainendra's, Ilachandra Joshi's stories were also psychological in spirit and content. 'Khandhar Kee Aatmaayen' (Souls of Ruins) 'Diary Ke Neeras Prusht' (A Diary's Dull Pages), and 'Diwali' are his major story collections. Yashpal was, like Premchand, reform oriented. But as a Marxist, believing in change by violence, he was more hard-hitting in his stories. For him, the story was a weapon to attack society and its mal-practices, and thereby reform it. His stories range in theme and setting, from the moral inertia of society, to the entrenched, psychological-cum-sexual bottlenecks it can give rise to. Among his representative stories are 'Chitra Kaa Sheershak' (The Title of the Picture), 'Aatiththya' (Hospitality), 'Gavaahee' (Testimony), 'Pratishtha Kaa Bojh' (The Burden of Fame), 'Aadmee Kaa Bachchaa' (The Child of Man).

Summing up, we can say that in these years preceding Independence, the realistic, realism-based flavour and fibre to story writing given by technology and the Western philosophy of individualism, expanded and branched out in diverse ways. It was enriched by the diverse writing sensibilities of the times, and the diverse definitions they gave to realism.

In the forties of the century, sweeping and historical events once again impacted with our minds, and a newer, intenser form of realism was ushered in into story-writing. Among these events were the second world war, the intensification of the freedom struggle under Gandhi, the eventual freedom from British rule, and the partition of the country. The world war and the final phase of the freedom campaign when independence was no longer a distant dream but a near certainty, were powerful influences on the minds of Indians. They were mutually contradictory, though. The war against Germany was being waged by the British who were our enemies in our freedom struggle. The Quit India movement of 1942, signifying a dramatic high point of anti-British feelings, distanced us, specially our writers, from the international war effort. In addition, events on the freedom front were unfolding fast in this period. The year 1942 and the Quit India campaign of that year were just three years before the end of the war. It was just five years before independence, and the shattering event of partition, just six years before the assassination of Gandhi.

This pressure of history-in-the-making kept the writer on a high pitch of creativity. Premchand wrote some of his finest stories in this charged atmosphere. The reformist that he was at heart drew him to the reformist ideals envisaged by the architects of the freedom struggle as fitting for a nation wanting to be born again. 'Jail', 'Jaloos' and 'Maikoo', are stories on the themes of liquor, the picketing of liquor shops, and people's rallies as forms of political protest: all of which were pronounced features of the independence campaign.

Alienation as Spur to Writing

However, it was Partition, which accompanied freedom and brought the sense of a near breakdown in the country, that made the already high pitch of creativity higher still, and sent it to dizzy heights. The environment, the urban environment specially, underwent bewildering changes, compelling the writer to relate to it anew and evolve new responses to it. The changes were basic, grass-root changes that upset the assumptions that had been held so far about people and their spheres of action. Women became visible members of the milieu outside the home. From indoor beings they became outdoor frequenters. Large-scale migrations from the village to the city took place, further disturbing the urban scene and setup, compelling the writer to re-define his or her relationship with the milieu.

It was this violent transformation and the sense of facelessness it gave the individual that caused the next phase of growth in the Hindi short story. This phase that set in, roughly, from the sixties of the century, is seen as the most exciting, still evolving phase of short story writing. Its most striking feature is alienation,. a state in which the individual is driven inward into himself or herself.

In a way, this inward drive or inward orientation was a feature of Jainendra's writing too, done in the preceding period, as we saw. Jainendra, as we noticed, preferred to probe the minds of his characters, and thereby get the steam for the structure and unfolding of his story. But Jainendra was neither alienated from his environment nor had he lost faith in human relationships. The tone of his stories is positive in spite of the vehement negative note ringing in them.

The Nai Kahani Movement

The nai kahani movement that dates back to the nineteen fifties or 1956 to be exact gave voice to the emerging middle class. That year saw the publication of a special issue of **Kahani** published from Allahabad and edited by Bhairav Prasad Gupt. The issue contains stories by Mohan Rakesh, Kamleshwar, Rajinder Yadav, Usha Priyamwada and others. Among the pioneers of the movement were Rajendra Yadav, Kamleshwar and Mohan Rakesh. Some critics also see Nirmal Verma as a part of the movement. As far as form and shape go, there is no blanket definition of the nai kahani possible. No two stories even of the same decade are similar. Mohan Rakesh and Nirmal Verma both leading writers of the sixties have different forms and flavours in their short stories. And Kamleshwar, an iconic figure of the movement, is different from both. Even so, it can be said that the nai kahani or the new short story turns inwards and the individual is shown to be a loner and a negative tone overrides the positive. Hope seems to have sunk very low for the

writer, his characters, their milieu, and for life itself. Hopelessness lies thick in the air, heavying the senses. The characters drift, flounder or grope, directionless. They are severely alone.

This state of severe loneliness seems an outstanding feature of the nai kahani, even though the themes and situations vary from writer to writer.

Basically, of course, the alienated individual is engaged in a quest for identity. The alienated hero's — or heroine's, as Latika's in Nirmal Verma' s *Birds* — is a search for his/her lost self in which identity lies contained. But it is a search for the familiar, for something known at one time. There is nostalgia in this search. Its end is either a confirmation, a denial, or, a re-definition of what was once known.

What distinguishes the nai kahani, broadly, is the mood of disenchantment with all established modes of behaviour, thought and action. This disenchantment set in, as we saw, in the wake of independence and the deep sense of breakdown it roused from the fallout of partition. Its expression was muted at first. In *Birds*, for instance, among the early stories of the movement, the difference between what is now and what was before does not seem absolute and irreversible. Faith is not lost and given up as a bad habit of the mind. The story ends on a note of affirmation of faith, when Latika slips in under Julie's pillow, the letter written to her by her boy friend, which she had earlier confiscated in accordance with the hostel rules. Of course, it is ultimately, only a gesture. The sadness that envelopes Latika like a shroud is not going to lessen by any means. When she slips in the letter a flutter of joy does go up in her. But it is a flutter, no more. The sadness will continue as a far greater weight, smothering her. Nonetheless, the possibility of its going underground one day and leaving the field clear for joy to reign as more than a flutter, echoes strong in the tones of the story.

This possibility become remoter and more or less disappears as more nai kahanis get written and writers multiply by the dozen. In Nirmal Verma's own stories, often set in foreign locales, this glimmer of hope fades and abnormalities are accepted as inevitable, as normal to life. Breakdowns of family, relationships, institutions and networks of faith and sustenance, are acknowledged and registered without protest, with small sardonic smiles. In other stories by other writers voices of protest and resistance are heard, but loaded with helplessness and a bitter fatalism. This makes the protest and resistance flailings of the trapped and the angry. The voice and expression of disenchantment becomes in fact bitter and thereby more strident. The gentler tones leave it. It becomes uni-tonal, a sustained snarl and growl at the two-facedness of life, at the impermanence of things.

The state of disenchantment, we can conclude, remains the bedrock of the nai kahani writing.

Women's Writing and Dalit Writing

Two important streams in short story writing are those on the traditionally marginalized sections of society, mainly women and dalits. Each of these kinds is a large subject and deserves a much fuller treatment than we can give them here. We shall have to make do with extremely brief references to them.

Premchand, Agyeya and Jainendra all wrote stories on women. Premchand also wrote some stories on dalits and was among the first to vocalize their torment. How were the new stories on women and dalits different from these older stories? The difference is that in these earlier stories the writers were not of the same caste or gender as their characters. Now women wrote on women and dalits on dalits. This gives the new stories an entirely new documentary force and a first hand feel of the reality that had not found expression earlier. There was a qualitative, indeed a radical change in both kinds of writing. Mannu Bhandari, Usha Priyamvada, Rajee Seth and Manjul Bhagat are among those who have written on women. The dalit writers include Omprakash Valmiki (whose autobiography *Joothan* has become a classic), Mohandas Nemisherai, Markandeya and Hridayesh and there are others.

Other Streams

Apart from women's and dalit writings, other streams of short story writing have sprung up. They include, among others, anti-stories (a-kahani), rational stories (sachetan kahani), contemporary stories (samkaleen kahani) and people's stories (janvadi kahani). Ganga Prasad Vimal, Maheep Singh and Markandeya are among the piloting figures of these streams.

3.4 CONTEXTS AND SETTINGS IN NIRMAL VERMA'S FICTION

Introductory Remarks

Context for a writer is formed by the impact of outer circumstances on his mind and sensibility. It is a compound of the two. And from this compound grow the settings and locales that he designs for his stories, and for his fiction generally.

Keeping this in view, let us consider the objective factors in Nirmal Verma's life and the significance they came to have in his writing.

He was born, as we saw, in 1929. This meant that his years of schooling took place at a time when the British presence was as yet a felt reality. Even middle class schools often had British men and women as principals or in influential positions. In *Birds*, for instance, Father Elmond, the priest, Hubert the organ player in the chapel, and Miss Wood the principal of the school, are prominent in the school's hierarchy, and thereby, in the consciousness of the girls. The church itself is depicted as a bit of a joke in the story. But it is accepted without resistance. The apparently non-Christian majority of the school takes it with an easy-going secular spirit.

It would be relevant to recall here that peaceful co-existence was among the reigning slogans of the decade that came immediately after independence, that is, the fifties, when Verma's generation graduated and took their M.A. degrees. The phrase was basically political in concept. Verma's application of this concept was instinctive and aesthetic. That is why, it can be said, his fiction has outlived and survived the now defunct political parallels it happened to have.

Let us now note the circumstances of his life that were shaped by the dominant social/political mores of the day, and helped create the context/contexts of his fiction. His father was a government official. This meant, as it did in those days, living the winter months in Delhi, the winter capital of the ruling classes and the summer months in the summer capital, Shimla. This seasonal migration affected the cultural moorings and kinship ties of the family, he says in an extended interview with Ashok Vajpayee.

A sense of a void was, apparently, felt by Nirmal and his siblings. And this void was filled in curious ways, he says. "To the Shimla of those days sadhus and sanyaasins congregated. Charismatic characters, especially when they danced as they sang and performed their rites. These scenes to this day are living in my eyes ..." (24).

In addition to sadhus, (in his story "Kavvey aur Kalapani" — 'Crows of Deliverance' — for which he won the Sahitya Akadami Award in 1959, the main character is a sadhu like recluse), another factor that inspired his sense of wonder was the devotion of his elder sister to the Goddess Kali (24). Between this sister and him there was a deep attachment. This closeness, coupled with her bhakti for Kali, went towards making women and womanhood for him absorbing elements, possessed of a kind of spiritual elevation. This is a marked feature in *Birds*. In his fiction generally too, his women characters overshadow the men.

He was once asked specifically about this feature. He said :

> "I think and also believe that just as there is in philosophy what we call the essence of knowledge, there is in art the essence of experience, which I see in a high degree through the medium of woman. There is no sociological reasoning here. In Antonioni's films too, a deep and complex analyses of middle class Italy is carried out through the medium of woman. When asked, Antonionini explained: The loneliness and the contradictions of our society can best be summed up in the character of women". I felt on reading this, that he was saying something very close to me. What I find somewhat compromised in men, I find free of its bounds, stark and complete in the character of woman (54).

Despite this natural bent towards the feminine personality and the greater vividness of his women characters, they cannot be called the backbone of his fiction. The backbone is provided by what we can call a blind reaching out by him for the felt and unknown forces that tug at the consciousness. He calls these forces "forms (that are) sensation and knowledge, forms half made, half unmade...".

This search for states of being that are non-physical and yet stir feeling in a very physical way was present in him from an early age. His interaction with the sadhus woke it. Side by side with this was, as we noticed, the sense of mystery produced by the figure of Kali. He and his siblings went to the Kali temple every evening, climbing the steep hill on top of which the temple stood. They played hide and seek in its verandahs. And then, there were the pilgrimages with the parents to Rishikesh and Banaras. All this, he says, "woke many things in him. I learnt how through saadhana (disciplined pursuit of knowledge) a person can totally forget himself. We can call this a sense of

total oblivion. This power to forget oneself, this intense concentration and merging with an unseen force was a little frightening too, but always remained an experience rousing my deepest curiosity" (26).

This attraction for the felt and unknown concretised in his life as a kind of wanderlust. And in his fiction it has emerged as locales that are unreal even when defined and specified. There is a curious absence of technology in these locales. In *Birds*, for instance, the school doesn't even seem to have electricity. Latika climbs or descends the stairs holding a lamp. When the locales are cities, as in other stories of his, no car ever figures in them. None of his characters has a car, or is shown getting into or alighting from a car. They commute by bus. Buses are technology, yes. But so friendly and innocent of the shove and push travel of are these buses in his fiction, that they seem like physical extensions of human limb power. And it is definitely no pre-technological era that is the time-setting of his fiction!

Before going deeper into his fiction, let us recall the real life circumstances relevant here. In 1959, as we mentioned in the Bio-Sketch, he went to Czechoslovakia on the invitation of the Oriental Institute, to learn Czech and translate from it. He stayed there till the early sixties. His European travels provided him close and first hand experience of Western culture. He related to it, on the one hand, as an individual free of the biases of history, and on the other, as an Indian rooted in his culture. It has resulted in a body of writing consisting of travelogues and reportages set in foreign lands, in addition to stories set there, that form a distinct segment of his writing. There is a candour in these writings and an attitude of involved non-involvement.

Within India he has gone on constant explorative-cum self-explorative journeys into places away from the metropolises. The most notable of these has been his journey to the Kumbh Mela, which has resulted in his much discussed travelogue, 'Sulagti Tahnee' (The Burning Bough).

Let us consider now, in some more depth the fiction arising from his fascination of the felt-Unknown. As pointed out, it has, first led to the creation of locales of supernatural or surrealist ambiguities. A forceful expression of this method of grappling with the fascination is found in the last sections of his last novel 'Antim Aranya' (The Last Wilderness).

The setting is a river bank. The hero has come there to immerse the ashes of his dead employer. The employer was a father figure to him. With the hero is no one else but the priest, present there to perform the immersion ceremony. But the hero's dead father seems present in the near distance somewhere. The essences of all the dead cremated on the river bank down the years seem standing veiled in the thin mist. The priest calls to the crows to come down and eat the food offerings made to the departed. (Crows in Hindu funeral rites are seen as the embodiments of the dead.) In a minute the horizon is black with the birds slowly winging down.

The deserted river bank is populous with life in manifold forms, manifold suggestions : bird life, human life, inanimate life, life that is neither of these but is there, breathing, sensed and felt. This intense abstraction, moreover, is achieved through matter-of-fact details of the geography and setting of the area. The river is the Sarpa. The town through which it flows is Parulkot.

somewhere presumably among the Shimla Hills that is so often the setting of his fiction (*Antim Aranya* 2004: 276-79).

Apart from supra-real locales, another culmination in his fiction deriving from his wanderlust needs to be noticed. Almost all his characters have an air of fatigue about them, of a history of bitter, unhappy experiences that have left them mentally uprooted. They are loners. Almost always, they are without family ties or obligations, content and wryly philosophical about their lot in life. A typical story of his — *Birds* is a typical story — is founded on these states of mind. These states of mind determine its characterization, dialogue and onward course. The experience and its aftermath of sad wisdom are tantamount to inner journeys, and fruitions-cum-transitions to mellow, deeper states of being.

To sum up: The physical and the non-physical play upon and with each other in Nirmal Verma's fiction. Each upholds the other in the spirit of inter-existence and dualism, which, as we noticed in the opening paras of this section, is the major component of Nirmal Verma's sensibility and fiction.

3.5 NIRMAL VERMA'S BELIEFS, CONVICTIONS AND HIS CRITICS

A serious charge made against him by some critics is that he is too westernised in his thinking and make-up.

On the face of it, it seems a valid enough charge. *Birds* can be said to bear it out. The music figuring in it is exclusively Western. And music, as we shall see in the subsequent section, is an important element in the composition of the story.

Secondly, there is a marked non-Indian human presence in the story. Miss Wood, Hubert, and Father Elmond are either British or European. They are important characters in the story. Dr. Mukherjee, too, is only half Indian.

In addition to music, religion is another conspicuous feature of the story. The atmosphere of the church and the representation of Christ in it are highlighted in the narrative. The school itself has a British atmosphere about it. It seems to be a school especially for English-speaking Indians. In current parlance, it would be called an English medium school. There is also the Army Club with its dancing, billiards, bar and easy mixing of the sexes.

But to assess *Birds* and thereby, the inner affiliations of Verma, on these bases would be unsound. It would be missing the spirit in which music and religion have been brought into the story.

Any form of artistic expression is a liberating experience, in Nirmal Verma's thinking. Further, in his thinking, religious experience equals artistic experience in its liberating potential. He makes a clear distinction between religion and religious experience. The one is mainly external, given form and made concrete by the paraphernalia of worship, by dogma, doctrine and prescribed behaviour. The other is abstract, free of rules and conditions. It is a charged release of spiritual energy. A formal religious setting can activate it,

as happens in *Birds*. But it is still free of the obligations and injuctions imposed by the implicitly authoritarian presence of the religion in the formal setting.

Keeping in view this trait of his sensibility, then, let us consider the music and religion figuring in *Birds*. We see the narrative passing behind the tonal presence of the music to its evocative quality where the music ceases and the words of the text rise amidst the echoes left by its passage. They are simple, descriptive words, describing the sense of motion present in the musical notes. 'Lead kindly light...The notes of the music seemed to have climbed a high mountain. and scattering wisps of breath into the vast emptiness of the sky, were climbing down. The soft, rain-drenched light was glistening on the oblong glass panel of the chapel window... The smoke from the candles traced a blue line in the light, now floating in the air.....'.

In this picture of motion and the flurry of motion what we get is a word picture of music shorn of label or place of birth. An icon of Christ in the chapel where the music is being played is described in words — a dozen or so (And one single ray of light falls aslant on Jesus Christ's image (*Birds*) — that bypass theology and sectarianism and evoke a Christ anonymous and universal.

This impersonalisation and globalisation of some salient features of Western culture considerably blunt the edge of the charge of Euro-Centrism made against him by some critics. But these critics could still dismiss the globalisation as an easy way of dodging the issue. The issue for them is unambiguous condemnation of Western culture. As it happens, he can satisfy them on this score too. Forthright and principled condemnations by him are not lacking.

Before coming to these, let us briefly consider the sheer irreverence portrayed in *Birds* for the very church rituals that are, just a few paras earlier, shown rousing spiritual fervour. In the chapel, during the service, the girls are frankly bored. They push their chairs back noisily. They titter. Dr. Mukherjee jokes under his breath, that Miss Wood was dozing in her chair, pretending to pray. And Latika wonders, looking at Father Elmond in his robes, if padres wore anything under their robes.

To come now to the weightier, principled condemnation of Western culture he has made. For this we shall once again go the interview with fellow writers mentioned in the earlier sections.

One of the interviewers (25) asked whether it could be said that his stories move on two levels: an outer visible level, and an inner level. This inner level is strong and consistently suggested, he says. 'But it never intrudes into the outer movement of the story that is constituted by speech, change of setting and sequence of events. The overall substance of the story is formed by defined positions of the two levels that interact upon each other without trespassing, yet with a spirit of vigorous inquiry'

Nirmal Verma agrees that there are two levels in his stories and that they are in a state of tension with each other. He then goes on to trace the origins of this tension. The origins are metaphysical and historical, he says.

Metaphysically it appeared from the moment man began seeing himself as separate and distinct from nature. As all estrangements do, it has given him a sense of incompleteness. No other species of life — animal, plant bird or reptile — he says, has to contend with this condition. 'To be human is in itself a state of tension', he says.

The historical reason for the tension, his reasoning goes on, lies in the creed of individualism. When the human being became an individual from man, when he saw himself as a unit apart from the human species, he entered the second stage of his fall from grace. He attributes this directly to the influence of Western ways of thought and the consequent erosion of traditional family surroundings and environments. In our country, he says further, the extreme and destructive individualism of Western societies is still not known. Nonetheless, he says, the concept of individualism has certainly become a prominent feature of our thinking, in so far as the urban sections are concerned (26).

Summing this up, we can say that in his view the creed of individualism into which metaphysical and historical factors have climaxed, has somehow to be moderated.

How would he do this?

To find out, let us again go to the interview.

One of the questions asked of him was about the importance of memory in his stories. The question was, whether it could be maintained that the story he or any writer writes eventually is only a memory of the real-life event that sank into his consciousness at the time it occurred (24). Memory and actuality, it is implied, are so close to each other that the story cannot exist without the presence of both, or in the absence of one.

Verma totally agrees with this. And he illustrates the proposition by a story about Ramakrishna Paramahamsa: 'Once, when someone asked him if he had seen God, he said, no he had not seen God but he had had a dream. In the dream he saw a lake. The lake was covered with weeds. Then he saw a gust of wind blow the weeds away to one side, and the blue waters below came into view. He then thought the blue water was reality. When the wind blew again the weeds spread over the lake again, and then he thought that the weeds were illusion, but after narrating this, he said, "neither could the illusion exist without the reality, nor the reality without the illusion".

Then, more explicitly, he says, 'The West has always tried to sweep aside the surface and isolate the truth underlying it. This is most destructive because without the surface the depths dry up. It is the same with their science and philosophy, where research takes the stance that the surface is just the outer skin, and so, by peeling away this skin, the inner truth will be revealed. When you break the link of the surface from the depth, the depth too hides its truth. I think that for a story-teller who functions in the area between illusion and reality, this is an invaluable perception. I believe that like a sanyaasi, the writer too weaves together, thinks into and writes about the 'leela' between illusion and reality, the interplay of the two' (25).

We now have two important clues to his basic attitude and thinking. One, that individualism is destructive, for it inflates the ego. It smothers further the

innate sense of belonging to a larger reality that has been already impaired by man's dualistic thought that he is different from the rest of nature. Secondly contrary to western approaches to truth, the outer, visible flux of life, its to and fro, are no less important than what lies below. De-linking the depth from the surface, only causes the truth to hide deeper into the depths, creating thereby a new surface and a new depth. We can now come to some conclusion about his sensibility. One, there is in it a keen awareness of appearance and reality. Two, appearance and reality are intertwined, not separate or separable. His stories and fiction generally, of which *Birds* is but one example, emphasize this intertwining. We cannot end any consideration of his beliefs and inner drives without taking into account a much discussed book of his, 'Sulagti Tahnee' (Burning Branch), published a few years before his death. It is a deeper probe into the issue of reconciling appearance and reality, memory and history, that forms the core of his fiction. Its underlying assumption is that history (standing for appearance and actuality) and memory (standing for reality and recollection beyond history) are the two points between which the reflective Indian of today flounders. Reconciling the two is obviously easier to accomplish in fiction than in real life. Craft and imagination, not as freely available in real life, help in the fictional exercise. He himself does not see any quick solution to this condition. The only answer, he feels is to live with it fully and unflinchingly without falling into the traps of revivalism or populist cults of god men.

It is, in terms of theory, a life of inquiry and patient plodding, along trails that promise clues of wholeness. And in practical terms it is a life of travel and motion. He himself has always lived this life, the itinerant life of a sanyaasi, who, in his view, as we saw, is like a writer in many ways.

'Sulagti Tahneee' (Burning Branch) records his re-discovery of cultural tempers and practices long forgotten by him.

He saw them in operation in the Kumbh Mela. With an involvement that is loving yet detached, he describes in detail the physical setting, of Kumbh Mela. He sees the sand and the rivers, sunlight and starlight, discourses and prayers and the roused, impassioned rush of the sadhus and other men towards the flowing waters of the Ganga. And he sees, feels, the steady pulse of faith below the frenzy and the panorama. Is it a home coming for him, he asks himself. It could be, why not, he reflects. To know is not the important thing! The important thing is to have faith.

To wake to the river of faith, flowing in the depths of the consciousness, is to arrive at a point where a synthesis of history with memory beyond history seems possible. It is not a state of mind that can be labeled one way or the other, this or that. It is totally introspective. Its conflicts will be resolved solely by introspection. We can call it a vigil for an inclusive state where labels lose all meaning and significance.

3.6 DISCUSSION OF *BIRDS*

3.6.1 The Title

The title, *Birds*, is symbolic of the flux of life. And as we said in the foregoing section, the awareness of this flux is central to Nirmal Verma's thinking. It has been woven into the fabric of the story from beginning to end.

***Birds* creates the idea of motion. However, as you read on, the two words blend. They evoke the much subtler, more fine-tuned idea of motion as an intrinsic feature of all life, as a force necessary for sustaining life. This idea gets stated formally in the story, as we shall see.**

A strong to and fro, back and forth motion is the dominant image formed from the very outset of the story. Latika is shown going to the girls' room. Her shadow falls in a quivery mass on the steps leading to the rooms. This quiver of her shadow is, of course, a realistic detail. But it is also more than that. It is meant to be a synonym for the state of turmoil and inner turbulence in which she is depicted all through the story. This deep, psychic disturbance of hers is sustained right up to the point just before the end of the story, where we see her walking along the corridor, shaken by questions for which she has not quite got the answers she has sought from Dr Mukherjee .

She gets them in the next few minutes. The sequence of events here is this: a ray of light flows from the half open door of Julie's room that she passes on her way. The action of light and the after-sounds of the quiet, sane words of advice from Dr Mukherjee explode in her mind in a pictogram of profound meaning. It gives her the sense of stability she is ever in search of. And once again, the image of the birds' orderly motion across the sky is evoked by this pause coming to her. For the rhythm of their flying is sustained only by the moments of pause present in their motion. The full choreography of the birds' motion is, thus, reflected in the swings and transitions of Latika's moods. It is a confirmation of the close link between the title and the story. Let us now follow the course of this development a little more closely.

We visualise Latika as she walks along. Her eyes seem abstracted, far away. At the same time they seem focussed on some vignette of reality within her, visible only to herself. Like her shadow on the steps, it is a picture of both motion and stillness that she makes. Like the shadow it is a picture real and unreal both. And in a sweep, we connect this being who is still and not still, solid and not solid, with the quality of the birds' skim along the sky. Isn't the motion of the birds a lot like the elusive, hard -to-pin air of mystery that surrounds Latika? How, one might ask. What is elusive about the birds' flying? On first sight, nothing. It's just a flock of birds flying. What you see is just what there is. But this is where the subtlety of the story and of all literature, perhaps, comes in. Latika has identified herself very closely and intently with the birds. Her moods have got transferred to the birds. This gives their flight a psychic quality and tension similar to her own. The main feature of this tension of hers is extreme insecurity. The ground under her feet seems shifting, never still. And it is this quality of permanent instability, permanent movement, that is very marked in the scene where she is shown walking along the corridor knocked about by questions without answers. So marked that there flashes into our mind instantly the image of the birds untethered from the earth, suspended in the void, and impelled forward by no visible force.

Indeed, almost none of the characters has a firm footing in the present. Doctor Mukherjee, stable and un-neurotic otherwise, has remained a refugee at heart, not fully broken off from the country he has fled from. As for Hubert he is an unhappy lover. No unhappy lover is ever strongly in the present. Added to this is his vocation as musician. His mind wings with the notes of his music, rises and falls with them.

Latika, the central figure of the story, and of the group of three it foregrounds, is the most disoriented of them. Her mind is locked with the past in a way that estranges her from her present and raises a communication gap with almost everyone round her.

Her swings of mood are linked more closely than those of the others, with the swings of the mountain landscape of the story, with its ever fluttering and shimmery, un-still atmosphere. This setting and the habitat are very important mood-creating factors. There is a perpetual play of light going on in the surroundings. At times the light merges with the objects it falls on, as in the chapel where it glistens on a glass panel, tapers away on to an image of Christ and produces a solid-seeming artifact of molten glass and light. At times, as at the rooftop performance of Hubert, the light of the candles on a table there, parries with the dense darkness around, holds it off and triumphantly proclaims its separate existence.

In addition to light, sound is another running strand in the setting and thereby, the story. Sound is depicted as a relentless, ever active, ever present force that punctures the body of silence, and thus thwarts it from taking root. The "silence of the jungle is never voiceless", the text says. "Sounds and voices like dreams in deep sleep flutter the light gossamer curtain of stillness..."

The birds in flight across the sky are an extension and expression of this unceasing flux on the earth below. And as one who is in a deep psychic link with the tossing and turning of the phenomena about her, the ceaseless, wavy motion of the birds on the sky above is also a manifestation of the rise and fall of feelings within her.

A second point of importance is that the rhythm and regularity of the birds' motion also imply a point of convergence, a motion inward and a point of rest from where the energy is impelled outward. Latika too, despite her compulsive roosting in the past wants this point of rest, a point where body and mind, time and space unite, touch each other in a natural junctioning, and a sense of the present is felt.

All through the story Latika is shown making an effort to touch this still centre present in all motion, all change. She loves, for instance, to climb up the hill in the winter months and trace out somehow, the road below hidden under the snow. The road is constant. The snow is seasonal, fleeting. And she wants to make contact with the constancy lying below the fleeting.

This steady awareness of the abiding latent in the breakdowns outside flares up sharply in Latika's mind as she turns to go after Hubert's collapse. He will soon recover, she knows. But what is it that keeps people going, she asks Dr Mukherjee, standing beside her. What impels people forward by its sheer momentum even when they stop?

In his tired, wise way, Mukherjee tells her that life is a flow forward, ever forward, and one flows with the current. This flow is the only truth the human being knows. It is constancy and motion both. You may thus remember the past, you may look back into the past, Mukherjee says. But you cannot, should not, be fixated in it. He himself is not, though he has his share of memories.

Latika now walks back to her room, less burdened by her neurotic need to cling to the past. She has woken to the forward motion of time and to the dimension of the future, the unknown, implicit in the action of time.

The sense of the unknown, the future, a time free of the past, is never totally absent in her swings of mood. The birds' orderly thrust through and across the sky wakes it time and again, just as it wakes a need to touch ground, be in the present.

But now, stabilised somewhat by the doctor's reflections, past, present and future come to her in a truer perspective. She can see time not only in sharply divided segments, but also as a continuum.

The flight of the birds across the sky expresses and encompasses this straightening out of the geometry of time gone wrong in her mind. The birds' flight, in short, describes the story of Latika. Their flight is the essence of the story. The title is a summing up of this essence.

3.6.2 Analysis of *Birds*

Two things strike the reader immediately on reading *Birds*. There is, first the close insider's view of the feminine mind and psychology portrayed by the male author of the story. In fact, the whole story has a strong feminine (not feminist) aspect.

Nirmal Verma does this not simply by having a woman as his central character: he does this by constructing his story on the brickwork of suppressed memories, unexpressed thoughts and unsatisfied desires. These, in our society, are parts of women's field awareness in a more poignant way than a man's.

This difference is presented in the story, on the one hand, by the way the two male characters — Dr. Mukherjee and Hubert — deal with their memories or with emotions not finding full expression. And on the other, it is presented in the way Latika, the main character, deals with hers.

3.6.2.1 The Extrovert Approach of the Male Characters

Mukherjee is detached about his life. It is a life not just without family, but also without country. He is a refugee from Burma, and is half Burmese. He lived in that country in a normal family setting of parents and wife, till all of them fled the country after the Japanese invasion.

But Mukherjee can laugh at himself. He can see the humour in the fact that he is time and again thrown in with old Miss Wood, the school principal, who seems even older than him. Alas! Is an old woman, long past her prime, the only fit female company for me, he seems to reflect, sad and amused.

For the most part he does not talk about his life prior to his coming to this little hill station. But sometimes a heavy philosophic mood seizes him. Memories of his past press in upon him, demanding expression and release. He gives in to this pressure, but he does so in an entirely indirect way, making personal experiences impersonal. He becomes lyrical or ironic.

For instance, during the picnic, when the talk turns to jungle fires, he says, they slowly spread like 'an intoxication in all directions'. Then about burning

cities that he'd seen, he says, "One after the other, houses fell like a pack of cards. Unfortunately it is only on rare occasions that one sees such splendid sights". The rare occasions when these splendid sights took place actually boil down to just one specific occasion, when his own house in Rangoon burnt down in the war. But he cannot, will not, focus on his personal loss. He will not reduce a nationwide calamity to a personal tragedy. None of Miss Wood's persistent questions succeed in making him narrowly nostalgic and succumb to the pleasures of reminiscing.

Mukherjee, in effect, has converted the pain of his past into strength. He has assimilated the pangs of memory into his system of perception. This assimilation has in turn, passed into the substances of his speech, of all that he says. In other words, Mukherjee has come to be a permanent observer of life. He is the man who has chosen to be on the margin as his point of vantage to study life and to relate to it.

An important consequence of his composure is that it places him in easy communication with all the other characters. He can put both Latika and Hubert, who is her shy admirer, into communicative moods with himself. He is equidistant from both of them. And he is one of the forces necessary to dilute the heavy, dumb grief enveloping Latika.

Mukherjee and Latika

Mukherjee has the personality to make Latika confide in him. He is not a father confessor, even if he is a father figure. Nor is Latika looking for a confessor to confide in or confess to, for baring her soul.

She wants unspoken sympathy, the kind that can be read in the eyes, no more. She wants no direct reference to her problems, neither by herself nor by whoever she is with. Mukherjee satisfies her on all these counts. He knows about her attachment to Girish Negi, for he was the one who brought them together. He inspires confidence in Negi no less than in Latika. On the eve of his departure for the Kashmir front, Negi comes over to him, not to Latika. The pain of parting from her is too much for him to bear. Mukherjee is the insulating agency who can soak up pain and be a kind of conduit to Latika. When Negi dies in action, Mukherjee is in no need of words to feel into Latika's torment. He sees it in the withdrawn, shadowy look that settles on her like a permanent fog. He pretends not to see it. But in subtle, delicate ways he draws her out of her befogged state. With clever, ingenious arguments he brushes aside her unwillingness to participate in the get-togethers he arranges. From the rooftop musical at which Hubert is to play Chopin on the piano, followed by "coffee with cream", as he emphatically announces, Latika wants to be excused. She is not feeling too well, she says. "Good, you would have had to come to me in any case", he laughs and more or less drags her by the arm to the venue.

Latika does not resist too much or too hard. She is not in a state to be definite or decisive about anything. All she knows is that the doctor's company and presence are soothing. She can be with him without having to make conversation. A current of goodwill and care flows from him always. He is watchful under the goodwill, making sure that she is not on the way to cracking up under the stress she is in. She is not unaware of his watchfulness.

But she can ignore it. Perhaps she needs the feeling of being cared for, as long as it doesn't get interfering.

She knows it will not. She knows he's just too much of a philosopher for asserting himself through means he has at his disposal. He is a doctor, weathered and wise. He has qualities of leadership. And despite the wide differences in their ages, he's still not too old to assume an easy, possessive male mastership over her. None of these incipient threats will ever materialise, she knows.

And so they continue to sit together, walk the paths of Meadows when he banters with her about the crush he is sure Miss Wood has on him. But all through these interactions, small draughts of wisdom and ways of preserving sanity amidst life's uncertainties keep getting conveyed to her from him. They take root within her. And it is this steady nurturing of her mind that emerges in forceful and fruitful expression when Hubert has his breakdown.

Mukherjee is in effect, a guide and a guru-figure to Latika.

Hubert and Latika

The other important male character in *Birds* is Hubert, a non-Indian who seems more European than British. He is employed as an organ player in the church attached to the school, of which Latika is the warden. At first sight Hubert may not appear an extrovert. He is given to introspection. This does not, of course, make him an escapist, backtracking into the past like Latika, to avoid a thorny present. But it does mean a capacity to be content in the company of one's own self, not feel any pressing need for company and diversion. Secondly, he often seems overshadowed by Mukherjee. Mukherjee seems to set the pace for his behaviour. It is at his prompting that Hubert's performance on the terrace takes place. He is the one who updates Hubert about Latika's mental state. Nobody else, Latika least of all, could have done this for him. And finally, as a doctor, by waking Hubert to his heart condition Mukerjee gains a marked ascendancy over him. A lot of Hubert's subsequent behaviour, as we see, ensues from these unsettling factors. If a man can be emotionally swayed thus, if he can be made to act like a junior partner without fuss, if he does not seek company, can he be at all classified as an extrovert?

The answer is that even if a man is without an extrovert personality, extrovert behaviour would be allowed to him, would come to him naturally. A man's behaviour is different from a woman's in times of crises. A man can get drunk, break out into song, make a public spectacle of himself to work out the assaults of pain and stress. Latika cannot get drunk as Hubert does, cannot come reeling back home boo-hooing in a whiskey-choked voice. A man may be an introvert, not be enough of an extrovert, but extrovert behaviour would not be banned to him. Very easily, therefore, Hubert gives vent to his heartbreak by getting drunk, sitting slumped in a daze in the club bar. Mukherjee herds him back home, and Hubert lurches up the stairs, singing in a boozy, broken voice, "In the back lane of the city there is a girl who loves me".

3.6.2.2 The Introvert and Feminine Approach of Latika

Neither Hubert's noisome extrovert behaviour, nor the suave and interpretative approach of Mukherjee is the way of Latika in her interactions with her past. For her, the past is made of images trapped in the deep freeze of

the mind. They flash past her eyes during her spells of heightened awareness. Limp and drained of will during these bouts, she watches entranced these re-enactments of scenes from her brief spell of romance and courtship.

She is a totally disoriented woman during these spells. She watches herself as though it is not herself. It is a state in which she is neither detached from herself, nor attached in the normal sense of the word. One could call it a sleepwalking state.

No matter how one defines it, the point is that it is a distinct way of reacting to memory and experience, totally different from Mukherjee's or Hubert's. It is a typically feminine way, a woman's way. Its main feature is silence. Speech lies submerged somewhere in the depths of this silence. A hush stays round Latika always. The dominant image she makes is of a shadowy woman winding her way along the corridors and staircases of the hostel. This shadowy figure takes its duty peep into the girls' rooms, makes reprimands or commands in low, far away tones.

Her bodily movements and facial expressions, in effect overshadow her speech. This emphasizes the mantle of silence round her. It gives her personality a pronounced mimetic quality — the quality whereby a person conveys a lot without words, with just body language.

Take this paragraph, for instance:

Latika recalled that she had said the same thing last year and perhaps the year before too. She felt that the girls were watching her with suspicious eyes, as if they did not believe her. Her head reeled, as if from some unknown corner a cluster of inky clouds were about to rise and enfold her. She laughed a little and then tossed her head (42).

The para depicts a storm of inner tremors and vibrations that have broken out within her immediately after she has spoken one of the sparse, stuttery sentences she speaks all through the story. ('Nothing's decided yet. I love the snow'.) The sentence seems unrelated to the actual context in which she is saying it. It has its own recollections and associations too heavy for her to bear. The sheer intensity of this and other flashbacks that she is subject to makes her a psycho-physical being, speaking an inner language of muscular tensions, and an outer language of tongue and voice.

Non-verbalism and body language are feminine styles of communication more than the male's. Sometimes they are called the weapons of the weak, of the underprivileged and the cornered. Latika is not underprivileged or weak in the usual sense of the word. She is sophisticated and highly individualized. Her grief is personal grief. Its roots lie more in existential tensions than in social demands.

Even so, the kind of stern and autonomous withdrawal into herself that she makes has strong feminine overtones and associations. They rise from impulses that are more primordial than cultural drives or pressures.

3.6.2.3 Role of Setting and Locale in the Creation of Mood

The physical features of the setting and locale have been fashioned by the author in such a way as to reflect the somber mood of Latika and the two men.

Never does nature break into violent states, threatening life and human habitations. The trees particularly, have been portrayed as discreet, yet emotionally sympathetic and solace giving presences, like benevolent spirits of nature. From the trees rebounds the wind's voice, never above a soothing, chant-like murmur.

The streams too never burst their banks and roar in anger. This low key, intuitive action of the ecological presences in the story underscores and further contributes to its feminine feel and physique.

Add to this the subtle pervasive play of light that is a feature of the story, and the femininity gets even more pronounced. The indirect, oblique action of the light matches the faraway, elsewhere look that characterizes Latika's gaze. Like the muted action of the trees, the wind, and the waters of the streams, the rays of light from either the sun, candles or torchlight is always filtered, either through the foliage of the trees, or soft and swaying due to the motion of the wind. It is never strident or glaring or direct.

When it is, as shown in the scene where Hubert comes out of the chapel ('...his eyes were blinded by the glare as if someone had sprayed a handful of bright, boiling light into his eyes') (62), it seems like an intrusion into the normal light of the place. It is blinding, something to shut the eyes to, and Hubert does just this, shutting his eyes and shutting out the loud, uncouth light. His thoughts rush back to the chapel, its muted lighting, the subtle, coded messages that rise from the notes of the music he plays there and bathes his mind in a fine mist. In the writing too at this place, there is a hint of impatience, as though the glare is an error of the weather that needs to be dealt with fast, and the normal pitch of light recreated soon.

Music

Music comes in as another supportive element in the projection of mood in the story. It too is always on a soft, soothing, descending and fading note, like the murmur of the trees or the gurgling of the stream. It washes gently over fretting minds. Take these lines, for instance: "That very moment Chopin's Nocturne, gliding from under Hubert's fingers, slowly began to dissolve in the darkness on the terrace, like soft whirlpools glinting on the surface of water and rippling far, far away towards some distant shore. Latika felt that from far off peaks of snow, flocks of birds were descending and flying away to unkown lands. These days she often did see them through her window..." (47)

The music, as we see, has had a deep effect on Latika. In the sections in the story that precedes the lines quoted, she is shown as having slipped far back into her past. Scenes of her first meeting with Girish Negi are swarming in her eyes. She is dissolving in the mists of the past, borne along by the soft stream of the music. This drowsy sinking into the past and the soft cascade of the music, connect in Latika's mind with the birds that she sees these days through her window, winging down from the mountains and headed for distant lands. Like the notes of the music, and the birds winging away to unknown lands, she too is poised on the edge between the present and a blurred uncertain outline of the future.

3.6.2.4 The Realistic Method

In addition to these symbolic means for projecting femininity, Nirmal Verma also employee the straight, realistic mode. An example is the scene where

Latika combs her hair, standing at the mirror. This is a common — far too common — scene in a lot of fiction and could easily have become cheap and melodramatic. But the author is alive to the danger. The narrative simply says, "She looked at herself with unseeing eyes" (53). Most fictional scenes of mirror-gazing consist of dialogues with the self for dramatic heightening. But Latika's thoughts are about a very practical, every-day question: that she'd forgotten to tell Karimuddin, the caretaker, to store fuel wood for the winter season almost upon them. Unstored, the wood never dries and worse, smokes away when lit, as it did last year.

This makes her smile — a mischievous smile with the hint of a wink in it. For last year, to escape her cold and smoke-filled room, she'd taken to sneaking into Miss Wood's quarters via her bathroom which the old lady had forgotten to lock when going away for the vacation.

Some more snippets of memory follow about her early, now thankfully over, greenhorn's fears at being alone in the hotel with the girls and Miss Wood away. She'd keep Karimuddin engaged in small talk till she dozed off. She'd have the doctor — another homeless loner like herself — sleep in the next room.

The upsurge of memories subsides. And, as if in illustration of it she pulls out tangled skeins of hair from the comb and walks to the window to throw them out.

In the short interval, of say, a quarter of an hour, spanning her going up to the mirror, comb in hand, and across to the window to throw out the tangle of hair from the comb, a whole chunk of her life and a whole aspect of her personality have been projected. It is a light, girlish aspect, full of kinetic energy and vivaciousness.

3.6.2. 5 Julie and the Girls in the Hotel

Another life-like depiction of femininity made by Nirmal Verma in the story, is that of the girls in the hostel. They are a giggly lot. They are quietly breaking the rules of hostel regulations by holding a singing session after lights-out. Yet they are possessed of an innate respect for the staff, as indeed, for all elders. They invite Latika to join them in their musical evening. They have, in short, all the bubbling high spirits tempered by restraint, common to the girls of their age and time.

When Julie is confronted by the letter to her from her boy friend in the army, she reacts in the typical feminine way of simply sinking into silence. Her flight from speech does not have the proud and existentialist grimness of Latika's. But it shares some basic traits with the latter. Both are spontaneous and untutored manifestations of the feelings of guilt and the sense of wrong-doing associated with love and romantic tie-ups. Latika's meetings with Captain Negi, it may be recalled, were clandestine meetings, even though they were public knowledge. The danger and insecurity this spelt for Latika are indeed, intrinsic to romantic liaisons in our country to this day, in real life and in popular lore.

Latika, of course, eventually legitimizes her feelings for Negi by openly sorrowing over his death. But this posthumous openness is in a large part, a fictional happening, produced by the demands of the story. It does not gainsay the earlier, true-to-pattern behaviour of Latika, in keeping her involvement with Negi a secret.

Julie's lapsing into silence, when confronted by the letter, in short, springs from reflexes instilled into her by cultural taboos and the ideals of female chastity they uphold.

3.6.2.6 Affirmation of Life

The second marked feature of *Birds* is the staunch affirmation of life against the forces of the anti-life it makes. The extreme inner exhaustion of the characters is no last-but-one step to total breakdowns as seems at first. It is, on the contrary, the last-but-one step to restoration and re-birth. This is so even for Hubert who does have a breakdown because of Latika's rejection of his suit. But he is going to recover and will apply himself to his usual pursuits of music and the aesthetic pleasures provided by music, nature, women and the feminine aspects of life their personalities evoke — the way of life to which he is most inclined by temperament.

The narrative skill here is two fold. First, it lies in highlighting and foregrounding the anguish of the characters, in extracting the fullest dramatic tension from it. But eventually — here comes the second aspect of the narrative skill — this whole build up of tension is demolished. Vital changes of perception, seemingly small, are shown taking place in the characters' minds even when they are in the throes of despair. These little internal changes climax into external action and behaviour, that radically alter the nature of the reader's involvement with the story. They disengage his attention at a stroke from the conflicts of the characters, with which it has been engaged all this while. The characters appear in a new light as refurbished beings. They demand to be looked at afresh.

This is seen most vividly in Latika's case. She is, as we have seen, weighed down heavily by her tragic love affair. She has become a recluse, allergic to human company, brooding over death though not exactly wishing for it.

Despite this, a persistent strand of self- questioning and self-appraisal and of self-doubt is present in all her aloof and distant interaction with the people round her. 'Am I a killjoy', she wonders, as she evades the invitation from the girls of the hostel to join them in their music session. To reassure herself that she isn't a killjoy, she asks the girls, wouldn't any of them stay back during the holidays and join her in seeing the snow? She just loved the snow! She knows she's sounding forced, and that the girls are unconvinced of her love for the snow. She knows that the loneliness she suffers from, year after year when the girls go away and she is alone in the hostel, is plain from her eyes and voice, despite her effort to hide it.

The object which rouses and reflects her self-questionings most vividly is the letter to the girl Julie, from a secret admirer of hers. As the warden of the hostel Latika has to examine and pass all letters coming to or going from the girls. The letter to Julie obviously is not one that can be passed. Latika therefore, is being no more than correct in withholding it and reprimanding the girl.

But a love letter — and. one from an officer of the same regiment to which Girish Negi belonged — is obviously going to stir heart more than the official level. She cannot hide this truth from herself. She is just a jealous old maid in lecturing to Julie about morals, not really the responsible official she is acting as, she knows in her heart of hearts.

The letter is a cruel reminder and mocking evidence of the things that she has lost forever, and which the girl want to have. Right under that pine tree off the window at which Julie stood now, dumb with fear at her wrath, she and Girish had played their silly but precious, meaningful games of people in love. Similar games like these will mature into sustaining realities for this girl, not break midway as they had for her.

A strong wave of self-hatred sweeps over her. If she wanted to, she could overlook the impropriety of the letter. In a sporting, tolerant, spirit she could let Julie have the letter and the pleasure of reading it.

But she is unable to muster that kind of large-heartedness. She *has* to muster if she is to come out of the prison house of her past. She *does* attain the large-heartedness one day. The events causing it are not directly related to the letter as we learn from the story. The events, however, set off a desire in her to unlock the doors of her self-made prison. Walking back to her room, dizzy with the new line of thinking that has come up in her, she slips the letter under Julie's pillow as she lies sleeping.

That act of surrender and restoration makes concrete the freedom as yet only envisaged by her. Her act of restoration is the climax of the story. But the spirit of self-questioning and self-doubt underlying that act is shown at work all along in the story.

Latika cannot help her bouts of self-doubt. For the memory of Girish Negi, the man she'd loved and would have married, is getting faint in her mind. It can be totally gone some day. And the prospect frightens her. Her memories have become too necessary for her survival. If they go, how would she survive? The void would swallow her! On the one hand is this fear that is distant and yet looming. On the other, is the, as yet, living memory of Negi she carries within her, despite its slowing pulse. Caught between the two fears Latika sways from her dominant mood of withdrawal to fits of wild outpourings of speech.

3.6.2.7 The Role of Hubert

The immediate spur for these charged vocal interludes of Latika is mostly Hubert. They do not arise fully from the give and take of conversation. Her vivacity has its roots in the revelling deep in her heart that Hubert finds her desirable. It is a revelling without vanity, without the sense of conquest that a woman can have at receiving the full load of a man's attentions. There's a touch of gratefulness in Latika's revelling. Hubert's attentions come as to her as an affirmation of her womanhood. She is mortally afraid of losing it. Is she becoming like Miss Wood, 'toothless, hollow-cheeked ... bags of flesh under her eyes?' Hubert's attentions, the letter he has written to her — all these assure her that she's not going Miss Wood's way, at least not yet. Also, these assurances do not clash with her feelings for Girish Negi. In the first place

she's not romantically inclined towards Hubert at all. Besides, there are other, deeper differences that put the two in distinct, un-interchangeable positions. Girish brought her to life as Latika, gave her birth as a special, unique being, so to say. Hubert affirms her being as a woman. His letter makes her see herself as part and participant in the stream of life.

This deep, inner poise comes to her at a psychologically critical stage as we saw in the preceding, paragraph. Re-inforced thus, re-invigorated by this knowledge about herself she is a different person in her interludes with Hubert. A bounce comes into her behaviour. She takes the initiative in the conversations during their walk back to the school after the church service. Each time Hubert clears a way for her through the pine leaves with his walking stick, she looks at him openly, almost without reserve, seeing him with informality as a sweet, dependable companion. All this is very different from the droopy, phantom figure she is for the most part.

Hubert, thus, is the life affirming character that pulls Latika out of her stand-still state, sets her in motion. Of course, Dr Mukherjee too plays a role in un-freezing Latika. But he is more a father figure to her. His words of advice stir her cerebrally, on the level of reason. What she needs, however, are strong emotional pushes that jolt her into animation. Hubert gives these emotional shake-ups. He doesn't do this consciously, as we saw in our consideration, in the preceding paragraph, of the effects of his letter on her. But he has an emotion-based approach to the kind of existential questions that haunt her. She is asking without being able to put it into words: what is the place of death in life? Hubert has an answer, and he gives it through music. In a piece of music, he says, each note fades out of hearing. But in the process of fading out it "bequeathes the remnants of its cadences to the coming notes. It dies but is not destroyed, therefore alive even in death, fusing with the other notes". There's something very tactile in that description. You feel you are touching vital nerves in the raw matter of life and death. This raw, flesh and blood quality breaks through in practically all of Hubert's words and actions. It is not, as we said, deliberate on his part. It is just a certain chemistry of personality he has, a chemistry that affects Latika in the way she has to be affected.

3.6.2.8 The Importance of Hubert and Mukherjee in *Birds*

Birds is the story of Latika. It is the story of the restoration of her broken personality. And to tell it Nirmal Verma utilises the axiom that the human personality — broken or whole — needs the head and the heart both to stay balanced and in working order. The question thus is, who and where are the head and heart of the story.

From our analysis so far, Hubert emerges as the heart and Mukherjee the head. Mukherjee is the crisis manager, the man level headed and in control of his faculties in the foreboding atmosphere that prevails in the small hill town. This atmosphere with an undercurrent of dread is important not only in the build up and growth of the story but also as the setting and habitat for giving full play to the character traits of both the men. These traits, as we are maintaining, are what give the story its final shape. Let us, therefore, consider and recapitulate the atmosphere of *Birds* in some depth.

There is, firstly, the idea of impermanence that has been worked into the fabric of the story. All the three major characters — Latika, Mukherjee and Hubert — are uprooted people. Mukherjee is a refugee from Burma. Latika

seems to have been washed up to the town after some happenings in Delhi she vaguely hints at. And Hubert seems to be a man of no nationality. You could call him non-Indian, even non-Asian, but nothing more specific than that. Latika is also uprooted.

Added to this are, firstly, the ever-present sense of a see-saw motion in the forest, as we noted in the section on the title of the story. Secondly there is the stumble and flurry of vacation time in the school. The idea of impermanence, of transience, of the temporariness of things, and the sense of dread all this can foster in the minds of the characters becomes easy to understand. They have to live with it, cope with it, like learning the art of navigating a particular twist in a current of water.

Mukherjee is the only one who has mastered this art and has developed from it a system of thought, a technique of living. 'Flow with the current', he tells Latika in various ways, time and again. 'Ride the current, go where it takes you. Don't look back'.

Hubert, on the other hand, thinks that by heeding and acknowledging the natural emotions and intensities of the mind the dread can be foiled. The love of man and woman is one such emotion that can falsify the dread.

Latika, of course, is just not in the state of mind to go along with this. But she is sensitive to the beauty of laughing at danger that Hubert's thinking and approach signify. She sees this beauty when Hubert lies before her one day, collapsed under the combined weights of the pain of her rejection of him, his own none too good health, and the weight of the whiskey he's drunk to forget the other two pains.

His young, collapsed body is a moving sight. Is this what the human body is, she speculates. Is it just a bag of sand, so solid to the eye, and so collapsible like a bag of sand?

The sadness of it and the poetic beauty of the sadness overcome her. And from its swirls rings the voice of Mukherjee in her ears. 'Flow with the current. Go where it goes'. Emotion and reason fuse in her. She comes unstuck from her past. She wakes to the folly of preserving memories, the folly of forgetting the perishability of the body — the perishability of everything, in fact.

Both Hubert and Mukherjee, thus, play a role in this maturing of Latika.

3.6.3 Some Points on the Narrative Technique of *Birds*

The narrative technique of *Birds* is strictly the kind in which the writer remains a detached, neutral observer of his characters. It is a third person voice that we hear throughout, a voice that is impersonal, yet can evoke and enter the vocal timbres of the characters.

We hear the dry humour and drawl of Mukherjee's voice when he says, "I sometimes wonder why human beings live, don't they have anything better to do?" And we hear the loud, hooting yawn he gives in the church and cries, "When will this business end?" (55)

We hear the halting, apologetic tone of Hubert's voice when he asks Latika to return to him the letter he'd written to her without knowing about her

bereavement. 'Please consider it unwritten', he says in, what we feel, is a hushed tone. This same hushed muted tone goes berserk, turns torrential when he collapses under the weight of his own emotional pressures, and breaks out into drunken singing. Then we hear the din and commotion of that voice gone out of control.

And Latika's soft but clearly enunciated voice we hear throughout the story. Her voice too breaks its bounds and rises at climactic points. "Many years ago I went to Delhi, Mr Hubert. I was very young then — I don't know how many years ago it was. I have lost count of the years ..." she bursts into a cascade of speech, and we hear its breathless rush forward.

Apart from the sounds of human voices, the sounds of trees, the wind, flowing water and innumerable natural phenomena are also worked into the texture of the story. A very aural quality pervades it. Even silence has sound. 'The silence of the jungle is never voiceless. Sounds and voices, like dreams in deep sleep, keep fluttering the light gossamer curtain of stillness ...', the text says at one point.

The objective stance that is the hallmark of a third person narrative has been carried in the story to the finest degree possible, till the author's voice merges with every living object, human and non-human. It is a tapestry of sound and voice that we experience. So unbiased and without preference, so utterly democratic is this entry of the author, one by one and turn by turn, into the vocal system of his characters, that we cannot decide whose perspective and vision he is upholding. Some kind of a division of authorial loyalties is usually discernible in works of fiction. Some characters are upheld, others are not. The nature of this division describes and categorizes the book.

But here, in *Birds* and in Nirmal Verma's fiction generally, no character is run down or disapproved of, no bad guy ever figures in his work.

In a way Mukherjee is cast as the man of the right, feasible outlook. But Mukherjee is a theoretician for the most part. For his theories to become part of living, as they do, finally, inputs from Latika and Hubert are also needed. Mukherjee does not emerge as the sole spokesman of his theories, at the end of it all.

What stays in the mind after the final scene of Latika moving off, restoring the letter to its owner, is the mountain setting. We see the steady, demanding gaze of a mountain god, whose inner and outer forms both are projected by the mountain setting. If human beings stray into this setting, an underlying statement of *Birds* seems to be, they cannot but develop the kind of level-headed, ad hoc living that Mukherjee has formulated. But how and why do they stray into the setting? A higher force determines the course of human life, *Birds* says in effect. And the third person narrative method adopted by the author culminates in that statement.

3.7 GLOSSARY

Pictogram: A drawing of an image or images carrying a meaning. As in dance, where the gestures of the dancer convey an everyday meaning. Pictograms were resorted to before the formation of regular scripts.

Choreography: The composition of the steps and body movements present in a dance. In this story the dance is a product of the imagination. The author sees the flight of the birds and Latika's swings of mood as two forms of dance, each reflecting the other.

After-sounds: The echoes of sounds made by speech or objects which stay or go up in the ear even after the sounds have ceased.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. Would you call Latika (a) strong (b) weak (c) a mixture of both? Elaborate your answer.
2. Memory plays an important role in *Birds*. Write a short essay of around 400 to 500 words bringing out its importance.

   Or

   Compare and contrast Latika's and Dr. Mukherjee's respective ways of dealing with their memories.
3. Write short notes of 150 words each on on (a) the setting of the story. (b) The effect on Latika of the music in the church.
4. Do you think *Birds* is an apt title for the story? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Hubert is instrumental in weaning Latika from her memories. In around 300 to 400 words explain how.
6. Re-create and highlight in your own words, the scene where Latika tucks in under Julie's pillow the letter she had withheld from the girl the day before. You may start from the point (or whatever point you think right) where she goes towards the girls rooms after saying good night to Dr. Mukherjee.
7. Dr. Mukherjee is a mature, philosophical man. In around 250 words give an account of these aspects of his character and personality.
8. Do you think *Birds* ends on a happy note?

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Books by Nirmal Verma

Short Story Collection

Parinde Patna. Rajkamal Prakashan. 1960.

Jalti Jhaari. Kahani Sangrah. Dilli : Rajkamal Prakashan, 1964.
Pichchli Garmiyon Mein Nayi Dilli : Rajkamal Prakashan, 1983.
Pratinidhi Kahayniyan. Nayi Dilli. Rajkamal Paper backs, 1987.
Meri Priya Kahaniyan, Dilli. Rajpal and sons. 1995.
Sookha Tatha Anya Kahaniyan. Nayi Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1995.

Short Story Collections in English Translation

The Hill Station and other Stories. Calcutta Writers workshop, 1973.
Maya Darpan and Other stories. Delhi. New York. Oxford University Press, 1986.

The World Elsewhere and other Stories. London Readers International, 1988.
The Crows of Deliverance. Readers International, 1991.
Such a Big Yearning and other Stories. New Delhi. Indus. 1995
The last Exit. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1999.

Novels

Vey Din. Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1964.
Lal Teen Ki Chat. Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1974.
Ek Chithra Sukh Nayi Dilli Rajkamal Prakashan, 1979.
Raat ka Reporter. Nayi Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1989.
Antim Aranya. Nayi Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 2000.

Novels in English Translation

Days of Longing. (Vey Din). Hind Pocket Books, 1972.
Dark Dispatches (Raat Kaa Reporter) New Delhi, Indus, 1993.
A Rag called happiness (Ek Chithra Sukh) Penguin Books, India, 1993.
The Red Tin Roof (Lal Teen Kee Chath) Ravi Dayal Publishers, 1997.

Essays and Memoirs

Chiron Par Chandni. Bharatiya Jnanpith Prakashan, 1964.
Har Baarish Mein, Dilli. Radhakrihna Prakashan, 1970.
Shabd Aur Smriti. Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1976.
Doosri Duniya. Hapur. Sambhaavna Pakashan, 1978.
Kala Ka Jokhin. Nayi Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1981.
Dhalaan Se Utarte Juey. Nayi Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1985.
Word and Memory. Bikaner. Vagdevi Prakashan.
Bharat Aur Europe. Pratishruti Ke Kshetra. Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1991.
Itihas, Smriti, Akanksha. Nayi Dilli. National Publishing House, 1992.
Shatabdi Ke Dhalte Varshon Mein. Dilli. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1995.
Dhundh Se Uthti Dhun. Diary, Notes, Journals, Yatra Samsmaran. Nayi Dilli Rajkamal Prakashan, 1997.
Sulagti Tahneee. (Translated as 'The Burning Bough' in English).

Interview

Verma, Nirmal. 'Nirmal Verma Key Katha-Desh Mein' [In the Story Space of Nirmal Verma]. An Extended Interview — Conversation with Nirmal Verma by Ashok Vajpayee, Madan Soni, Dhruv Shukl and Udayan Vajpayee at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal in 1988. Included in *Nirmal Verma* by Ashok Vajpayee. Rajkamal Prakashan. New Delhi. 1990.

Criticism

1. 'Naee Kahaanee, Naey Savaal'. By Dr Satyakaam. Anupam Prakashan. Patna. 2002.

UNIT 4 ISMAT CHUGHTAI : *TINY'S GRANNY* TRANSLATION : RALPH RUSSELL

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Urdu Short Story
4.3 Ismat Chughtai : Life and Works
4.4 *Tiny's Granny*
  4.4.1 Structure
  4.4.2 Atmosphere
  4.4.3 Characterization
  4.4.4 Humour and Irony
  4.4.5 Narrative Voice
  4.4.6 Meaning
4.5 Let Us Sum Up
4.6 Glossary
4.7 Questions
4.8 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim in this unit is to acquaint you with the writings of one of Urdu's most famous writers, namely, Ismat Chughtai. In the biographical note on the writer, an attempt has been made to put the writer in her historical and literary contexts. (In Block 8 you will also study a character sketch of the writer by one of her illustrious contemporaries, i.e., Saadat Hasan Manto, which will through further light on her life and art). A discussion on the text prescribed for you, i.e., *Tiny's Granny* follows. This unit will help you enjoy a great piece of literature that dramatises the relationship between a grandmother and her granddaughter in a way that moves the reader profoundly. It will also sensitise you to the problem of ageing and the need for social security for the aged. In India, a significant segment of our population belongs to this category. With the break up of the traditional family structure these people tend to get neglected and are often left uncared for. To deepen your understanding of the theme you can also read stories by other writers on the subject. The story will also help you appreciate Ismat Chughtai's merits as a short story writer. You should keep in mind the fact that this is a text not originally written in English, but Urdu, and then translated into English. Those who can access the story in any of the Indian languages should endeavour to do so, and then see what kind of complex negotiations were involved in the process of translation.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The prescribed story, i.e., *Tiny's Granny* is as much about an old woman's struggles for survival as it is about the society which is unsympathetic to her plight and treats her as an object of ridicule. While reading the story you

should ask yourself the following questions: What it is about? What is the central concern of the writer? Who is/are the narrator/s of the story? What are the narrative perspectives available to the readers? You should subject the story to a close reading, taking care not to miss even the most minute details, words, symbols etc. that contain clues to the meaning and answers to the above questions. The story has been discussed and analysed highlighting the following elements:

a. Structure — the organisation of events (plot) plays a significant role in a narrative. You should follow carefully how different episodes in the story hang together.
b. Atmosphere — the right kind of setting and ambience contribute substantially to the appeal of the story by enhancing verisimilitude, and the story "rings true".
c. Characterization — development of the character is important in a narrative. In the current story, it is doubly important because it is the protagonist who is the main focus of the story.
d. Humour and Irony — these are important devices that Ismat Chughtai uses in her story to drive the point home.
e. Meaning — author's message as it can be understood through an analysis of the different elements in the story

4.2 URDU SHORT STORY

As in other literatures of India, "Afsana", or the short story is a relatively new genre, even though India has had a rich tradition of kathas that go back as far as several centuries. There is no consensus about who wrote the first Urdu afsana, but according to a renowned literary scholar, Mirza Hamid Beg, Allama Rashidul Khairi wrote "Naseer aur Khadeeja" in 1903, making him the first Urdu short story writer. According to another view, the genre and even the word "afsana" owes its origin to Sajjad Haider Yaldaram (1880-1943), who was the first to coin this term for the *qissas* that were being written at the time, and he then went on write his first afsana in the journal, *Makhzan*, in Lahore in 1907. Another pioneer of the Urdu short story was Niyaz Fatehpuri (1884-1966). Sentimentalism, realism and romance mixed freely in the stories of the early phase.

However, it was with Premchand (1880-1936) that short story emerged as discrete narrative genre. He divested the afsana from its excessive preoccupation with the world of romance and gave it a realistic base. Further, his treatment of rural life and its problems as potential subject for fiction opened new possibilities for other writers. The first short story written by him was "Soz-e-Vatan" (1908). Premchand's short stories cover nearly a dozen volumes including *Prem Pachisi*, *Prem Battisi*, *Prem Chalisi*, *Zad-e-Rah*, *Vardaat*, *Akhri Tuhfa* and *Khak-e-Parvana*. The Progressive Writer's Movement (the literary wing of the Communist Party of India) in Urdu fiction gained momentum under Sajjad Zaheer (1905-1976), Ahmed Ali (1912-1994), Mahmood-uz-Zafar (1908-1994) and Rasheed Jahan (1905-1952). All of them belong to the group known in Urdu literature as the "Angare" group because of the eponymous volume of short stories authored by them. In spite of their meagre output they created quite a stir in Urdu literature, shocking people out of their complacency in matters of conventional patriarchal values. The eight stories in the slender volume, *Angare* (Embers, 1932) threw up an uproar of

unprecedented magnitude and the book was quickly banned. Urdu short story writers like Rajender Singh Bedi (1915-1984) and Krishan Chander (1914-1977) showed commitment to the Marxist philosophy in their writings. Krishan Chander's 'Adhe Ghante Ka Khuda' is one of the most memorable stories in Urdu literature. His other renowned short stories include 'Zindagi Ke Mor Par', 'Kalu Bhangi' and 'Mahalaxmi ka pul'. Bedi's 'Garm kot' and 'Lajvanti' are among the masterpieces of Urdu short story. Bedi's important works include collections of short stories, *Dana-o-daam*, *Grahen*, *Kokh juli* and *Apne dukh mujhe dey dau.*

Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto were close contemporaries of the 'progressive' group of writers, though their relationship with the votaries of Progressive Writers Movement was problematic. Ismat Chughtai appeared on the Urdu literary scene with a bang with her controversial short story "Lihaf", and then went on attacking patently oppressive patriarchal values and the traditional hypocritical mores related to women's sexuality in story after story Manto learnt his art from Gorky and Maupassant and depicted the stark reality of the life of prostitutes and other marginalized sections of the society. However, Manto's practice of realism not only embraces the external aspects of reality about which there is general consensus, but also those that are subjective and psychological and therefore, tend to be more complex and varied. It is undeniable that Manto's most powerful stories deal with the partition of India and its aftermath. About the development of the Urdu short story up to the time of India's independence, the noted critic M. U. Memon writes:

> The eleven years between the founding of the Progressive Movement in 1936 and the Partition of India in 1947 are remarkably intriguing from the perspective of Urdu literary history. The short story proper, considerably developed and strengthened by Premchand, grows to maturity in that short period in both thematic range and technical skill. The bulk of the writing of the period, however — which is made up of the 'utilitarian' fiction of the Progressives — is quite traditional in its main technical attributes. It is marked, above all, by a pronounced emphasis on linear development and sequential plot. The narrative mode is still largely naturalistic, inclined to turn inward, unaware — or perhaps uncertain — of the potential of devices such as the deliberate scrambling of temporality, interior monologue, and the subtle interplay of consciousness and its free associations ...[1]

The most notable achievements of Urdu fiction after India's independence can be seen in short stories rather than novels. As evident from above, Progressive Writers' Movement, despite its internal dissensions, played a seminal role in the development of the Urdu short story in its early stages, though it got stymied later..The writers were primarily concerned with the thematics rather than the formalistic aspects of the genre. Immediately after 1947, the one dominant theme was the trauma of partition and the terrible human tragedy that it entailed. Though Manto is the most powerful chronicler of partition, Bedi, Krishan Chander, Ismat Chughtai, Qurratulain Hyder, Hayatullah Ansai, Upendranath Ashk also wrote with insight and understanding. The dislocation of a vast populace and the agony of truncated families remained a recurring

[1] "Introduction", *The Colour of Nothingness: Modern Urdu Short Stories*, ed. by Muhammad Umar Memon, Karachi : Oxford University Press, 1998, p. xvii

theme. The agony of exile and the loss of a composite past continued to haunt Urdu writers for many decades after independence.

The liberation of the country from the British yoke did not bring the promised "tryst with destiny". The dream of all-round development and social equality soon dissipated. The idealism evident at the time of freedom struggle slowly gave way to scepticism and cynicism. The Nehruvian vision of progress did not touch the masses of ordinary people for whom the problem of hunger still remained a stark reality. An insensitive bureaucracy and an increasingly corrupt political climate led to widespread disillusionment. For the Urdu writer there was an additional cause for depression. Urdu began to be seen as the language of just one community — the Muslim community — and given short shrift. The survival of the language and its literature and culture became a genuine concern. This accentuated the anxiety of the Urdu writers writing in India. They were not sure of a sizeable reading public that is the mainstay of any writer.

Against the political-cultural background delineated above, progressivism slowly gave way to modernism in the late fifties and early sixties. The progressives took a very limited view of human beings. They tried to understand the individual through the society, taking a minimalist view of his desires and needs. Though the movement started with great promise, its limitations became increasingly evident as the ideologues became more rigid and inflexible in their understanding of what good literature should be. They forgot that artistic freedom is the first condition of all good art, that writers can write best when they are unfettered, and that socialist realism is no guarantee for the production of good literature.

Modernism held great appeal for them as it promised to restore the autonomy of the individual. External reality ceased to occupy the entire attention of writers. Writers began to have a more complex notion of reality. In this sense modernism can also be seen as "post-realism". The linear development of the narrative and sequential plot are the devices specifically designed to capture external reality. But to capture the myriad impressions and experiences that go on in the mind, the writers needed a method that would capture through various strategies of indirection like suggestion, symbolism, analepsis, prolepsis, stream of consciousness, interior monologue and so on, to convey the multi-faceted aspects of reality. In other words, a method that is more inclusive and captures both the outer and inner realities. Existentialism became the buzzword and Sartre, Camus and Kafka were the new source of inspiration. Among the votaries of modernism in Urdu short stories in India, the prominent names are Surinder Prakash, Balraj Manra who pioneered the "New Story", to be joined later by Qamar Ahsan and others. Moreover, there are those like Joginder Paul, Ghyas Ahmad Gaddi, Balraj Komal, Devender Issar Salam Bin Razzaq who have written some short stories that are symbolic in mode but they have avoided its extreme form, i.e. abstraction. Mention may be made to Balraj Komal's "Kuan", Ghyas Ahmad Gaddi's "Parinda Pakadnewali Ghadi", Jeelani Bano's "Roshni Ke Minaar", Rattan Singh's "Hazaron Saal Lambi Raat", Ram Lall's "Chaap".

It must be pointed out, however, that a symbolic or abstract story demands greater resourcefulness on the part of the writer, a much greater artistic control and insight into the subject than the traditional realistic short story. In writers of lesser talents, a symbolic or abstract story becomes an excuse for penning unintelligible gibberish. Pyrotechnics and gimmick can work only when the

writer has some innovative spark in him. In the sixties and the seventies of the twentieth century, there were a glut of Urdu short stories that were pretentiously symbolic. The writers had joined the bandwagon of modernism simply as a fad, or at the instance of some influential critics. The stories became riddles, and very dull ones at that, alienating the readers. Even the best writers of the symbolic/abstract story like Surendra Prakash and Balraj Menra wrote stories that were abstruse and immensely forgettable. It was mainly writers reading each other's stories and the critics who either encouraged them or lambasted them. In their enthusiasm for a mode that was mainly derivative and did not spring directly from their milieu or from their individual experiences, they forgot to become interesting storytellers and much of what they wrote seemed contrived. The hiatus between the writers and the reading public grew wide and unbridgeable. However, in the same period we had another group of writers, mentioned above, who maintained a balance, despite their marginalisation in the general din of the faddist onslaught.

In the late 70s of the twentieth century, the overtly symbolic story slowly underwent a change, giving way to the mimetic realism of an earlier era. In Urdu criticism, the phrase that is bandied about is, "the return of the story". But the fact remains that the story had never disappeared. It had merely to lie low because of the faddist onslaught mounted on it, and showed its resurgence in the 80s. A host of writers appeared on the scene who brought back the alienated Urdu readers to the simple, straightforward and palatable story. Mention may be made to Ali Imam Naqvi, Salam bin Razzak, Anwar Khan, Abdus Samad, Shaukat Hayat, Paigham Afaqi, Husainul Haq, Mohsin Khan, Shafaq, Nayyar Masood, Syed Muhammad Ashraf, Sajid Rashid, Tariq Chhatari, Mazharuzzaman Khan, Musharraf Alam Zauqi, Shamoel Ahmad, Iqbal Ansari, Ghazanfar, Zakia Mashhadi, Muqaddar Hameed, Shafi Mashhadi, Shaukat Hayat, Fayyaz Riffat, Moinuddin Jinabade, Manzar Kazmi, Sughra Mehdi, Tarannum Riaz, Anjum Usmani, Rizwan Ahmad, Khalid Javed and others.

4.3 ISMAT CHUGHTAI : LIFE AND WORKS

Ismat Chughtai (1911-1991)

Ismat Chughtai was Urdu's most courageous and controversial woman writer in the twentieth century. She began writing at a time when the Urdu short

story had already established itself as a significant genre of literary expression through the writings of Premchand, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Krishan Chander. Though she operated largely within the parameters of Indian patriarchy, she offered subtle critiques of its dominant assumptions through her writings. She had a special place among her illustrious contemporaries in the field of Urdu fiction — Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander, Sadat Hasan Manto, Qurratulain Hyder — and brought into its ambit hitherto unexplored areas of experience of female subjectivity and female sexuality. She gave voice to the areas of silence that marked women's writing in Urdu before her, and thus brought about a significant change in literary judgements and appreciation.

Ismat Chughtai was born in 1911 in Uttar Pradesh at a place called Badaun, associated with the memory of Gautama Buddha. Her father, Qasim Beg Chughtai, was a judicial magistrate who served in different capacities at Agra, Bahraich, Jaunpur, Kanpur, Lucknow and Jodhpur. The Chughtai family was a large and sprawling one, with ten children and innumerable relatives and hangers-on. The atmosphere was relaxed, lively and convivial — family banter laced with wit, humour and repartee was indulged in with great gusto. When she was in her ninth class at the school in Aligarh, her father moved to Sambhar in Rajasthan. However, Chughtai returned to Aligarh to do her F.A., after which she was admitted to Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow to do her B.A. As evident from her unfinished autobiography, *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan* [Papery Raiment], I.T. College was a greatly liberating experience for her, and in a way, the seeds of her literary life was sown there. However, the two decisive early influences in her literary career were her own brother, Azim Beg Chughtai (1899-1941) and Dr Rasheed Jahan (1905-1952). Azim Beg, her elder brother, was a humourist-satirist of considerable talent who was her first mentor. Chughtai admired Rasheed Jahan for her independent spirit, her fierce individualism and her advocacy of women's emancipation through education. She was also a zealous member of the Progressive Writers' Movement which changed the contours of Urdu literature in unprecedented ways. The movement acted as a catalyst for Chughtai's fledgling literary career. Her close interaction with the Progressives, when she moved to Bombay, helped her sharpen her sensibility and hone her art.

Having completed her B.A., Chughtai worked in three schools in U.P. and Rajasthan. One finds vivid and hilarious descriptions of these schools in her works, particularly in *Terhi Lakeer* [Crooked Line] and *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan*. She wrote her first work, a play titled, *Fasaadi* [Trouble Maker], in 1937, which was published in *Saaqi* (a celebrated monthly journal published from Lahore). Though she had written a couple of stories after that she came to be regarded as a serious writer only after she wrote "Lihaaf" [Quilt] in 1942, which raised a storm in literary circles for its daring delineation of female sexuality.

Chughtai wrote novels, plays and travelogues. However, her most remarkable achievement lies in the short story form. Her creative temperament was suited to this genre where a single human situation is dramatised and a single protagonist or at the most, two or three characters, are given prominence. Her sparkling dialogue, brilliant turn of phrase and scintillating humour — the essential ingredients of her style — achieve startling effect when she works on a small canvas with a few bold strokes. She uses this canvas not only as the social and cultural matrix for her characters, but also as the psychic landscapes on which the human drama is played out.

Ismat Chughtai is a storyteller par excellence. Throughout her literary career her style remained the same — direct, uninhibited and spontaneous. She never takes recourse to any complicated narrative devices like flashback, flashforward, ellipsis, stream of consciousness and so on. Even the most uninhibited reader of literature can enjoy and appreciate her stories at his level. The language used in them is that of everyday speech. She makes extensive use of highly interesting dialogues (for instance, in stories like "Til" [Mole], "Kafir" [Infidel], "Saas" [Mother-in-law]) punctuated with sparkling wit and repartee. Her success in this regard is so phenomenal that even if the reader does not like the theme or the treatment, still he is swept off his feet by the sheer force of verbal accomplishments. The idioms, the images and their curious juxtaposition pull him along. Krishan Chander, the famous novelist and short story writer, remarked most aptly about her style: "What one is reminded of by these stories is horse race, i.e., speed, movement, briskness and acceleration, to the extent that the reader is left far behind cursing the writer in his mind. Not only does her story seem to be running, but the sentences, images, metaphors, the sounds and sensibilities of the characters and their feelings — all seem to be moving along in a cluster with the force of a storm".[2]

Ismat Chughtai died on October 24, 1991.

Works by Ismat Chughtai

Novels and Novellas

Ziddi (The Wild One, 1940), *Masooma* (The Innocent One, 1942) *Terhi Lakeer* (Crooked Line, 1945), *Dil ki Duniya* (The Heart Breaks Free, 1964), *Saudai* (The Trader, 1964), *Ajab Aadmi* (A Strange Man, 1970), *Jangli Kabootar* (Wild Pigeons, 1970), *Ek Qatra-e Khoon*, (A Drop of Blood, 1975), *Teen Anarhi* (The Three Novices, 1988), *Naqli Rajkumar* (A Fake Prince, 1992) and *Kaghazi hai Pairahan* (Papery Raiment, 1994)

Collections of Short Stories

Kaliyan (Buds, 1941), *Choten* (Wounds, 1942), *Ek Baat* (One Thing, 1945), *Chhui Mui* (Touch Me Not, 1952) *Do Haath* (A Pair of Hands, 1955), *Badan ki Khushboo* (Body Fragrance, 1979), *Amarbel* (Eternal Vine, 1979), *Thorhi si Pagal* (A Wee Bit Crazy, 1979), *Aadhi Aurat Aadha Khwab* (Half Woman Half Dream, 1986).

Collection of Plays

Shaitan (Devil, n.d.)

English Translation of Ismat Chughtai's works:

Tahira Naqvi and Syeda S. Hameed (eds. and trs.) *The Quilt and Other Stories*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990.
Tahira Naqvi (tr), *The Heart Breaks Free & The Wild One*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993.

[2] Krishan Chander, "Pesh Lafz" (Foreword), *Choten*, Delhi: Saqi Book Depot, 1945, p. 5-6. My translation.

Tahira Naqvi(tr), *The Crooked Line* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1995).
Tahira Naqvi(tr), *My Friend My Enemy: Essays, Reminiscences, Portraits*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2001.
M. Asaduddin (ed. and tr.), *Lifting the Veil: Selected Writings of Ismat Chughtai*, 2001.

4.4 *TINY'S GRANNY*

Tiny's Granny was originally published in Urdu as "Nanhi ki Nani", in the famous Urdu journal *Naqoosh*, in its special issue devoted to Urdu short story that appeared in January, 1954. It is an immortal creation of Ismat Chughtai that can compare with the best in world literature, and can be found in many popular anthologies. You will study it in English translation done by Ralph Russell.

(Ralph Russell is one of the foremost scholars of Urdu literature in the West. He taught it in the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, for more than four decades. Among his notable works are: *Three Mughal Poets*, *Ghalib: Life and Letters* and *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History*. The first two books were co-authored with his Indian collaborator, Khurshidul Islam.

4.4.1 Structure

As a writer, Ismat Chughtai was mainly concerned with the theme or subject matter of her stories and was not overly preoccupied with formalistic aspects. Even so, the story *Tiny's Granny* presents a neat structure held together by the writer's organisation of events within the story and her use of realistic details in signalling a smooth transition from one phase of Granny's life to another. The introduction of Tiny's character in the first half of the story and her departure from the scene in the second half contribute substantially to this structure.

4.4.2 Atmosphere

Chughtai has masterfully built the atmosphere in the story that makes Granny's character come alive in vivid colours. She builds the ambience of a close-knit community life in the countryside with its unhurried pace of daily life that makes possible the emergence of a character like Granny's. Granny's sleight of hand in stealing things — be they vegetables, eatables or other household items, the mischief-making children, the housewives eager for a whiff of gossip, the village festivities that would allow Granny to collect leftovers, the monkeys playing prank on her, are the details that help the writer in building up the atmosphere that would allow the protagonist to be seen in her natural habitat, with her extraordinary resilience and resourcefulness and endearing idiosyncrasies.

4.4.3 Characterization

It is her power of close observation that helps Ismat Chughtai pick up seemingly trivial but immensely interesting and relevant details about people and their lives that are then woven into her stories to create real life characters in believable settings. This ability is in evidence in story after story written by

her and allows her to explore the lives of the poor and the oppressed, and not just the middle class, as is commonly supposed. *Tiny's Granny* is one such story that demonstrates how Chughtai can delineate the lives of marginalized people, such as widows, prostitutes and beggars.

The focus of the story is Granny and Chughtai shows consummate skill in portraying her. Granny represents the total facelessness of the disenfranchised Indian woman, shorn of any individual identity. The opening paragraph of the story introduces her first as "Bafatan's kid", then as "Bashira's daughter-in-law", and lastly, as *Tiny's Granny*. She had no name by which she could be called, let alone the question of her individual identity. Of course, she must have had a name given to her after her birth, but no one ever felt the need to invoke it on any occasion. Chughtai's artistic merit lies in the fact that she has been able to make such a nameless character the stuff of literature, and make her a memorable creation of hers.

The writer charts Granny's progress (or regress) through different stages of her life. She had to fend for herself from her early childhood. As a matter of fact, from the time she had learnt to hold her cup she was compelled to do a variety of jobs for her livelihood. However, Chughtai does not dwell much on Granny's youth or her middle phase of life. Obviously, the focus is on her old age, i.e., her life as Tiny's "Granny". The writer shows how Granny had to develop an elaborate strategy of survival in a society that merely tolerated her presence and that that had no real sympathy for her plight. Her resourcefulness in wrangling off a meal from housewives, her inventiveness in the art of stealing and using her burkha as a potent weapon in many situations etc. — all these basically spring from the instinct for survival which is so strong in her. They never fail to win our admiration, even if we cannot support them from a moral standpoint.

Whatever her other failings, Granny tried her best to be a good and protective grandmother to Tiny, and made utmost efforts to shield her from the machinations of young men who eyed her lustily. But when the blow came from the most respectable member of the society, the Deputy Saheb, Granny was stunned to silence. She could complain to none but God. But there were more disappointments in store for Granny. Tiny became the common target of all the young men in the mohalla and ultimately decided to run away with Siddiq's nephew. Granny was shattered. The only emotional anchor of her life was lost, and she became listless, just pulling on with her life. The last deathly blow was struck by the monkeys who were her sworn enemies. One of the monkeys picked up her pillow and when it began to peel it off fold after fold, all the stolen goods that she had stored therein for years came out in the open, in the full view of the public. People hounded her, calling her a thief and a swindler. "Granny's life was in the pillow, and the monkey had torn the enchanted pillow with his teeth and so thrust a red hot iron bar into Granny's heart". Two days later people found her stark dead. "Her mouth was open and flies were crawling in the corners of her half-closed eyes". This is the ignominious end of Granny's no less ignominious but adventurous life. Chughtai's skill in portraying Granny's character lies not only in describing her relationship with Tiny, but also her intimate relationship with her burkha and her pillow, both of which have been used by the writer as powerful and complex symbols to bring out different traits in Granny's character.

4.4.4 Humour and Irony

Humour and irony are the literary devices used by writers to enhance the expressive and suggestive power of language, be it for the purposes of delight, correction or social criticism. As mentioned earlier, Ismat Chughtai writes a language that is laced with humour and irony. It is because of this that her prose is always a delight to read. Chughtai often uses humour and irony masterfully to expose social ills rampant in the society. Behind the apparent laughter that the humour evokes, you will often feel a tear trickling down indicating where the narrator's sympathy lies. Though a good deal of laughter is evoked at Granny's expense you should appreciate that the author could not have created such a moving character without the deepest sympathy for her plight. As humour and irony often consist of play upon language, this is an element that is most difficult to retain in translation. However, traces of it can certainly be found in the English version of the story. The author's tongue-in-cheek mode of humour is evident right from the second paragraph where she describes what she meant by "odd jobs" that granny was subjected to do as a child. Then there are delicate touches of humour when Chughtai describes Granny's sleight of hand, her craftiness and her inventiveness as a liar and a talebearer. Then the description of her burkha and the different uses to which it had been put is evokes laughter. The humour has come through even in the English translation:

> ... her biggest lie was the burkha that she always wore. At one time it had had a veil, but when one by one the old men of the mohalla died, or their eyesight failed, Granny said goodbye to her veil. But you never saw her without the cap of her burkha with its fashionably serrated pattern, as though it were stuck to the skull, and though she might have left the burkha open down the front (even when she was wearing a transparent kurta with no vest underneath), it would billow out behind her like a king's robe. This burkha was not simply for keeping her head modestly covered. She put it to every possible and impossible use. It served her as bedclothes: bundled up, it became a pillow. On the rare occasions when she bathed, she used it as a towel. At the five times of prayer, it was her prayer mat. When the local dogs bared their teeth at her, it became a serviceable shield for her protection. As the dog leapt at her calves it would find the voluminous folds of Granny's burkha hissing in its face. Granny was exceedingly fond of her burkha, and in her spare moments would sit and lament with the keenest regret over its advancing old age (91-92).

The above passage illustrates Chughtai's genius for humour, her eye for the minutest detail and her power of vivid description. Chughtai's strategy of subversion is also fully evident here in the way she turns around the symbol of Burkha. Traditionally seen as a symbol of subjugation and oppression of women, it has been transformed into an enabling symbol of empowerment by Chughtai. Continuing with the sources of humour, the elaborate inventory of goods that tumbled out of the pillow as it was torn to shreds by the monkeys and the way they have been described by the author contribute no less to the humorous effect. However, as pointed out earlier, you should appreciate that the humour employed here is double-edged. From another angle, Granny's craftiness and resilience would appear to be the survival strategies that allowed her to sustain herself in a society that was unsympathetic and totally indifferent to her plight. Her vulnerability is a measure of the people's

indifference towards the plight of the needy and the seriously flawed system of dispensation of justice in the society.

Similarly, there are several instances of irony in the story that have been masterfully used by the author to drive her point home. The first of these instances is the rape of Tiny by none other than the Deputy Saheb which exposes the hypocritical social morality of the people. Granny and Tiny have always looked upon the Deputy Saheb as their protector and provider. The irony in this case is enhanced because the blow has come not from expected quarters, like the young men of the village who lusted after her, not even from the Deputy's son, but the great man himself. The authorial voice drives the point home by highlighting the sharp contrast between the external traits of Deputy Saheb's character and its treacherous undercurrent: ".. one of the leading men in the mohalla, grandfather to three grandchildren, a religious man who regularly said his five daily prayers and had only recently provided mats and water vessels to the local mosque...". Then the author deploys irony in showing Granny's complex and capricious relationship with the monkeys. She had to scramble and fight for scraps of food with the monkeys. The monkeys bore a grudge against her because of this. "How else can you explain the fact that they turned their back on everything else the world had to offer and concentrated all their attacks on Granny's food? And how else can you explain the fact that a big rascally, red-bottomed monkey ran off with her pillow, which she loved more than her life?" This wicked fellow took revenge on her by exposing her thoroughly in public when it peeled off the pillow and stolen goods tumbled out of it one after another. The authorial voice says, "And now see what trick Fate played on her". It was as though Fate had combined its strength with the monkeys to work for Granny's ultimate disgrace. As hard-hearted as she was (the authorial voice says, "In her last birth Granny surely must have been a dog tick, that's why she was so hard to kill".), Granny could not bear this public disgrace and died.

4.4.5 Narrative Voice

As sensitive and intelligent readers of the story, you must be aware of the narrative point/s of view. The narrative point-of-view tells us about the perspective or perspectives from which a narrative is told. You will see that *Tiny's Granny* has been narrated from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, with a fair amount of dialogue thrown in. By and large, you have been given the perspective of the omniscient or third person narrator, who you may or may not like to identify with the author. A sophisticated reading of any literary narrative text demands that you make a fine distinction between the author and the narrator. The third person narrator in the story pretends to be impersonal, but on several occasions, e.g., while describing how the monkey picked up her pillow and towards the end of the story when the Judgment Day is evoked, the narrator seems to shed his/her impersonal tone and invites the reader's sympathy one way or the other.

You must also pay attention to the tonal variations in narration. The breezy, casual tone of the narrator suddenly gets sombre before Tiny's rape by the Deputy Saheb. The reader is filled with a sense of foreboding when the paragraph opens with the line, — 'But a pair of old hands cannot wipe out what is inscribed in a person's fate'. One finds a similar change in tone beginning with the paragraph — 'Two days passed in this way and the people

of the mohalla began to feel sorry for what they had done'. These tonal variations not only adds variety to the delightful experience of reading a gripping story, but also helps the narrative attain greater depth and complexity.

4.4.6 Meaning

What is the subject matter or theme of the story? In crafting Granny's character and describing her arduous journey through life, the writer has made implicit comments on the fate of women and the destitute and society's indifference to their plight. As a member of the Progressive Writer's Movement, Chughtai had a heightened sense of social iniquity and gender discrimination. She was aware of the double marginalization of women in society, first because of gender discrimination, and second because of their lack of economic independence. The story provides a telling illustration of the sexual and economic exploitation of the poor in society.

Chughtai is known for her courageous attack against the rampant hypocrisy in society pertaining to sexual morals. She depicts female sexuality with exemplary forthrightness and candour, and exposes the "male gaze", to use the fashionable phrase. In *Tiny's Granny*, the rape of Tiny by the Deputy Saheb is an obnoxious crime against a minor, but no one raises a voice against it. For the women of the mohalla it provides some scope for titillation and that's all. No one has the slightest sympathy for the victim, because she comes from the wrong class. It is because such injustices were the order of the day, and have been in practice for generations, that the event just does not register in public perception as a crime. The story gives the impression of a society that provides no social security for the poor and the elderly. Granny settles for a life of petty thievery and mean subterfuges because society provides her with no other option. This society also makes it impossible for Tiny to work for her livelihood and thus lead an honest or decent life. She is finally driven to run away from the mohalla and leave Granny alone to fend for herself. And yet the same society sits in judgement, feels offended by her acts of stealing and finally drives her to death. The narrator's sympathy for Granny and Tiny can be seen in her wry comments and her exposure of the hypocrisy and double standard prevalent in society. However, towards the end of the story, the narrator throws away the cloak of invisibility and comes out in the open to give her explicit comment that contains the kernel of the story:

> On the Judgment Day, the trumpet sounded, and Granny woke with a start and got up coughing and clearing her throat, as though her ears had caught the sound of free food being doled out... Cursing and swearing at the angels, she dragged herself somehow or other doubled up as she was over the Bridge of Sirat and burst into the presence of God, the All Powerful and All Kind... And God, beholding the degradation of humanity, bowed His head in shame and wept tears, and those divine tears of blood fell upon Granny's rough grave, and bright red poppies sprang up there and began to dance in the breeze.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

Ismat Chughtai had said in one of her interviews: "In my stories I've put down everything with objectivity. Now, if some people find them obscene, let them go to hell. It's my belief that experiences can never be obscene if they are

based on authentic realities of life. These people think that there's nothing wrong if they can do things behind the curtains.... They are all halfwits".[3] Many of her plots have been taken from her experiences in real life. That is why her characters are so life-like and their problems have a kind of urgency and immediacy that can come from a writer's direct experiences in real life. An immortal character like *Tiny's Granny*, can be drawn only when the writer has intimate knowledge of her social and psychological contexts. Chughtai has been able to get into the skin of her protagonist and invest her with details physical features, clothing, gestures, mannerisms and speech pattern (those who can access the story in the original or the Hindi version should do so in order to fully appreciate this point) that make her memorable and convincing.

Though Chughtai has drawn a number of notable male characters, her real strength lies in the way she draws female characters with their foibles and frivolity, their immense capacity for suffering and self-effacement. The total self-effacement of the Indian woman can be seen mirrored in Granny as well. She does not have claim even to a name, and has been known all her lives through references to others — as someone's kid, as someone's daughter-in-law and lastly, as someone's granny. The women in *Tiny's Granny* come across as a dis-empowered lot and do not show any inclination or courage to stand up for the vindication of their rights.

4.6 GLOSSARY

Mohalla: ward, small division of a town

Hakeems and Vaids: practitioners of indigenous medicine

Isha prayer: the last of the five obligatory daily Muslim prayers done at night

Faras Road and Sona Gachi: prostitute quarters of Mumbai and Kolkata respectively

Judgement Day: the Muslim belief that on the Day of (Final) Judgement all human beings will be made accountable for their actions in the world.

Bridge of Sirat: (*pulsirat*) (According to the Muslim belief), the bridge the believers must cross before entering paradise.

Aravi: A root vegetable

Burqa: A loose, flowing garment worn by Muslim women who observe purdah, completely enveloping them from head to foot. The eyes are covered either by a cloth mesh or by material thin enough to be seen through from the inside. Some have a veil which may be thrown back over the head when not in use.

[3] Quoted in Chand Gul, ed., *Ismat ke Shahkar Afsaane*, Jheelum: Book Centre, 1987. p. 3

Gur: Brown unrefined sugar, usually in cake form.

Nose: Cutting off the nose was the traditional punishment inflected on a loose woman. In this context, it would be the act of a jealous lover, punishing her for her promiscuity.

Katora: A meta drinking bowl

Dupatta: A piece of muslin or other fine material worn by women across the bosom, with the ends thrown back over the shoulders.

Kajal-box: Lamp-black, used as a cosmetic

...her bangles were broken: As a sign of widowhood

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the merits of Ismat Chughtai as a short story writer with special reference to *Tiny's Granny*.
2. Write a note on Ismat Chughtai's art of characterization giving illustrations from *Tiny's Granny*.
3. Attempt a character sketch of Granny. Does her plight evoke your sympathy?
4. What is the role of Tiny in the story?
5. Write a note on the elements of humour and irony in the story.
6. Who is the principal narrator in the story? Are the narrator's opinion necessarily the author's?
7. Can this story be read as a social document? Comment on the ending of the story.

4.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

M. Asaduddin, *Ismat Chughtai* (Monograph in the series, "Makers of Indian Literature"), New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1999.

Sukrita Paul Kumar and Sadique, eds., *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times*, New Delhi, Katha, 2000.

M. Asaduddin (ed.), *Lifting the Veil: Selected Writings of Ismat Chughtai*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001.

UNIT 5 GOPINATH MOHANTY : *TADPA* TRANSLATION: SITAKANT MAHAPATRA

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 A Synoptic View of Oriya Literature
  5.2.1 Fakirmohan and the Oriya Language and Literature
  5.2.2 Fakirmohan and the Tradition of the Oriya Short Story
5.3 Gopinath Mohnaty: His Life and Works
5.4 *Tadpa* : Theme and Issues
  5.4.1 Narrative Style: Realism and Point of View
  5.4.2 Cast of Characters
5.5 Postcolonial Approach
5.6 Let Us Sum Up
5.7 Glossary
5.8 Questions
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5.0 OBJECTIVES

Our main aim in this unit, is to study one of Gopinath Mohanty's lesser-known works, a short story entitled *Tadpa*; but we cannot do so straightway, and definitely not without sufficient preparation. The purpose here is first, in a few introductory paragraphs, to acquaint you briefly with Orissa history and culture, and also the tradition of Oriya fiction, especially the shorter version.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

If I asked you to name a few writers in languages other than your own, you would perhaps mention the names of some award winning writers you may have come across in the media, electronic or print. For, until recently, contemporary Indian Literature in the numerous Indian languages (the so called vernaculars or Bhasas) used to be identified with a few award winning names and titles which were otherwise inaccessible to those outside their respective language-regions. Thanks to the now-flourishing translation industry, this seems no longer the case; and the category Indian Literature signifies much more than the sum-total of discrete literatures from different linguistic groups. In fact the inclusion of many titles in your course has been possible due to the flurry of translations. This is certainly true of many of the lesser-known languages such as Oriya and Assamese. More contemporary Oriya writers are accessible now to non-Oriya readers than was possible, say, in the 1980s, and Oriya literature means much more than the names of a few well-known, award-winning writers. Still, Indian literary culture is so diverse, heterogeneous, and unwieldy that people from one linguistic region often are ignorant of the traditions in the other linguistic groups. It is possible that many

of you have little or no information regarding Oriya literature, let alone about Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1991), preeminent among practitioners of Oriya fiction.

We shall begin with a synoptic view of Oriya Literature highlighting the contribution of Fakirmohan Senapati, and then go on to outline the development of the genre in the post — Senapati period.

5.2 A SYNOPTIC VIEW OF ORIYA LITERATURE

Like most other Indian states, Orissa's geopolitical boundary as it stands today is a little over 60 years old. But Odissa, or the land of the Odras is ancient, and was variously known as Utkal and Kalinga, and its boundary varied with successive conquests and specific rulers. The beginnings of Oriya poetry coincide with the rule of Gajapati Kapilendra Dev, who ruled over a vast stretch of land from the Ganga in the North to the Kavery in the South in the 15th century. Thus, Oriya literature is about 500 years old, if not more. The broad periodization of Oriya literary history is relatively simple. The period stretching over 400 years — from the 15th to the mid-19th century is called "ancient" period the followed by the modern period (for our own convenience, we call this period medieval rather than ancient). Though within these periods, divisions are a little more complicated. There is very little space here to go into the details.

More religious than secular, traditionally by Oriya literature one understood, until early 19th century at least, songs and poems rather than prose. Also, the themes ranged broadly from the retelling of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, to the singing in praise of Jagannath. Sarala Das, belonging to 15th century Orissa of Kapilendra Dev, is considered to be Orissa's *adikabi*. His epic, *Mahabharat* in 18 *parvas*, is not an exact translation from the Sanskrit original, rather an imitation of the same. For all practical purposes it can also be seen as an original piece of work. It has provided subsequent poets with the necessary foundation for a national literature. It gives a fairly accurate idea about the culture of the Oriyas at the time. Towards the end of the 16th century, Balaram Das's *Jagamohan Ramayan* provided the other pillar on which subsequent literature was to thrive. However, the most influential work was yet to come. It came in the form of Jagannath Das's *Bhagabata*. This was closely followed by Achyutananda's *Haribamsha*. This period stretching from Kapilendra Dev to the time of Prataprudra Dev is the period of efflorescence of Oriya poetry.

The second phase from the 16th century to the 19th century saw the emergence of descriptive poetry, which in turn could be sub-divided into three kinds. The first was secular writing that came into Oriya literary culture with the appearance of Narasimha Sena's *Parimala*. This was followed by the better known *Kanchikaveri* by Purusottam Das and *Chata Ichhabati* by Banamali Das. The second category comprised largely works which derived from the themes of the classical epics and Kavyas. Some of the earlier works, especially *Kanchikavery*, have been seen by historians as being responsible for the formation of Oriya identity, which is an important subject for interdisciplinary studies. Yet another set of writings derive primarily from *Bhagabata*, and are based on the Balyalila and Gopalila aspects of Krishna's life.

Numerous lyrics and other shorter forms of verse were written within the third category. The lyricism and emotional intensity of these poems sprang from personal experiences. Poets wrote love lyrics based on Radha-Krishna love, and also non-devotional love poetry about man-woman relationship. The forms used here were mostly *chautisha, chaupadi* and *padabali.* The *kavya-alankar* tradition was so dominant that poets showed their learning instead of letting loose their imaginative vigour. The tradition of Oriya prose fiction can be traced back to the 18th century works by Brajanath Badajena (1730-1795), especially his *Chatura Vinoda.* But the first Oriya novel was *Padmamali* (1887) by one Umesh Chandra Sarkar. The first Oriya poet to be influenced by the new world view was Radhanath Ray (1848-1908), and with him begins the modern period in Oriya poetry. Similarly, the first writer of Oriya prose fiction to represent modern Oriya society in fiction, that is the first writer of realist fiction, was Fakirmohan Senapati. In the works of Senapati, one notices for the first time, characters and incidents from the real, modern world. Modernity is said to have dawned on Oriya culture with the British occupation of Orissa in 1803. With the spread of English education, and the influence of neighbouring Bengal's reformers, modern education spread in Orissa, as did the general awareness of the world beyond. Modernism is a movement in the arts, as you know.

5.2.1 Fakirmohan and the Oriya Language and Literature

The growth of modern Oriya literature owes a lot to the unceasing efforts of Fakirmohan Senapati and his circle of writers and poets such as Gaurisankar Ray, Radhanath Ray, Madhusudan Rao, and some younger contemporaries such as Gopabandhu Das and Gopal Krushna Praharaj. For, at the time when Senapati began writing, Orissa was merely an adjunct of Bengal. Bengalis had so dominated the Oriyas that Oriya, as is well-known, would have perished but for the singular efforts of the few I have named above. After the British annexation of Orissa in 1803, the dismembered Kalinga came under different presidencies, but chiefly under the Bengal Presidency. There were many reasons why Oriyas felt exploited by the Bengalis. One was the so-called "sunset law", by which land owners forfeited the right to their land if they defaulted on the payment of tax by the sunset of a notified date. After this, their land was auctioned away at Calcutta. Since many Oriyas could not keep track of the proceedings, petty Bengali officials working for the East India Company went for the bids. The rivalry was especially acute in North Orissa, because of geographical proximity.

You must also remember that along with the rivalry, ran a kind of cultural osmosis which is responsible for the development of modern Oriya literature. The influence of the West filtered into Orissa, partly through the interaction of educated Oriyas with their counterparts in Calcutta. It was mediated by Bangla culture no less. Fakirmohan, Radhanath (a Bengali himself), Madhusudan Das and Madhusudan Rao (a Maratha) were all exposed to Bangla culture through their knowledge of the Bengali language. Fakirmohan was born and brought up in the coastal town of Balasore. He grew up to be an administrator in ex-feudatory states. Enraged by the attempts of the Bengalis to marginalize, even replace Oriya by Bengali, he took to creative writing rather late. Though he had translated from Sanskrit, wrote poetry, and attempted many forms of literature, he is now known primarily as the father of modern Oriya prose fiction. His agenda was clearly cut out: a two-, even multi-pronged attack on all kinds of cultural invasion. As he says in an apostrophe in

Chha Maana Atha Guntha: "Such has been Bharata's misfortune. It was Parsi first, and now it is English. God alone knows what it will be next. But one thing is for sure. The fate of Devanagri is buried under the stone. The English educated say: 'Sanskrit is a dead language'. We clarify the matter further: this is the language of a moribund people" (Senapati 24).

5.2.2 Fakirmohan and the Tradition of Oriya Short Story

If either Fakirmohan or posterity had preserved his short story, "Lachmania" which he had written in the late 1960s, and which was published in the journal Bodhadayini, edited by himself in Balasore, Fakirmohan would certainly have been credited with having pioneered the genre in India. But as ill-luck would have it, except for a bare mention in his autobiography, the story cannot be traced, and thus his "Rebati" (1898) is widely recognized as the first Oriya short story. The credit of being the father of the Indian short story, thus goes to Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali. "Rebati" is the story of a young innocent girl whose desire for education is placed in the context of a conservative society in a backward Orissa village, which is hit by the killer epidemic cholera. The story is too easily celebrated as an example of Fakirmohan's reformist zeal. However, in terms of art, the story lacks in the necessary qualities of strong plot or characterization which mark his later success as a writer of short fiction. The most celebrated of his stories of course is "Patent Medicine". Between these two, Fakirmohan can justly claim to be a supporter of feminism. Though not all his stories have been put together in a single collection, some appeared in 1917 in two collection under the title, "Galpaswalpa".

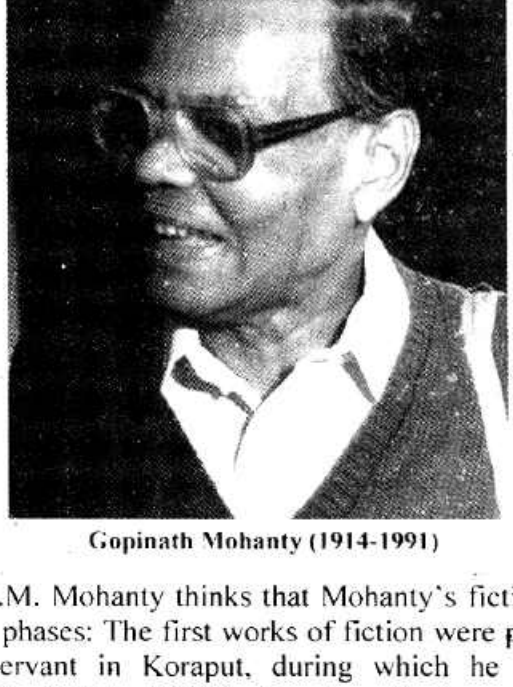
Fakirmohan's stories remained a source of inspiration for many decades to come. They became models for his contemporaries as well as successors. It was difficult to emulate his linguistic virtuosity, as it was eclectic and highly democratic, having borrowed freely from Persian, Urdu, Bengali, and so on. He contributed to the "de-sansritization" (a term I borrow from the renowned comparatist, Sisir Kumar Das) of Oriya. Some writers such as Chandrasekhar Nanda, Godabaris Mishra, Bankanidhi Pattanaik, Laxmidhar Mohapatra, and Dibyasingha Panigrahi tried to emulate Fakirmohan's craft, especially his social realism.

During the thirties, when the *Pragatibadi* tradition was in full flow, Bhagabati and Kalindicharan panigrahi, two brothers tried to give a fresh twist to the tradition inaugurated by Fakir Mohan. Fired by socialist thought, the two depicted the lives of the downtrodden, the subaltern (lower caste) people who were often discriminated against and exploited. You may have heard of if not seen a movie made by Mrinal Sen based on the short story "*Mrigaya*" ("The Hunt") by Bhagabati Panigrahi. Made sometime in the 1970s, the film featured the now well-known actor, Mithun Chakravarty, who played the role of the protagonist. The next phase of the tradition of the Oriya short story was dominated by Gopinath Mohanty, who started writing when Kalindi Charan Panigrahi had made his mark.

5.3 GOPINATH MOHNATY: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Gopinath Mohanty was born in a small village called Nagabali, not far from Cuttack, a historical city, in 1914. His family was originally that of a Zamindar, but had fallen into bad days, and when he was born, his family was

one of ruined aristocracy. He left his village for higher education in 1923, and would return to his village only intermittently. But the nine years he spent of his childhood in his village, in many ways shaped his sensibility as he grew fond of its folk traditions and developed his sense of rootedness to one's land. He was then educated in Patna and Cuttack, obtaining his Master's degree in English in 1936, and became a civil servant under the Orissa Administrative Service. Among the intellectual influences one must count the indigenous as well as the Western, in the form of Gandhi, Freud and Marx. He was also drawn to the literary works of Romain Rolland and Maxim Gorky. He began writing in the 1930's, and his first novel *Managahirara Chasa* appeared in 1936. After this began his sojourn in various parts of Orissa, especially in the inaccessible areas with large populations of tribal people, who lived in abject poverty though far removed from the corrupting influence of modern society. Soon he grew fond of the Kondh tribes and learnt their ways. His writing subsequent to this was devoted to the depiction of the life of this underprivileged and endangered population. He died in 1991.



Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1991)

The Oriya critic J.M. Mohanty thinks that Mohanty's fiction can be grouped under three broad phases: The first works of fiction were produced during his tenure as civil servant in Koraput, during which he wrote novels like *Dadibudha* (1944), *Paraja* (1945), *Amrutara Santana* (1947), *Siba Bhai* (1955), and *Apahancha* (1961). They deal with the theme of exploitation and suffering of the tribal people in the Orissa hills. The second group of novels deal with the lives of the townsfolk. The novels under this category are *Sarathabunka Gali, Rahura Chhaya, SapnaMmati, Ddanapani*, and so on. The last group comprises only one novel, an epic of Oriya village life. It also deals with the lives of the tribal people, but not exclusively so. *Danapani* is his most ambitious novel, though he will always be known for *Paraja*. I can quote from J.M. Mohanty a succinct summary of the novel *Paraja*: The novel was published in 1945, when Gopinath had just left Koraput after spending 5 years there. The novel deals with the Parajas, a very poor and small tribal group of the district of Orissa, having a population of about 6000. Their life is revealed through the sympathetic depiction of a family, which is caught in an adverse situation. Sukrujani is the protagonist of the novel who suffers at the hands of exploitative sahukars and government agencies. The language faithfully

captures the nuances of the spoken idiom of the tribeal people, and is difficult to translate. *Amrutara Santana* depicts the life of people from the Kondh community, and is much wider in scope, and complex in its structure. If you want to know more about these works you can read translations of some of these novels now available in English. His short stories are no less significant. In fact, even if he had merely left behind his short stories he would still be a well-known writer. Acknowledging the Gnanpith award he received in 1974, he said: "I have faith in man, and in his ultimate victory and liberation".

5.4 *TADPA* : THEME AND ISSUES

Tadpa is the eponymous story of Tadpa, the protagonist and a group of officials, "outsiders", moving from Bhubhaneshwar to the jungles of Orissa, and on their way discussing how best they can "tackle" the problems the gonds in the hills of Niyamgiri are facing. Their names, signifiers of their caste, are Parasuram, the development officer, the anthropologist Bharat, and Haripani: they are all educated, well settled, either Brahmins or belonging to other upper castes. Their descent along the "fearsome" slope of the hill, which is construed as a descent into the barbaric netherworld of tribals, is at once their uphill task of "civilizing" these tribals. The journey of these academics and officials is clearly a journey motivated by the ideological imperative of the civilizing mission. This argument gains strength when we realize that the story contains very little by way of action and the bulk of the narrative is taken up by the exchange of ideas and debates among the government officials and academics regarding the best possible manner in which the illiterate, uncivilized tribals can be brought within the pale of civilization. At the same time, they are also concerned about the preservation of the dongriyas' goodness and simplicity, which runs the risk of contamination in its contact with the outside world.

5.4.1 Narrative Style: Realism and Point of View

The short story deploys and exploits the stereotype of the native as someone who is very fond of liquor, who has no interest in what we call "civilization", who is like a child and thus at the mercy of his/her benefactors; the educated superiors who are not only capable of "analyzing" the dongriyas and their problems but are also equipped to prescribe the much needed, the much awaited solutions! In a crucial passage at the end of the story, Tadpa is finally presented as a shadow, much like his apparitional counterpart, Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Tadpa is given two coins, one a ten paise coin and the other a five paise coin, because he had asked them for some money. On obtaining the money Tadpa drops the coins, and the officials are surprised to see that Tadpa who had asked them for money has not felt it necessary to keep the money but has thrown it away. One of them asks, why was he begging for it if he really did not care? Another replies that it was his way of honouring us as his parents. As is the case with a child, it is enough for the dongriya to get whatever s/he needs at a given time, to indulge in momentary satiation. Money, the hallmark of civilization, is like pebbles for him.

There could be two response to the story. The story can be taken to be a critique of the civilizing mission. However, this perspective can be troubled by the recognition that apart from the three or four government officials, there is another voice, the voice of the short story writer/narrator who concedes to

the argument presented by the characters in the story. This view seems to suggest that this is a mysterious land, that these people are very "strange", illiterate and uncivilized, and that it is not our privilege but moral responsibility to try to find out what is good for "them". What we would like you to do is to read the story carefully and decide for yourself.

5.4.2 Cast of Characters

As we have already seen, the story is dominated by the representatives of the so-called civilized world, who are called "outsiders". The Development Officer, Parashuram, anthropologist Bharat, the local official Hari Pani, the forest guard, Madhusudan, and the three chaprasis, Makara, Najiru, Ramaya. The conversation among the representatives of the "civilized world" in a way summarizes the endless debates that have gone on among the self-styled guardians of the tribes. Tadpa, of course, is the representative of the subaltrern "other". It is interesting to note, that the thoughts of Tadpa are being reported to the reader by the narrator, who we could call the omniscient narrator. While introducing us to his character, the narrator supplies us with information about the tribe, their customs, belief, their "culture" and world view. And we have to trust the teller. Obviously he has spent time with the tribe, and knows, or claims that he knows, everything about the way their mind works. Do you think, there is a problem in the point-of-view of the narrator? How would you compare this point-of-view with that of a narrator who belongs to the same culture as that of the characters?

Tadpa is all good, noble. He is shown as being very friendly, and not at all of the kind that the outsiders had expected. Madhusudan is dogmatic about the Kondh people. They are totally wedded to their duties but they won't change. Hari Pani is optimistic that they will change. He believes in modernizing them, giving them modern amenites. Professor Bharat holds a different view, showing a deeper understanding. The story has two climactic points: one, when Tadpa thinks the place where there is no practice of *dhangda-bent*, must be full of animals. This is a complete reversal of perspective: two, when the visitors find the same coins which they had given to Tadpa on his asking for them. They try to arrive at some conclusions; but are not sure whether they can ever fathom the mind of a Tadpa, the other.

5.5 POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH

The terms of reference of such a discourse are only too familiar to us, the postcolonials, the former British subjects, to require any elaboration/elucidation.

When texts such as Conrad's or Mahasweta Devi's or Mohanty's become "subjects" of study as part of the humanities/English curriculum, readers irrespective of their respective identities are invited to undertake journeys in the heart of darkness, Belgian Congo, or the Sunderbans, or Sundergarh, with the narrator. The trope of the journey into the interior, the unknown, with lurking dangers, carries the promise of knowledge of the world of the other. There are remarkable structural parallels in most such narratives. In "Pterodactyl..." it is Puran, in *Tadpa* it is Parasuram. ... In Conrad's novella

too, we have come across the discourse of the other, and seen how at some point, a character suggests how the idea of civilization is a matter of perspective. The inhabitants of Congo in the 19th century must have viewed the Europeans as "primitive", says one character.

Don't you think there is a suggestion, among others, in the story that the tribals may be poor and exploited but they are intelligent and have worked out a simple philosophy of their own, and that those concerned with development need to consult them? The narrative focuses on: (i) a tribals' lack of fear; (b) the importance of song and dance and togetherness for a healthy relationship in life; (c) his acceptance of death as a sleep in the lap of Dhartani; and (d) his sense of communal responsibility towards outsiders. The last gesture of Tadpa's is almost grand — money is like pebbles for him and comes as a climax to his entire conversation with the outsiders.

Since Mohanty's important works attempt to speak for the downtrodden, the subaltern, the marginalized groups, it might be necessary for us to take up the theories of subalternity. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's assertion that the subaltern cannot speak has been attacked as "an expression of terminal epistemological and political pessimism" (Lowe, Rosenthal, and Sillman, qtd in Chrisman 42). In her defense, Spivak has argued that her purpose had been to counter the impulse to solve the problem of political subjectivity by romanticizing the subaltern (ibid). Is this a defensible position when placed beside her own showcasing of Devi? [Spivak speaks of Devi's preoccupation with a "Space" which has to be called decolonization for lack of a more suitable word.] "There will always be a space in the new nation that cannot share in the energy of this reversal [of the logic derived from the old colony']". Elsewhere she says something similar. "There is a space in post-imperial arenas which is displaced from empire-nation exchange ... reversing it in many different kinds of ways. But in post-imperialist societies there is a vast arena, which is not necessarily accessible to that kind of exchange. It is that space that one calls subaltern". Though Spivak goes off in a different trajectory, I see this relevant to my purpose here, though in a less complicated way. The so-called tribal population remains unaffected by the chain of oppression. What Soso Tham says about the Khasis: "Do not rejoice because the *White* man has left. Their place will be taken by the *Black* man and he will enslave us". The "black" being referred to here is the plainsman, the Bengali coming from the sweltering plains. Here, not only is the European as the colonizer, and India as the colonized being questioned, even the black/white binary gets totally dislocated and complicates the enunciatory site of otherness.

The teleology of Spivak's progress from her deconstructive analysis of the category 'subaltern' to her more recent preoccupation with Mahasweta Devi is discernible in her work in the intervening period. For, first she says that by definition the subaltern cannot speak. Conversely, she who can speak is not a subaltern. Thus, for her, the ground is clear for launching Devi. Also, her response to the attack of Benita Parry that Spivak, Bhabha and Jan Mohammed do not listen to the voice of the native, that such an attitude is also Eurocentric clears the ground for Mahasweta Devi. It is well known that the globalization of Devi's work ("produce", commodification) owes a lot to the immense prestige and the star value of her translator.

When we "study" someone like Mahasweta Devi, who for instance is much talked about and ironically enough after Spivak wrote about her, translated her and talked about her in the West, we often forget that writers like Mahasweta

Devi are in the same position as say, Conrad was, when he was writing about Africa. For, in writing about the tribal populations of West Bengal, one wonders what qualifications she has, however sympathetic or humanistic the considerations may be, for, after all, she too has been following the liberal humanist discourse of the West. This is evident in the stance/role she assumes vis-à-vis the tribals — and by implication exhorts her readers to do the same. According to her, since we are in a position to analyze their condition and may be prescribe remedies for their suffering and poverty and exploitation, she advocates a sympathetic attitude towards these less privileged subjects. This is something I want to illustrate by discussing not Mahasweta Devi, but continuing with infinite regress and going back further into my own state, though not beyond. For, internal colonialism does not stop with even the Indian centre, or Hindi-Hindu-north Indians, or even Bengalis looking at Oriyas, the hills of Bengal or the northeast, but with the upper caste Oriyas looking at tribals in Orissa. It is possible to see this by reading the short story, *Tadpa*. I expect you to do this on your own, by using some of the hints I have already given, and referring back to your other course materials.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

As I have already suggested, though the story has many of the qualities of a story well-told, with well-defined characters, and interesting dialogue, suspense, and surprise at the end, it seems to be lacking in the complexties of some other stories by Mohanty. Also, it carries many of the stereotypical representations: the well-meaning but ignorant visitors, the mysterious Tadpa. The jungle is also represented in terms of the familiar trope of the space which holds many impregnable mysteries. To a reader of the 21st century, with her ultra-conscious and conscientious upbringing in political correctness, the story might strike as almost banal, and too proper.

5.7 GLOSSARY

Subaltern: According to the dictionary the word 'subaltern' means any commissioned officer in the army below the rank of the captain. It was used by the Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) to mean a subordinate. He used it specifically to refer to unorganise groups of rural peasantry in southern Italy who had no social and political consciousness as a group. The concept was further developed by a group of historians lead by Ranajit Guha (b. 1923). This group defined the term subaltern as 'the general attribute of subordination in south asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of caste, age, gender or office or any other way'. This group thought that the term included rural peasantly, the working class and the untouchables.

Spivak expands the term by including women both from the lower class and the upper middle class among the subalterns.

Dhartani: The god of ancient earths, according to the Kondhs.

Kondhs: The Kondhs, also described Kandhas, Khonds and Konds are the, largest group of tribals in Orissa. They are mostly concentrated in Koraput, Phulbani and Kalahandi districts. According to Mcpherson the name of the tribe is derived from Telugu word Konda which means a hill.

Dhangada and Dhangadi: Dhangda is a young male lover and Dhangdi is a young female lover. According to Sitakant Mahapatra, youth dormitories play and important part in the life of the Kondhs. These dormitories are known as *dhangar basa*. They are organized institutions meant for socialization of the youth, the unmarries boys and girls.

Post-colonial criticism: refers to criticism that has emerged from countries that were once colonized by white colonial countries. This criticism runs counter to the Eurocentric criticism that sought to justify colonial rule with the help of a systematic misrepresentation of the colonized people. In his essay, 'Discourses on Colonialism' (1950), Aime Cesaire talked of 'millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement'. This feat was accomplished by the rulers to justify their rule, 'the white man's burden'. Some key texts that influenced the development of post-colonial theory may be mentioned. They are: Aime Cesaire's essay: 'Discourses on Colonialism' (1950); Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*(1952 and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961); and most of all Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The collections of essays *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) edited by Bill Ashcroft and others gives examples of texts that run counter to the European view of colonial history. Post-colonial criticism thus looks at colonial literature from the point of view of the colonized and exposes the way in which the colonized people were brainwashed into believing in their inferiority that justified white domination.

Soso Tham (1873-1940): Nongkynrih, renowned Khasi poet, calls Soso Tham the chief bard of the Khasis. He has Soso Tham has written two volumes of poetry: *Ka Duitara Ksiar* (The Golden Harp, 1925) and his crowning work *Ki Sngi Ba Rim U Hynniew Trep* (The Olden Days of U Hynniew Trep, 1936). Has also translated Aesop's Fables.

5.8 QUESTIONS

1. What are the distinguishing features of the tribal identity, especially those of the dongriya kondhs?

2. How correct shall we ever be in answering that question, without falling in the trap of stereotyping?

3. Why do you think Tadpa asks for bidis and coins?

4. What impression does the author wish to convey through the dialogues of the townsmen?

5. Do you think Madhusan knew better than the others, and he reprents the authorial point-of-view?

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Notes

Notes

U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prayagraj

MAEN-116

Contemporary Indian Literature In English Translation

Block

5

SHORT STORY-II

UNIT 1

Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom Goswami) *The Empty Chest*
[Udang Bakach : Assamese]
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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In this second Block on short stories, we present four well-known writers Indira Goswami from Assamese, Motilal Jotwani from Sindhi whom we unfortunately lost only in January this year, Afsar Ahmad from Bengali and Vijaya Dan Detha from Rajasthani.

Unit 1 deals with Indira Goswami's Assammese story, *The Empty Chest*. The second unit discusses Motilal Jotwani's Sindhi story, *Very Lonely, She*. Unit three is concerned with Afsar Ahmad's Bengali story, *Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur*. And the last unit deals with Vijaydan Detha's *The Compromise* which is the cast in the form of the allegory. Together these stories give us an idea of the important concerns that press upon the consciousness of our writers.

"Writing is in my blood, in my veins. If I stop writing I will die of suffocation..".- Dr Goswami.

UNIT 1 INDIRA GOSWAMI [MAMONI RAISOM GOSWAMI] : *THE EMPTY CHEST* TRANSLATOR : PRODIPTA BIRGOHAIN

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1. OBJECTIVESE

Assamese literature is known to have excelled in the field of poetry and short stories. This unit is primarily meant to introduce you to this wonderful world of Assamese short stories and to enable you to understand and enjoy a contemporary short story entitled *The Empty Chest* written by one of the greatest Assamese writers writing today, Indira Goswami. She is popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, particularly in Assam. Besides unit will give you an idea of Goswami as a woman writer and her literary style as a short story writer par excellence.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Goswami's stories have a common setting in the southern part of the district of Kamrup in Assam. Her tales have multiple themes in a wavering timeframe spreading through half a century. Although her stories are set in Assam, the universality of the themes, nevertheless, touches the reader to the core. Love and human relationship form the core of most of her stories. The original title of the story chosen for your study is *Udang Bakach and is* one of Goswami's much acclaimed short stories. It has been translated into English as *The Empty Chest* by Pradipta Borgohain. He teaches in the department of English Gauhati University and is also a novelist and a translator. The English translation is available in *Katha*, Prize Stories, Vol. 3 and also in *The Shadow*

of Kamakhya, stories by Indira Goswami (Rupa, 2001). The story is reproduced at 1.5.1.

In this Unit, we analyse *The Empty Chest* critically keeping in view its theme, narrative technique, characterization, atmosphere and symbolism. The story is reproduced below. However it is important to give a general introduction to the history of Assamese short story, and also an overview of Indira Goswami's writings.

1.2 ASSAMESE SHORT STORY : AN INTRODUCTION

In Assamese literature, as in the case of literature of other Indian languages, modern short story is a pleasant outcome of the influence of the West. Although stories, fables, tales, etc. were first published in the pages of *Arunodoi* (1846-1870), the first Assamese news magazine published by the American Missionaries, short story in its real sense appeared first only in the pages of *Jonaki*, the first Assamese magazine in 1892. This was the beginning of renaissance in Assamese literature. *Jonaki* played a pivotal role in the evolution of Assamese short story. Since the publication of the first short story in 1892 till the modern times the history of Assamese short story could broadly be divided into three periods: *Jonaki Yug, Avahan Yug,* and *Ramdhenu Yug*. This division is based on the name of the magazine that had helped in setting new trends in the history of Assamese short story.

Lakshminath Bezbaruah is the father of Assamese short stories. In fact, he is also considered to be the father of Assamese language. It was due to his efforts that the language survived from getting eclipsed under the influence of the Bengali language. It was in the fourth volume of the fourth edition of *Jonaki* in 1892 Lakshminath Bezbaruah published his first Assamese short story *Seuti*. In this story Bezbaruah dealt with some contemporary social problems riddled with superstitions. The protagonist of the story was a simple rural woman, but her problems were human and representative of any woman. Bezbaruah's *Sadhukathar Kuki* (Basket of Fables) (1890), *Surabhi* (1910), and *Jonbiri* (1913) were the first short story collections in Assamese. The contemporary Assamese society was beautifully reflected in his stories and the life-like presentation of the characters drawn from real life made the stories very interesting.

Sharat Chandra Goswami's name comes second in the discussion of Assamese short stories. Among his contemporaries were Nakulchandra Bhuyan, Lakshminath Phukan, Nagendranarayan Choudhury, Holiram Deka, Lakshmidhar Sharma, Rama Das, Beena Baruah, Trailokya Goswami, Radhika Goswami, Mahichandra Borah, Munindra Borkotoky, Nirmala Devi, Indibor Gogoi, etc. These writers flourished in the pages of *Avahan*, the second literary magazine that came into existence after *Jonaki*. *Avahan* ushered in a new era in Assamese short story writing. The writers of this pre-war period were attracted by western romanticism and the influence of Freud, Young, Edgar Allen Poe, etc. was visible in their writings.

The changes that crept into the domain of Assamese short stories through *Avahan* continued until the beginning of World War II. Lakshmidhar Sharma was the most significant writer of this period. He beautifully balanced his writings with psychological analyses of the characters of his stories on one

hand, and social awareness on the other. In other words, influence of Freud and Marx found expression in his writings. Literary activities, however, became a victim with the spread of the war. This was a great setback for short story writers because with the irregular publication of *Avahan* during this period they were devoid of a platform for their creative writings.

In the post-war period short story writing blossomed again with the publishing of new magazines like *Jayanti, Surabhi, Pachowa,* and *Ramdhenu*. The first three magazines, however, could not establish themselves as trendsetters. The emergence of *Ramdhenu* in the post-Independence period came as a great relief to the writers. Under the able editorship of Birendrakumar Bhattacharyya this magazine brought in a whiff of fresh air. Romanticism gave way to realism. Although publication of this magazine stopped sometime in the sixties, the trend set in by *Ramdhenu* is still continuing.

As a result of the war there were changes in the political, economic, social spheres of the country. These changes were reflected in the social structure as well as in the thinking and beliefs of the people. Writers of this period depicted these changes well through their writings. The new breed of writers focused more on the social and psychological conflicts of individuals through ornamental language rather than depending upon simple narratives. Syed Abdul Malik was a pioneer among modern writers. Although he had established himself as a short story writer in the pre-war period, he was a trendsetter in post-war writing also. Uniqueness of theme, sympathy for the downtrodden and the socially neglected, human considerations hidden behind social and religious traditions in society and open, fearless descriptions of sexuality were special features of Malik's writings.

Among Malik's contemporaries were Dinanath Sharma, Birendrakumar Bhattacharyya and Jogesh Das who had created a niche for themselves even during the early period of Assamese short story writing. Homen Borgohain, Medini Choudhuri, Bhabendranath Saikia, Lakshminandan Bora, Saurabh Chaliha, Chandraprasad Saikia, Mahim Borah, Nirod Choudhury, Shilabhadra (nee Rebatimohan Datta Choudhury), Nagen Saikia, Arun Goswami, Atulanada Goswami are some of the important writers who have enriched Assamese literature with their short stories during the post-war and in the post-independence period. With rural as well as urban society serving as a backdrop, these modern writers depict the decay of social and moral values as a reflection of Western influence. Sufferings of the poor get a prominent place in the stories of this period.

1.2.1 Women Writers

There were not as many women writers during the initial stage. The prominent names that come to mind are Sneh Devi, Nilima Sharma, Dipali Datta, Nirupama Borgohain, Prabina Saikia, Anima Datta, and Mamoni Raisom Goswami. Their writings help the reader to have an insight into the female psyche and understand the feelings and aspirations of women in the changing society. Of these writers, Sneh Devi had a restrained and conservative outlook and restricted herself to the details of family life. Nilima Sharma and Dipali Datta had a psychological angle to their writings. Nirupama Borgohain depicts the problems and conflicts that a woman faces in her family life.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is the youngest of these writers, but stands taller in her treatment of the plots. She picks up titbits from her vast experience and gives them life in her writings through a very sensitive and human handling.

She is fearless and honest in expressing the earthly desires of her characters, and the description of circumstances that lead them to do what they do gives her plots a truthful picture.

However, it will not be correct to think that Assamese women writers concentrate only on woman-centric plots. Preeti Baruah's short story *Swargachyuti* tells about the problems faced by refugees. Class differences in a rural society can be seen in Nirupama Borgohain's short story *Anthropologyr Saponar Pisat*. Among the modern writers Dipali Deka, Purabi Bormudoi, Arupa Patangiya Kalita, etc. write about communal disharmony and high moral values of lower-middle class families, despite their economic backwardness.

Apart from these writers, in recent times there are a host of new writers establishing themselves through the pages of weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly magazines. Since, in this section, our aim is only to give an idea about the evolution of Assamese short stories, the foregoing account should suffice

1.2.2 Other Writers

In the second half of the last century most of the writers were influenced by the Marxist ideology. The Naxalite movement of the neighbouring states of West Bengal and Bihar also influenced the younger generation of writers. Poverty, oppression, injustice, etc. had a place in the writings of Udayaditya Bharali, Bipul Khataniyar, Bhupendranarayan Bhattacharyya, Rabin Borah, etc. With the help of their short stories, the writers tried to awaken the society from its slumber. Natural calamities and the sufferings of common people at the hands of nature, hypocritical life style of the middle class, fraudulence, deceitfulness, etc. drew the attention of short story writers in the nineties. Bhupen Sharma, Kamaluddin Ahmed, Debabrata Das are some writers of this period. Some other prominent writes of the new generation are Shibananda Kakati, Jyotish Sikdar, Anuradha Sarma Pujari, Kula Saikia, Khabir Ahmed and Arundhati Datta. However, the list is not exhaustive.

1.3 INDIRA GOSWAMI (MAMONI RAISOM GOSWAMI): AN OVERVIEW

Mamoni Raisom Goswami (Indira Goswami) is a celebrated name in the field of Assamese literature. She is 'perhaps the greatest woman writer in Assamese today'. According to the distinguished Assamese critic, Prof Hiren Gohain, "*Mamoni Raisom Goswami is the most extraordinary thing to have happened to Assamese literature in recent years*". She is the only Assamese female writer to have received the prestigious Jnanpeeth Award. She received this award for the year 2000 for her contribution to Assamese literature?

Born in November 14, 1942 in an orthodox family in the south Kamrup District of western Assam, Indira married Madhavan Raisom Iyenger at an early age. However, misfortune struck her very soon. She was widowed just after one year of marital bliss when her husband died in a jeep accident near Udhampur in Jammu and Kashmir in 1967. Taking life in her stride, she decided to pursue her studies from Gauhati University, Assam. She was awarded her Ph.D. degree in 1973 for her doctoral thesis on *Comparative Study of Goswami Tulsidas' Ramcharit Manas and Madhava Kandali's Assamese Ramayana*. At present, she is Professor in the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi.

Indira Goswami has written 25 novels and a hundred short stories in Assamese. Most of her writings have a rural background and she deals with the lives of poor and middle class people. Her writings have been very well received and many of her works have been translated into different Indian languages. Her novel *Dontal Hatir Une Khowa Hawda* (The Worm-eaten Hawda of a Tusker) has also been translated into Urdu in Pakistan. Indira Goswami is also a renowned scholar.

In their literary criticism of her works different critics have paid rich tributes to Goswami. For her 'writing is like worship'. In her interview to the Times of India, after receiving the Sahitya Akademi award, she said, "Writing is in my blood, in my veins. If I stop writing I will die of suffocation. Without my pen I will die... With my writings I am free as bird, to fly anywhere, to be anyone, to understand anything..". One of her critics Prof. Hiren Gohain's comments are worth repeating here. "Mamoni Raisom Goswami is the most extraordinary thing to have happened to Assamese literature in recent years. She has sprung upon her readers a whole new world of experience — feelings, perceptions, thoughts, characters, types and situations — that amaze and enthrall... A singular intensity of feeling and a searching honesty, courage, and masterful confidence of expression mark her writing..".

Although acclaimed as a prominent woman novelist of the day, Mamoni Goswami emerged in the literary world as a short story writer. In most of her writings she has a female protagonist, and she portrays her sufferings, feelings, desires, both base and lofty, etc. very boldly with vivid descriptions. She has a masterly command over the language she writes in and that makes the description of the situations of her stories very life-like. Although she writes in Assamese language, her stories have a universal appeal and of her universal appeal makes them translatable.

1.3.1 Works of Goswami

Novels:

1) *Chenabar Sont* (1972) [The Stream of Chenab]. This book set her trend as a novelist with a new setting and some unusual characters. The background is a construction site for a bridge over the river

Chenab in Jammu and Kashmir. The plot revolves around the work of a construction company and the people involved in it.

2) *Nilakanthi Braja* (1972) [Blue-necked Braja]. The background is Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh and the plot revolves around the plight, the exploitation, and the miserable lives of the Brahmin widows who come to the holy city in search of salvation.

3) *Mamare Dhara Tarowal* (1980) [The Rusted Sword]. Dr Goswami has received the Sahitya Akademi award for this book. This novel is also about a construction site of an aqueduct on the river Sai in Uttar Pradesh. The plot is concerned with the exploitation of the workers of the company, their labour union, and labour strike which ultimately fails because of some corrupt union leaders and manipulation by company management.

4) *Dontal Hatir Une Khowa Hawda* 1988) [The Worm-eaten Hawda of a Tusker]. This is a powerful novel and it won the Asom Sahitya Sabha award. Sahitya Akademi and National Book Trust of India have listed this novel as a masterpiece of Indian literature (*Masterpiece of Indian Literature, Vol .I*). The setting is a Vaishnavite monastic institute in the south Kamrup district of Assam. The plot revolves around the lives of three Brahmin widows in the family of the head of the monastery. The theme is the socio-economic decadence of the feudal institute lingering on till the coming of independence of India, and the repression of widows in the orthodox Brahmin society. An Assamese feature film (*Adahya*) based on this novel won several national and international awards.

5) *Tez aru Dhulire Dhusarita Pristha* (1995) [Pages Stained with Blood]. This novel is based on the political violence and social unrest in Delhi in the communal riots that broke out in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination. It is in the form of a diary of a woman protagonist living alone in Delhi and recording her first-hand experiences during the riots in 1984.

6) *Adhalekha Dastabez* (1988) [Unfinished Autobiography]. This is an autobiographical novel.

7) *Chhinamastar Manuhto Man* (2000). The background of this novel is the famous Kamakhya shrine in Guwahati, Assam. Dr Goswami faced a lot of criticism for her open criticism of the Tantric practices that prevail in Kamakhya in this book.

Apart from these highly acclaimed novels, she has written and published a host of other novels.

Short Stories:

i. *Chinaki Maram* (Collection of short stories) — 1962
ii. *Kaina* (collection of short stories) — 1966
iii. *Hriday ek Nadir Nam* (Collection of short stories) — 1990
iv. *Nirbachita Galpa* (Collection of short stories), NBT — 1998
v. *Priya Galpa* (Collection of short stories) 1999
vi. *Shadow of Kamakhya,* Rupa & Co., 2002
vii. *Lal Nadi,* Jnanpith Publication, 2004.

Besides these she has also translated a number of literary works into English.

Translated Works of Goswami

i. *Munshi Prem Chandar Chuti Galpa.* Translated for National Book Trust of India from original Hindi. 1975, 1988, 1990.

ii. *Adha Ghanta Samay* (translation of Malayalam novel *Aranazliika Neram*) NBT. New Delhi.

iii. *Kalam* (Collection of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Bengali short stories Co-translated with Papori Goswami), Student Stores, Guwahati.

iv. *Sarisripar Katha* (Translation of a Japanese book by Shriji Tazima and Kangwoo with support from Toyota Foundation Nadartha, New Delhi).

v. *Jatak Katha*, Publications Division, New Delhi.

vi. *Ahnik* (Translation of award-winning collection of Oriya poems by J.P. Das), Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

Most of Goswami's works have been translated into Hindi and English. A sound scholar, she has written a good number of research articles on literature, art and culture, which have been published in a number of magazines throughout the country.

Goswami has written a good number of research articles on literature, art and culture, which have been published in a number of magazines throughout the country.

Awards received by Goswami

i. Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 at Delhi.
ii. Assam Sahitya Sabha Award in 1988.
iii. Bharat Nirman Award in 1989 at Delhi.
iv. Sauhardya Award of Uttar Pradesh Hindi Samsthan in 1992 at Lucknow.
v. Katha Award for literature in 1993 at Delhi.
vi. Kamal Kumari Foundation Award, 1996, Guwahati.
vii. International Jury's Award for the film 'Adahya' based on her novel *Une Khowa Hawda.* The film was directed by Dr Santvana Bordoloi in 1997.
viii. The International Tulsi Award in 1999 at Florida, USA, in the occasion of International Conference on 'Tulsi Das and his works'.
ix. Jnanpeeth Award for the year 2000.
x. Padmashree (2002). She rejected this award with honour due to some personal reasons.
xi. Conferred D.Litt degree from Rabindra Bharati University, West Bengal in 2002.
xii. Mahiyashi Jaymati Award with a citation on gold by the Ahom community of Assam in 2002.

Several institutions and organisations throughout India have honoured Dr. Goswami with citations for her outstanding literary work. She had been conferred honorary membership in a number of academic and cultural organizations.

1.4 *THE EMPTY CHEST* : A DISCUSSION

1.4.1 Introducing the Story

The Empty Chest is based on a true story of a coffin found in a cremation ground. The sight of the coffin made the writer brood and she created a life-like personal? Story of Toradoi, the protagonist. The story was first published in an Assamese magazine in the nineties.

The protagonist Toradoi lives in a shack near a cremation ground. One day she finds a bloodstained empty chest lying on the ground. On coming to know that it had carried the dead body of her lover Saru Bopa, she retrieves it and takes it to her shack. Saru Bopa was the son of a zamindar in whose house Toradoi had worked, and had died in an accident. Saru Bopa and Toradoi were in love with each other and he had vowed that he would marry her. But he did not marry her and they get separated.

She decorates herself in whatever meagre way she can and sleeps inside the empty chest in order to relive her moments of love with her lover until the reality dawns upon her. She comes to know through her policeman brother that Saru Bopa was not faithful to her as she had thought he was and had planned to marry someone else. As a proof of this he shows her the invitation cards that had been printed for the occasion. When this reality breaks upon her, she is stunned. But she recovers in a few days and with the help of her two children she drags the empty chest outside and burns it down.

Her husband is in jail for rash driving and in her absence a firewood vendor Haijol has been pestering her to sleep with him, promising to look after her two children. Earlier she would find invariably him standing outside her door fruitlessly waiting for her. But when after the death of love for Saru Bopa, she comes out of her shack ready to do anything, there is no Haibor waiting for her.

1.4.2 Critical Appreciation

The Empty Chest portrays the death of the protagonist's love for the zamindar's son. Toradoi works in the zamindar's house as a maid and she falls in love with his son. Her love for Saru Bopa is intense and passionate and she had given herself to him completely. But there was family opposition to the marriage. We are not given full details of the quarrel or what happened thereafter. We are only told that following the quarrel, Saru Bopa was transferred to Upper Assam. All that happened some twelve years back. We are left to assume that she had married a driver who is now in jail for rash driving. Saru Bopa's dead body is brought to the very crematorium on the fringe of which Toradoi now lives along with her two children.

The point of the story is that even after separation from him and her own marriage, her love for Saru Bopa has known no abatement. In fact her love for him has been a source of strength for her through all these years of adversity and has helped her to hold her own and survive. She is living with her children in abject poverty and they are half-starved. However, faithful to him, she can rebuke the lusty advances of Haibor, the firewood vendor, who promises a world of comfort. Her annoyance at the advances of Haibor can be

felt in her own words when she says, "*What is left in this body to keep drawing you here?*" (78). The writer has very effectively contrasted the lust of Haibor with the passionate and intense love of Toradoi for her lover. He would save the children from starvation. But she is loyal to Saru Bopa The intensity of her attachment is also clear from the way she tries to relive the intimate moments of love that she had spent with her lover in his home by sleeping in the empty chest. Her love reaches to the level of frenzy.

'Its [the empty chest's] very existence gave strength to Toradoi. She ran her hands over the chest, caressing it. The bakul flowers, beautifully engraved on its sides, seemed real. She pressed her cheek to the flowers. Then, as on other days, she wriggled into the huge chest and lay there, ...

We need to remember that she had put on her wedding blouse and had felt she was spending the night on the same bed with 'he adored one'. In other words in spite of her marriage and two children Toradoi feels married to Saru Bopa. Note that her love and union with him seem real to her. It is as if she has achieved a kind of fulfillment in her love.

The disillusionment comes when her brother shatters her make-believe world with the painful truth — that Saru Bopa was ready to marry someone's else and gives her proof of this in the form of wedding cards. This encounter between Toradoi and her policeman brother Someswar is the principal focus and also the turning point in the story. Goswami's description of the moment is gripping:

> *Toradoi remained rooted to the spot near the pile of wedding cards. She reached out for the cards like someone groping for the bones of the dead among the ashes of the crematorium* (84).

'Toradoi's personality undergoes a sea-change after she realizes that she has spent all these years under the false belief that Saru Bopa's love for her was real and that he had stayed a bachelor only because he couldn't marry her. In other words her love for the zamindar's son has remained unrequited.

When the truth dawns on her, she is rendered speechless. She is a shattered soul at the end of the story. But she recovers and realizes that life has to go on:

> *The bulbuls on the hijol tree started chirping noisily. The sun rose above the Brahmaputra* (84).
> *Toradoi came out of her shack. She wore no chadar* (85).

Toradoi's life is no longer in a twilight zone. The sun has risen in her life to a new morning. She comes out of her shack to face a new life with new challenges. Her personal misery now takes a back seat. She is least bothered about her personal appearance. She wears no chadar now--chadar being a symbol of respectability. Which means that she is ready to do anything to survive, even take to prostitution. The crowning irony is that Haibor who earlier used to stand waiting for her is not there at his usual place. Her situation is truly desperate but her will to survive seems indefatigable.

1.4.3 Narrative Technique

One of the important elements to be noted while discussing narratives is the difference between the person *who speaks* and the person *who sees*. They may be the same person, though they need not be. Here the speaker is an

omniscient third person narrator. He is not a character in the story and stands outside the action of the story. We see things through his/her eyes. That is, he/she is the focalizer. He has the godlike capacity to look into the minds of all characters and knows what is happening in them. He could be called the narrator-focalizer.

However, though he stands outside the action of the story, he sees things from the point of Toradoi who is a very intense character. This is the source of the intensity that one finds in the story. Look at the following example:

'As she came out of her shack, Toradoi saw Haibor, the firewood vendor from the crematory, standing under the hijol tree. Again! His spindly legs stuck out from beneath his black shorts. His white teeth gleamed like the chewed up remains of sugarcane sticks'.

The third person narrator-focalizer is describing the scene outside Toradoi's shack in the morning: Toradoi is the character focalized here. But she is also the focalizer so far as Haibor is concerned. We see Toradoi viewing Haibor. The description of Haibor's 'spindly legs' and the image of his white teeth resembling 'the chewed-up remains of sugercane sticks' suggest the extent of her dislike of Haibor and that he is of no use to her.

As we said earlier, Toradoi is an intense character but the external narrator-focalizer is no less intense. Note the following description:

'The bulbuls on the hijol tree started chirping noisily. The sun rose above the Brahmaputra. Wreaths of violet and brown clouds clung to it, making it look like the pinched and pale face of a hapless prostitute, blushing at the thought of having to spend time with an unwanted stranger. The clouds seemed to lay bare the strange combination of helplessness and indomitable strength on this face'.

Here we have the narrator describing the scene after the death of love in Toradoi's life. The comparison suggested here is quite complex but the image of clouds looking like 'the pinched and pale face of a hapless prostitute blushing at the thought of having to spend time with an unwanted stranger' vocalizes the feelings of Toradoi after her faith in the love of Saru Bopa proves illusory — 'her helplessness and her indomitable strength'. The comparison conveys a great deal about Toradoi's changed attitude in life.

Exercises

1. How is Someswar presented in the story? Do we know him through the narrator's eyes or through Toradoi's eyes or through the eyes of both?

2. To what use is the flashback technique put in the story?

1.4.4 Style and Symbolism

Style

The writer writes in a very intense and cryptic style.

Her language is very expressive of the situation depicted. Her similes are very vivid and unconventional and say a great deal.

This is how Haibor the firewood vendor in the crematorium is described:

'His spindly legs stuck out from beneath his black shorts. His white teeth gleamed like the chewed up remains of sugarcane sticks.'

The comparison saves the writer from having to explain her dislike of Haibor. Again, the poverty-stricken, malnourished condition of Toradoi's children is portrayed vividly in the following expression- *Their trousers hung loose like the hides of goats strung up in a butcher's shop* (79). Note the image of violence in the above description. Such violent images are common in her stories.

Another example of eloquent images is the following:

The sun rose over the Brahmaputra. Wreaths of violet and brown clouds clung to it, making it look like the pinched and pale face of a hapless prostitute, blushing at the thought of having to spend time with an unwanted stranger (84).

The suggestion is clear that Toradoi is not averse to the life of a prostitute anymore. But the irony is, her unwanted suitor is not around anymore.

Symbolism

Many a times, to convey an idea or a concept in a more effective way, the writer uses symbols in writings. A single symbol may convey a great deal. A short story writer has the limitation of working on a small canvas. S/he does not have the luxury of a novelist to narrate his story at length. Therefore, symbols can play an important role in short story writing.

Goswami has made extensive use of symbols in her story. There is an immense variety in her symbols — some are private, and some are general. The inner psyche of the characters in her story has been effectively expressed through very powerful symbols drawn from various sources. The juxtaposition of the symbols of life and death in the form of a cremation ground and chattering of bulbuls right at the opening lines of the story is striking. Again, the Brahmaputra is a symbol of life. It is a traditional symbol of Assamese culture and society. It is intertwined with the Assamese society. Assam without Brahmaputra would, probably, have been a static society. Then we have the powerful symbol of the *hijol* tree in the story. It receives a special mention by the author not only at the beginning of the story, but at the end as well. It appears, as if this particular symbol drawn from nature is deliberately used to show the strength of Toradoi's character against all odds. *hijol* is a strong tree which stands erect withstanding nature's ravages and symbolizes the unbending nature of Toradoi. Placed in front of Toradoi's shack, it may also be considered a witness to the travails of Toradoi's life.

The central symbol of the story is the empty chest. The empty chest is primarily a symbol of death and is used to carry the dead. But though it has been put to use to carry Saru Bopa's body, it has also been used as a symbol of Toradoi's love — a symbol of matrimonial consummation, a symbol of fulfillment, a symbol of belongingness, a symbol of conjugal bliss. It is also a symbol of a life after death of love, which was very real to Toradoi: *She ran her hands over the chest, caressing it..(79).....Vermilion and flowers, which*

were means organising *one's hair, lay scattered inside the chest (80)...* It is a symbol of union on the one hand, and alienation on the other. The empty chest acquires another meaning at the end. After the disclosure of the reality about her lover,

The big black chest lay with its mouth yawning open like the cavernous mouth of hell.

The chest assumes the character of a monster that has its mouth open to devour things — in this case it devours Toradoi's love.

1.4.5 Characterization

There are only three main characters in the story — the protagonist Toradoi, her brother Someswar the policeman, and Haibor the firewood vendor. However, Haibor remains in the background most of the time. References to other characters like Toradoi's two sons are meant to give a touch of reality to the story. Nevertheless, a very important character, even in its absence, is that of Saru Bopa, love for whom was the focal point in Toradoi's life. Although circumstances made her marry a man she did not love and bear his children, she remains honest in her heart for Saru Bopa. Even during her days of hardship she prefers hunger to the advances of Haibor. She feels loyal even to the wooden chest that carried the dead body of Saru Bopa. Snuggling into the chest she goes ten years back when she was with Saru Bopa. She is so loyal to her first love that the knowledge of his death almost unsettles her. She is not bothered about the inquisitive eyes that peer into her shack, and decorating herself like a bride in whatever meager way she can, sleeps inside the chest stained with blood. The feeling is sublime for her. Yet, at the knowledge of Saru Bopa's imminent wedding, she crumples down like a pack of cards. The memory of her young love gave her character strength, but she feels betrayed now.

Toradoi's character stands out in the story. In Toradoi, the author has created a very emotional and passionate woman who lives for love. The beauty of her character lies in living a life of purity and love against all odds. She prefers to live a life of poverty rather than accepting the lusty suggestions of Haibor. He is not there when Toradoi really needed some support. Haibor is presented as a lustful man who tries to prey upon Toradoi.

Someswar is a tough policeman with a morally conservative outlook. Yet, he is concerned about his younger sister. 'Sturdily built', with 'an imposing moustache' wearing 'a pair of huge ungainly boots' and carrying 'a sizeable stick', he is the perfect picture of an ordinary policeman. But, within that sturdy body, he has a soft heart. A strict policeman for law-breakers, he cannot bear to see his sister suffer emotionally. He has to bring her down to reality.

Haibor is a man of lust waiting like a hawk to take advantage of the loneliness and poverty of Toradoi. With *white teeth gleamed like the chewed-up remains of sugarcane sticks (78)* he would wait outside Toradoi's shack and try to cajole her into sleeping with him in her husband's absence. But when she is awakened from her imaginary world of love, the man is not there to comfort her.

Saru Bopa is a weak lover belonging to a zamindar family. He did not think much of taking advantage of the young girl who was working as a maid in his father's house and taking care of the ailing old man. He did not have the strngth of charactr to stand against th socity and marry th poor girl who had beliyed his promises of love to be gospel truth.

1.4.6 Atmosphere

Goswami's short stories are known to show an obsession with death. As Prof. Namvar Singh says "Mention of Death and Gmetries are frequent in her stories" (Indira Goswami and her fictional world: p.66). This at least seems true for *The Empty Chest*. The writer has set her story in a cremation ground and all the action in it takes place there. Consequently the atmosphere of the story is somber. However it is not altogether dark. It is enlivened by love and also lust. The first paragraph prepares us for the peculiar atmosphere of the story.

No one got up at this hour, not even the people who had come to live on the fringes of the cremation ground. A few bulbuls chattered in the hijol tree in front of Toradoi's shack...The stench of burnt human flesh stole across the cremation ground to mingle with the sweet scent of distant lemon blossom.'

This togetherness of death and life or its variations, death and love, or death and desire give it a strange atmosphere. The extract also shows the constant presence of nature as a backdrop.

We are told how the poor people living there carry the belongings of the dead that lie scattered on the cremation ground into their shacks and shanties. The most important article in the story is an empty chest that had been used to ferry the dead body of the lover of the protagonist, Toradoi. What makes the atmosphere truly weird is that she not only drags it inside her shack but also wears her wedding blouse and wriggles into it to relive the moments of love with her lover. And this she does for several days — till she learns the truth about the man.

The atmosphere of death that surrounds the story lends urgency to Toradoi's desperate efforts to salvage some moments of love from her otherwise hard and loveless life.

Exercise

1. Look for an example to show the co-presence of death and desire in the story.

1.4.8 Title

The title is highly suggestive.

The title of the story is suggestive as well as ironic. Like the empty chest, Toradoi's life is full of emptiness. In her younger days she was lured by empty hopes. Even in her marriage she had a worthless husband. In her later days also whatever hope she had faded away in the vast emptiness of misfortune.

To Toradoi, before her disillusionment, it was a precious object that she had salvaged from the ruins of her love. It meant a reminder of her love for Saru

Bopa. Afterwards it is really empty — empty not only in a physical sense but also emotionally because it is empty of love. And she burns it and with it all her empty hopes.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

One of the driving forces of life is 'hope'. It may be for a better tomorrow, for the fulfillment of desire unspoken or even a subconscious urge to achieve what is probably consciously unachievable. Toradoi lived with hope that some day Saru Bopa would come to take her out of her miseries and marry her. But when Saru Bopa died in an accident she derived solace by sleeping in the wooden chest in which the mutilated body of Saru Bopa had rested till his mortal remains were consigned to flames. In this way she could recall his love and caresss. In her conscious mind she knew it was but a mere feeling of comfort. Yet, that comfort was enough to reaffirm her love for Saru Bopa. This also made her spurn the offer of Haibor for physical and material relief.

Toradoi loved Saru Bopa honestly. It was a pure unfulfilled love. She had accepted the fact that Saru bopa was beyond her physical reach. The very thought that he remained unmarried for a long ten years was a huge satisfaction for her. She thought that he at least reciprocated her love. In his death she wished to live with her memories of the dear one. But her dreams were shattered. In reality, Saru Bopa's remaining unmarried had nothing to do with Toradoi's love for him. When her brother brought this cruel fact to her by showing her the wedding invitation letters, the last ray of comfort was lost for Toradoi. After that nothing mattered to her. She was ready even for Haibor who she had strongly detested earlier. She decided to face life on its own terms. But ironically, Haibor was no more waiting there for her under the *hijol* tree.

Like many other stories of the writer this story too deals with the theme of love but it is love that remains unfulfilled. This thwarted passion finds expression in a most unusual way. Even in defeat the woman shows an unbreakable spirit.

1.6 GLOSSARY

Hijol: It is an indigenous tree. Its wood is used for making furniture.

Garubok: Crane. A long legged, yellow-billed white bird.

Uriam: A kind of timber tree (*Bescoffla Javanica*).

Bakul: A fruit-bearing tree. The tree has small white fragrant flowers.

Satgaon: Name of a place.

lathi: A long, big stick.

sal: A kind of hard wood tree (*Shorea Robusta*).

gamocha: Assamese hand-woven towel.

Yama: God of Death in Indian mythology.

chadar: A long sheet — a part of dress worn by Assamese women around the upper body.

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. The title of the story is a 'symbol'. Discuss
2. Describe the characterization of the protagonist in the story.
3. Discuss the symbols used in the story.
4. Comment on the style in the story.

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

I.

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"Agkatha", Hiren Gohain — *Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Swanirvachita Galpa*, National Book Trust, India, 1998.

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Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom Goswami) and her Fictional World — The Search for the Sea. Compiled by Kaikous Burjor Satarawala, B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 2002.

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Her Story So Far — Tales of the Girl Child in India, Penguin, Delhi, 2003.

UNIT 2 MOTILAL JOTWANI: *VERY LONELY, SHE* TRANSLATION: DR. NANDLAL JOTWANI

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1. Introduction
2.2. Sindhi Language
2.3 Motilal Jotwani: Life and Works
  2.3.1 Background to Sindhi Short Story
  2.3.2 Jotwani: A Writer of Unified Sensibility
  2.3.3 Themes and Concerns
2.4 Introducing the Story
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  2.5.1 Narrative Technique
  2.5.2 Main Characters
  2.5.3 Objectivity
2.6 Let Us Sum Up
2.7 Glossary
2.8 Questions
2.9 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The second Unit in this Block has a two-fold objective: one, to give you a sample of a Sindhi short story and to enable you to read it with enjoyment and understanding; two, through the story, to open up a window on the world of Sindhi short stories and Sindhi literature in translation.

The story chosen for your reading is *Very Lonely, She* by Motilal Jotwani.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Unit begins with a brief note on Sindhi language and then goes on to introduce you to the author Motilal Jotwani and his works and their major themes and concerns. It then critically examines the text of the short story, *Very Lonely, She*, particularly its narrative technique and characters and its ending and suggests how this story dealing with of an old woman living a lonely life could be compared with the other stories dealing with old women and their struggle to survive.

2.2 SINDHI LANGUAGE

Sindhi is one of the recognized languages on the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In undivided India Sindhi was the language of Sind but after partition that province became a part of Pakistan. Now Sindhi is spoken by a large number of people who have migrated to India and have settled in

Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, U.P. and Delhi. Among the major Indian languages it is the only one that isn't the state language of any one particular state.

Motilal Jotwani is among those writers who are deeply concerned about the uncertain future of the Sindhi language and literature. He feels particularly unhappy because he finds the Sindhi-speaking people themselves seem to be losing interest in Sindhi as a subject of serious academic study. He dedicated his *Dictionary of Sindhi Literature* to his students 'who have offered Sindhi as one of his subjects of study during the acculturative decades for them in Independent India.'

Sindhi is written both in both the Perso-Arabic script and the Devanagari script.

2.3 MOTILAL JOTWANI : LIFE AND WORKS

Born in 1936 in Sukkar, Sindh (now in Pakistan), he started life as a primary school teacher in Delhi and worked his way up to be a Reader in Sindhi in Deshbandhu College, New Delhi.. He has written in a variety of genres — short stories, novels, poetry, essays and criticism, besides an autobiography — 55 works in all. He has written principally in Sindhi but has also written in Hindi and English. He likes to describe himself as an Indianist in his thought and writings.

Works:

Sindhi: *PeeleeBattee-a Te* (novel, 1974); *Ihe Rishtaa Nataa* (novel, 1982); *Sanbadhani Je Sarakanui Te* (poems, 1982); *Koth* (novel, 1985; *Sunjaanap jo*

Sankat(short stories, 1992): *Te Nadha Novel* (three novels. 1992): *Aatamkatha Je Naale Mein* (autobiography, 1994). *Purush ain Prakriti* (Poems. 1997) etc.

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Prose and Criticism: *Shah Abdul Karim: A Mystic Poet of Sindh (1970): Shah Abdul Latif: His Life and Work (1975); Sindhi Literature and Society (1979); Sufs of sind (1986); Dictionary of Sindhi Literature (1996).*

2.3.1 - Background to Sindhi Short Story

Indian narrative tradition goes back to ancient times. Though western education introduced us to the genre of short story, as we know it today, we would have come by it anyway. The first embryonic stirrings in this genre were recorded in the mid-nineteenth century in "Kudhaatooro ain Sudhaatooro" (1855), a didactic story based on a Hindi original version by Pt. Bansidhar Chiranjilal, adapted in Sindhi by Miran Muhammad Shah. Out of the two men — Kudhaatooro and Sudhaatooro — one grew into a gentleman because of his good qualities and other landed in a prison for he knew vices only. The Sindhi short story in the second half of the nineteenth century portrayed people in almost flat contrasts.

Childlike at an early stage, the Sindhi short story described the lawbreakers of the Makhi Lake in "Hur Makhee-a Jaa" (1914) by Lalchand Amardinomal (1855-1954). Based on a historical fact, it is the first Sindhi short story, and tells us about the Muslim Hurs (Hurs, an Arabic word meaning "independents"), who took to looting of the rich landlords, traders and businessmen and helped the lowly and the lost in society. These law-breakers boldly confronted the alien British Government. It is a dark and passionate story, a blend of virtue and vice, in which the good guys and the bad guys are difficult to tell apart.

The Sindhi short story, however, was still not on its own and relied much on the ideas and intentions of the writer. It adolescently indulged in the all-too-apparent situations of life and hardly tried to bring out the *raison d'etre* of human actions, or if it did, it chattered a lot about it, leaving almost nothing to imagination. The stories of Jethmal Parsram (1886-1948), Mirza Nadir Beg (1891-1940) and others were replete with the ideals the authors exhorted frail humans to abide by. The writers idealistically portrayed the Hindu and Muslim heroes and heroines in love — love, which was not meant to be corrupted by the narrow considerations of caste, colour and creed. They delineated the zamindars who were liberal in their attitude — unexpectedly so, in their real life situations — towards the tenants on their lands, and depicted them in their notorious attempts to bring the nationalists among them into hardship. This they did in so many words, not missing the sharp and clear note. For instance, the main character in 'Ado Abdur Rahman' (Brother Abdur Rahman) by Amarlal Hingorani's (1907-56) did not speak a word which was not dictated by his inner monitor, "the ever-present conscience residing in each person". The artistic objectivity in the Sindhi short story suffered a great deal at the hands of content which very often embodied fictional facts for the ideas of Marx, Freud and Gandhi. In sum, the *kathaa-lekhs* (essays in the story form) masqueraded as the *kathaas* (stories). Even Asanand Mamtora's (1903-

93) "Kikee", a short story titled after its heroine, which showed signs of artistic maturity in handling the situation, lapsed into the age-old sentimentalism and moralism at its end.

It was after Partition that the Sindhi short story was shocked into adulthood. Unprecedented as the mass migration was in human history, the entire community — about 1.2 million of Sindhi Hindus — migrated to India. The whole of Sindh, known for its syncretic Sufi though, was lost to Pakistan. All this shook many out of their complacency and created many a problem of rehabilitation for them. Since the problems of *ato, lato* and *ajho* (food, clothing and shelter) became acute for them in the wake of Partition, the progressive writing had a new lease of life, and it held the floor for about a decade. Soon, however, some of the progressive writers realized that they could not possibly raise the talk of class-conflict, etc., in their short stories in view of the basically classless character of the Sindhi society and they should, instead, present life as it was and the story would speak for itself. While Uttam (B. 1923) and Gobind Panjabi (B. 1918) confined themselves to the delineation of unconcealed social purpose, writers like Kirat Babani (B. 1922) and Gobind Malhi (1921-2001) joined the humanist writers.

By 1960, there appeared on the scene a new wave of contemporary writers, namely, Mohan Kalpana (1930-92), Lal Pushp (B. 1935) and Guno Samtaney (1934-97), who could be called human interest storytellers.. Mohan Kalpana struggled hard to get the Sindhi short story out of the slogan-mongering progressivism that had set in. But he is essentially a romantic storyteller in both mind and art. In one of the stories his protagonist is hard-pressed to find enough money to treat his beloved to a respectable cup of ice cream — a humble desire in the urban situation indeed! With Lal Pushp a "true" realism shows itself in the psychoanalytical studies of characters — a husband and wife, a brother and sister, a son and mother, sisters, etc. He probes deep in the dark recesses of the human psyche and brings out the purposes that account for, or justify, their actions. Lately, he has been able to shed off the trappings of psychoanalysis which had reduced some of his stories to case studies. For instance, his 'Kahaani-a Jee G'olhaa' (The Pursuit) arrives at a psychological truth that "if a man does what a woman should ordinarily do, she cannot love him". But it does so in an atmosphere of gaiety and light-heartedness. Guno Samtaney is a neo-classicist in the field of short story writing in Sindhi. His short story 'Abhiman' presents a world *sans* discotheques, frustrations and the sick hurry of modern times. He draws a sensuous world in which man strives to know himself vis-à-vis woman, and vice versa. Kamal in the title story 'Aparajita' commits suicide because she fails to translate her "knowing" into "doing".

By the mid sixties, the second new wave of short story writers appeared in Vishnu Bhatia (B. 1941), Ishwar Chander (B. 1937-92) and Shyam Jaisinghani (B. 1937). According to them the forces of industrialization and urbanization (in one word, of "modernization") have been moving so fast in the world of today that the organizational changes have not been able to keep pace with them. As a result, man is disorganized and he should be described in the way he experiences the real life around him. These writers have for their materials the life of the common people in their day-to-day workings. For instance, in Vishnu Bhatia's 'Kaaniru' (A Coward) we see Ramaprasad going to Bombay in search of a job. There he meets Kalicharan, and both of them drive carts with *bhelpuri*, monkey-nuts and parched grams piled on them to

sell in the streets. Since the organizational changes are not commensurate with the fast-changing life, the dehumanizing effect of the metropolis shows itself on them. Kalicharan who has aleady "adapted" himself to the city life shatters Ramaprasad's legitimate hopes of a good, happy married life. At the end the reader is left wondering whether Ramaprasad, who used to regularly read the *Hamumaan Chaaleesaa* before coming to Bombay would also take to Kalicharan's ways and visit the houses of ill-fame. Ishwar Chander's stories are authentic commentaries on contemporary life; they sensitively etch out men and matters around us. Vasudha in Ishwar Chander's short story "Panhinje Ee Ghar Mein" (In Her Own House) goes to visit her parents in another city on receiving a not-so-warm invitation from them for the first time in the five years of her married life. She finds that her poor, helpless father whose to-day is bleak and the morrow still bleaker looks forward to her going back; her stay alongwith her little child in the house calls for extra expenses which the poor father cannot bear. Shyam Jaisinghani's short story "Hiku B'iyo D'eenhun" (Another Day) portrays a working couple in a mechanical dehumanizing situation. Yet another day passes like a cog turning onward and onward in time machine, leaving its scratch and screech on the mind of the young husband and wife: they begin the day (in fact, they don't want the day to begin, to rise; it rises in spite of them, their curses) with a usual supply of milk at the door-step of their flat and end it on the weary loveless bed with shrieks and shouts from the nearby slums within their hearing.

It is true that in the changed conditions after Partition, the Sindhis have come to live in the cities, big or small, with their life at once marked by despair and hope, cynicism and faith. In the ferment and flurry in and around their homes, Ashu in Prem Prakash's (B. 1946) story 'Villain' wonders if the idea of "sweet home" or "happy family" is a myth, for she has never experienced the home or the family in such a sweet, happy way. She remembers when she was a school-going child, she read a lesson in the Primer: "This is my family. He is my father. She is my mother. They are sitting together on the sofa. My younger brother is standing beside me. My younger sister is sitting on the floor. Both of us go together to the school everyday. I love my brother and sister very much". She also remembers the illustrations given alongside the text in the book, in which members of the family are all smiling in happiness. Now, Ashu thinks either the school or the family is a big lie. But then great literature, as John Gardner says, "has a clear moral base and ultimately affirms humane values".

Other writers, who have remained in the "and/or" of the subsequent waves and helped the contemporary Sindhi short story to develop further are — Sundari Uttamchandani (B. 1924), Krishan Rahi (B. 1932), Krishan Katwani (B. 1927), Tara Mirchandani (B. 1930), Popti Hiranandani (B. 1924), Hari Himthani (B 1933), Harikant (1935-94), Harish Vaswani (B. 1940), Hiro Shewakani (B. 1935), Ishwar Bharati (B. 1942), Lakhmi Khilani (1935), Jayant Relwani (B. 1936), Namdev (B. 1946), Param Abhichandani (B. 1926) and, of course, the present author (B. 1936).

Here is a list of short stories, novels and poems available in English translation that you might like to sample at your leisure.

Sindhi Short Stories

1. This City by Sundri Uttamchandani (translator: Param Abhichandani)
2. Ado Abdur Rahman by Amarlal Hingorani (translator: Hashu Kewalramani)

3. The Desire of a Boy by Sundri Uttamchandani (translator: Hashu Kewalramani)
4. Khanwahan by Kala Prakash (translator: Hashu Kewalramani)
5. Struggle by A.J.Uttam (translator: Shree Israney)
6. The Ruins by Guno Samtaney (translator: Param Abhichandani)
7. Search for Blood by Gope Kamal (translator:Param Abhichandani)
8. The Portrait of a Father by Hiro Shewkani (Param Abhichandani)
9. Continuity by Harish Vaswani (Translaator: Param Abhichandani)
10. Time of Ennui by Lal Pushp (Translator: Param Abhichandani)
11. The Tail by Brij Mohan (Translator: Param Abhichandani)
12. Sometimes by Ishwar Chander (Translator: Param Abhichandani)
13. The Cell by Harikant Jethwani (Translator: Param Abhichandani)

2.3.2 Jotwani : A Writer of Unified Sensibility

During a meeting with Mrs Indira Gandhi, Moti Lal Jotwani characteristically introduced himself as an Indian writer in Sindhi, Hindi and English. At this the Prime Minister remarked: 'People of your tribe introduce themselves as writers in Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Kashmiri, etc. But you have put it rightly.' Jotwani likes to describe himself as an Indianist in his thought and writings. One of his books is entitled *Of Grass and Roots: An Indianist's Writings* (1987). He has in fact emphasized the essential unity of the literature produced on the subcontinent

Jotwani has written in a variety of literary genres — short stories, novels, poetry, essays, and criticism besides an autobiography — 55 works in all. He has written in three languages but he has written more in Sindhi than in either Hindi or English. And his works have earned praise from knowledgeable critics. Among other things, he has published four collections of poetry, four collections of short stories, and also four short novels. Full details of the publications have been given earlier. His books on Shah Abdul Karim (1970) and Shah Abdul Latif (1975) and *Sufis of Sindh* (1986) have won critical acclaim.

About his poetry, only a few Sindhi poets have 'the rich variety of subjects and themes as Jotwani possesses.' (Hari Dilgir about his fourth anthology). Talking about his short stories, another reviewer says that Jotwani 'modifies tradition through his individual talent and brings in modernity in his works.' His *Koth*, a collection of one short novel and several short stories, says yet another reviewer, is 'highly readable' and his language 'ripe, mature and genuine.' The short novelette *Koth* (1985) deals with 'East-West encounter and looks at the problem of women's lib from the women's point of view. Jotwani recreates the *ardhanarishvar* myth in the modern context. (Param Abhichandani: *Indian Literature*: 29/6 1986) Jotwani's short story 'Aakaash D'isana Jee Chaahnaa' (A Desire to See the Sky) included in his third collection is rated to be among his best Sindhi short stories. It portrays the pathetic condition of the miners and passionate love of Kalu for his wife. When Kalu comes to know that his wife has returned to him, safe and sound, he is anxious to talk to her from his coal mine and a desire is born in him to see her, to see the sky above.

Jotwani is deeply concerned about the future of Sindhi language and literature in post-independence India. About his book *Sindhi Literature and Society* (1979), said M.V. Kamath said.

> "...I can understand Motilal Jotwani's agony. Which is why I have read with particular interest his book. He questions his fellow Sindhis' penchant 'increasingly to hide their separate entity by changing names and surnames'. The characters in Sindhi fiction today, he says, 'are generally representative of those who live in a cultural void, roam about in Connaught Place of New Delhi or the Fort area of Bombay and cry in desperation that they are broke'. If I were a Sindhi, I would never forget Sindh..." His *Dictionary of Sindhi Literature* (1996) over which he worked for several years is dedicated to those students of his who 'offered Sindhi as one of the subjects of study during the acculturative decades for them in Independent India.'

As a writer Motilal Jotwani has made a name for himself. But to those unsympathetic to him, he is a Sindhi writer to the Hindi people, a Hindi writer to the Sindhi-reading public and an English-knowing scholar to both of them. He remains somewhat dissatisfied with his achievements for he likes to conclude by saying that 'he could have been a much greater writer, but didn't permit himself to be one.'

2.3.3 Themes and Concerns

The central theme of Jotwani's works, including the fictional ones, is the one single reality that legitimately lies at the basis of the universe, which sages express by various names, in various forms (Skt. *Ekam Sat, vipraa bahudhaa vadanti*). While this theme runs like a silken thread in them, it manifests itself in a variety of sub-themes and concerns like one family on the earth, (Skt. *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*), love, co-existence, toleration, acceptance, responsibility, faith, discipline, etc. The comprehensive sense of one single reality would include love for nature, in the first place; then of man for woman and vice versa, for philosophic truth, for God, for the country — and it would also not exclude the traditional love and the modern love (tradition and modernity) — in their permutations and combinations.

Jotwani relates a significant incident from his early life to which he owes existence of this broad spectrum of reality as the presiding metaphor, in his works. It was 6 January 1948, and he was barely 12 at that time. The Jotwani family lived in a building belonging to a devout Muslim in Karachi (now in Pakistan). Things were never bad in Sindh before the Partition, for the people, bred and brought up as they were on the Sindhi Sufi soil, lived in peace and harmony. But on the fateful day of January 6, 1948, it looked like the world would come to an abrupt end for them. The rioters were at the gate and demanded of the house-owner to quietly hand over all the *kafirs* in his premises. Huddled along with other members of the family in a small storeroom of the house, they all waited with bated breath for destruction and death. But their house-owner Allahdino lied to them, saying, "The people you are looking for, sailed to India yesterday....The poor creatures couldn't take along with them their possessions.....Do you want their belongings?"

Allahdino? He is so dear to our heart that we in our family never use any honorific before his name. God's good man, he is God himself — God without any honorific. Allahdino? He is a commoner in the Indian

subcontinent, with a name having roots in the Indian composite culture : he is Allahdino with a Sindhi-Sanskritical suffix *dino* (*dutt*, meaning 'given by, or gifted by'; Allahdino meaning gifted by Allah, or God) in his Muslim name, as there are many Hindu names like "Gurubaksh", with a Semitic suffix *baksh* (again meaning 'given by, or gifted by': Gurubaksh meaning gifted by the Guru, or Preceptor).

As the night descended on that gloomy day, his father and Allahdino sang together the *padas*, or songs, of the great saint/ Sufi poet Kabir (1399-1518).

Secularity to him means not the state or the quality of being non-religious as it is believed in the West but that of being variously religious (Skt. *sarva dharma sama bhaava*),]. This was the view presented by sages and seers like Valmiki, Vyasa, Buddha, Mahavira, Muhammad, Kabir, Nanak and Mahatma Gandhi. Deep spirituality that attends this kind of secularity makes one rise above the narrow confines of one's own religion and respect all religions of the world. And this kind of secularity, evolved as it is by the Indian mind over the centuries, suits the Indian-multi religious society the most.

Conjugal love is also one of his major themes. It was depicted in his short novel *Koth* (1985). Familial love is depicted in the present short story *Very Lonely, She*.

In fact, Jotwani celebrates the forces of affirmation — they may relate to the union of soul and Super Soul or to the togetherness of Siva and Sakti, as in the icon of *Ardhanarishvara*. His themes and concerns are, as it were, a 'condensed India'.

2.4 INTRODUCING THE STORY

The short story *Very Lonely, She* was originally published in Sindhi with the caption of "Akeli Akeli Hoo-a" in the quarterly journal *Sipoon*, (Mumbai; July-September, 1999). It was translated into English and published in *KATHA: Prize Stories Vol 10* (New Delhi, 2000) and was subsequently available in its Hindi translation, as "Akeli Akeli Waha" in *Samkaaleen Bhaaratiya Saahitya*, a Sahitya Akademi bi-monthly (New Delhi; January-February 2001). This short story is not yet formally included in any of Jotwani's four collections of short stories in Sindhi.

In the "Contributors' Note" published in *KATHA: Prize Stories, Vol. 10* (New Delhi, 2000), the writer said that this short story is based on an autobiographical incident. Pooran Mausi and Manohar are taken from life. 'I wanted to focus on the sense of utter loneliness experienced in old age, and the fine line of distinction between loneliness and aloneness.' Bur the readers will have to figure out from the story which epithet — 'lonely' or 'alone' — suits whom.

The story has been translated by the writer's own brother Dr. Nandlal Jotwani who is a writer in his own right.

As you read the story keep the following questions in mind. If something strikes you as you read do make a note of it. This will help you formulate your ideas later on.

1. Who is the narrator in the story?
2. Are the focalizer and the narrator the same person or are they different?
3. Who is the main character in the story, Pooran Mausi or Manohar? Or do they both occupy center-stage?
4. What is the prime interest in the story?
5. Is there irony in the story? In what way?

2.5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The first question to ask yourself is: '**What is my reaction to the story?**' Put it down on paper before you read any further. It doesn't matter if you find your reaction a little deficient or even mistaken. The important thing is to think for yourself before you reach out to the views expressed by the teacher.

Well, as you see, very little happens in the story — very little that is external. A nephew on way back to Delhi pays a visit to her mausi who is living alone in a different town. She recalls a painful remark made by a close young relative. The nephew discovers that they also have been guilty of neglecting her. There are guilt feelings and regrets. The story ends with the nephew reflecting on the web of human relationships and the difference between loneliness and being alone. Clearly, most of the action in the story is psychological.

2.5.1 Narrative Technique

The story is told by a third person narrator, Manohar. He is also the focalizer. That is, he sees and we see what he sees.

The narrative is simple enough. Manohar breaks journey at Agra to see his Mausi. Which means, he is a decent person who is not entirely neglectful of relationships. But like everyone else he has got busy with his life in Delhi and he and his family haven't kept much contact with her. The revelation about their neglect of Mausi comes in the course of the conversation between the nephew and the aunt. An event in the family, like death, is generally an occasion for relatives to come together but when his younger sister, Vimla's husband in Delhi died, they didn't let her know of the tragedy. Obviously they didn't consider her to be important enough to be informed. Manohar is reminded of the serious omission on their part when Mausi enquires about Vimla's daughters.

When the truth dawns on him, Manohar feels guilty and he doesn't have the courage to face her. But that is not all. This revelation leads him to reflect on life. Read in this way, the story is the story of growth in the awareness of Manohar and of the human need to keep in touch with one's own people.

If you need an identical example, think of Tagore's story 'Kabuliwala'. I hope you have read it at some stage. There also we find something similar happening. In Kabuliwala, as in *Very Lonely, She*, the story is narrated by a

character whose consciousness expands at the end. If in our story it is Manohar who realizes the truth about Mausi's feelings, it is Mini's father in the other story who comes to understand why the Kabulaiwala used to come and bring dry fruits for Mini. Both Manohar and Mini's father begin to see what they had not seen earlier.

2.5.2 Main Characters

Pooran Mausi

We can now take a close look at the principal characters in the story.

Who are the principal characters in the story?

As is evident from the heading of the short story, *Very Lonely, She*, it is Pooran Mausi who is the main character. But she shares the importance with Manohar. Abandoned by her husband as Pooran Mausi, she lived with her parents in Agra. But when her parents died, she was left alone to fend for herself (a characteristic which helped her, especially in her old age). She had been running a domestic school for women where she had been giving lessons in tailoring and embroidery and etiquette. Latterly however because of old age she sold away the sewing machines and now lives on the income that comes from rent of a portion of the parental house.

She can't afford to have modern conveniences like a telephone or a television or even a newspaper. But she has reconciled herself to her lot, thinks positively and lives a fairly contented life.

She gets up rising early in the morning, sweeps and swabs the rooms and does *puja* in front of the framed photograph of the Anandpur Sahib Guruji. In spite of her indigent circumstances she has self-respect. That is why after having been asked by her brother-in-law's son that 'Chachi, for God's sake, leave us alone', Pooran Mausi hasn't stepped into her in-laws' house.

Pooran Mausi leads a lonely life. When Manohar remarks that she must be feeling very lonely, she responds simply: 'Life becomes the way you mould it.' This suggests that she has come to accept loneliness as a part of her existence and she has made peace with it. But while her loneliness has not made her bitter, she has not been able to forget her hurt. So when Manohar comes she welcomes him lovingly, with the tears of joy in her eyes and serves him the best fare she can. She also remembers his preferences — that he doesn't take sugar and that he likes tea in a mug — but the visit also revives painful memories in her, particularly when her nephew reminds her of her loneliness. The one hurtful memory that sticks out in her mind like a sore thumb and that made her weep recalling it was the remark that her brother-in-law's son had made when she went to visit them. She had merely asked the young man to visit her and drop a line once in a while. But the response was heartless. 'For God's sake, Chachi, leave us alone'.

However, life has not soured Pooran Mausi and like an affectionate and concerned aunt she asks Manohar about the well-being of other members of the family, particularly about the daughters of his younger sister Vimla. It is this enquiry that takes Manohar aback and brings forth the honest confession from him that Vimla had lost her husband a few months before and that they

had omitted to inform her about the tragedy. Forgetting to inform Pooran Mausi about this, her sister's son Manohar had behaved in the manner her brother-in-law's son had behaved earlier. It was as if the former too had said to Pooran Mausi, "Mausi, for God's sake, leave us alone".

Mausi is of course shocked sand she sees the brother-in-law's son reflected in Manohar. Here was a fresh proof of the indifference of the relatives in Delhi towards Pooran Mausi. This makes Manohar feel guilty and full of remorse.

Pooran Mausi comes through as an old widow who barely manages to survive with self-respect and is condemned to lead a lonely life by her relatives.

Manohar

Manohar is both the narrator and the focalizer. We get to see what he sees and narrates. It is through him that we get to experience the plight of an old woman who is his Mausi. Manohar should be a man well past his middle age.

Manohar's impulses are fairly sound. Just as he notices in his train journey from Bhopal that he has reached Agra Cantt, he immediately decides to drop and see Pooran Mausi. But he is also one among numerous persons who are so wrapped up in their own affairs that they have no time for those beyond their immediate family.

As a result it didn't occur to him (nor for that matter to any one else in the family), when Vimla's husband died, that they should inform her of the tragedy. This was a glaring omission and Manohar the honest man that he is has no excuse to offer for it. There is an irony in this because earlier when his aunt had said that Delhi people had no time for their kin, he had asked if she got this feeling while staying with them also. Now he is as guilty as Mausi's brother-in-law's son was. He only asks his aunt to forget and forgive.

The revelation leads Manohar to reflection. Lying on the cot, he worries over "the distinction between loneliness and aloneness, between that which was imposed on an individual by society and what the individual sought voluntarily". In the same breath, Manohar further says, "it is different matter that aloneness becomes loneliness in time". Manohar seems to be reduced to the state of loneliness where he does not have the courage to face Mausi's grief any more. Lonely and grief-stricken, he lies down on the cot, a pillow beneath his bed, and closes his eyes at the end of the short story.

Pooran Mausi's story is not hers alone. It is quite a suggestive story that goes beyond those who are its immediate subjects. The story tells us how the ambit of the family is shrinking and how people in a big metropolis like Delhi cut themselves away from all but their immediate family. It is particularly the story of innumerable old people, particularly old women whom their intimate relatives have practically disowned and who barely manage to survive on their own with self-respect. Pooran Mausi's line — Delhi folks have no time for their kin — can be generalized to read: *Humans all over the world have no time for others.*

Exercise

Now here is one exercise that you could do with profit. Try and link this story up with those that have woman characters who try to live by themselves and

see how the comparison holds. Can you draw some conclusions about poor and/or old women in our society?

2.5.3 Objectivity

T. S. Eliot wrote that 'the only way of expressing emotion in art is by finding an "objective correlative", in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.' (Source to be quoted.) Since the details in the story are autobiographical, the question of achieving objectivity through the right selection of events is very important.

The writer has made the right selection of events which help him to evoke the right response. Jotwani's objectivity in the short story lies in his permitting his narrative to unfold itself and allowing people to speak for themselves.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

The short story, *Very Lonely, She*, though autobiographical in origin, is bifocal in in effect. It makes us realize the weakening of familial bonds taking place in cities and at the same time shows us the consequences of this weakening in the life an old widow like Pooran Mausi who is trying to survive with courage and self-respect.

2.7 GLOSSARY

The writer's younger brother Dr. Nandlal Jotwani, who is also a writer in his own right, translated the short story from Sindhi into English for *KATHA : Prize Stories. Vol 10* (New Delhi, 2000) and wrote for its "Contributors' Notes", "... I chose to retain the original expressions for a few terms, especially the kinship terms, as I found the English equivalents somewhat superficial and deficient".

How are the English equivalents of kinship terms 'superficial and deficient'? One sample may suffice: "aunt" means 1. (father's sister) *booa;* 2 (father's brother's wife) *chachi, kaki*; 3.(mother's sister) *mausi;* 4. (mother's brother's wife) *mami*.

The original expressions in the short story are explained in their English equivalents:

aloo parantha:	a kind of fried cake made in several layers, stuffed with potatoes
chachi:	father's brother's wife
chapati:	a thin cake or bread
dahi:	yogurt, curd
guruji:	preceptor; 'ji' is suffixed out of reverence
haan bhai:	yes, dear
halwai:	confectioner

Mausi:	mother's sister
Nana:	maternal grandfather
Nani:	maternal grandmother
nari-shala:	domestic tailoring school for women
puja:	worship
uffo:	an expression of regret, Ah
vaishnava:	devotee of Vishnu, one of the three principal divinities of the Hindu mythology

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. Examine the theme of familial love in *Very Lonely, She* and the techniques the writer employs to deal with this theme.
2. Compare and contrast the two characters of Pooran Mausi and Manohar, discussing the epithets of 'lonely' or 'alone' for them.
3. Write a note on the appeal of the story.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

L.H. Ajwani, *History of Sindhi Literature* (New Delhi, 1970).

Popati Hiranandani, *History of Sindhi Literature: 1947-78* (Mumbai, 1984).

K.M. George (General Editor), *Masterpieces of Indian Literature* (New Delhi, 1997).

Motilal Jotwani, *A Dictionary of Sindhi Literature* (New Delhi, 2000).

Geeta Dharmarajan and Nandita Aggarwal (Editors) *KATHA: Prize Stories, Vol. 10* (New Delhi, 2000).

UNIT 3 AFSAR AHMED : *HEADMASTER, PRAWN, CHANACHUR*
TRANSLATION : CHANDANA DUTTA

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Afsar Ahmed: An introduction
3.3 Introducing the Story
3.4 Analysis
- 3.4.1 The Narrative
- 3.4.2 Framework of Madness
- 3.4.3 Major Incidents
- 3.4.4 Madness Missing its Mark
- 3.4.5 Love of Nature
- 3.4.6 Style

3.5 The Translator's Note
3.6 Let Us Sum Up
3.7 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall discuss a Bangla Short Story by Afsar Ahmed: *Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur* in English translation by Chandana Dutta. This story aims to unfold the meaning behind the meaningless expressions and behaviour of the protagonist. The constant element of surprise arises from the fact that everyone around him is able to find meaning and beauty even as he despairs. It is hoped that after reading first the story and this unit, you will be able to appreciate the poeticness and beauty of words and expressions in the context in which the author uses them. You will also see the protagonist behind the mask or persona of madness and how his expression and behaviour is a strategy for survival in the upheavals in society. You will also appreciate the element of drama in indirect discourse in a short story besides the cohesiveness that verse imparts binding the disparate events and characters together.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the second Bangla Short story we are taking up for discussion, the earlier one being salt, Block-4, Unit 1 by Mahasweta Devi. I suggest that once again you read the survey on Bangla Short-story before coming to this unit to acquaint you of the creative florescence of this genre in Bangla language.

From the 1950s to the 70's the short-story acquired greater formal sophistication in terms of both craft & content of fiction.

It was during this period that disenchantment with the administration creating a mood of alienation, frustration and pessimism struck the youth leading to introverted protagonists. Afsar Ahmed belongs to such writers along with Debes Ray, Mati Nandi, Shyamal Gangopadhyay, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Kabita Sinha, Syed Mustafa Siraj and others. Mahasweta Devi in her preface to *Bashai Tuda* accuses the writers for "an atrophy of conscience". In a country bedevilled with so many problems — social injustice, communal discord and evil customs, a conscientious writer has to take a firm stand in defiance of the exploited. Afsar Ahmed apparently is voicing his concerns by a conscious coating of the irrational, counter-provoking behaviour in the wake of provoking incidents. In the course of our discussion we shall touch upon various aspect of the protagonist's stance, look at the dramatic and poetic elements in the story and finally how his madness is thwarted and he is forced to defeat his own purpose.

3.2 AFSAR AHMED: AN INTRODUCTION

Afsar Ahmed (1959) post-graduated in Bangla from Calcutta University. He began his literary career as a short-story writer but later graduated to novel writing. He is working with Paschim Bango Bangla Akademi on a collection of social and economic articles. His novels include Gar-Garasti (1982), Basabas (1988) and Alowkik Divrat (1999). Afsar Ahmeder Galpa (1989) and Shreshta Galpa (1999) are the collections of his published short stories. He has also written one children's book, Bagnaner Bhoot (1996). He has received Somen Chandra Memorial Award for Short Story, Nikhil Bharat Banga Sahitya Sammelan Puraskar (1997) and the Sapan Puraskar (1993). In his own words "I wanted to convey through my story that basic human rights cannot be violated in a democratic country"

3.3 INTRODUCING THE STORY

The title of the story in Bengali *Arrthaheen Katha Balar Nirbharta* literally means to be dependent on the meaningless words. The translator obviously felt that the title chosen by her recur in the story and capture the essential meaningless, poetry and the lyrical quality in the story.

The story H.P. Chanachur is perhaps unlike any other story that you have read. Arupda, and his perception of life there is no cohesive plots, though there are incidents in it and the story concerns.

The story is about Arupda's response to the incidents that happen around him and his perception of life in general. There is no cohesive plot, though there are incidents in it. You will come across quite a few references to death violence such as suicides, drownings, rapes, dacoity, murders and police atrocities. All these incidents about which you shall read in details in the following sections, colour Arupda's perception and imagination.

3.4 ANALYSIS

The story..... *Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur* was first published in Bangla as Arthaheer Katha Balar Nirbharata" in *Baromas* in September 1998, Calcutta and translated by Chandana Dutta for Katha. The English translation was published in KATHA PRIZE STORIES VOLUME 9 IN 2000.

Chandana Dutta has a doctoral degree in English Literature from JNU. She has taught in colleges in DU and Bhutan. She headed the editorial department at Katha Vilasam. This is her first attempt at translation. According to her "to convey exactly what the writer wishes to, and yet keep the translated version readable, was like walking a tightrope.

3.4.1 The Narrative

You are I am sure accustomed to narration in the third person and in the past tense. But here we have a first person narration — (Do you not think that first person narration) — Arupda the protagonist, is not only the first person narrator of the story but also the focaliser — that is to say that we see things through his eyes.

Since he is both sane and pretending to be mad we hear two voices in the story. We are normally used to a verbal mode of communication but here we have non-verbal communication, through gestures, silences, pauses, evasive behaviour. So as you read this story, be alert to these different modes of communication.

Do you think that the use of the first person narration makes the story more effective? In what ways the sane voice come through to us? Does it add to the sense of immediacy and urgency to the story?

3.4.2 Framework of Madness

On the face of it you can call this story to stay of a man called Arupda pretending to be mad. This appearance of the madness which he wears / effects is his shield — a kind of defiance against the social decadence and violence that he sees around him. In other words he is shying away from the erosion of the social fabric or ground realities of the day.

Founding a story on pretensions of madness is not a new theme/practice in the history of literature. We do have precedents in : Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear'. "Hamlet's madness has a method in't" says Polonius. Hamlet's plan to act mad is a pretense so he can get away with saying and doing things that would not ordinarily be tolerated. When Polonius is sent by Claudius, the King who has slain Hamlet's father and married his mother Gertrude to find out about Hamlet's disposition, he uses madness as a cover to ridicule Polonius.

Polonius :	Do you know me, my Lord?
Hamlet	Excellent well, you are a fishmonger.
Polonius:	Not I, my Lord.
Hamlet:	Then I would you were so honest a man.
Polonius:	Honest my Lord?
Hamlet:	Ay, Sir, to be honest as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.
Polonius:	That's very true my Lord.
Hamlet:	For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog. Being a good kissing carrion. Have you a daughter?
Polonius:	I have, my Lord.
Hamlet:	Let her not walk in th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter can conceive. Friend look to it.

Hamlet acts mad to serve a motive, i.e. to get closer to Claudius so he could take his revenge for his father's murder.

The Fool in King Lear, another of Shakespeare's great tragedies acts as the only person with wisdom and insight. He is Lear's jester but "not altogether a fool". Lear's foolishness in dividing his kingdom among his daughters based on their statements of love for him furnished Lear's fool with many points of philosophical recriminations.

> Fathers that wear rags
> Do make their children blind,
> But fathers that bear bags.
> Shall see their children kind.
> Fortune, that arrant whore,
> Ne'er turns the key to th' poor....

There is some similarity between the fool providing humour in the play by parodying its serious theme and Arupda in the story indulging in a spurt of poetic utterances realizing fully the collapse of values that typify the present times.

Another way of looking at the story is that it is a story of defeat because the of madness that he puts up all the time has a complete opposite effect. It is either found amusing to the policeman or is transformed in an effortless manner by his wife as another variety of everyday reality. So this weapon of madness goes blunt and in the end we see he and his wife having an exchange where he admits his defeat.

> She says "Why are you going"?
> He says "Because I am not able to do anything" (this sentence sums up all his sense of frustration and defeat)

She says "when will you return"?
He says "I will be back".

"I will be back soon because I will not be able to do anything. And then I will go along".

In these four or five lines of dialogues his total defeat is expressed. And it comes clinching in the last paragraph.

"I go down the stairs. But at the bottom right in front of me, I find another flight of steps. Climbing up the new staircase. I find myself at the door of my bedroom. A funny way to return to base, I think, feeling my senses come alive".

It is a complete rounding off of the entire exercise of his: of escaping reality and being defeated by reality at the end. Reality get the better of him. Reality wins. So, we can say that the story depicts the ruthlessness with which reality wins every time in life.

Do you think that all the incidents have been framed by the writer within this broad framework? Let us take a look at them one by one:

3.4.3 Major Incidents

Arupda, the protagonist makes a pointed statement at the very beginning of the story that sets our expectancy ignited: "I am forced to weave together meaningless activity and thought, and have reached a point where there is no other way out. My body, its numerous parts, strike different meaningless poses, constantly. I lose myself in never-ending meaninglessness, seeking refuge in it". This way, Arupda, accounts for his behaviour both verbal and non-verbal. We are also made to understand that his so called staged, absurd behaviour is not questioned by his wife, daughter, colleagues and neighbours. What does this show? Do you think that people around him understand his occasional odd behaviour and therefore indulge him? Or is it something different?

To substantiate his statement he cites an incident that is taking place in the present in the story. His wife Pramita and daughter Tinni arrive home from Tinni's school and ring the door bell. But, instead of opening or asking them to push open the door and enter in, he lets them think that he is busy with some work and therefore taking time to open the latch of the door. He has in the first place never bolted. The door after they left. He had also seen Tinni and Pramita returning to the house from his balcony.

After they have entered the house, he greets his wife with a hello which again is a pretense but which Pramita takes as real. She retorts "don't be stupid" She has other things on her mind. She throws her concerns at him "Uff, once again today they could not rescue the child from the manhole". Arupda, not acknowledging her talk returns to the door and pretends to latch an already latched door. Pramita is astonished to know that the door was never latched by him and that he was pretending. When she questions him, Arupda is roused and his mind gets filled with a flood of images. He blurts out thus:

One night
rain
a lot of rain
the juice-filled fruits are dry
birds fly, their feet pointing downward, their spines ramrod
water crocodiles collect the colour blue at the root of the banyan
tree as they yawn
the water-borne moss against the mountain face flaps its wings and chaffs its knees
oh! My poor birds, don't go into the water, float away like the clouds
Snake-like evening
ink-filled night
naked breeze
all these in our rooms
pit caves, tar flies, children's lessons
meetings with a mermaid have not yet happened.

Pramita, it must be noted, unruffled by Arupda's deliberate inchoate utterances believes in establishing linkages between Arupda's responses and her own thoughts. She says to Arupda "Hanh! I think I remember your saying one rain filled night some one had fallen into the manhole. What a country. What a city, the height of being unsafe".

Look at the following conservation between the couple which establishes their friendliness and mutual trust inspite of all odds.

Pramita: "I am afraid of letting Tinni come back from school by herself".
Arupda: "It is something to be afraid of ".
Pramita: "Are you never afraid?"
Arupda: "Of course, I am" *Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur.*
Pramita: "Murders have gone up in the city, so have rapes".
Arupda: .....*headmaster, prawn, Chanachur.*
Pramita: "The budget session is approaching. Who knows what madness the ministers will indulge in this time".
Arupa: .....*headmaster, prawn, chanachur.*

The story itches forward by Pramits's terrified utterances, quizzing him on various issues and Arupda's helplessness at quenching her fears. Shall we list those perplexed questions? What are they?

"You know, Rajat said the other day, there is a price for everything. Nothing happens anymore without a bribe".

"Where ever there is someone responsible for some work, they are waiting with their hoods raised to take a bribe".

"You are absolutely correct. Otherwise, how can they buy hilsas worth more than two or three hundred rupees".

Besides the child falling into a manhole incident, Pramita recalls two dacoities in the colony and the police flushing out a headless body of a youth from a canal. The gruesome macabre incidents keeps coming at us. "Sometime

earlier, a young girl form the basti was abducted and gang-raped in the park nearby". And even before that, about a month and a half ago, the police came to the S–7 flat of "theirs" to look for a young boy whose limp body hung from a ceiling fan. The boy's name was Sanju. He was about-twenty one years old and his parents we are told are practicing doctors.

In E–3, Arupda tells us nine days before Sanju's suicide a young boy who came home for two days from hostel swallowed thirty sleeping pills and died. Arupda's response to these unfortunate incidents is not in the form of explanations, wonders, quizzing questions but meaningless thoughtfulness — "No meetings with a mermaid happened". This line occurs several times in the story. Why do you think Arupda's response come in this way?

Now, read Sanju's suicide incident carefully to see for yourself the apathy of the police. One that the police had heard S–7 instead of N–7, just two blocks away. To probe the suicide case in S–7 flat which is Arupda's house the police stomps in to see the corpse. Pramita resorts to self defenes by trying to explain the mistake of the officer in noting down wrong house number, Arupda on the contrary uses his meaninglessness to provide police "with all the evidence of a suicide in my bedroom". He even daydreams imagining his lifeless body hanging from the ceiling fan of his bedroom.

The dialogue between Arupda and the police characterizes the usual apathy on the part of police to probe crimes and Arupda's usual manner of evading replies by talking out of context till the police leave. (Can you recall any encounter you have had with the police or one that you have heard of on similar lines?)

Another funny incident in the story is Arupda's purchasing a phone and getting it installed in the house N–7 where the boy had committed suicide. The parents of the boy are made to understand that the phone was ordered by the boy before his death. The phone we are told "coos like a bird at N–7 and showers consolations from relations and well-wishers, pours requiems for the dearly departed. Arupda revels in the fact that the phone is making consolatory noises to Sanju's parents".

> Standing in the dark balcony of my flat I hear the cooing of this bird. Whenever I wish to sleep restfully in my bed, it echoes strangely in my ears. During the day sometimes, I stand on the tarmac below N–block so that I can hear my bird trill every time a call comes through. The phone instrument which could have been mine, had I so much as reached out for it, is now in the room of a recently dead youth. His parents have embraced this falsity as being so deeply true that I don't stand any chance of introducing myself as the rightful owner now. I have no existence there.

Arupda's stage managed death is not without significance. He wants his madness to explode in an arresting manner. He even stages an imaginary event of his death. The message of his own fake death is somehow conveyed. We are not told how the news of his own death is conveyed to his friend but the news reaches him and Ananya goes to the wrong address given by Arupda to his friend Ananya. Ananya is made to understand that Arupda has hanged himself from the ceiling in N–7. Ananya visits the doctors, the boys parents,

mistaking for Arupda's parents, grieving, consoling, shouldering the wails of the boy's parents. Ananya later coming out from N–7 passing by Arupda's balcony sees him with a newspaper in his hand. Obviously, Ananya is shocked, a dialogue ensues and to each of his perplexed questions, Arupda replies in three words. Headmaster, prawn, chanachur. But when he talks to his wife later he gives an all together different version of it. He says that he gave a resounding Rick at his back for going to a wrong address. How do you think one can be so frivlous to convey the new of his fake death to a friend of his what does it tell you about the state of this or consciousness?

It is interesting to note that Arupda does not want to die. Rather he wants to live. He says that Ananya could never comprehend his desperation to live alive. Having heard of incidents of death, he wanted to experience his own annihilation, eclipse by taking himself to the brink of things at the edge of the abyss. He wants to die without losing consciousness. It is there in all the mythologies when you dream your death or experience near-death experiences. Thus death, its aftermath dovetail all the incidents in the story.

3.4.4 Madness Missing its Mark

The story goes on like this with Arupda acting mad and Pramita's interludes of laughter making sense of his meaningless words, activity and thoughts. There also ensues a normal dialogue between them.

"But suppose that policeman returns and rings the bell on such a night?

Then he will go back laughing deliriously as if somebody has tickled him, when I utter a few of these words".

He, as if, withdraws back into his meaninglessness when he tells her that it was a mistake to stop talking in his usual way. At one point of time he tells Pramita:

"I am trying to say something without saying anything".

The all seeing, all understanding being emerges as the dominant consciousness in his aggressive pursuit of madness. We have related the facts that drive him to madness. He is, therefore, a very sane man but in a state of hopelessness.

The opening sentences we mentioned earlier are not the speech of a madman look at the tone of these sentences. "I must live with them without solutions" is a very sane voice, not madness, "I loose myself in never ending madness". The question before us is — up to what extent does the tactics of madness adopted by Arupda help serve his purpose? (which is that of escaping bleak realities around him).

The answer to this is: one that nobody finds his affected insanity irrational, frightening or threatening. An instance in case is *the rain dance*. Unknown to Pramita he enacts a mad dance.

"I pull faces and dance mockingly, brazenly, behind her back. I think about the result of my dancing and my gestures. If only there would be rain. No, there is no rain anywhere, there is no ocean anywhere, there are no trees anywhere, there is no earth anywhere, only this taunting dance as I kick my feet high in the air thee is no rain anywhere, there are no torrents anywhere at all. (If you have read Ibsen's Play A Doll's House, you will recall that Nora's

tarentalla (spider dance) in fear of her lie being detected by her husband is an act of her absolute helplessness in controlling the situation). At that point he is interrupted by his wife:

You know, Rajat said the other day.....and so forth.

Think of other ways in which his mad act simply misses the point or goes wide off the mark?

Read the scene between the policeman and him. The policeman asks his vocation.....

Arupda "I blow things out of proportion"

Very soon you realize that the encounter between Arupda and the police does not remain at the level of comedy alone. The policeman keeps coming. Gradually it becomes threatening and terrifying. Arupda cannot take it anymore. He lapses from insanity to sanity, there is a change of tone. The policeman says that he wants to see his bedroom where he sleeps. This is clearly an invasion of his privacy. He begins to admire the colour of his walls, his beautiful wife and daughter. Arupda becomes even with the policeman like any sane, enraged, outraged man would. Then the policeman becomes a little normal.

Arupda: "There is vulture shit on your head".
Policeman: "Every now and then I have to go to the morgue. I have put vultures close to the morgue. It must be their shit". He bursts into laughter. "Fact is not all corpses in the morgue can be disposed off properly, we also do not always hand over the corpses to the next of kin".
Arupda: How do you live with dried bird shit on your head?
Policeman: Oh, my dear sir, we too are types of vulture".
Arupda: Are we?
Policeman: Are you scared?
Arupda: "Why don't you take a cigarette? It makes you look a little human".

This is a cheeky play with the police.

Arupda: "What is stopping you from flashing the child out of the manhole?

(We see that Arupda has not forgotten the incident of child falling in the manhole).

We must understand that he is a consciously split personality and there is a piquancy, a tantalizing aspect of his verbal madness. One does not want to give it up — rather one wants to read the lines again and again. His tragedy ties in this that he no longer is able to play a madman.

3.4.5 Love of Nature

Arudpa's interaction with nature does not strictly fall in the framework of madness. It is a sad and reflective man relating to natural phenomena to

escape from reality. He feasts his eyes on the red glow around the Krishnachurna tree, rather watching the tree from the balcony is his favourite pastime. This is as if there is an ideal world possibly symbolized by the tree and its red glow. The sheet of light that comes from the tree is like a screen from the ugly realities of life. His bedroom walls are covered by the same glow. In his verse there is a lot of nature, its sensuous description reminding one of Keat's poetry: juice — filled fruits, colour blue, water-borne moss, float away like the clouds, ink-filled night, mermaids, rain, ocean, torrents, trees, earth — all life supporting elements inter linked with birds, hilsas, crocodiles, mermaids and so forth. Arudpa emerges as a very poetic character. (Read the poetic utterances again and again to find out the deep hidden meaning/messages). A line like "meeting with a mermaid have not yet happened", which is repeated time and again, suggests a child like craving and longing for a dream universe. While day dreaming nature he feels he has escaped "to an enchanted hill or to a lonely lake on whose cool waters bob many a road". The lotus leaves are all water-like below the waters.

3.4.6 Style

You must also appreciate the three dimensional aspect of words — literal, metaphorical and contextual all the three together combining to give the seemingly abstract, contradictory, illogical sequencing of words and statements significance and loaded meanings. (You can look up dictionary how paradoxes and oxymoron convey meaning more significantly through apparent contradictions). So, the abstract statement Arupda makes in the beginning of the story, becomes concrete, palpable, fathomable, reachable, understandable — found on optical realities.

Arupda talks of his living death "Just try to see me both alive as well as dead. May be you will get something from it". He compares his ability to survive in-spite of the ordeal of survival experienced by an intelligent and a sensitive man with that of ants. He says "ants are more imaginative than the fire" What perhaps he means is that fire is characterized by extinction, it has an extinguishing quality where as ants multiply in huge numbers — even if they are destroyed.

In other words fire here perhaps suggests the overwhelming presence of destructive forces in society and ants suggest the human will to survive and go on inspite of the negative forces in life — the returning of the police again and again to Arupda's house, Pramita's terror of the police, Arupda's staged act of death, Annanya episode, child and manhole incident, all other reported incidents and finally Arupda's defeat. Also, remember that the major incidents in the story are those of crime and lawlessness. So the police and its coming and going and Arupda's climbing up and down the stairs at the end of the story as it were is like the phoenix coming out of the ashes.

The story also has a high element of drama in it. It can be enacted. Most of the story is unfolded in the form of Arupda's dialogues / conversation with the other characters in the story — Arupda and his wife Pramita, Arupda and the policeman and Arupda and Annanya. You are I am sure mostly accustomed to reading a story that is narrated in the past tense. The first person narration and the dramatic element in the present story provides an immediacy and an

urgency. The writer has made use of the technique of 'monologue' which for instance, you find in plenty in Shakespeare's plays.

The story is rich in literary devices too such as imagery, paradox hyperbole, personifcation etc. At the same time it has genious trill flaps etc. *imagery* — splash of red, sweat drenched, red-radish face, spines ramrod, juice filled fruits, water-borne moss, ink-filled night, glistening drops waiting to roll off, putrefying corpses (covering sense of sight, hearing, touch), *Simile* — Pramita stomps into the bedroom like a reckless, uncaring bull, float way like the clouds, snake-like evening, phone coos like a bird. The story abounds in the images related to death and destruction.

The copresence of morbid images and sensuous images gives the story a unique flavour involving us holistically. As the story frightness as also bewilders the reader it has a multi-dimensional effect.

Metaphor-red-radish face Paradox — Because they consider the untruth of my existence a living truth, these two creatures somehow continue to exist.
(You must discover others from the story on your own).

Also note the element black humour i.e: houmour connected with death and destruction. Can you figure out examples of black humour in the story? We can conclude by saying that the writer has adopted a powerful idiom – a mixing of genre — poetry, drama, fiction to comment on serious issues that need to be addressed.

3.5 THE TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

It is not easy to talk of translations that one has done. I believe that the process of translation works at multi-levels, not simply as a two-level conversion of a given piece from a source language to a target language. Each translation involves a range of details which may not ultimately be seen on paper but which nevertheless contribute to the process. The practice becomes even more complex when it involves the translation of a piece of fiction. Any such work, a short story or a longer work, actually plays with ideas unlike a non-fictional work that depends more on facts. The emotional and mental range that a story operates within is wide because it leaves much to the imagination, both of the writer and the reader, and more so when a translator is involved. A short story is a singular piece of creation, one with its quirks, its complexities, its philosophies, intact. Such a piece of work is successful when it is able to convey to its reader a large part of what its writer has tried to put into it. I deliberately use the words "large part" because I believe that every creation is open-ended, not only because every reader interprets it from his or her individual perspective but also because the writer struggles as well with his own mind and art to convey in a story all that he would like to. Therefore, to my mind, we read a story the way we are able to, perhaps not entirely as the writer intended. This gap between the processes of writing and reading is an important one. As translators it is essential that we understand this and remain alert to it on all counts.

To extend this point further, I would like to say that each effort at creating something, whether writing a story, or translating it, is also, paradoxically, a

way of fixing meaning to certain ideas. After all, translations involve, at least in the first count, a word-by-word conversion of the source language into the target language. It is only after a first draft, in some cases after numerous drafts, that the translator begins to read this re-creation in the spirit of how it stands on its own. This is the start of a new stage to the process, one where the translator pays attention to this new version as something that is independent of its original. The source story and the translated story must ultimately stand as two separate pieces of work. This is not to say that the translation should not ever reflect back to its original, or that the translator should erase every trace of that first piece, but it is important to remember that the translated story is a work on its own and this sense must be conveyed to all readers.

It was a particularly difficult task working with Afsar Ahmed's *Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur*. I took up the story because it was gripping. And to me it expressed the predicament that most of us are in, though we either do not understand or will not acknowledge the truth of our situation. I certainly have felt myself transit through long phases of "meaninglessness". We could, of course, interpret this word according to our own situations. This feeling grips us not only in profound ways but also in everyday, mundane moments. We may be sitting around a table, a group of friends, talking animatedly over dinner when suddenly we slump back. It hits us that we are talking a lot but do not know why. What is it that starts us on such energized conversations, to perhaps dissect the ills of the world, when we have absolutely no capacity to change the course that the universe is taking? Or when we perceive ourselves as the speck we are in this vast universe. Is our existence meaningless? Is everything around us ultimately negative and hopeless?

Perhaps, our experiences are meant to teach us that meaninglessness is part of our lives, and yet we must journey on. It is essential for us to find meaning, to be positive. To end our lives is not the answer. It is, as in the story. The stairs, though we have no clear understanding as to where they appear from, lead us back to a cocoon of familiarity, of safety and comfort. They stand for the secure, that which leads us home, something which will help us wade through the mass of meaninglessness to find, once more, the need and reason to move on. A variety of feelings are implicit in the gory mention of the young boy's suicide. He kills himself inexplicably; his tragic end forever darkens the lives of his parents. The shadows from his life and home extend over the home and lives of the inhabitants of S–7 as well. And yet it affords some comic relief. The narrator's acquaintance finds himself at a strange door, consoling the parents of a dead son he never knew. And, the trilling of a bird fills the house with a sound which fits poorly in a house of death. It is this jumble of emotions, of events, which make up life. And, to me, this is what the story is trying to convey.

There are some inexplicable aspects to the story. For instance, the case of the narrator's friend; perhaps, acquaintance would be a word better suited. If he is a friend, he should know his friend's address. So how does he mistake S–7 for N–7? Has the narrator done the impossible, called this person up to convey the news of his own death? How do we look at these instances in the plot? Do these reinforce the meaninglessness that the story is trying to convey? My advice would be that though we must interpret the details of the story, we should do so with caution and not to such an extent that it chips away at the "meaningless" core.

I see Ahmed giving us a story which speaks of the lives we lead everyday, a mix of snatches of sense, with periods of incomprehension. What makes no sense to the narrator himself, makes much sense to his wife, who reads in his incoherence a logic of her own. On the other hand, is the policeman who comprehends the narrator's insensible grouping of words in a way that he can draw joy out of it. In between all the meaningless incantations are questions about the state, the system, democracy, the ills that plague modern society, and so on. The juxtaposition of two such variant streams of thought, perhaps, highlights what the writer understands of life. The story, in fact, makes me recall the idea of "deference", of "slippages", which show how meaning hides in the crevices of words and sentences, or how the true meaning is always "deferred", something that we may attempt to reach but which always slips out of grip. The title of the story, *Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur*, uses three words which are very familiar and close to the Bengali heart. Individually, they convey sense; together they become "non-sense". Their continuous chorus through the story forces us to look for their "purpose". We are unable to dismiss them or their relevance. The narrator himself vacillates between periods of no-sense and phases of lucidity. After all, he does not have the complete luxury of slipping into "meaninglessness"; the world awaits him — in the form of his wife, his daughter, the policeman, the friend.

To me, the story plays very interestingly with certain everyday ideas that we don't normally think about. When the narrator's wife and daughter return home, they continue to ring the bell. But it does not occur to them that the door may be unlatched and a small push will open it. To them, the certainty that doors are meant to be latched is more valid than the effort needed to give the matter fresh thought. On the other side, the narrator, aware that he has left the door open, is amazed that the situation does not appear different to anyone but himself. In fact, when he strings random words together, he knows that they mean nothing. But his wife reads situations and excuses in what he says. If we think carefully, this is normal behaviour for most of us. The spirit of positive questioning is sometimes missing from us. We accept unthinkingly. Perhaps, to Ahmed, this is "meaninglessness".

To me, such a story is ultimately a reader's story. Each of us will understand it as our situation and perspective permits. To some, and I think back to discussions I've had on the story, the challenge is to dissect each word to unearth exactly what the writer is trying to say. I have nothing against such an attempt. Personally, however, I would like to allow the story to seep into my being, without becoming overly burdened by each little bit in it. I wish to understand my own world, as well as the one around me, as I think Ahmed would like us to. One that is riddled with problems, one that is imperfect, one that makes no sense at times, and yet one that helps us to live and be who we are.

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed a story which has a powerful idiom. It has different genres jostle with each other to depict the intelligent rationality of a seemingly unintelligible man taking recourse to meaningless expressions and mad behaviour. We fathom out reasons for the narrator's counter provoking behaviour and see the reasons behind his consciously staged split madness. What is paradoxical about the story is that madness is a weapon of sanity for up keeping one's bearings in the wake of upheavals in society. We have also seen the three dimensional effect of words when used in particular contexts. Lastly, we have also seen that a short story need not contain itself by strict modalities of plot character and theme. A writer if he so chooses can work out various possibilities within the genre as is unfolded by the story *Headmaster. Prawn, Chanachur*. The story frightens and bewilders us even as it enchants us. It obviously has a multidimensional effect on us.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the persona of Arupda.
2. What are the reasons that provoke the narrator to take recourse to seemingly mad behaviour?
3. How do people surrounding Arupda react to his insanity?
4. How does Arupda's insanity gets thwarted?
5. What is the role of the police in the story?
6. What event in the story leads you to think that that was the height of Arupda's stage-act of insanity?
7. In what way is the verse in the story utterly poetic?
8. Discuss the character of Pramita.
9. Do Arupda and Pramita present a picture of harmony or are they discordant?
10. What lend humor to the story?
11. Write the story from Pramita's point of view or Tinni's point of view.

UNIT 4 VIJAYDAN DETHA : *THE COMPROMISE* TRANSLATOR : SHYAM MATHUR

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Vijaydan Detha : An Introduction
4.3 Origins of Rajasthani
4.4 Relationship between Hindi and Rajasthani
4.5 Detha's Contribution to the Development of Rajasthani
4.6 Detha's Use of the Format of Folktale
4.7 Detha's Writing on Folktale Literature
4.8 Tradition in Rajasthani Literature
4.9 Introducing the Story
  4.9.1 Discussion
  4.9.2 Significance of the Title
4.10 Let Us Sum Up
4.11 Glossary
4.12 Questions
4.13 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you

1.

- will know about the life and work of the Rajasthani writer Vijaydan Detha,
- the contribution of Detha to Rajasthani Literature,
- the form of the folktale. Also, you will know how a modern reader today reads these folktales,
- the special features of Vijaydan Detha's writings on folktales,
- detailed information about the tradition of Rajasthani Literature.

2.

- Next, the unit will also discuss the theme, characters and purpose of the story, *Compromise*, and its aesthetic qualities,
- and finally the significance of the title of the story.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The story 'Rajeenavo' is one of Vijaydan Detha's original stories. Detha is a renowned writer in Rajasthani. This story is symbolic and depicts the gradual decline of a person into corruption. It has different stages in its development. In the beginning the protagonist appears strange and funny. Later we see him transformed into a profound and troubled being. Before we discuss the meaning and aesthetics of this story, familiarizing ourselves with Vijaydan Detha a little more would be helpful.

4.2 VIJAYDAN DETHA : AN INTRODUCTION

Vijaydan Detha was born on 1st September 1926 in village Borunda, district Jodhpur. The village is on the border of Nagaur district. The language spoken here is the Marwari dialect of the Rajasthani language. Detha's writings are in Marwari. It is a village with a Jat majority, and also includes people belonging to the Nai, Kumhar, Khati, Meghwal, Sunar and Rajput castes. Many of the characters of Detha's folktales belong to one or the other of these castes. Very few people in the village are educated. The majority are still illiterate and are well-versed in their oral folk literature traditions.

Detha belongs to the Charan caste which has traditionally had close links with literature and the royal courts. Writing and reciting poetry was a tradition in Detha's home too. His father and grandfather were well versed in the traditions of Charan literature. They were connoisseurs in the art of conversation, and were therefore held in high esteem in the village.

His early education was in Jaitaran, Jodhpur. For higher education he went to Jodhpur town. Here he began his writing career in Hindi. Later in 1953 he returned to Borunda village and decided to write in Rajasthani. In 1960, he and Komal Kothari founded the Rupayan Sansthan for bringing together and developing Rajasthani folk literature, and brought out a fourteen volumes collection of Rajasthani folk stories, *Bataan ri Phulwadi* (A Garden of Folktales). This constitutes one of the many achievements of his literary career. In no other language is there a collection of folktales of such discrimination and taste. The full depth and range of his creative capacities are present in this collection. For the tenth book of this collection he got from the Sahitya Akadami in 1974 the first ever award given by it to the Rajasthani language.

Besides the collection, collation and editing of folk stories, he has also re-written some folktales. Some critics do not consider this exercise of re-writing folktales particularly fruitful. The rewriting, they think, has neither led to the survival of the folktale in its original form, nor can it be counted as an original piece of writing. But Detha himself is of the opinion that this kind of writing should be counted as original work of his. He says that his re-writing follows the style of folktales, and that the resulting product is his own, not conditioned by the folk content. The Rajasthani critic Rameshwardayal Shrimali says:

"Though basically all these are folktales, the stylistic treatment given by the author has made a considerable change in their texture. To derive different conclusions from the existing forms of some of these tales, the author has given twists and turns to the prevalent text, thus trying to superimpose his own ideals. Apart from merits of literary workmanship in such attempts, it is a tragedy that the originality of the tales has been set aside". (Citation of Sahitya Akadami Awards, 1974).

Besides these re-writings Detha has also written, as we said earlier, stories of his own, stories that are his original compositions. These too he wrote in Rajasthani which he later translated into Hindi. After the publication in Hindi of *Duvidha and Other Stories* (The Dilemma and Other Stories) and the collection of stories *Uljhan*, (Perplexity) fame on an all-India level came to him. Some stories of these collections too are based on folk stories. The main themes of his narrative are thus familiar. Some other stories, however, deal with themes hitherto not dealt with.

Detha's stories have been translated into Hindi, English, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya, Bengali and Urdu. These translations are read with great interest and have been greatly commended. Film producers, theatre directors and TV serial makers have had their eyes on his works. The recently released film 'Paheli' (2005) is based on a folktale. Mani Kaul also had made a film on this very folktale in 1973. Many of his stories have been staged in various cities of the country. Besides, he has travelled extensively in France, Belgium, China, Germany, Russia and other countries.

Thus, we can sum up the discussion so far as follows:

1. A major part of Vijaydan Detha's writing is linked to folktales.
2. Another aspect of his work is his re-writing of folktales and his efforts to give them new meanings.
3. A third aspect of his writing is original composition, wherein he creates stories from his own imagination.
4. Some of his stories have been brought to the stage as plays, while some others have been made into films and TV serials.

4.3 ORIGINS OF RAJASTHANI

At this point we have to understand where the origins of Rajasthani lie, and where it gets its vocabulary from.

Rajasthani is one of the prominent languages of the Indo-Aryan family. It is spoken by around eighty million people (total number of speakers 36 million as of Census of India 2001) in Rajasthan and other states of India. It has eight dialects: Bagri, Shekhawati, Mewati, Dhundhari, Harauti, Marwari, Mewari and Wagri. Most of these dialects are chiefly spoken in the state of Rajasthan and adjacent parts of Gujarat, in the Malwaand Nimar regions of western Madhya Pradesh, and the Pakistani provinces of Panjab and Sind. Rajasthani language is classified in the Central Zone of the Indo-Aryan languages, which also includes Hindi and Urdu. Some of the Rajasthani dialects are considered by some to be dialects of Hindi. However many linguists agree that Rajasthani is a different language from Hindi at the phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical levels.

The four most important dialects of Rajasthani language are:

Marwari. The ancient name of Marwari is Maru. It is widely spoken in Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Barmer, Nagaur, Pali, Sikar, Ganganagar and Ajmer districts. Marwari Literature includes the specialty of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apbhrans.

Mewati. Mewati is widely spoken in the North West part of Alwar-Bharatpur and Gurgaon. It is highly influenced by Brij.

Vagari. It is widely spoken in the southern part of Mewar. It is highly influenced by Gujarati.

Dhundhari. Dhundhari is spoken in Jaipur, Dosa, Tonk and Sawai Madhopur. The sublanguage of Dhu dhari called Hadoati is spoken in Kota, Bundi Baran and Jhalawar. It is equally influenced by Gujarati and Marwari.

Rajasthani has a vast literature in various genres starting from 1000 A.D. In the past, the language spoken in Rajasthan was regarded as a dialect of western Hindi (Kellogg, 1873). George Abraham Grierson (1908) was the first scholar who gave the nomenclature 'Rajasthani' to the language, which was earlier known through its various dialects. Today, however, the Sahitya Akadami (National Academy of Letters) and the University Grants Commission recognize it as a distinct language. It is also taught as such in the universities of Jodhpur and Udaipur. The Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education included Rajasthani in the course of studies and it has been an optional subject since 1973. But, there is a long way for Rajasthani language to go. The reason is that it lacks a comprehensive reference grammar and latest dictionary prepared based on a thorough linguistic survey of Rajasthan. Now an extensive descriptive grammar of Rajasthani is under preparation. (Rajasthani languages — Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

The Rajasthani language includes words from Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Parsi, Gujarati and Panjabi. Words from many other folk dialects of Hindi are also found in it.

Two views are expressed about the Rajasthani language. Most observers are of the view that Rajasthani developed from the Shaurseni Apabhramsha. Some supporters of Rajasthani, however, do not agree here. V.L Maliney, writing his 'History of Rajasthani Literature', sees it as a people's language. According to him its earlier name was Maru Bhasha. Composed in 778, the 'Kuvalachmaley' is the first source of information about the features of the language of Maru Pradesh. Many linguists are of the view that the Rajasthani language had its birth sometime around the fifth century, but no notable composition of those times has yet been found. ('The History of Rajasthani Literature', Page 7, Rachna Prakashan, Jaipur, 2004). But what is certain is that Rajasthani finds mention for the first time in the second part of the ninth book of Grierson's 'Linguistic Survey of India'.

Because this language has been always spoken among the people, the influence of words from the neighbouring languages is clearly imprinted in it. Words from Gujarati, Malwi and Panjabi are present for this reason of proximity. Many words are straight usages of the Sanskrit terms, such as 'neer', meaning water. Because of the influence of the Sufis many Arabic and Persian words have also got absorbed in Rajasthani.

4.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HINDI AND RAJASTHANI

In any consideration of Rajasthani as a part of Indian literature, some facts have to be borne in mind. One is that Rajasthani is not a language in the sense that Bengali, Oriya, Marathi and Tamil are. These are languages in their own right. They have a set and standard form. They have a grammar of their own, a literature of their own, and also a tradition of literature. But Rajasthani is still involved in the exercise of becoming a language in its own right. It has still to acquire a settled form for itself. It has still to evolve rules of grammar. It is one among the many supporting languages of Hindi, such as Braj, Avadhi and Bhojpuri. Therefore all these languages have to be considered within the framework of Hindi. Besides, Hindi is a little apart from the other Indian languages. Unlike them it is not spoken just in one state but in five states. In addition, in Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore and Calcutta it is also used in trade, commerce, cinema, tourism and journalism.

At the 58th session of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan which year speaking about the pre-eminent position of Hindi, Ashok Vajpeyi said in his presidential address. "According to the report of the Population Commission of India, Hindi is not just one language but a family of forty six languages. This means that Hindi speaks through these forty six languages". Elaborating on the mutual relations between Hindi and these forty six languages, (of which Rajasthani is one) he said, "It appears that within the last few decades the relations between Hindi and its sister languages have become increasingly difficult. Till the nineteenth century the mainstream of Hindi literature consisted of the literatures written in Maithili, Braj, Avadhi, Rajasthani and other tributary languages. But from the beginning of the twentieth century, the creative work in these languages has been more or less exiled from the terrain of modern Hindi literature. It is accepted that the true strength of Hindi lies in those words which are used in the local languages — their impure or corrupted forms, and the biggest fount of such words is in the dialects. It is not a matter of chance that even today a special feeling of intimacy comes in to the language when a writer, whether in story, poem, play or novel, uses words from these dialect-languages". If we study and reflect on these observations, we come to the following conclusions:

1. Rajasthani is a dialect of Hindi.
2. It is evolving from a dialect into a language.
3. In the process of this evolution the relations between Hindi and Rajasthani are becoming uneasy.

It should be understood here that what is meant by Hindi is the present day form of it, the form known as Khadi Boli. It is the standard, recognized form, and is the medium of thought and expression of educated Indians. It is the medium that the newspapers, radio, television and films employ for their purposes. Along with this, in all the Hindi states there is also a supporting language in use. Its use is limited to the particular area. Both the educated and the uneducated sections use it and converse in it too. It too has its own literature, tradition, and thinking. In addition to these characteristics this language has a reservoir of oral literature not available in Khadi Boli Hindi. We can call it folk literature. This vast material lives in the realm of folk

memory. In some languages, some segments of this vast oral unwritten literature has been scripted and made available to educated readers. Some are in the process of being scripted. Some others are vanishing too. Such vanishing of the literature of memory is going on fast in the whole country. Side by side with the spread of education and literacy this process of disappearance is taking place. For the culture-and-tradition-conscious people this is a worrysome phenomenon.

I would like to point out again that Khadi Boli Hindi has no folk literature of its own. For its needs of folk literary material it has to depend on these other local languages. In such a situation anyone engaged in the difficult and important task of writing down and scripting this vast reservoir of spoken literature, earns the respect and admiration of the entire Hindi world. This is the task that Vijaydan Detha has accomplished in Rajasthani literature.

4.5 DETHA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAJASTHANI

Broadly speaking, with the advent of the communication revolution and the internet, almost all the languages of the world are faced with the problem of survival. But the folk languages' struggle for survival began earlier, with the development of Khadi Boli Hindi. They had to prove themselves in the face of Khadi Boli. An anti-Hindi attitude thus developed amongst them. Because of this attitude, the Rajasthani poets, on the one hand, refused to learn anything from Hindi: and on the other, at the same time, they tried to imitate Hindi. Thus, they brought an evolving language into competition with an evolved language. In addition, they had to answer the charges made against the language. The biggest charge against this dialect evolving into a language was that it was as yet a mixture of various other dialects such as Mewati, Marwadi, and Shekhawati. That, it hadn't yet stabilized into a standard form. And without a form it had no grammar either, the opponents said. A dialect has no grammar. And without grammar a language does not exist.

The solution to this conflict and these charges will come only from writing. A language gains a standard form only from being written and the creation of literature in it. And it is only then that it develops a grammar. From this point of view the contribution of Vijaydan Detha is outstanding. Through his compilation of folk stories in fourteen volumes, namely, 'Bataan Ri Phulwadi' (A Garden of Folktales) he has established a standard and universally accepted form of Rajasthani. He does not tell the story. The telling is done by someone else. He has given an alphabet to an oral tradition, given it a script, given it permanence, given it immortality. He has made it, not just nationally, but internationally acclaimed. Everything that was preserved within the throats of the folk, he has transposed on to paper. This has by no means been an easy task.

In this way Detha has ensured the continued existence of an extremely mutable and changeable genre. He has given it a new form. Otherwise it would have gone into collective oblivion. Modernity and development have made the world lose memory. They have stolen memory from folk memory. Vijaydan Detha has rescued folk literature from this certain destruction. This is a wonderful achievement. And this wonderful achievement is helping Rajasthani develop from a dialect to a language. A standard form of it is taking shape.

4.6 DETHA'S USE OF THE FORMAT OF FOLKTALE

We shall now try to understand the form given to the folktales by Vijaydan Detha's scripting it and writing it down. The first noteworthy fact about these stories is that they have vignettes of pre-British India, or say, have depictions of a pre-capitalist society. There are rajas and maharajas, pandits, banias, barbers, dhobis, gypsies, farmers and labourers, ranis and slave girls, coming in as characters. Wealthy seths and seths' wives are present in them, but no capitalist. There is trade, but no industry and no industrialists. The deceptions of the seths' wives and the seths' trickeries are there, but not the exploitations indulged in by the capitalists. There are no cannons, guns, bombs, injections, medical capsules, cars and telephones. Thus, in the folktales a world that had vanished fully, is reborn. For the contemporary reader thus, this is the creation of an unrecognized unknown world. And the tales also afford the joy of seeing recreated a forgotten vanished world. You also can call it the joy of history. You can also derive pleasure from it by seeing it as the storehouse of antiquity.

Reading these stories you can also get the sense of release from your times, from the realms of the present. However joyous and heavenly the present, the pain, the loneliness and unease it breeds can lead to states of depression and heavy non-communication. Entering the world of these stories you are transported out of your context, and gain a sense of release from the present. And then, the characters of the folkstories are not bound by time. They are human likenesses gone beyond the pull of gravity of time. They can come alive within us in different forms. But they may not. We can just as well be wonder struck by seeing them in their given forms. We can thus say that the time depicted in the folk story is timeless, the characters are of all times, and the country portrayed in them goes beyond geography. These are values not available in modern creative literature.

In the folk story is contained spoken literature, and this literature keeps gathering body and mass in folk memory. After receiving it from the preceding generation earlier, the succeeding generation commits it by heart, adds its own experiences to it, and hands it over to the generation after. This tradition goes on without break. We can thus say that folk stories carry the live experiences of many generations. It can also be said that they are not the creation of any one individual. Each person is a listener first, and the same listener becomes the narrator-creator and narrates the folktale to another. Because it is based on memory, it has no heavy descriptions, pointless lamentations or complex philosophical discourses. The story moves easily towards its aims. Language chases it, jogs at its heels to keep track of it.

Grammar, theory and discipline get left behind in the folktale. The language gains ease, flow and animation without effort. Dialogue is so lively that understanding comes on the heels of utterance — saying and understanding are inseparable, like thunder and lightning. Momentum is all important. Anything worth its salt has to move forward, has an inherent forward motion. Rigidity and inertness fall behind and melt away eventually. The folk story, thus, has the capacity to attract and contain within itself the hearts and minds of successive generations.

The narrator of the folk tale is of special importance. He is a man adept in speaking, adept in adapting his voice to the many characters he has to portray, has psychological insights into people and events, is a man of vast experience. He has to be all this. Only then will he understand the finer points of the story, and only then will he be able to communicate it to his listeners. As the story-teller he has to be even more engaging than the story he is telling — only then will he be able to keep his listeners spell bound. We can thus say that the story-teller has to have a creative capacity. The world of the story he is telling will not come alive in the absence of such talent. Any or every one cannot be a story-teller, no matter how deep his understanding of the story is. A run of the mill telling will make even a good story go heavy.

Since the folk story is pre-modern, its characters and the story tellers, and the audience are all illiterate. To bring them into the sphere of literates, at the same time keeping intact the beauty of the world of the illiterates is a difficult task. Not everybody can do it. For doing it, a thorough inside understanding of the worlds of both the literate and the illiterate is necessary. The story-teller and the story writer demand different kinds of capacities. The contents and contexts of oral literature are different from those of written literature. By casting oral literature into a written form the contents often undergo a change.

4.7 DETHA'S WRITINGS ON FOLKTALE LITERATURE

We can now consider Vijaydan Detha again. He is not an ideal story-teller. It is possible that he fails to preserve the beauty of the story while telling it. It is possible that he turns out a bad story teller. But he has the skill to change the oral tale into the written form. He is careful to retain the basic oral flavour of it. If Detha's written folktale is sung to music the beauty of its folk character will float out. Everyone cannot do this.

His friend Chagan Mohta repeatedly said about Detha and his work on folktales, 'If Bijjo Bhai forgets his obsession with folk stories and steers his pen in the direction of the stories of the Mahabharat and the Upanishads, it will make for joy all round'. Vijaydan Detha himself believes and says : 'I do not work half heartedly at anything once I have undertaken to do it, even if it is the task of sweeping with broom and brush. Every task has its own creative code and dharma, and it has to be done by the hands of the mind' (ibid 24).

Two kinds of people read Detha. They are those who have already heard the stories that he has put into words. For them this is a minor job in the task of compiling the stories. But Detha's compilation is no minor job because no other language in this country has a more complete compilation than his. The second kind of readers of Detha are those who read the stories for the first time through Detha's rendering. For them his writing is unprecedented and wonderful, in the presence of which creative writing, so-called, is a pigmy. So when Detha was published in Hindi he was greeted with resounding cheers from all the Hindi states. That is why Detha keeps feeling that his own state has treated him cruelly. In 'Roonkh' he states this fact with immense pain. 'No writer can ever have suffered such savage attacks on his work by his own state, by the people of his own language'.

A second fact, as pointed out earlier, is that modernity has led to the fading of folk stories. The full store of our folk literature, of our memory-based

literature, is going extinct. As this process of extinction goes on, the significance of Detha's work shows up more and more. The only way to save folk literature is by harnessing it to the written word and having it in print.

The task of transforming memory into the printed word has its own challenges. It is a test of the writer's command over language. The critics who have lauded Detha have showered fulsome praise on his linguistic ability.

Rameshwar Dayal Shrimali said in his nominating note for the Sahitya Akadami award, 'He has a good command over language and knows it well to use the appropriate phraseology decked with fitting idioms and proverbs. He also knows how to coin words suitable to his needs and gives them a local colour which may be difficult to be singled out even by the discerning eye'. Writing on the English translation of the folk stories transcripted by Detha, Deepa Aggarwal says in 'Book Review', Volume xxi, No 8, 'Vijaydan Detha's richness of language, his poetic use of simile and metaphor, which add so much to the reading pleasure of these stories, the pithy statements that punctuate them, have been more than adequately rendered into English'.

4.8 TRADITION IN RAJASTHANI LITERATURE

If we consider this literature from the viewpoint of tradition, that is consider it along with the other languages of the Hindi belt, we have to keep in mind two or three factors.

The first of these is that the standard language of the early literature of Hindi, (roughly from the tenth century to the fourteenth century) has been *Dingal*. Dingal is an ancient form of Rajasthani. The whole of the literature of the early eras, filled with tales of heroism and valour is available only in this language. After this, in the Bhakti period, the Bhakti Kal of Hindi literature, Meerabai's compositions are conspicuous for their depictions of the life and culture of Rajasthan. But of course after Surdas, Braj Bhasha practically became the accepted language of all of Hindi literature. All the literary works written in Riti Kal, are in Braj Bhasha. The poets of Rajasthan too wrote in Braj Bhasha. For example, the noteworthy poet of this period, Bihari, was the court poet of the Jaipur royal house, and his language was Braj Bhasha. From the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries all the literature produced in Rajasthani was what could be called for want of a better term Rajasthani. It did not win literary recognition.

Ever since the advent of the modern period in Hindi, Khari Boli replaced Braj Bhasha as the language of literature, and also won recognition for itself. Khadi Boli developed as the language of Hindi literature, as the standard medium of thought, journalism, administration, politics — of all spheres practically. This affected literary activities in the other languages of the Hindi belt. They lapsed into their former state as dialects. While folk literature is available in them in plenty, the number of nationally recognized, creative writers began dwindling. The successful initiation of the process of reestablishing these dialects as languages was made only with Detha's compiling of folktales. Detha gave this task a luster. It was an outstanding job.

As far as fiction writing in Rajasthani is concerned, it made its appearance very late in the post-Independence period. Very few writers showed interest in the writing of stories and novels. Among the early well known fiction writers in Rajasthani are Annaram Sudama, Nrisingh Rajpurohit, Yadavendra Sharma Chandra, all of them contemporaries of Vijaydan Detha. Next in importance comes Sanwar Daiya, who has written some noteworthy stories. Among contemporary writers Malchandra Tiwadi and Bharat Ola are particularly worthy of mention.

Vijaydan Detha turned to creative writing much later after his compilation and editing of folktales. Because of his early and prolonged involvement with folktales, influence of the folk in style and form is marked in his stories. He is finding it difficult to come out of the trammels of the folktale.

Abstracting the line of his creativity from the mass of his writings, Vijaydan Detha says: "In the very first book of *Phulwadi*, with absolutely clean intentions and my senses whole, I called it *Rajasthan Ri Kadeemee* Lok *Kathawan*. (The Ancient Folktales of Rajasthan). This title went on till the tenth book. I never felt the need to give it a second thought. Apart from a few writers in Rajasthani "I have not read or seen anyone asking, — what kind of a writer is 'Bijji'. All that he's written are tradition-soaked folktales. He knows it himself that the folktales of Rajasthan have been written times without number and have vanished without a trace. He thinks the one line he's written in 'Phulwadi' is the greatest and irrefutable proof of his prowess". To date I have not made any answer to these people's illogic, envy, heartburn and small minded-ness"

Then, discussing other writers basing their works on folk traditions, he said, "Albert Camus's play 'Cross Purpose' is based on a folk tale, and the play has its own place among the plays of the world. Many writers in the Indian languages have based their works on stories from the Ramayan and Mahabharat, the Upanishads and the Puranas, which have won awards too. Most of the Kannada plays of Girish Karnad are based on folktales, and he is ranked high among Indian playwrights". ('Loksmriti' Page 84-85, December 2005)

4.9 INTRODUCING THE STORY

After this familiarization we have built up with Vijaydan Detha and his links with the Rajasthani language and literature, we are in a position to read the story.

First of all, we shall focus on the outward form of the story. The story is written in the style of an autobiography, and it wants to impress on the reader that the writer is keen on making the reader participate in his experience. The story is set in Jodhpur, and its events take place in the students' hostel of the Charans. Before going further, it is necessary to know that in Rajasthan the leaders of every caste have built hostels for the students of their caste. Charan students' hostel, Bishnoi students' hostel, Rajput students' hostel, Farmer students' hostel (which is the hostel of the Jats) and so on. The elders and intellectuals of the respective castes are frequent visitors to these students' hostels. In Rajasthan this is a common, formal and accepted practice. Because the writer is a Charan, his visits to the Charan students' hostel is but natural.

The main character of the story, Aaskaran too, is a Charan, even though his caste denomination has no effect on the story. He could be of any caste, could be any one. In the same way, the story telling "I" too, could be of any caste, any individual. He is an uncommon individual and individuals like him are always interesting to one and all. People talk about him, say many things about him, and according to the "I" what they are doing is right.

The strange habit of the protagonist is that when he stands at the mirror he passes into a state of dialoguing seriously and honestly with his image in the mirror. Whatever Aaskaran does, the Aaskaran outside the mirror quizzes the Aaskaran inside it. Quite clearly the Aaskaran outside the mirror levels charges of various kinds against the Aaskaran inside, and, the Aaskaran inside tries to clear himself of the charges.

The story moves slowly. We get to know Aaskaran to some extent. And then, in the story some extra human elements come up. These probably have come in from the writer's association with folktales. Detha has put these elements to good, aesthetic use. To the Aaskaran outside, the Aaskaran inside seems a being either horned like a goat, or long-eared like a donkey. These images go away but the tension between the "two selves" increases day by day. The self inside is told off roughly, is threatened everyday. A point comes when Aaskaran outside has reached the limits of tolerance with his image inside. He wants to settle things finally. They decide, eventually, to smash the mirror, and this way the Aaskaran outside stops all talk and conversation with the one inside. A compromise is struck between the two and the story ends. In other words the voice of conscience is not active any more. It is stilled forever. The story teller makes his appearance again here, and elaborates on the compromise. He tells us that in time Aaskaran has now become a police thanedar. And the rumour is, he says, that he has made lakhs of rupees and become filthy rich. This is the last sentence.

4.9.1 Discussion

Let us now consider the story again, after this cursory consideration of it. We shall try to get to the inner meaning of it. What does the writer want to convey through the story? Has he been able to say it in a telling way? Where does the message of the story lie? What is the momentum of the story like? Is it a realistic story? Does it or does it not succeed in expressing the real through the medium of the unreal? I am sure many such questions arise in your mind. Not only do they arise in your mind, they arise, from within the story. And this is exactly perhaps what the writer wants. How and where does an ordinary event become a story? This is something we feel compelled to find out.

The first thing to realize is that this is a not a descriptive story even though it may seem like one. Its aim is *not* to inform the reader about strange happenings. It is a symbolic story. The bizarre-seeming ordinary events have a different meaning. The main character is coping with his inner voice, the voice of his conscience. As long as he is engaged thus, it is a descriptive account, not a story. The story shapes out after the end of the story, when the compromise is struck, when the problem is no more, when the duality finishes. When non-duality is established? And then, Aaskaran, hale and hearty, through with his worries, eats, drinks, and makes his lakhs. He has silenced his *atma* shining and pure like the mirror. He plucks out of himself the sense

of right and wrong that was nagging him, threatening him. What does he do then? What kinds of deeds, good and bad, doable and undoable does he do? The writer says nothing about these. And it is in all the things he does not say that the story lies. All that we are told is that he has become a thanedar and has made lots and lots of money. We can thus say that the story is made by the last sentence, or because of the last sentence.

The beginning of the story consists of simple, description-based situations. The "I" of the story teller does the telling. He tells of a man who is not acceptable to society. He is a strange man. People do not like him because he is given to doing things that are not the norm, not typical. When the "I" tells his listeners about him, he seems to be in agreement with the people. But the last sentence of the story makes it clear that it is only the a-typical, the non-standard, that is right: it makes it clear that the typical, standard people have become dehuman, and that dehumanisation has become acceptable to society. The a-typical man too gradually becomes typical and indistinguishable from the others.

Till this point it looks as if the first person narrator is the main character, and that Aaskaran is not. He is but an example of comic idiocies, we feel. The writer regards him thus too, and shows him thus in the story. Gradually, as the "I" talks with increasing familiarity about Aaskaran, he — the "I" — disappears. But there are always two characters in the story. So far the two were Aaskaran and the "I", but now Aaskaran has got divided into two selves that are in a state of dialogue with each other. The dialogue becomes a conflict, and because of this conflict, in the mirror image too strange and idiotic changes begin to take place. Soon, however, a compromise is reached between the two selves. At this point. You feel the story is practically over, that there's nothing left to say. A sharp jerk, the mirror cracks, and there, the story is over!

The story takes a new turn with the idiotic and comic antics of Aaskaran, as he sits before the mirror in deep dialogue. Till now, the story teller was with him. He is not needed any more. Aaskaran is grave, solemn. The man outside is giving a sharp talking to, to the man inside. The man inside is defending himself with equal gravity and solemnity. One man, with two selves within him. The author is grappling with both. Gradually a human truth emerges from this situation. The tension between the two selves rises. Strange things happen in this climate of tension, as we pointed out earlier. A donkey's ears or a goat's face appears on the image in the mirror. This is unreal. But in a symbolic sense it is also real. Donkeys' ears and goats' faces are not unreal. The real and the unreal blend in such a way that the unreal seems real. At times it even seems that the unreal is the *real* real, the solid, tangible real. The so-called real, is just so-called, is superficial. If the story was purely realistic, if the image in the mirror hadn't had the ears of the donkey or the face of the goat, it would have been weak. This unreality has made the story strong and arresting. This treatment brings out Vijaydan Detha as a story writer as his best.

Between the self and the image, then, the dialogue goes on. In the initial stages of the dialogue, a conflict is portrayed between the self as an obedient being, faithful to the do's and don'ts taught by his parents, and the self falling prey to the pulls of the senses. It looks as if the traditional morality is resisting the liberal impulses of contemporary outlook. As the story unfolds, the self in the mirror frees himself from the pull of the other self. He becomes a full-

fledged character, who has to be either accepted or destroyed. When the tension between the two comes to this point, the self turns round and cuts the cord with his mirror image, with the value-bound, scruple-filled being who harries him from the mirror. He smashes the mirror, smashes his better self. The story should have ended at this point. But it goes a step farther. Freed of his mirror image, the self gives full rein to the impulses of bribery, corruption and get-rich-quick strategies. Exactly what he does is not made clear, but his possessions run in to lakhs. As long as the image in the mirror was there, there were checks, restraints, there was morality. Now that the image is not there, which means that his voice of conscience has been silenced which means that he has reached a compromise with himself. His decline is complete.

4.9.2 Significance of the Title

We shall now talk about the title of the story. The dictionary meaning of the word 'compromise' is 'an agreement to end conflict'. In the story, there are two parties, both in opposition to each other. Both come to realize the futility of opposition, and arrive at a compromise to break the mirror. Each sees the other's point of view. Both accept what is good for each other and come to terms with each other. The conflict ceases. Moral scruples end, and the field is left clear for immoral activities.

What this means is that as long as the mirror was there, the reflection in the mirror was looking on, and the voice of conscience was clear and heard. With the breaking of the mirror, the voice of conscience goes, it becomes muted, and the inner conflict ends. This is where the meaning of the story comes in. This meaning enters the story in a most imperceptible way, which one can almost overlook. As said before, the main character of the story is strange, eccentric, given to acting in the strangest manner. He is not ordinary. What then, is ordinary?

In terms of the story the ordinary man is one who is corrupt and immoral. He is a man who suffers no remorse at his corrupt deeds. His soul does not reprimand him. Nobody considers him strange. In the beginning of the story when he dialogues with his reflection everybody considers him strange, touched in the head. As he grows older, proceeds towards adulthood from childhood, distances begin between him and his reflection. Debates take place between the two. One character becomes two independent personalities. Their dialogues turn into conflict. As the story unfolds the conflict intensifies. The inner self, contrite and pleading, commits errors one after the other. The outer self becomes aggressive, threatens him under the pretext of making him see reason. At this stage the story takes a turn. The reflection changes form. It is not the images of the outer self. It becomes somebody else — the strange and the wondrous make their appearance here. Aaskaran now begins seeing in the mirror sometimes a donkey, sometimes a goat complete with long ears and protruding snout. Here the story develops further. The characters develop. The relationship of the two selves of the main character changes, and the first breaks the mirror to wipe out the very existence of the second, and the medium of their contact.

Now there's no one left to cross-question him, ask him uncomfortable questions. If this is taken to be the compromise, it takes place by the wiping out of all dialogue and communication. The very medium of the dialogue is

broken. There is no dialogue, no questioning presence, and the self can get down in earnest to the business of money-making, untroubled by questioning voices. But the story doesn't end here. It goes farther. And when it is about to end we recall its beginning. We remember that the writer had designated Aaskaran a strange and bizarre fellow. At that time he is alive to the voice of the reflection, to the voices of true values. But at the end of the story nobody calls him bizarre, strange, abnormal. He is considered 'normal', no more strange and bizarre. He has amassed lakhs. He has made his compromise with himself. The writer does not say this anywhere. He just suggests it. This open-endedness enhances the total effect of the story. And for this reason the title of the story is meaningful, is loaded with meaning.

As we see the writer employs the supernatural elements of the folktale in a very beautiful, aesthetic way. In an ordinary, realistic story it is not possible for the reflection in the mirror to be that of someone else, of something else, and not of the man standing before it. The reflection cannot be of a donkey or a goat in place of a human face. within the form of the folk tale Such supernatural scenes can easily be accommodated. Detha has used this facility very creatively indeed. With the help of these devices he has most successfully highlighted the meaning of the story. After arresting before the last sentence in the paragraph.

4.10 LET US SUM UP

Vijaydan Detha's story 'Rajinavo' is an extremely beautiful depiction of the changing values of our times. It dialogues on a serious problem in an engaging way with the help of symbols, with economy of words, and without sermonising. In addition, by using the structure of the folk tale it has given a new form to the story, breaking new grounds in the development of the short story.

Vijaymohan Singh's view is "Detha the writer is mostly absent (in "Rajinvo"). Only Detha the compiler of folktales is present in the story — but like a human audio-visual machine — recording and filming everything". ('Loksanskriti', December 2005, Rupayan Sansthan, Borunda). Amrita Pritam said: "He tells his story in the form of a folktale, and at some point, comes out with statements that change the dimensions of the story. It becomes a fully contemporary story. This is a beautiful craft of which he is a master. It is not just a craft. Behind it lies a whole way of thinking that makes the story universal even if it is about things said before" (Ibid. 55-56).

Dr Santosh Tiwari's opinion is: "His world as a story teller is pervasive and singular, but even better is his clarity and style. We feel we are in the company of a like-minded and engaging elder, who is acquainting us with the bitter-sweet and cruel experiences of life through the agency of various characters, an elder who is familiarizing us with life's interesting and disgusting facets. There is such charm and inquisitiveness in the telling, the strands of the narrative are so well knit, that even though each experience is felt in segments it leaves the effect of an undivided whole". ('Loksanskriti'. January 2006).

4.11 GLOSSARY

Bat-ras: Do you know the meaning of the phrase 'the pleasure of conversation' what we call 'Bat-ras' in Hindi? Often, you must have seen people who are devoid of serious, original thought, but who yet give immense pleasure by the way they talk. Also, there are some who are thinkers, have thoughts worth listening to, but are lacking in the art of persuasive speaking. The man who thinks and is also a good speaker is a rarity. It is necessary for the story-teller of the folk tale to have a talent for speech that gives pleasure and stimulates thought. But it is equally necessary for the compiler and writer of folktales to be alive to this quality and produce it in the letter-bound, scripted folk tale. The Hindi poet Bihari also uses the term 'Batras', meaning the pleasures of conversation.

4.12 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss *The Compromise* as an allegory.
2. "*The Compromise* is a comment on the absence of moral restraints in modern life": Comment.
3. In what way is the story *The Compromise* relevant to our times?
4. Discuss Vijaydan Detha's art of story telling in *The Compromise*.

4.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bataan ri Phulwari, 14 parts (1960-76); *Duvidha va Anya Kahaaniyan*, trans. into English as *The Dilemma and Other Stories* (1979) by Ruth Vanita; *Chaudhrain ki Chaturai* [The Cleverness of the Chaudhri's Wife] (1996); *Ujaley ke Musahib* [The Friend of Light] (2000); *Antaraal* [Interval] (1998); *Maha Milan* [The Great Union] (1996); *Mero Dard na Janey Koi* [None knows my pain] (1998); *Pratishodh* [Revenge] (2002); *Lajwanti* (2001); *Rukh* [Tree] (1987).

Bataan Ri Phulwadi. (Collection of the folk stories of Rajasthan). 14 parts. In Rajathani

Anokha Peyd. (The Strange Tree) (Stories for children)

Kabboo Rani. (Stories for children)

Duvidha va Anya Kahaniyan. Translated into English as 'The Dilemma and Other Stories' by Ruth Vanita.

Uljhan. (Complication)

U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open
University, Prayagraj

MAEN-116

Contemporary Indian Literature In English Translation

Block

6

POETRY

UNIT 1
K.S. Nongkynrih : *Requiem* [Khasi]
Translation : The Poet
Chandra Kanta Murasingh : *The Stone Speaks in the Forest* [Kokborok]
Translation : B.S. Rajkumar
Yumlembam Ibomcha Singh: *The Last Dream* [Manipuri]
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UNIT 2
Haribhajan Singh : *Tree and the Sage* [Rukh Te Rishi : Punjabi]
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Raghuvir Sahay : *The Stare* [Taktaki : Hindi]
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UNIT 3
Dina Nath Nadim : *The Moon* [Zoon : Kashmiri]
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Padma Sachdev : *The Moment of Courage* [Dogri]
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UNIT 4
Kondepudi Nirmala : *Mother Serious* [Telugu]
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Vimala : *Kitchen* [Telugu]
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K. Ayyappa Paniker : *I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday : An Interview*
[Njaan Innale Walt Whitmaane Kandu — Oru Interview, Malayalam]
Translation : A.J. Thomas 461

UNIT 5
Ramakanta Rath : *Sri Radha* [Oriya]
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Shakti Chattopadhyay : *Just Once Try* [Akbar Tumi : Bengali]
Translation : Sibnarayan Ray 485

UNIT 6
Sitanshu Yashashchandra : *Orpheus* [Gujarati]
Translation : The Poet
Namdeo Dhasal : *A Notebook of Poems* and *Autobiography* [Kavitechi Vahi; Atmacharithra : Marathi]
Translation : Santosh Bhoomkar 515

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 6 is a comprehensive block that introduces you to Indian Poetry from the Northeast to Gujarati poetry in the west and Kashmiri poetry from the north to Malayalam poetry in the south.

Unit 1 discusses Nongkynrih's *Requiem* (Khasi), Chandra Kanta Murasingh's *The Stone Speaks in the Forest* (Kokborok) and Yumlembam Ibomcha's *The Last Dream* (Manipuri).

Unit 2 deals with excerpts from Haribhajan Singh's *Tree and the Sage* (Panjabi) and Raghuvir Sahay's *The Stare* (Hindi).

Unit 3 is concerned with Dina Nath Nadim's *The Moon* (Kashmiri) and Padma Sachdev's *The Moment of Courage* (Dogri).

Unit 4 discusses K. Nirmala's *Mother Serious* and Vimala's *Kitchen*, both feminist poems in Telugu and K. Ayyappa Paniker's *I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday: An Interview* (Malayalam).

Unit 5 is concerned with excerpts from Ramakanta Rath's long poem *Sri Radha* (Oriya) and Shakti Chattopadhyay's *Just Once Try* (Bengali).

Unit 6 discusses Sitanshu Yashashchandra's *Orpheus* (Gujarati) and Namdeo Dhasal's *A Notebook of Poems* and *Autobiography* (Marathi).

UNIT 1 K.S. NONGKYNRIH : *REQUIEM* TRANSLATION : THE POET CHANDRA KANTA MURASINGH : *THE STONE SPEAKS IN THE FOREST* TRANSLATION : B.S. RAJKUMAR YUMLEMBAM IBOMCHA SINGH : *THE LAST DREAM* TRANSLATION : UDAYAN GHOSH

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we propose first to acquaint you with the background to Northeast Indian poetry in brief with specific reference to the Assamese, Manipuri, Kokborok Tripura and Khasi languages. You will also be able to see how English language has been a dominant cultural force in the shaping of the poetry written in Northeast India, especially since the 1980s onward. It is note-worthy that some of the contemporary poets in this part of the country are bi-lingual, writing felicitously both in their mother tongue and in English. Such poets have also contributed in full measure to the growth of contemporary Indian poetry in English. We shall study in details one poem each by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (Khasi), Chandra Kanta Murasingh (Kokborok) and Yumlembam Ibomcha Singh (Manipuri).

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Northeast of India remains a little less well known owing to its geographical location and socio-political conditions. There is a coexistence of paradoxical worlds such as the folk and the westernized, virgin forests and

car-choked streets, ancestral values and insurgency. (Isn't it sad that such a picturesque region should remain especially vulnerable to tragic happenings of life?) In such circumstances, the society becomes a mute witness to the "banality of corruption and the banality of terror" (Editors, *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*). However, as you will see for yourself, it is poetry that unites the different regions of the Northeast.

After a brief discussion of Assamese poetry, you will get an overview of poetry in Northeast India followed by Northeast poetry in English. The background information will help you subsequently to place the works of Nongkynrih, Chandra Kanta Murasingh and Ibomcha Singh in a proper perspective.

1.2 AN OVERVIEW OF POETRY FROM THE NORTHEAST

1.2.1 The Assamese Poetry

I begin with Assamese poetry because the literature of Assam 'influenced' in its own way the creative literature of most parts of Northeast India, including Bengali literature in Northeast India, which has its own distinctiveness and is set apart from creative writing in Bengali, either in West Bengal or in Bangladesh.

The first phase of Assamese poetry that dates back to the early twentieth century was marked by a romantic trend coupled with patriotism and mysticism. This continued till the 1960s when there was a subversion of such treatment, making way for symbolism and esotericism. Eventually thematic changes and experimentation in both content and style became the hallmark of Assamese poetry. Also, there was an ideological dash (Marxist/socialist) as in the poetry of Navakanta Baruah, Ajit Baruah, Nilmani Phukan, Hiren Bhattacharya and Homen Burgohain. In their hands poetry for the first time reflected sociopolitical crises and expressed underpinnings of social and economic problems. This was a pronounced departure from the earlier expression of nostalgia and idealism. It was thus a watershed in Assamese poetry where a cultural shift from the ideal to the real was evident. Poetry therefore was not only contemporary but modern. Modernist elements were evinced in the use of symbolist and flashback techniques as in the poetry of the doyen of Assamese poetry: Navakanta Baruah. The language used was more abstract, fragmentary, symbolic and obscure rather than logical to suit new forms and style; traditional rhyme and metre in favour of free verse were rejected.

1.2.2 An Overview of Poetry from the Northeast in Translation

Here I am specifically thinking of 'modern' poetry in Northeast India. We are witness to the emergence of a group of poets in the 1980s and the 1990s who wrote poetry in feverish moments of social and political crisis. Their poetry, as in the poetry of the Assamese poets referred to above, used symbolic devices, with a wide range of influences from the West. In Manipur there were poets like Nilakanta (now dead), Somorendra, Sri Biren, Thangiam Ibopishak, Y. Ibomcha etc. who wrote experimental poetry. They were wide-awake to the

violence and social unrest with increasing tension resulting from material culture, corruption and moral breakdown. They wrote (and still write) a poetry which is stark, real and naked, although lyricism is their rich repast. They are recalcitrant poets though, unable to accept the violence and horror of the contemporary society. So to 'escape' from this they would often speak of the past and, of halcyon days which they experienced either in their native place or outside. This trend was evidenced also in Khasi and Tripura (Kokborok) poetry as exemplified in the writings of Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Chandra Kanta Murasingh.

Such poets were reacting to their surroundings so that their poetry was marked by strong social and political overtones. It was the poetry of crisis creating conflicts within the poets' mind — conflicts between the past and the present, between what 'was' and what 'is'. I am trying to explain this to you in the context of what was (and is) happening in the various states of Northeast India, in the form of ethnic clashes, extremist movements, social unrest, corruption, nepotism etc. These poets could not shy away from such realities, and so their poetry became increasingly referential: the point of reference being their native land. However, this is not to suggest that such poets were impervious to the universal tenets of poetry nor do they lack love and human relationships to be taken care of. No, they are certainly poets of pathos, and they revere human relationships and their sacrosanct values. But the entrenched irony is never lost sight of. This is particularly typified in the poetry of Robin S. Ngangom who writes both in English and in his mother tongue, Manipuri:

> My love, how can I explain
> that I abominate laws
> which punish a man for this post
> only the night seems to understand
> that we must bear in again.
>
> When I am gone
> I would leave you these:
> A life without mirrors,
> The blue ode between pines
> And the winter sky, the
> Secret understanding of
> Roots and the earth,
>
> But where can DAC run from the homeland,
> Where can I flee from your love?
> They have become pursing prisons
> Which hold the man
> With criminal words.
>
> ("The Strange Affair of Robin S. Ngangom: Khasia in Gwalia, 38)

While sharing universal human emotions, joys and suffering, poetry written in Northeast India cannot be reduced to stereotypes. It is also not the poetry of the metropolis, intellectual and arcane. It is, in short, the poetry of the heart, of the people of the land, their visions and dreams. It is characterized at times by rural or natural imagery recalling halcyon days. In this sense poets such as Robin S. Ngangom, Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih are essentially poets of the soil who represent the dreams and

aspirations of the people of the region. Poetry of Northeast India is unfailingly committed to social, political and historical issues though satirical and personal themes are widespread whether that be in Assamese, Manipuri or Khasi.

1.2.3 Poetry from the Northeast in English

You may wonder as to why I am giving you an outline of English poetry which is being written in Northeast India. I mentioned earlier that many of the poets writing in this part of our country are bi-lingual. They also write in English and some of them have a Masters Degree in English. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why they choose to write in English, but we must also remember that in many of the states of Northeast India, English is the lingua franca. However, a majority of poets in a state like Manipur choose to write in Manipuri, because English is sidelined by them in their endeavour to create authentic Manipur literature.

Northeast India witnessed the emergence of a younger generation of poets in the 1980s and the early 1990s, whose poetry was written in critical moments of societal crisis, and they attracted the attention of critics and literary journals in India and abroad. Coincidentally many of these poets live in Shillong and it was the poetry page of The Telegraph Colour Magazine edited by the celebrated Indian English poet Jayanta Mahapatra which gave them the opportunity to be published, and break new ground on the Indian English poetry scene. In the mid 1990s, the North East Forum For English Studies, in Guwahati, and North East Writers Forum devoted much of their energy to encouraging poetry written in English, in the region.

The poets whose names readily come to the mind are: Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, Robin S. Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (all from Meghalaya), H. Ramdinthari (Mizoram), Nini Lungalang, Mamang Dai (Arunachal Pradesh) and Easterine Irolu (Nagaland). They weave universal concerns with local themes. Even though giving a broad continuity to the Indian poetry writing scene in general, theirs, at times, is a varying discourse from the poets of 'mainstream' India. This 'discourse' is related to the 'multi-voice' that they use: political, social and personal; often these interweave thematically in a single poem.

If we speak of a general "Indianness" in the poetry written in India which is inclusive of both the vernacular languages and English, the poets of Northeast India have subverted such a nebulous notion by writing poignantly of their home, town and country, a shared nostalgia, and of the prevalent social issues and ethnic problems with their attendant pitfalls. They evince a racial, sociological and historical memory to capture iridescent moments of their societies in transition. They may also be described as 'ethnic' poets. Their poetry at times is simple, yet astonishingly lyrical; they shun, many of them, intellectualism in poetry and believe perhaps that the best of poetry and its finer instincts bear the indelible stamp of the native genius: innate and untutored wisdom. They effectively use the oral tradition and mythology/folklore of their specific cultures (the Khasi poets are a case in point), and rework these appositely to achieving their poetic vision and craft. Above all, they view the craft of writing poetry as essentially meditative, likened to what Wordsworth says of a poet as a 'man speaking to man'. They

glimpse such a primal functioning of poetry and attempt to encapsulate the same in their verse. They are nativist poets, but at the same time they are not blind to the inadequacies of their immediate societies.

I feel that this has given rise to a second classification of 'Indianness' in the poets in Northeast India. Their 'Indianness' is complexly and subtly related to their cultural and historical moorings. They hearken to the past, to its nostalgic calls. Despite this, to call them romantics and idealists will amount to overlooking their social, political concerns appertaining to the angst of the post-independence period. Perhaps, for many of them their past is as important as the present; their awareness of regional identity and their concern with it guarantee that they are at a par with their counterparts in other regions of the Indian subcontinent, all of which will confirm Indian literary scene as a product of unity in diversity.

What then are the actual themes of this poetry? A careful analysis shows that in this kind of poetry there is a constant dialogue and dialectic between, 'what is' and 'what could have been'. There is an interminable hiatus between the past and the present. There is no apparent lamentation in the poems, but there are wounds, unhealing, unquiet. A strong historical sense pervades the best of such poetry and there prevails the dialectics between reality and realism. The dialogue between urban and rural is a thematic concern, if not an obsession. At the same time the 'angst' of being and becoming besets such poetry with deep humanistic perspectives, marked again by the 'rural' or 'small town' syndrome.

This is basically a framework, which I have given to you so that you are able to discover 'meanings' when you read specific poems.

The dexterous intermingling of personal, social, political, historical, folkloric and satirical themes makes poetry of the Northeast unique in itself.

I think that the poetry of Northeast India holds tremendous potentialities. The younger generation of poets in Assamese, Manipuri and Khasi are writing prolifically. Their poetry is at once reactionary, amoral and a critique of the contemporary society. What is also interesting is that they are in close touch with one another and, view themselves as one entity, sharing similar concerns, and all get enmeshed at the crossroads of change and transition.

If life is going to be volatile, then why should literature be left behind? That literature is a recreation of life rather than an imitation of life seem to be the motif underlying their poetry.

1.3 KHASI POETRY: KYNPHAM SING NONGKYNRIH — A SHORT LIFE SKETCH

Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih resides in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. He is the Deputy Director of the Publication Cell in the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He was born on 4 April 1964 in Cherrapunjee in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. He did a teaching stint as Lecturer in English in Sankardev College, Shillong and was co-terminously editing the English daily *Apphira* during 1994-1996. He is now Reader in English, NEHU, Shillong. He has published two books of poetry in English. *Moments*

(1992) and *The Sieve* (1992) and three in Khasi: Ka Samoi jong Ka Lyer, Ki Mawsiang Ka Sohra and Ka Jinghkynmaw. Nongkynrih's versatility is also evident by the fact that he has translated ten books for children into Khasi. His poetry has been widely published and anthologized.

1.4 AN OVERVIEW OF NONGKYNRIH'S POETRY

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is flexible in his choice of themes covering a gamut of ideas ranging from nostalgia, the small town syndrome, Khasi mythology to social and political ones. Therefore his poetry provides wide-ranging themes and sensibilities. This is the focal point and overarching quality of Nongkynrih's poetry. The wide array of themes is indeed the distinguishing attribute of his poetry. There can be the coy lover, the irate husband, the sulking son, the laughing journalist and so on! He uses the techniques of irony very effectively in his poetry, as a means to satirical ends. There is a nice blend of humour in his poetry. For example, he writes about the Earth Summit in an ironical, if not a trenchant, vein. The poem is satirical and is a caustic comment on politicians, yet it is tempered with some kind of sadness.

> The very first Earth Summit
> Was given a big build-up for weeks,
> ....At Nan Polok
> the parking lot
> humbles down
> fifteen of our proudest
> pines
>
> ("The Parking Lot", Khasia in Gwalia)

His "Winter Song" vivifies the charming winter season in Shillong and is once again an intrusion into the social fabric of the times, of what is 'happening' around us.

....The nights cavort....
Singing hymns
In wobbly tomes

(Khasia in Gwalia, p. 56)

1.5 THE POEM: *REQUIEM* : A DISCUSSION

In *Requiem* Nongkynrih takes us into the social world of a close community, which has gathered together after the death of a woman. The poem, as the title suggests, is a dirge written on the death of a young woman "Meri". The first stanza sets off in a lugubrious tone:

> The moans that floated
> into the still autumn nights
> were borne by the cold winds
> onto the season of carols.

The refrain, "I heard them" that is repeatedly used in the next three stanzas, adds to the general sadness climaxing into the question, if not the insinuation: "What was wrong with Meri?" Such poignancy obliquely reflects both a general condition of sadness and a specific condition that of the speaker's (who need not necessarily be the poet). The above question is also ironical because it prompts one to ask what could be 'wrong' with a dying person or what could be 'right'? The question is a lamentation as if the speaker were asking: "What is wrong with you? Come Meri wake up". Notice carefully the imagery in the first four stanzas. The "moans" are deeply associated with the still autumn nights, the cold winds, the plaintive note of the cock crowing, and the muezzin's call. Such disparateness in the use of images intricately and subtly conveys an emotion: the stillness of mourning. Someone who is stunned into silence by the moan of someone who is going to die, probably unattended is pictured in the first part of the poem. But through the sounds heard by the poet it is clear that the suffering of Meri is acute and fatal, accentuated by the murky symbolism and the trenchant imagery, which reminds one of Shakespeare's sonnets dealing with time, change and death. As Meri was dying, we gather "No doctor came". There is an irony here. Is it because of negligence, or is it because the family was very poor?

Meri's death was no ordinary death (stanza 7). The images evoked in this stanza are hair raising, for we are told that:

> And finally, only two titanic tarantulas,
> one black, the other with a crimson chest,
> crept with slow hairy step, like skulkers
> of the night, and hauled her off to their invisible lair

Finally death's messengers came and 'hauled her off/to their invisible lair'. The poet draws upon his cultural belief associated with death. Thus the intense emotional situation is heightened by the personification of death.

The second part of the poem which describes the mourning of friends and relatives releases the tense emotional state of the first part. A return to normal pre-cremation rituals ensures this release easement. It is descriptive, whereas the first part is more meditative. The metaphor of death is used in the first instance as a generic condition of humanity, and in the second and third

instances, as a specific condition; the referential points here are the speaker and Meri's beloved ones. The second part of the poem describes the pre-funeral situation with the dead body "bathed and scented", "dressed in her favourite clothes". Friends and relatives and visitors were entertained with feast, tea, biscuits in the midst of prayers until they sadly mourned the sudden demise of Meri:

> such a young girl
> such a sweet girl
> such promise....

The poet, however, overcomes the tragedy of untimely death by a stoic acceptance in the last two lines where "some comfort" was offered by the eschatologists so that "They were happy she went so peacefully". There is a streak of irony in such comfort. Meri made no noises about her death but rather she died "as naturally as a sleeper snoring/no doctor came...". See the contrast between her painful suffering — moans — and her natural death. The irony of the situation is that death disturbs the living more than the dead.

> Love broke into loud lamentations
> The mother cried for divine explanations
> Mourners swarmed her death-bed.

The distancing of the speaker from the event in the second part is once again ironical. However, in the first part the speaker identifies with the death. Such neat balancing of the subjective self with the objective fact invests the poem with a thematic unity: death seen from different perspectives and viewpoints.

Requiem in my opinion is a poem which not only transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary but also merges the natural with the universal. It takes us into a typical social situation: people gathering in a house to mourn the death of a person. But it presents multiple viewpoints: that of Meri's (she didn't get a chance to speak before she died), that of the mourners' and that of the speaker's who finally represents the death scene in a multifarious form with dramatic effect.

1.6 KOKBOROK POETRY: CHANDRA KANTA MURASINGH — A SHORT LIFE SKETCH

Chandra Kanta Murasingh who lives in Agartala, the capital of Tripura was born on 1 April 1957. He is a bi-lingual writer, writing both in Kokborok, the language of the indigenous people of Tripura and in Bengali. He is the President of the Kokborok Sahitya Academy. He has received numerous awards and accolades for his poetry in Kokborok, including the prestigious Bhasha Sanman from Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. He is presently employed in a government bank in Agartala.

1.7 AN OVERVIEW OF MURASINGH'S POETRY

Chandra Kanta Murasingh's special appeal as a poet lies in his upholding the simple life of the village folk in his native Tripura. He is essentially concerned with the common man, with what William Wordsworth would call 'humble and rustic life'. Murasingh is able to re-create the elemental aspects of life coupled with his use of natural imagery. A deeply sensitive poet, Murasingh's poetry is embedded in the tradition of humanity, village life unsullied by the intrusion of a materialistic or mechanized world of humanity, he uses images vividly and sensitively, landscaping his poems in myths of the past and memory. In this manner he is able to make his poems deeply evocative.

The sensible world for Murasingh is the world of the commoner, the rural folk as opposed to the urban elite. He voices anguish and oppression in any form. His poems are spontaneous and lyrical in their song — like cadence.

Chandra Kanta Murasingh has published five collections of poems, namely *happing Garingo Chibuksa Ringo* (The Python Calls in the Deserted Tong House), *Holong Kok Sa — O Bolong Bisingo* (The Stone Speaks in the Forest), *Lok Chethuwang Lok* (Rise Up Chethuweng Tree), *Pindi Watwi Pin* (Sprinkle the Rain), and *Rufei Ni Buduk Ani Nogo* (The Silver Pope in My Room). As is evident from the titles of these poems, Murasingh's poetry abounds in natural imagery. He is sensitive to human situations and society at large. The pleasure and pain of the common folk, the strife and stress of the urban people, and the myths of the Kokborok community constitute the imagery and vision of his poetry untrammeled and melodic.

1.8 THE POEM: *THE STONE SPEAKS IN THE FOREST*: A DISCUSSION

This poem speaks probably of an ancient myth, but in a complex manner; it builds the relationship between animate and inanimate things, between man and nature. All over the poem the running motif is that of 'search' — a golden deer looking for a mate; a king looking for his prey; a man with his lady love going upstream to build their home in the deep forest, and Hachukrai rowing downstream towards a market. However, the search motif in the last two stanzas is subdued. But the stone that appears in all the four stanzas is central to the poem's very subtle emphasis on the relationship between the stone and others, the deer, the king, the man and a villager, all of whom are defined in relation to the stone. As mentioned above, each stanza of the poem speaks of a particular situation.

The deer, the king, the lover and Hachukrai symbolize earthly life, drawn from the past and the present. Their movement is intricately woven, and archetypal symbols work demanding the emotional involvement of the reader too. Each stanza is closely knit with structural opposites: (1) deer and stone —

animate and inanimate, (2) man and nature — the dichotomy between the invading man and the invaded nature:

> He stood, with his foot
> Pressing the forehead of the stone
> And looking — to find which way
> His prey was on the run
> The weight of feet tormenting the hill
> The stone was silent because
> The pain was not his alone.

It goes on like a formula tale and one can see the bundle of relations referred to. (3) a couple crying and rowing upstream to build their home in the deep forest recalls the past as set against the present and (4) man and nature in open conflict in which the stone comes out as a powerful symbol of the indomitable force of nature that is self-preservative and self-protective against the abuse of its resources in terms of buying and selling.

In the first three stanzas what is unique is that suffering is universal whether for a deer which does not get a mate, or for a hunter unable to find his prey; this does not preclude even a man with his lady love, who "Sprayed dreams and tears on the stone". In the last stanza the stone rises up against the man with "bow and arrow in hand" in protest against the material exploitation of the forest by man. The deer, the king and the lover are painted as shedding pain in their own way, but not the villager who represents a threat to environment and nature. The poem, thus, speaks volumes of modern day ecological imbalance implicitly in symbolic and metaphorical terms, in which the stone remains a convincing central motif, an anthropomorphic image. Everything in the poem — the deer, the lover — is under the shadow of the stone. The king and the stone are nearby to confront gradually locked in a duel.

The poem mirrors the past and the present on a meaningful symbolic and metaphorical plane. It delves into the mythic past of a culture reliving it in the present. This, however, is my view. You may or may not be in agreement with me. Think about it and reach your own conclusion.

1.9 MANIPURI POETRY: YUMLEMBAM IBOMCHA SINGH – A SHORT LIFE SKETCH

employee in a state government office. He was born on 21 August 1949. He has two collections of poetry: *Sandrembi Thoraklo Nahum Ponjel Sabige.* (1973) and *Rajkumari Amasung Ucheck Machasing.* (1992). He has also published 90 short stories. Ibomcha is the recipient of the Manipur State Kala Academy Award (1974) and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1991 for his short story collection called *Namiṭṭi Asum.*

1.9.1 An Overview of Ibomcha's Poetry

Ibomcha's early poetry was rebellious, a kind of protest poetry to 'counter' social and political oppression. He was part of a literary movement by a group of poets known as the "Angry Young Poets". Noteworthy among one of these *avant gardists* was the celebrated Manipuri poet Thangjam Ibopishak (1948-). The protest was against social oppression and violence of the times which overtook the state of Manipur in the 1980s. However, Ibomcha's poetry gradually eclipsed such a note of protestation and took surrealistic overtones, with dreamlike imagery. Perhaps it was an 'escape-route' from the reality of the times. Ibomcha's poetry takes a narrative shape characteristic of his style. It is complex and deals with wraith-like images. It is as if the poet is in a reverie and stupor. There are dominant overtones of irony and satire, but the poems also depict absurd situations as in "Story of A Dream" and "Battle Ground of The Victorious". He uses surreal images to express the absurdity of social realities. Rats are run over by vehicles, bullets are compared to raisins and being shot is like being caressed by ladies! Ibomaha constantly expresses the absurd as an antidote to the suffering and ills of society. In this context the poems also assume a satirical note with irony being used as a literary devieş

Ibomcha moved away from a directly protest poetry to a kind which is surrealistic and dreamlike as mentioned above. The theme of protest however remains implicit in that he tends to be very critical of his immediate surroundings. As mentioned above Ibomcha's poems border on 'escapism' as a kind of his personal myth as you will see in the poem prescribed for your study. The absurdity in his poetry is an attempt to depict the topsy turviness of the world, how things have gone wrong, how truth and reality have been travestied. In "Home for the Homeless" he says:

To his father who begot him
A boy asks
Where is my home,
The one who begot him stands confused
Looking into the distance,
As the sky's verge....
Where is my home
Where is my home
The questions reverberate
From the nooks and corners
of the earth

Where is my home
The question returns and looks
At the boy's face.

Note the expression, "the question returns", which typifies a kind of absurdity as "The question returns and looks/At the boy's face". There is obvious irony in the lines which reverberate:

Where is my home
Where is my home

1.10 THE POEM: *THE LAST DREAM*: A DISCUSSION

This is a poem dealing with the theme of death, and the motif of death pervades the poem. But this death is not real: it is a fantasy, some kind of a ritual death or some kind of death against life and vice versa. The villagers, who could swear that they carried the old woman in a hearse, are now told that she is visible to some people across the banks. They react:

That can't be
That can't be
She had died many years ago
She cannot live any longer

The poem attempts to build a mythic compulsion: that of the 'ghost' of the woman who died long ago. It is woven round the beliefs, customs and traditions of a community, all of which form an anthropomorphic vision of the existence of a village goddess — "ancient goddess of the village" who has been treated as an ordinary human being — unwanted, hence to be disposed of. How callous the villagers are as they can catch the women from across the river to be cremated alive, the "vaguely staining old woman" carrying her on a bier "through the narrow village paths". But the "hundred tongue of all consuming flame" to which the woman is consigned cannot harm her, burn her, but rather in her anger she comes out after flinging all her parts one after another, as if in a process (re-process) of recreation. It reminds us the theme of Eliot's *The Waste Land* that tells in a subtle and symbolical way how the modern world turned into a waste land consequent upon man's corruption and lack of faith. The nightmarish condition of the village when the ancient goddess of the village has been burnt is conflated with the waste land condition of the village as shown in the opening of the poem.

Lifeless fields stretch scorched and dry
Like death in silence

The same image of being waste recurs in the sixth stanza: "The village was laid waste by her/Hunting ghosts she had sent".

The poet laments the sacrilegious deeds of the villagers. It is consecration and not desecration that would save both the village and villagers without which they will be constantly haunted and terrorized by the spirit of the mythical old woman. The last stanza reveals the unredeemed fate of the villagers who violate what is inviolable and sacred:

Thus was cremated the old woman
Darkness of the night embraces

The wide forehead of the village
Sleeping they cannot change positions
In the early hours of daytime
Up and down the village
They are all having nightmares
The old woman looks on wet eyed.

Through the painful depiction of the contemporary human condition the poet writes about the inseparable ties of the past with the present for which he tries to relive the past — mythical past as extremely meaningful to restore the old values of life and existence. That becomes his 'last dream' in which he sees the peace and harmony of his community represented by the villagers.

The poem is rich in imagery. And the presence of a world behind the visible is strongly suggested in a dreamlike world of myth and fantasy. Flashback technique is adroitly exploited as a link between the past and the present almost as a continuum.

Can you add a few more points to the mythopoeic vision of the poet? Poets and writers not only draw upon myths but also create personal, communal and cultural myths.

1.11 LET US SUM UP

We have in this unit given you a bird's eye view of the poetry of the Northeast and talked about three contemporary poets and their poems. The poems you have read deal with different aspects of life, death and parabolic relationship between man and nature. But you, as student and reader, will have to decide how each poet treats his subject matter, and what the poetic and philosophical implications of such treatment are. The poems have been discussed. This of course does not mean that you will necessarily agree with a particular way of looking at the poems. You will have your own interpretations. Try and discern qualities associated with good poetry, such as lyricism, contemplation of certain moods, thematic unity, irony etc. Note also, weaknesses if any, such as repetition, desultoriness etc.

In short you should be in a position to analyse critically the strength and weaknesses of the poems and, also whether there is harmonious blending of form and content in them.

1.12 GLOSSARY

Dialectics: intellectual debate, conflicting positions

Kwai: The Khasi word for betel nut

Khari: The language of Meghalaya

Kokborok: One of the languages of Tripura

Manipuri: The language of the Meitei community of Manipur.

1.13 QUESTIONS

1. Write a critical analysis of each poem prescribed.
2. Write an overview of Northeast Indian poetry with special reference to the poems prescribed.
3. Make a comparative study of these poems.
4. Critically examine the titles of the poems.
5. Write a note on the structure of the poems prescribed.
6. Which among these three poems do you like the best and why? Give reasons.
7. Do you think that the flavour of the oral tradition can be detected in these poems? Give reasons.
8. Write a critical note on contemporary Northeast India poetry.

1.14 SUGGESTED READINGS

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing and Robin S. Ngangom (eds.) *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*. Shillong: NEHU, 2003.

I am mentioning this book once again because it is a fairly definitive book on contemporary poetry written in Northeast India. You will get a wide panorama and insight into the kind of poetry which is currently being written in Northeast India, today. It will also help you to compare and contrast poets representing a particular cultural and social milieu. You might discover commonalities among these poets and that will help you to understand the prescribed texts better, and more critically.

The anthology includes poem from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It represents as many as 45 poets in Assamese, Manipuri, Hindi, Bengalee, English, Khasi, Tenyidia (Nagaland) and Chakma, Tripuri and Kokborok (Tripura).

UNIT 2 HARIBHAJAN SINGH : *TREE AND THE SAGE* TRANSLATION : J.S. RAHI AND RITA CHAUDHRY RAGHUVIR SAHAY : *THE STARE* TRANSLATION : THE POET

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Outline of Modern Punjabi Poetry
  2.1.1 Progressive Poetry
  2.1.2 Post-independence Punjabi Poetry
  2.1.3 Feminist Poetry
  2.1.4 Neo-progressive Poetry
  2.1.5 Punjabi Poetry Abroad
  2.1.6 Latest Trends
2.2 Haribhajan Singh — A Brief Life Sketch
2.3 An Overview of Haribhajan Singh's Poetry
2.4 *Tree and the Sage* (Rukh te Rishi)
2.5 Outline of Modern Hindi Poetry
2.6 Raghuvir Sahay — A Brief Life Sketch
2.7 An Overview of Raghuvir Sahay's Poetry
2.8 *The Stare* (Taktaki)
2.9 Let Us Sum Up
2.10 Glossary
2.11 Questions
2.12 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall study two poets: Punjabi poet Haribhajan Singh and Hindi Poet Raghuvir Sahay. Both are important Indian poets. We shall begin with an outline of modern Punjabi poetry. After discussing the growth of modern Punjabi poetry we shall give the life sketch of Haribhajan Singh followed by an overview of his poetry. We shall then look more closely at his poem "I am a tree walking...". (from *Tree and the Sage*). With Raghuvir Sahay too, we shall follow basically the same pattern, beginning with life-sketch and an overview of his literary career, followed by a more detailed discussion of the prescribed poem "Stare". After going through our discussion on their poems Rukh te Rishi (*Tree and the Sage*) and 'Taktaki' (*The Stare*) you will be in a position to appreciate their contribution to their respective languages and Indian poetry in general.

2.1 OUTLINE OF MODERN PUNJABI POETRY

Modern period of Punjabi poetry starts after 1850 and first fifty years are the transitional years, when modern idiom of Punjabi poetry is emerging. Several social political and religious movements influenced the modern Punjabi

one of the pioneers of this movement. In the last decade of the ninteen century, he wrote his first novel 'Sundri' but in the first decade of the twenteeth century he wrote his epic 'Rana Surat Singh'. After this epic continuously he wrote short poems, which were religious and metaphysical but this poetry was different in style and form. This religious and metaphysical poetry influenced other poets also. Prof. Puran Singh was other major poet who wrote his poetry in the third decade of twenteith century. His poems in 'Khule Maidan (Open fields) were influenced by the poetic style of American poet Walt Whitman. Puran Singh wrote blank verse and continuously he influenced the other poets. Deewan Singh 'Kalepani' also wrote in the same style but he was more realistic and opposed the rising fasicism and imperialism. Dhani Ram Chatrik also wrote in the realistic idiom. He was different because he was concerned with the folk culture of Punjab.

2.1.1 Progressive Poetry

In 1936 the Progressive Movement came into limelight in the whole of Indian Literature. Punjabi critic Sant Singh Sekhon under the influence of Marxism advocated progressive ideology. Because Indian people were fighting against British imperialism that was also the reason that progressive movement became very strong in Indian literature. Prof. Mohan Singh became the major progressive poet. He wrote 'Saave Pattar' (Green Leaves), 'Kasumbra' (Safflower) and 'Adhvaate' (Half-way) before the partition. Amrita Pritam in her poetic collection 'Lok Piran' (Pains of People) had already written about the tragedy of Bengal. About the partition she wrote 'Mein Twareekh Han Hind Di' (I am the history of India) and a new consciousness created a turn in Punjabi poetry and we reached the tendencies of poetry written after independence.

2.1.2 Post-independence Punjabi Poetry

a) Continuity of Progressive Poetry

Post-Independence Panjabi Poetry inherited progressive ideology from the pre-independence developments and the partition sharpened this outlook with a sense of loss and tragedy. The significant poets established before independence were still writing. Bhai Vir Singh published his selection *Lehar Hulare* (Swinging waves) in 1951and his Sahit Academy award winning last poetic work *Mere Saian Jio* (O Mylord) was published in 1953. Amrita Pritam's *Mein Tawarikh Han Hind di* (1950), which made a voice of partition tragedy, changed the thematics and language of Panjabi poetry. She cried for Waris Shah, who wrote the Kissa of Heer-Ranjha and created a signifier of composite Panjabi culture, Partition had saughtered this culture:

I say unto Waris Shah
Today I implore Waris Shah
to speak up from his grave
and turn over a page of
the Book of Love.

Mohan Singh in his *Kach Sach* (Half Truth) (1950), remembered Baba Nanak and said "O baba come and see, your land is ruined. Amrita published *Sarghi Vela* (Morning Time) (1951), *Sunehre* (Messages) (1955) and this progressive voice created the atmospheare of futuristic socialistic idealism.

The era of Nehruism and the influence of Soviet socialism had also become significant now. Mohan Singh in '*Kach Sach*' celebrated the socialist revolution in China and wrote rhetorically against imperialism and capitalism. He published *Awazan* (Voices) (1959), when in Panjab the peasant-movement and in whole of the world peace movement was strong. In his *Vadha Wela* (Early Morning) (1958), *Jandre* (Locks) (1964), *Jai Mir* (Cheer Chieftain) (1968) also, he spoke in progressive voice.

But progressive movement was declining during the sixties. Even other progressive poets of that generation were declining. Piara Singh Sehrai published a *Same di Vag* (Strand of Time) (1951), *Van-Trin* (Wild Trees) (1970), *Guzargah* (Passage) (1974), *Batan Waqat Dian* (To converse about time) (1985), *Geet Maria Nuhin Karde* (Songs cannot die) (1988), *Sangeet de Khambh* (Feathers of Music) (1992). He was one of the major progressive poet, but during this span, the atmospheare changed, the split in the movement and progressive parties influenced the destiny of this poetry.

Another progressive poet Santokh Singh Dhir published *Dharti Mangdi Meeh Ve* (Land wants Rain) (1952), *Pat Jhare Purane* (The old leaves have fallen) (1955), *Bihrde* (Separation-songs) (1960), *Diggde Pate* (Falling Leaves) (1976), *Kali Barchhi* (Black Spear) (1980), *Singhawli* (Lion-natured) (1983), *Jadon Asin Aawange* (When we shall come) (1988). Though he is a significant progressive Panjabi poet, yet he is more known as short story writer.

Bawa Balwant created a distinctive voice in this progressive poetry. He published his *Bandargah* (Port-harbour) in 1951 and *Sugandh Sameer* (Sweet fragrance) in 1959. He was distinctive because of his imagery and conscious use of Indian mythology. He reinterprated mythos from Marxist point of view. Urdu poet Iqbal and Hindi poet Nirala also influenced his poetry.. For him *Usha* (Morning) becomes the symbol of revolution:

Usha

O the diffusion of the universal light,
the darling of the day and the night !
Countless colours dissolve in the glow of the moon and the stars.
It flows like Ganga from the big eyes of the Shiva-like sky.
O Usha ! O the charioteer of the suns,
Dispel my darkness!
.....

b) Experimentalist Punjabi poetry

During sixties experimental movement raised its voice against the Romantic-progressive and traditional poetry. The poets belonging to this movement said "a new industrial metropolitan society has changed the atmosphere and Previous trends are not coping with the transformations or new social-contradictions. So a conscious change is must". A new experimentalist manifesto was released. These poets discussed the poetry of T.S. Eliot and other modernist tendencies in the western literature. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia,

Ravinder Ravi, Ajaib Kamal were the major poets who started this experimentalist movement. Ahluwalia published his book *Kaagaz da Rawan* (The Paper-Ravna) in 1964, and this poem also created a stir:

Kaagaz da Ravan

I, a Paper Ravan
The glimmering of the stars
the hustle and bustle of the streets
and the colourful company of the friends-
these bandits make away with my fortune
in the twinkling of an eye.
.....

Ravinder Ravi published *Dil Darya Samundron Doonghe* (Heart-river is more deep than the sea) (1961), *Bukal de Vich Chor* (Thief in the wrapper) (1963), *Bindu* (Mark) (1965), *Mon Hadse* (Silent Accidents) (1967). Later, he migrated to Kenya and Canada. His *Dil Transplant ton Baad* (After the Heart-transplant) (1969) and *Apne Khilaf* (Against ownself) (1986) are very significant books. Continuously he is experimentalist and modernist, concerned with global consciousness and reality of atomic age, I can quote his poem 'I Don't Intend To Commit Sucide':

Time has stopped
like death in the body-
even so people
were running round and around.
What sort of calm island is this ?
.....

After the decline of Romantic-progressive poetry, we have the parallel developments in Panjabi poetry. Pritam Singh Safeer turned towards neo-mystic trend. Jaswant Singh Neki, who emerged as one of the major poets is also a new metaphysical poet. But his two long poems *'Simrti de Kiran ton Pehlan'* (Before vanishing the memory) and *'Karuna di Chho ton Magron'* (After the touch of Agony) have created a new norm in the history of Panjabi long poems. He has also written his autobiography *Koi Naon Na Jane Mera* (No body knows my name) (2000) in poetry, Because you have to study Dr. Haribhajan Singh's long poem, you can also have some glimpse of Neki's long poem 'Simrti de Kiran ton Pehlan' for a comparative analysis.

'Simrti de Kiran ton Pehlan' was written in 1965, but he published this poem after the span of ten years. This is not a narrative poem, rather a deep and philosophic poem. The poet selects symbols, thematics and images from Indian classics, Indian mythology, especially Kath-Upnishad becomes the source, but thematic dimensions are new. For him the myth of Nachiketa and Yam is very significant. He is in search of Nav-Nachiketa. He raises the questions regarding the mystery of life and death:-

Even a mystery exists before death
There is a mystery even after death
and this double mystery
only Nav-Nachiketa can know
because he can be the guest of both life and death.

This Nav-Nachiketa has its roots not only in traditional mythic character, rather it transcends and becomes a consciousness beyond that mythicality, it becomes futuristic also.

In this eternal spacio-time the poet discusses life, death, love, passion, attachment, pleasures, renunciation, penance, existance-non-existance, illusion-reality, belief- non belief, faith-doubt, eternal — non eternal, memory — non memory. The poet creates these kinds of binary oppositions in the development of this long poem.

The poet thinks that he could have the glimpse of this mystery. There is an eternal circle, and on that circle there is a sign, the eternal circularity from both sides meets at that sign. The Yum is the master of that sign. When we cross that sign we lose out memories. We can see how the poet creates the signifiers in this poem. To understand this poetic process we must know the totality of experience, because the mythic consciousness and aesthetics are merging in this creation. The poet, in the vicissitudes of experience defines beauty:

Beauty

Beauty is neither in flower
nor in the eye,
It is in desire of flower for the eye
It is in the desire of eye
Yearning to embrace the flower

In this poem the poet defines philosophically various things which we deal with in arts and knowledge, but the signification is in his orientalist point of view. That is the reason this poem is also important ideologically in the development of modern Punjabi poetry.

In a creative way, he rejects the traditional progressive and narrative poetics, which did not believe in this kind of neo-metaphysical and neo-orientalist ideology, he also rejects that kind of lyrical poetics which could not grasp the philosophical depths of creativity, he also transcends the traditional mode of poetry and his own understanding of the genre

You would think that I am a narrater
But believe it
I am not a narrater
The incident which I have passed through
I have lost the control of those details.

The new genre of long poem, in its design, raises so many questions regarding the quest of man, which is eternal, but when Neki raises these questions he is not unaware about the developments in classical and modern western philosophy, he combines these roots in the unconscious of signifiers of this poem. He is able to create the foregrounding, the background is very vast and multi-dimensional. These kinds of generic complexities of the poem made it a controversial poem and the poem created a challenge to the traditional communicative poetic model in Panjabi.

c) Parallel Tendencies

After the decline of progressive movement, in parallel tendencies, S.S. Meesha brought some changes in Punjabi poetry. He published *Chaurasta* (Cross road) (1961), *Dastak* (Knock) (1966), *Dheeme Bol* (Whispering) (1972) and *Kach de Vastar* (Clothes of Glass) (1974). He was anti-romantic, with modern sensibility, progressive and against idealism. He believed in a new idiom. Another poet who became very significant was Shiv Kumar who published his first poetic-work *Peeran da Paraga* (Grist of Pains) in 1961, but he is known for his long dramatic-poem *Luna* (1965). He considers this work as an epic. He reinterpreted the legend of Puran Bhagat and Luna. Shiv Kumar's cultural imagery with lyricality is distinctive in the history of modern Punjabi poetry. The dialogue between Puran and Luna: (Luna is Puran's step-mother, who wants Puran's physical love).

Luna:
Puran ! This is your vanity
The earth was fruitful yesterday
and it is fruitful today too
Even if you dissect a ray today
you'll find seven colors in it
but each color like you
has lost its eye-sight
No color has died
light is still everywhere
but due to our ignorance
we are unable to recognize it
In fact, we have no color of our own
otherwise, *Puran*, no ray is without color
Dissect *Luna* and look into her
You'll find every color in Luna
You'll find the history of each color
you'll find the fragrance of each color
and you'll find the corpse of each color !

Puran:
Luna, you want the third color
to lose its existence too
in these two colors !
Who can mix the colors of fate
who can efface them ?
They were present on the forehead at birth
Who can change the color of the forehead ?

After the decline of Romantic-progressive poetry Amrita Pritam also came under the influence of modernist idiom and style. Her *Kagaz te Canvas* (Paper and Canvas), (1970) became her major work in the development. The influence of existentialism and rejection of traditional progressivism became significant in her poetry. The new feminist consciousness also made her voice more strong. Her metaphors and symbols were also not traditional and romantic. Her poem 'Blotting Paper' begins with a question and floats symbols in a rational way:-

What was the real text of life?
That text was in good handwriting like
silken thoughts but hot like blood
and the blotting paper that soaked
.....

d) Modernist Tendencies

In the modernist tendency Haribhajan Singh emerged as a major poet. He published *Laasan* (Welks) (1956), *Adhraini* (Midnight) (1962), *Na Dhupe Na Chhaven* (Not Sunlight nor shade) (1967), *Sarak de Safe Ute* (On the Page of a Road) (1970), *Main jo Beet Gaya* (The spent I) (1970), *Alf Dupehar* (Burning Noon) (1970), *Tukian Jeebhan Wale* (The people with chooping tongues) (1977), *Matha Dive Wala* (Lamp-lighted Forehead) (1982), *Mahkan nu Jindre na Mareen* (Dont lock the fragrance) (1983), *Alvida ton Pehlan* (Before the farewell) (1984), *Mavan Dheean* (Mothers Daughters) (1989), *Niksuk* (Common) (1989), *Chauthe di Udik* (Waiting for the last) (1992), *Rukh te Rishi* (Tree and the Sage) (1992), *Mera Nam Kabir* (My name Kabir) (2000). Haribhajan has written beautiful lyrics and lyricality became his distinctive quality in other poetry also. His modernist idiom in *Na Dhupe Na Chhaven* and *Sarak De Safe Ute* influenced other poets also. Harnam, Sati Kumar were writing in new idiom. Experimentalist poets were also rejecting the traditional idiom.

Haribhajan Singh is known because of his long poems also. His *Rukh te Rishi* (got Saraswati award) is a long narrative text, complex, philosophical based on his experiences. The structure of this poem is different from the other long poems in Panjabi. The narrative technique is not traditional and linear. Autobiographical details are there, but not in a concrete way, the style is abstract, signifiers and symbols construct a paradigm. We discover the depth of the unconscious, We cannot grasp the depth of this poem without philosophic and perceptive consciousness. This long poem has six chapters, one Aadika and Antika. The opening lines create the stylistic atmosphere and the concept of Desire which has created the thematics of this poem:

O Supreme Space !
O Supreme Time !
I desire my life be the meditation of a tree
Soil my mother, water my father
I desire to write the lines of fragrance
.....

In this meditative poem the poet creates three signs: Rukh, Man and Rishi. Tree becomes the signifier of eternal nature. Rishi becomes the signifier of truth. Man is passing through the existential agonies, He is in search of transcendent truth. Between Rukh and Rishi man is becoming conscious about his destiny and the relation between Nature and Culture.

e) New Punjabi Poetry

When these kinds of transformations were happening, the new poets emerged. Some of them had sympathy with neo-progressivism. Mohanjit, Parminderjit, Amitoj, Surjit Patar are such poets. No doubt all these poets were significant, but Surjit Patar dominated the scene. He published *Kolaj Kitab* (1973, co.ed.) *Hawa Vich Likhe Haraf* (Words written in the air) (1979), *Birkh Arz Kare*

(Speaking Tree) (1992), *Hanere Vich Sulagdi Varanmala* (Alphabet smouldering in darkness) (1992), and *Lafzan Di Dargah* (The Srhrine of Words) (1999). Surjit Patar is known for his ghazals, lyricism and satiric power. No doubt his poems are equally powerful, but his ghazals have created a new norm in the this genre. His famous ghazal in 'Hawa Vich Likhe Harf':

If I speak how will the darkness tolerate it,
if I keep quiet what will the candle-holders say,
if my song dies this night,
how will my friends tolerate my living ?
.....

Jagtar also made a mark in the history of Punjabi ghazal, when he published *Sheshe da Jungle* (The forest of glass) (1980). Other known ghazal-writers Sadhu Singh Hamdard, Deepak Jatoi, Takhat Singh, Ajaib Chitarkar, Jaswinder, Gurtej Koharwala, Vijay Vivek, Sukhwinder Amrit, Gurbhajan Gill, Mohinderdeep Grewal, Surjit Judge have contributed to this genre in a significant way. Even in Pakistan, Munir Niazi, Zafar Iqbal, Rakshanda, Tanveer Bukhari, Raoof Sheikh, almost all the Punjabi poets have written ghazals also, Ghazal, in Panjabi has encouraged the lyricality in other poetry also. The new idiom also emerged. Ahmed Saleem and Fakhar Zaman's voice dominates this modern trend:

A Sparrow In The Drawing Room
Shut all the outlets —
windows, doors, ventilators.
Do not let it sit
.....

2.1.3 Feminist Poetry

Manjit Tiwana emerged as a significant woman poet after Amrita Pritam and Parbhjot Kaur. She spoke in a strong voice against the patriarchical values and traditional man-woman relationship, she rejected the concept of husband in this society:

Pati (Husband)
A husband is a hungry wolf
Who shields you from all other wolves
But himself...

Fixing you betwcen his jaws
He boasts:
'See, how safe you are !
I don't devour you'...
A husband is a hungry wolf
Who shields you from all other wolves
But himself...

A machine
He fits in all your spare parts,
Weeding out every hair on the body of your existence.
Questions:
'Who the hell are you?'

Instantly, like Red Riding Hood
You want to run away
But like a lightning flash he catches you.
Bewildered, you search desperately for yourself.

A husband is a hungry wolf
Who saves you from all other wolves
But ultimately
Devours you.

(Dargah) (Tr. by the author)

Many other women poets have published their work. Vanita, Paul Kaur, Manjit Pal, Kuldip Kalpna, Manjit Indra, Sukhwinder Amrit, Surjit Sakhi, Shashi Samundra, Surjit Kalsey, Amarjit Ghuman are known in this development. Vanita has become significant because she has worked on the theory and analysis of modern literature also. Otherwise also she does not speak rhetorically about social institutions, rather in a soft voice with a depth, also writes about different aspects of life and human problematics :

Varjit (Forbidden)

Mostly I remember those faces
glimpse of which is forbiddeen by them
mostly I remember those songs
.....

2.1.4 Neo-progressive Poetry

Neo-progressive or Naxalite poetry was opposing the traditional romantic-progressive and experimentalist modernist poetry, Avtar Singh Pash emerged the leading new-progressive poet. He published *Loh Katha* (Iron Strong) (1970). *Udde Bajan Magar* (Following the flying Hawks) (1974), and *Sade Samian Vich* (In our times) (1978). Pash believed in Maoist ideology and he created the new language for poetry. He combined the rural sensibility with the modern idiom:

At a little distance from myself, I am asleep
in spite of the intensified dispute with those
who have been malevolent towards me for so long
This little distance
is a black partridge hiding in the sugarcane fields
.....

Jagtar, Harbhajan Hundal (Janwadi), Harbhajan Halwarvi, Amarjit Chandan, Surinder Dhanjal, Iqbal Ramuwalia, Lal Singh Dil, Joga Singh, Darshan Khatkar and some other significant neo-progressive poets also emerged during the movement. After the decline of Naxalite movement in Panjab these poets wrote neo-progressive poetry, ideologically beyond Maoism or they discussed the situation which was responsible for the collapse of the socialist Soviet Union or the communism in Europe. They became aware about the developments in the asthetics of poetic art.

In this development Jagtar and Harbhajan Halwarvi also became the major poets. Jagtar published *Rutan Ranglian* (Colourful Seasons) (1957), *Talkhian Rangeenian* (Pleasures Agonies) (1960), *Dudh Pathri* (Milky stones) (1961),

(1973), *Chhangia Rukh* (Pruned Tree) (1976), *Sheeshe da Jungle* (The forest of Glass) (1980), *Jazeerian Vich Ghiria Samundar* (Sea encircled by islands) (1985), *Channkri Sham* (Quadrangular Evening) (1991), *Jugnu Diva te Darya* (Glow-worm, Lamp and River) (1992), *and Parvesh Duar* (Entrance Gate) (1992), Jagtar's journey started from lyricism and modernism, that is why he absored that language beyond neo-progressive poetry also. His 'Islands of Silence':

The Islands of Silence
The train stuck in the graveyard
whistles aloud.
It passed through the paddy fields
.....

Harbhajan Halwarvi published *Paun Udas Hai* (The air is sad) (1981), *Pighle Hoe Pal* (The Melted moments) (1985), *Pankh Vihuna* (Without feathers) (1991) and *Pulan ton Paar* (Beyond the bridges) (1999). He is sad about the decline of revolutionary struggle and expresses the sad moments, also writes love poetry with aesthetic understanding, His search beyond the struggle dominates his poetry:

The Hero of the Age

When a relationship is broken
and another is yet to be formed
the story of that period's incertanity:
who would listen to it, if not myself ?

With my own hands I have broken
an old mirror which reflects no face,
glass-shards are scattered on my path:
whose hands would collect them if not my own ?
The season's eyes are tears tears
the wind's breath is a sighing sighing
the waves in the Chenab are violent again:
who would swim them if not myself?
Every atom of the earth glows
stars burn red in the sky
and in the scorching deserts of darkness:
Whose foot would step there if not
my own, curious foot-steps?
The fresh verdure of the fields
bears red red flowers
but iron rains from above:
whose chest would shield them
if not my own ?
Everywhere a fire has flared
the sparks turning into flames.
So the ages come and go...
Who will be the hero of this age ?

(Pulan ton Paar, Tr. Surjeet Kalsey)

2.1.5 Punjabi Poetry Abroad

We cannot grasp the post-independence Panjabi poetry unless we understand the developments of Panjabi poetry being written abroad, because after independence a number of renowned Panjabi poets migrated to other countries. In the first decades U.K. became the center of Panjabi literary activity. Niranjan Singh Noor, Santokh Singh Santokh, Mushtak Singh, Jagtar Dhah, Baldev Bawa, Avtar Jandialvi and some other poets wrote noestalgic poetry with progressive consciousness. Now after the decline of first phase Avtar, Amarjit Chandan and Varinder Parihar in the new voice, have deconstructed the traditional language and thematics. They have become modern or post-modern poets. Amarjit Chandan has become the significant voice of new poetry:

No this isn't a memory
A memory
Brings a sparkle in yours eyes
Your heart begins to flutter.
.....

In Canada Gurcharan Rampuri, Ravinder Ravi, Navtej Bharti, Ajmer Rode, Iqbal Ramuwalia, Surinder Dhanjal, Sukhinder, Surjit Kalsey, Darshan Gill and so many other poets belong to different tendencies. They have written progressive, modernist, experimental, lyrical, post-modern, diasporic and poetry in other voices. After the two decades of post independence the center of Panjabi literary activity shifted to Canada and the poets spoke in a much mature voice — Navtej Bharti and Ajmer Rode published their collection '*Leela*' (Wonder-Performance) (600 pages) and created a stir in whole of the Punjabi world. Ajmer Rode experimented in new style and poetic-structure:

Blue Horse

Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside,
came the Guru to punjabi acadmy
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside,
came the Guru
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside, came ?
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside...
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom ?
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of ?
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean....
Blue horse dances
Blue horse dances.
Blue horse.

In Sweden Sati Kumar, in Denmark Sohan Kadri and in Switzerland Dev have written in modern and post-modern idiom. When they migrated to Europe already they were writing in modern language and style. Dev has published *Vidroh* (Protest) (1970), *Doosre Kinare di Talash* (In search of second shore) (1978), *Matabi Mitti* (Flame-coloured soil) (1983), *Prashan te Parvaz* (Question and flight) (1992), and *Shabdant* (End of Words) (1999). Being an artist, his modern imagery and thematic spaces make him distinctive in contemporary poetry:

The Last Moments
Look ! I've written the lost moments too
on the page of my senses.
Defeat is a vow of my journey,
my companion !
.....

In America Gurumel is also a poet with cosmic consciousness, Ravinder Sehraa, Sukhwinder Kamboj writing in a new-progressive idiom. In Germeny Rajwinder is writing poetry in Panjabi and Germen both.

Parminder Sodhi in Japan is another significant poet, because his Asian and orientalist voice is different from the poets living in the West. He is a zen poet, aesthetically different than the others.

2.1.6 Latest Trends

After Surjit Patar's lyrical poetry again blank verse (Nazam) has emerged. Parminderjit, Jaswant Deed, Aasi, Darshan Buttar, Ravinder, Amarjit Kaunke, Ambrish, Sarwan Minhas, Sukhchain Mistri, Sutinder Noor, Ramesh Kumar, Devneet, Gurpreet and several other poets are known because of nazam in contemporary Punjabi poetry, no doubt still some poets (Mohanjit, Anoop Virk) are known because of lyrics also.

New contemporary Punjabi poetry is beyond the post-progressive and modernist. Now, the poetry is more deep, concerned with pluralist ideological consciousness, without unnecessary metaphorical details. To conclude, I want to mention some lines from Manmohan's poem 'Vision' which shows how the new poem is taking even the themes insignificant in the past:

Merely by Shutting eyes
You can't acquire
Vision of a blind
Who reads with tips
.....

2.2 HARIBHAJAN SINGH — A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH : (1920-2002)

Dr. Haribhajan Singh was born in Lamding (Assam) on 18th August, 1920. His father Ganda Singh sent Haribhajan Singh to his aunt at Lahore for education. After some years, he shifted to Delhi. He had completed his graduation. He became a school teacher in 1943. In 1948 he did M.A. Hindi from Delhi University. He did M.A. English also in 1951, but he became college lecturer in Hindi. In 1953-54 he started his research on the subject 'The study of Hindi poetry written in Gurmukhi script,' and got Ph.D. degree from Delhi University. In 1968, he shifted to Punjabi and became Professor of Punjabi in Delhi University. He retired in 1984 as Head of the Department of Punjabi. Till his death in 2002 he was active in writing poetry and literary criticism.

Haribhajan Singh (1920-2002)

Haribhajan Singh got a number of awards for his literary contribution. In 1933 he got Punjab State Award; in 1969 Sahitya Akademi Award; in 1978 Sahitya Kala Parishad Award; in 1975 Punjabi Shromani Sahitkar Award, Punjab state Bhai Veer Singh Award, Punjabi Literary Forum Award; in 1980 Soviet Land Nehru Award; in 1986 Kartar Singh Dhaliwal Award and in 1986 Madh Pardesh's Kabir Award. In 1984 he was awarded the K.K. Birla Foundation Saraswati Award.

In 1976, he visited Canada and USA and in 1981, U.S.S.R. to participate in the conferences on literature. In 1974, he got Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, in 1995 Punjabi University fellowship, in 1996 Guru Nanak Dev University Fellowship, and many other honours from different institutions.

2.3 AN OVERVIEW OF HARIBHAJAN SINGH'S POETRY

Haribhajan Singh published his first book of poetry **Laasan** (1956). At that time, romantic-progressive poetry was on the decline. Experimentalists were raising their voice for modernist experiments. Politically there was a split in the progressive movement. *Laasan* created a stir because of its distinctive poetic idiom. Haribhajan Singh's lyrical and intellectual styles were both

powerful. In 1957, he published **Taar-Tupka**, a poetic play, which was against atomic war, but in that poetic play his poetry was again powerful and within two years, he became a major Punjabi poet. In 1962, he published **Adhraini**, a collection of lyrics. These lyrics were different from those of the other lyricists. He was conscious about the tradition of Indian lyric as well as the classical Punjabi lyric. Awareness of Punjabi folklore made his lyric more significant.

When in 1967, he published **Na Dhupe Na Chhaven** he became a modernist. T.S. Eliot and other modernist poets influenced him. The existential, anti-romantic, anti-idealist view also influenced his poetry. The individual living in the modern culture became the centre of his poetic thought. His poetic language which was anti-metaphoric was very apt in this poetry. Absured and other tendencies of modern poetry influenced him:-

An Accident

I wish an accident would happen on this road
So I could go home.
I've been waiting at this crossing for a long time.
Perhaps something may happen
but nothing is broken anywhere.
The people of this city are strangely without will
they stop when the traffic light indicates
They start when the traffic light indicates
tired tired they walk, stale stale waters.
What conspiracy has tamed this whole city?
Who has put the pace of the city under a spell?
Now nothing can happen in this city.
No one's gait is his own....
I think something must happen
maybe someone run over by a car
abruptly a light of disobedience should glow
in someone's forehead.
May be I could devour the red and green lights
in a fit of savage rage.
A new creation should arise out of this thick haze
I wish an accident would happen on this road
so I could go home.

(Tr. Surjit Kalsey)

In 1970, he published **Sarak De Safe Ute** (On the Page of the Road) and continued his distinctive modernist style. This poem represents his modernist style and language and in the later works also he is known for this modern poetic language:-

On the page of the road
I've written a letter addressed to you
and hung it on the pole
so that you can read it.
Whatever letter is written
on the page of the road
cannot be folded and put into the pocket.
My letter is not Christ

that it would willingly hang itself on the cross:
every cross is an innovation
Whoever ascends it becomes a dwarf.
The pole is a good mailman
the mail is easily distributed by it
and is read instantly.
This road wanders unrestrained
it also takes a turn
towards the battlefield,
it goes on and on with its cut head and torn feet
jumping over the heightless plains
it climbs the mountains
when it does not find any path forward
embracing a peak, it
hangs from it.
Long before the innovation
comes the end-
peace be with you !
On the page of the road
under people's feet
my letter crushed, disfigured and
wounded but alive
written on the dust, it asks again and again:
Is there any path other than this road to see you?
Life is not a conspiracy.
Why should we see each other in a hidden place?
Friendship is not patronage.
Why should only one side greet every time?
The words of love we may read wrongly
but why should a Pandit always be the
interpreter of love?
You were crazy about travelling
your sunny body touched everyone.
When you wished you became rain
and poured over everyone.
For a long time I've not seen you
at the public meeting place.
What helplessness has come over you?
Whose fear? What danger?
Why are you always surrounded by guards?
For the sake of a handshake
I will never enter your fort, come what may.
This side of the threshold is strictly guarded.
I would like to see you
as a rebel meets a rebel.
I am not your masses, I am your friend.
Those whom the people adore are not emperors.
On the page of the road
I've written a letter addressed to you
and hung it on the pole, so that it shall reach you.

(tr. Surjit Kalsey)

In 1970, he also published the selection of his poetry **Mein Jo Beet Gaya.** This selection is important because of its 'Preface', Haribhajan Singh attacked

those poets who were still writing in traditional lyrical style or were committed to traditional progressivism.

His next two volumes of poetry were distinctive because of certain reasons. In 1972, he published **Alph Dupehar** and in 1977 **Tukian Jebhan Wale.** The poems in the first volume were about the war of Bangla Desh and the poems in second volume were related to the Emergency. Haribhajan Singh wrote in a lyrical style but he did not speak in rhetorical language like the traditional progressive poets. He created satirical lyrics.

In 1982, when he published **Matha Deeve Wala,** he wrote a long poem in a different style. Polyphonic inner voices of the modern individual create a dialogic situation. Existential tension is depicted in a paradigmatic growth. Again in **Mavan Dhian** (1989) and **Niksuk** (1989) Haribhajan Singh published his lyrics, but his great work **Rukh Te Rishi** came in 1995. This long poem was awarded the Saraswati Award.

Haribhajan Singh was also a significant literary critic. He discussed the theory of Russian formalism, structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics and system theory. He exposed the limitations of classical Marxist literary criticism.

He also translated Aristotles Poetics, Longinus's *On the Sublime*, Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, Camu's novel *Plague*, a portion of 'Rig Veda' and so many other works from Western and oriental literature.

Haribhajan Singh has influenced Punjabi poetry and criticism in a significant way. His 'Rukh Te Rishi' and some other poetic-works have been translated into English, Hindi and other languages.

2.4 *TREE AND THE SAGE* (RUKH TE RISHI)

Tree and the Sage is a long narrative but complex poem, based on his experiences. The structure of this poem is different than other long poems in Punjabi. The narrative teachnique is not traditional and linear. Though autobiographical details are there, yet not in a concrete way; the style is abstract. Some signifiers and symbols construct a paradigm. We discover the depths of the unconscious. The experiences, through words and poetic forms create the commumicative surface. We cannot grasp the depths of this poem without philosophic and perceptive consciousness. This poem is a postmodern text and in this way the poet transcends his own previous modern texts.

Dr. J.S. Rahi has said about this poem: "*Tree and the Sage* is a narrative woven round varied experiences of psychological and behavioural complexities. The experiences are episodic in nature, but fused into a cohesive whole by rhythm and intensity of meaning. The descriptive range of the experience is extensive but dense. The use of allusions for creating symbolic structures is profound and encompassing.

(Preface, *Tree and the Sage*, p.3)

This long poem has six Cantos, one Aadika and Antika. The opening lines create the stylistic atmosphere and the desire which has created thematic motifs of this poem:-

Long live thirst
Though all the world is for you
Yet the most precious gift of all
Is the thirst that the Creator showered on you

The blood that flows in the veins
Drop by drop
Swims like tears in the eyes
It knows you though it sees you not

(Cants I, p.15)

In this meditative poem the poet creates three signs: Rukh (Tree), Man and Rishi (Sage). Tree becomes the signifier of eternal nature. Rishi is the signifier of Truth. Man is passing through his existential agonies in search of Truth. Between Rukh and Rishi man is conscious of his destiny as well as the relation between Nature and Culture.

In the first Canto, the poet thinks that in his own home he is like a tree. He is conscious of his fragrance and fruits, though he does not know the name of his own fruits. When he goes out of his own home, he goes like a tree and people sit without inhibtion under the shade of this tree.

A simple fellow battered by the sun
Sought the shade and sat
Till the shade slides into motherhood
He sat so long
That he lost the urge to wander
Like the baby clings to the suckling mother
Truth dawns by itself

(p-17)

Some children have thrown stones towards the tree, lovers have written their names on it with knives and the tree has seen many seasons.

He knows that he is not a Kalp-Brikh, though he has fulfilled desires of some people. The tree and sun rise together. The birds bring the voices of Rishis. The tree talks in the voice of flowers and fruits. Now the Tree is transformed as the Rishi :-

Who could be a *Rishi* greater than the tree
A stoic meditating in sun and frost
Undaunted and unshaken
In rain or drought
Fragrance is your sermon
And flowers your *prasad*
Fruits are your inexhaustible store
Come back, *O Rishidev*, come back
You are the *Rishidev*.

(p.20)

The poet praises desire, search and thirst and that search is for Omi who was lost in poet's own existence. In the Second Canto, the poet puts various questions to Rukh-Rishi Dev. He wants to know from where Rukh-Rishi Dev

got love, smile and devotion like a mother. Is this not the divine knowledge? How is tree shaken upto its roots?

This kind of interior monologue or dialogue creates the paradigm of this poem. The poet creates the multi-layers of language to express his experiential state.

In the Second, Third and Fourth Cantos, the search is from Rukh-Rishi Dev to Rishi Dev. The poet does not know where he resides. What is his identity? How will he recognize him? He experiences an alienation, but he depicts his journey of life in a city. Signifiers float onwards, time-space merge with his search, with his desires, with his fancies. Sometimes he creates questions and answers, sometimes only questions, sometimes only answers and we understand the silent floating questions and answers. He speaks about love, tradition, dreams, images, doubts, death and relations:-

Leaving the shade for visitors
I set out to seek the *Rishidev*
Where was his meditation and his abode?
Vainly did I trudge through the town
None knew who the *Rishidev* was
Was he yours or mine?
None had known or heard of him.

'Which *Rishidev*?
Which is his village or his home?
What is his appearance?
What are his features?
Are you seeking the one with no address?
How will you know him if you do find him?
Do we not seek the one we already know?"

Strange were the questions
Stranger still was my quest
I felt like an exile
Without foothold in sight

Then came the voice:
'He did exist in encyclopedias once
Seek him there
Who knows if he still lives there
Or has shifted elsewhere?"

I combed the city crowds, assemblies, and parties
Rubbing through the forest dense
Like an uprooted tree
My branches and shoots were torn apart
Leaves wounded one and all
Tears flooding the eyes to brim
Distance yawning in fissures every inch
(Canto II, p. 24-5)

The poet is in a search. Sometimes he feels that he should go back, but he also feels that paths of retreat are lost. He continues his search for Rishidev:-

Where are you. *O Rishidev*?
I have brought God's message
Allah is keen
To reveal himself to some *ummity*
Where is the *ummity*?

(Canto II, p.35)

In the Third Canto he remembers his childhood when a girl met him, who was at the same time a fire to pass through and sacred like Ganges. He came to Rishi for knowledge. He remembers Gautam and Ahilya.

Thematically Canto IV is significant when the poet thinks that in the cavity of the tree, a serpent is residing and he is not alone. When he comes out of his home, this serpent is always with him. Sometimes he says to the serpent that he should leave the tree: How can he go to the Rishi with him? But the serpent says that only this hollow is his home:

Often I said:
"*Bhai*" *naga*, do leave me now
How can I go to *Rishi* with you
How shall I be true and pure"

The *naga* hissed back:
"The hollow is my home
We were born together
Like Siamese twins
How can I leave my home
Banish your hollow
Please, if you can
I will leave along with it".

(Canto IV, p-53)

But now the poet, the man is awakened. He can walk like a tree. He feels that a Deeva (lamp) burnt within him. Now he can see his inner recesses:-

Walking like a tree
I turned into a room
With slits in the door
And crevices in the walls
Once I believed
That a *deeva* burnt within me
But now
There are no slits nor crevices
Through which
I could peep into my inner recesses.

(Canto IV, p. 62)

In Canto V, he feels his awakened self, the dawn of awakening, the illumination of a path. He again remembers the girl who met him in his childhood, but now she is the full moon in the sacred water. This is the Rishi-life, this is the Rishi-style.

Knowledge has created this transformation. Now the man, the poet, speaks in the language of Rishi:-

Man at birth
Is the text original
The creator's creation
But is then mutated
Into fences and walls
And languages barbed and strange

The same man weathers
The versions varied
Unable to know
He is one or many

The creator surprised
Anguished and bewildered
Seeks the same person in the crowd
Where is my text original?

(Canto VI, p.81)

The poet belives in the existential reality of man. Ideologically he is not metaphysical, but realistic and modern, His symbols present the modern man in totality. But this experience creates an open text. He feels like Sidhartha, like Buddha:-

When Sidhartha became the Buddha
His body was on fire
Boils appeared all over
Hard was it to bear his own light

When he left home
Dawn was just breaking
But now the high sun was blazing
Smouldering in its light

At times he felt like a tree
Brimming with new sharp fragnance
If it broke not free
It would go crazy

At times he felt he was a pot with holes
With *deeva* burning bright within
Light there is
But spills not from the holes
The light thus trapped would turn into smoke
The earthen pot would crack and crumble

I wish to flow into waters and deserts
And appear before the sun rises
Even at midnight
I long to dip into oceans and streams
To light the waters with my fire

(Canto VI, p. 85)

Haribhajan Singh's critical and creative consciousness merges in this text, and it becomes a distinctive, philosophic and significant poetic text.

I am a tree walking.....
(from Tree and the Sage, Canto I, Sections 1-4)

In the first Canto of this long poem the Tree is speaking. The poet has created the symbol of Tree for his own self. This tree is walking within his house. He feels his fragrance. He has illusions. He narrates his experiences of the world. Sometimes people have enjoyed his shade and sometimes people have stoned him also. Some lovers have carved their names into the frames. He narrates how he has experienced rains, winds, seasons. Metaphorically he is speaking about the tragedies and other kinds of happenings. He has felt always fresh, new. Now he wants to move, the staying is too long.

Though he is not a Kalpa Brikh, yet he has fulfilled the desires of the people and they went away after their wants and needs, after picking the fruits. He has not forgotten them. The treasures of a mother never shrink. He has the wisdom of scriptures. Sparrows sing on his branches. This is his way of life. Again he speaks in metaphoric language.

He is such a tree which is free from bondage. This way is not calculating. As fruits become sweet and free, bow towards earth. He feels such a benevolence. When somebody tries to snatch the fruit, he feels as though some bird has pecked at the fruit or as a mother feels when her child suckles. He feels joy, he gives shade to the sun-scorched people. Again the Tree becomes a signifier of the self or the speaking subject.

The poet celebrates the thirst or the desire, because of Desire or Thirst, the vision of streams, waterfalls, cascades and deep wells is possible. This Thirst or Desire makes the soul go beyond the roaring whirlpools. The style, the philosophic layers of this poem open wings through this kind of metaphoric language and aesthetic thematic expansion. This kind of aesthetic expansion is distinctive in Haribhajan Singh's poetry; it creates a lyrical style. His depths are philosophic, but lyrical and his metaphors are original.

Tree is transformed into the self and the self of the poet is transformed into the tree. Tree is very significant in Indian tradition. Buddha attained knowledge under the tree in Budhgaya. In paintings, Guru Nanak Dev, the first guru of the Sikhs is generally shown sitting in meditation under a tree. In several Indian myths and folktales tree is very significant, symbolically and otherwise also. The concept of Desire is important in metaphysics, in psychology and religious philosophy. In Lacanian psychoanalysis and Julia Kristeva's concept of 'Desire of language and language of Desire' it is again significant. This suggests that we can interpret this poem in post-modern langauge also. Lacan is a post-Sigmand Freud thinker of psychoanalysis and he has reinterpreted 'Desire'. Julia Kristeva has interpreted language from this point of view beyond Freud. We can interpret Haribhajan Singh poetry in that post-modern language.

2.5 OUTLINE OF MODERN HINDI POETRY

In the Medieval Hindi Poetry Kabir, Jayasi, Meera, Surdas and Tulsidas made the rich poetic tradition. They wrote devotional and religious poetry and influenced the growth of Hindi poetry. The other thing about this growth is

of development brought Maithili, Bhojpuri, Avdhi and Brij bhasha into Hindi poetic tradition still in modern Hindi we have the heritage of these dialects.

Bhartendu Period

Modern Hindi poetry starts from the times of Bhartendu (1868 — 1900). Bhartendu Harishchander and other poets based their poetry on the new nationalist thinking because the British imperialism had occupied whole of India and these poets didn't accept the imperialist slavery. Though still most of the poets were writing in Brijbhasha yet from the thematic point of view they were concerned with the new problematics of India and they were united in their nationalist voice. These poets were Thakur Jagmohan Singh, Ambika Datt Viyas, Babu Bal Mukand Gupta and others.

Bhartendu Harishchander started the publication of "Kavi Vachan Sudha" and this magazine was committed to the new poetry. Harishchander also started "Kavita Vardhni Sabha". The poets were writing about Rama, Krishna, Nirguna, Saguna, Atma, Parmatma, Radha, Sita and on some other subjects also. These poets were also writing about the Indian culture, Indian tradition, Indian religions and the Nation of India. They also studied the western literature and other books on western social thought and political theory. They studied these things in a comparative way but in their poetry expressed nationalist thoughts. They openly said that East India company is looting the country. They also praised the Britishers because they were doing some modern things for the growth of industry and education, but they were conscious that India must be conscious about freedom.

Dwivedi Period

The critics start the Dwivedi period from 1900 because after 1900 Pandit Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi dominated the Hindi scene. He started the publication of "Sarasvati". He said that the poets of Bhartendu age were not conscious about the correct language and they wrote most of the literature in Khari Boli or Brij Bhasha. Pandit Mahavir Prasad felt that the writers of Hindi language must be conscious about grammar and correctness. Pandit Mahavir Prasad also felt that the vocabulary of Hindi literature was not so wide and he took vocabulary from Sanskrit, English, Marathi and Urdu. In poetry the poets of this age had no sympathy for Shringar Ras and a voice was raised against the traditional "Shringaric" poetry. Dwivedi suggested that the poets should write on different subjects. He studied the different tendencies in Bangla and English. Rabinder Nath Tagore influenced Dwivedi. He said that we shouldn't write only about Rama or Lakshmana but we should also write about Lakshmana's wife Urmila. Under the influence of this voice Maithili Sharan Gupat wrote his epic "Saket". Dwivedi refused to publish Nirala's poem "Juhi Ki Kali" (1916) because he considered this poem romantic and said that from the ethical point of view it shouldn't be published. But some poets revolted against this kind of formulation and they wrote poetry under the influence of romanticism or "Chhayavaad". Pandit Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi was an idealist and in his poetry he preached idealism. Maithly Sharan Gupat became the other known poet who wrote about Indianness Indian culture and against the imperialist slavery.

Chhayavaad

Modern Hindi poetry was under the influence of romanticism or Chhayavaad from 1918 to 1938. Hindi Chhayavaad doesn't mean exactly romanticism, but most of the romantic poetry was written by the poets who were writing Chhayavaadi poetry. Acharya Ram Chander Shukal said that this Chhayavaad was under the influence of symbolism of European poetry. Sumitra Nandan Pant said that this poetry revolted against the enlightenment of traditional poetry. The other reason for this Chhayavaadi poetry is that during "Dwivedi" period the poets were writing about the Objective reality. They didn't write about the subjective reality or the innerself of the poet. Now the poets were writing about the innerself, that's why they were writing about Love, Karuna, and other bhavas. Pant, Nirala, Prasad, Mahadevi wrote about the innerself and beyond objective reality also. This Chhayavaadi poetry developed the language and imagery of modern Hindi poetry. Some Hindi critics have also used another word "Halavad" which is extention of Chhayavaad. Harivansh Rai Bhachan's "Madhushala" is the most significant creation in this kind of Hala-Balavaad. This tendency was most lyrical and was under the influence of Persian poet Omar Khayam.

Progressive poetry

In India Progressive movement started in 1936 and this movement was under the influence of Socialist Realism, Russian Revolution or Marxism. Munshi Prem Chand was the main voice for this progressive movement. He said that ".....we shall no longer tolerate a social system under which a single individual can tyrannies over thousands of human beings; then our self-respecting humanity will raise the standard of revolt against capitalism, militarism and imperialism; and we shall not sit quiet and inane after doing a little bit of creative work on pieces of paper but we shall actively participate in building that new order which is not opposed to beauty, good taste and self respect. The role of literature is not simply to provide us with amusement or recreation, it does not follow, but is one the contrary, a torch-bearer to all the progressive movements in society".

(Munshi Prem Chand's Message to the conference of Progressive Writers Association, 1936).

In the first conference of progressive writers association at Lucknow in 1936 the writers resolved "..We consider that literature is the heritage of the whole human races and is not diisible in national radial or geographical boundaries. Further, we consider that collectively and individually we stand in the ranks of those who are striving to build a new social order based on equality, freedom and peace, and as such we cannot but protest against the anti cultural forces of fascism and militarism. We declare that was is a brutality and is a serious menace to human culture and progress". This movement created a new force in modern Hindi poetry. Now poets didn't trust Chhayavaad or romanticism. Realism became the new creatie exression Progressive movement became very strong because the Indian people were fighting against the British imperialism and now they could understand the anti-cultural forces of Fascism and Imperialism. Muktibodh wrote his famous long poem "Zamane Ka Chehra" (Face of the time). This shows the new kind of commitment in Hindi poetry.

When the enraged sea of Asian sorrow
Merged with the Euro-American seas
On the wharfs of Africa
In the vast field of the universe
United through the threads of tears, related in pain
And the burning fire in the hearts,
When Human beings
United through love and became one
On the banks of time

Even Hira Nand Vatsyayan 'Agyeya' in his poetry described the horror of war. The other poets Nag Arjun, Kedat Nath Aggarwal, Trilochan Shastri wrote impressive progressive poetry. Still Hindi poets are writing under the influence of progressivism, though they are writing about the new situations, because now the situation is not of Nehruvian utopia about the socialist structure of our society.

We experienced the tragedy of the partition of 1947. This historical tragedy became the subject of modern poetry. Some poets wrote about this tragedy in a direct language and some with depth created the new idiom. Raghuvir Sahay wrote his poem "7 O'clock" during that tragic period

A fruit mellows in the east and vastness shrinks
Into red. The sun revolving like a kicked football
Leaps high and crashes in a cold ground-glass.
Again, again a day has come, by now,
We ought to have forgotten late night dance,
And early morning's feast of wholesome dreams.

Like splashed at random pools of faded paint,
The earth brown-baked is litterd with cool shades,
For all will be hot when work has half been done
On the fields,
Where by and by the earth its remnant virtue yields
To man. Without the expected guest of one gold dream
I have played an embarassed host all night,
The crescent which sent me all my sour sleep,
It cannot runaground in the shores of day
A puffed whitness makes tangents with tree-tops
And turns a dark green into lighter green.

A flick of match-stick light is this morn
No moments more quick more fleeding than these
The thread of last day's work I have to catch
Adieu, I go out now but will return
Soon. In the evening; all the light of day
Tucked under my eyelids, and all the weight of sun
Borne on my shoulders, all the breadth of time
Grasped tight
In both the useful fists.

(7 O'clock)

After 1950 the progressive movement in continuity becomes neo-progressive or Krantikari movement under the influence of new situations in Marxism or under the influence of Maoism and Naxalism. Some poets and critics used the word "Janvaad" also.

Anti-poetry or experimentalist movement

After 1960 some poets were attracted towards "Akavita" or anti-poetry movement. This movement believed in new experiments. It revolted against the voice of neo poetry (Nai Kavita). This anti-poetry movement believed in anti-hero, decadence, frustration, alienation because they said that the traditional value system is shattered a new kind of imagery appeared. Even the significant poet Dhumil was influenced from this tendenciy. Jagdish Chaturvedi started this akavita movement and so many poets were under the influence of this akavita movement. But the poets like Raghuvir Sahay, Sarveshwar Dyal Sexsena, Kedar Nath Singh, Paryag Shukal never accepted this anti-poetry movement. Some other poets were in search of other new styles and poetic language. Vishnu Khare, Arun Kamal, Manglesh Dabral, Rajesh Joshi, Ashok Bajpayee said that the poetry has returned and they used the word "Kavita Ki Vaapsi". Raghuvir Sahay, Mukti Bodh and after them Kunwar Narain, Anamika and so many other poets reinterpreted humanism also and the styles beyond progressivism.

In the contemporary poetry Kunwar Narain is the most significant poet. "En Dinon" (During these days) has become the most significant anthology of poems. He is a poet of depth but his languages is very simple and aesthetically impressive.

Different somewhere
I am
Find me
Look for me in every word
See where
I am

(Mein Aur Tum)

The new poetry is committed to the ordinary man, not to the superman or the idealism which prevailed in the first decades of modern Hindi poetry. The satiric style is also very powerful in the contemporary Hindi poetry. Again we can quote Raghuvir Sahay's poem "Communication" to understand this kind of poetic style:

I beg your leave, Superman.
May I not join your procession
Please understand before the common dinner
I, a mere poet, am a no-good-cook-and-cleaner.

You are not a poet, you can understand
How utterly stupid it would be
To face the crowd.
And to claim familiarity with it
At the same time.

I did try once
And I said I love the people.

And was left hanging over the heads
Of men on their haunches.

Then came the national call
For all to join the Operation-Destruction-Idol.
There was a choice.
You could simply keep your hand raised and vote
If you did not like to pound
The party's hammer.

No doubt the contemporary Hindi poetry was influenced by the western thematics or philosophy, existentialism and thoughts of absurdity also influenced the poetry, yet we believe that the poets in new Hindi poetry are in search of their own idiom and style. Now most of the poets write in simple language about the reality of common man especially in the third world.

2.6 RAGHUVIR SAHAY — A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH

Raghuvir Sahay was born on 9 December, 1929 in Lakhnow. His father was in Police, but had some land also. After retirement his father served Arya Samaj and died in 1939. Raghuvir Sahai was doing Inter when he wrote his first poem. He published his first poem in 1947 and in 1948 his long poem 'Sayankaal' was published 'Pratik' a known magazine at that time. Raghuvir Sahay became Asstt. Editor of Daily Navjeevan from 1949 to 1951.

Raghuvir Sahay (1929-1990)

In 1950 he did M.A. (English) and also became interested in drama and theatre, acted in plays also. In 1951 he became Asstt. Editor of 'Pratik' and migrated to Delhi. In 1953 he joined All India Radio as an Asstt. Editor. In 1955 he was married to Vimaleshwari. In 1957 he resigned from All India

Radio. In 1958 he joined National School of Drama New Delhi as a Research Officer. In 1959 he again joined All India Radio.

In 1960 he published his first collection of poetry "**Sirion Par Dhoop Main**". In 1963 he joined Daily Navbharat Times as a special correspondent. In 1968 he joined Dinman as a news editor. In the same year he became the editor of Dinman. In 1970 he visited U.S.S.R, U.K. and Germany. In 1972 he published his first short-story collection: **Rasta Idhar Se Hai**. In 1979 he translated Shakespeares play Macbeth. In 1984 he received Sahitya Akademi Award for his book **Log Bhool Gaye Hain**. In 1990 he died of a heart attack.

2.7 AN OVERVIEW OF RAGHUVIR SAHAY'S POETRY

Raghuvir Sahay published five **volumes of poetry**. In 1951 when **Dusra Saptak** (ed. Agyeya) was published, Raghuvir Sahay was not alone in this edited volume. His poems were published alongwith Shamsher Bahadur Singh, Bhawani Prasad Mishar, Shakunt Mathur, Harinarayan Vyas, Naresh Mehta and Dharam Vir Bhatri. In this edited volume Vatsyayan Ageya included Raguvir Sahay's early poems which he wrote in 1948 and 1949. But these were representative poems and distinctive also in the contemporary Hindi poetry. His romantic, intellectual and realistic poems were in a different idiom. His ghazals and lyrics were also included in this selection.

Raghuvir Sahay published **Serion Par Dhoop Mein** in 1960, but in this book his short stories and essays were also included. The poems of this book had been written from 1950 to 1959. During this decade there was a movement of 'New Poetry', but Raghuvir Sahay did not join that movement. He was not in favour of that kind of conscious 'newness', 'The poet naturally writes new poetry. He experiments very naturally,' this was his feeling. In 1957, He wrote his poem **Hindi** and satirized this movement:

We were fighting
a language battle to change society.
But the question of Hindi is not longer simply a question
of Hindi-we have lost out.

O good soldier,
know when you're beaten.
And now, that question
which we just referred to in connection with the so-called
langauge battle,
let's put it this way:
Were we and those on behalf of whom we fought
the same folk?
Or were we, in fact, the agents of our opperssors-
sympathetic, well-meaning, well-schooled agents?

Those who are the masters are slaves.
Their slaves are those who are not masters.

If Hindi belongs to masters,
then in what language shall we fight for freedom?

The demand for Hindi
is now a demand
for better treatment-
not rights-
put by the agents
to their slave-masters.
They use Hindi in place of English,
while the fact is
that their masters
use English in place of Hindi-
the two of them have struck a deal.
He who exposes this hypocrisy
will dispose of Hindi's slavery.
This will be the one who, when he speaks Hindi,
will show us what simple folk really feel.

(Translated from Hindi: Harish Trivedi & Daniel Weissbor)

He was in search of poetry, real poetry, serious poetry. His next collection of poetry '**Atamhatya Ke Virudh**' was published in 1967, and there was a great change in poetic idiom and theme. Now the poet was facing the society and the masses, he was actively involved in Journalism. The reality of folk and social situation had great impact on his new poetry. The language became more simple and transparent. A new kind of poetry emerged. It was different from the progressive poetry. This poetry also rejected the modernist idiom or anti-poetry movement. Some critics interpreted it as the Janwadi poetry.

The next collection **Hanso Hanso Jaldi Hanso** was published in 1975. The poem 'Taktaki' and the other poems included in this volume satirized the establishment and the situations which became a preface to the emergency. The poet wrote about the fear and terror in people's mind. His language was simple, ironic, but the awakening call was hidden and deep:

Laugh
Laugh; for you are under watch
Laugh not at yourself for the bitterness in it
Would give you away and they will get you.
Laugh; do not betray sheer joy as you do
For they may suspect you of being free
From the common guilt and they will get
You.

As you laugh do not let anyone know what is
It you laugh at
Let all of them believe that having lost your will
Like others you laugh a known laughter like
others
Who laugh in place of their speech.

Speak to yourself you may while the high dome
reverberates
But remember to laugh when the echoes die
For if they found you silent they will get you on
charge of protest

But if you laugh last, they will
Have the last laugh and
You will be able to get away.

Laugh; but beware of jokes; they are made of words
For they might carry in them a meaning given to them
A hundred years ago by someone else.

Would it not be better if you were to laugh
Before and after you spoke
So that nothing that you say is taken seriously
Or if you took care to laugh in all inevitable situations
Such as the beating of the poor by the powerful
Where none can be of help
Except the poor man himself
And he too usually laughs.

Laugh, laugh be quick to laugh
Laugh before the master leaves
Shaking hands with him
Lowering your eyes,
Assuring him that you had laughed
Yesterday when he was here.

(Translated by the poet)

In 1989 he published **Kuchh Patte Kuchh Chithhian**. These poems present the situation in which the man is defeated and sad in struggle. This kind of poetry was written by the ideological poets when the decline and contradictions occured in the progressive movement and in the growth of socialism. The images of social decadence disturb the reader also.

After four years of his death **Ek Samae Thha Sahay** was published in 1995 and these were the unpublished poems. Images of death and other experiences of his own lonely world made these poems distinctive.

The development of Raghuvir Sahay's poetry shows the growth of Hindi poetry. He influenced the contemporary and the next generation of poets. Critics still are evaluating his contribution to the modern Hindi poetry.

2.8 *THE STARE*

Raghuvir Sahay wrote this poem in 1972 and published in the same year in 'Dharamyug' with the title 'Taktaki' (State). In 1978 he published it again in 'Hanso Hanso Jaldi Hanso' and the title 'Aj Ka Paath Hai' (Today's Lesson).

In the very first line 'common facts about death' are very significant words, and we underline the word death. This is the central philosophic signifier of this poem, which makes this poem deep. This central signifier gives 'Death' multi-meanings. Signifier makes an image, but this image is always moving, never stays at one meaning, that is why it becomes 'Floating Signifier' Floating signifier is always more poetic.

In Kath Upanishad Nachiketa speaks about 'Death' and the Upanishad philosophizes 'Death'. Raghuvir Sahay does not philosophize but creates

multi-semantic layers. Death does not come in the same manner to all. Dead persons do not become equal after the death also. Even before death they were not equal. The dead body is a remainder after the struggle of life. Poet consciously uses the words 'battered' eating bowl, 'soiled', hair comb, the struggler had a 'breakage' within', only we hear the 'cry' from within, but how this cry escapes, we cannot explain, still this is to be studied and analysed. Poets write in their native langauge about this cry, about this pain. We print it, we translate it into English.

Here, the poem becomes satiric. The 'cry' takes expression only in 'the poetry of native language, in folk-idiom, some times 'cry' is lyrical and musical, but we print it and translate it into 'world-wide English language' whether that cry remains same in translation, this question is hidden in this satiric expression.

How the people, critics or translaters interpret that cry, the speaking subject of this poem cannot tell, he is dead, he may have said 'Liberty', but now the translaters or interpreters have written 'help'. The satire is in the difference, 'Liberty' is ideological word, but help is anti-ideological, it creates sympathy and the spirit of 'Liberty' dies. The speaking subject is misinterpreted, but that tragedy is happening. Here the poet is also satirising the theory of translation. We cannot translate poetry or the poetry in native language. Ideological depths are shatterd in that translation

In this situation the literate people are passing through their own crisis, they think they are giving a direction to the half-dead illiterate persons, but this situation is very ironical, the dead man of this poem says that he would not ask the question about the hanging heads who have load of wisdom and in a religious respect they are silent about the crisis. This is the shameful situation. The dead man is only staring at their bald heads, The stare is like a dead or silent machingun, which cannot fire. The symbol of 'machingun' satirizes the situation of that 'dead' society, unconscious about the crisis. The 'dead' is conscious about the crisis, but the living heads are 'bald' ignorant and 'dead'. This irony and satiric language makes this poem powerful and ideological. The poet has not spoken in a direct rhetorical language. He has created 'symbolic language,' and this symbolic language has made this poem more powerful and ideological.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the development of modern Punjabi and Hindi poetry. We have stressed the growth of different tendencies. We have also studied two poets and their poetic-texts. Both were contemporary poets. Haribhajan Singh's text is the first part of the first Canto of his long poem *Tree and the Sage*. This is a symbolic poem, significant because of its philosophic depth and poetic-signifiers. The poet is conscious about the Upnishadic thematics also, speaks on the experiencial level. His transformation to the metaphysical and spiritual state of a Rishi or Sidhartha is combined with the consciousness of Gurbani. The poem is in monologic style, but the inner-dialogic situations are significative. Before *Tree and the Sage* (Rukh te Rishi) Haribhajan Singh had written 'Matha Deeve Wala' another long poem and two years before his death wrote another long poem 'Registan Vich Lakarhara', but he is known for *Tree and the Sage*. His distinctive

narrative style, his message and communicative art makes this poem significant.

Raghuvir Sahay is another Indian poet, who created a new kind of poetic-consciousness in Hindi poetry. He was a modern and progressive poet, but not in favour of western modernism. He rejected traditional progressivism also. He created new Janwadi idiom. His satiric style is very powerful. He satirizes establishment, sloganmongring and silence in social and political crisis. His poem *The Stare* is also such a satiric poem. We analyse this poem in a politico-cultural perspective. This poem cannot be studied without larger social context. He is telling about the shape of things to come. His poetic vision is futuristic. This kind of poem becomes powerful, ideologically distinctive in contemporary progressive and neo-progressive poetry also.

Both Haribhajan Singh and Raghuvir Sahay have found a firm footing in Indian literature. Their contribution in the making of Indian poetry is laudable.

2.10 GLOSSARY

Oblivious: not aware of what is happening around one.

Mundane needs: needs of this earthly world

Saline: impregnated with salt

Kalpa Birchh: A wish tree in paradise.

Dearth: Scarcity

Tresses: a long lock of hair

Benevolence: well meaning and kindly

Barge: a long ornamental boat

Residue: What is left over, remainder

Reverence: relegious respect

Pate: head

Russian Fomalism: theory of formalism developed during the year 1913-30 by the Russian thinkers Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Boris Tomasheshevsky, Yuri Tynyanov and Roman Jakobson. They believed in the autonomy of literature. They also believed in Defamiliarisation and Literariness.

Structuralism: literary theory based on the work of Saussure, Roland Barthes, Levi Strauss and other thinkers, Largely a French phenomenon, Common to all of these is an interest in structure and systems which can be studied in a Text. Saussure became the base of this theory.

Semiotics: the study of Sign-system. Sign combines 'Signifier' and 'Signified', the multi-images and meaning.

Experimentalist: who did not believe in traditional styles, rather in innovative styles and language.

Rhetorical language: loud voice, language of slogans.

Polyphonic: many-voiced, the term is associated with the theories of Mikhaeil Bakhtin, with his idea of the 'polyphonic novel'.

Paradigmatic growth: word is from Saussuare's Paradigm', how changes take place in thinking.

Post-modern Text: post-second war text, Text deals with the thinking of Globalization, age of electronics, beyond the limits of modern text.

Anti-poetry movement: Akavita movement, poerty which rejected the idealism of previous romantic and progressive poetry, did not believe in rural idiom, rather in the crude realities of city life, anti-heroic life, shattered values.

2.11 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the development of modern Hindi poetry.
2. Discuss the tendencies of modern Punjabi poetry.
3. What kind of poet was Haribhajan Singh? Discuss his poetic growth.
4. Discuss the thematics and poetic-style of the poem *Tree and the Sage*.
5. Discuss the symbols of the *Tree and the Sage*.
6. How do you feel the conceptual and experiencial levels of Desire in 'I am a tree walking...'. (*Tree and the Sage*).
7. Discuss the meataphoric language of this poem.
8. Give the interpretation of 'Kalpa Birchh'.
9. Who is the speaker in *Tree and the Sage*? To whom he is speaking.
10. Annotate the following:-

    i) Never did I need to dote
    The world has no death of the sun-shriveled
    The fruit pickers made daily trips
    He who earns his bread from the depths of soil
    Never knows want

    ii) When a bird's beak
    Pecks at my fruit
    I feel a pleasant little itching
    With a joy akin to the mother suckling her child
    The language of fruits and flowers has been mine
    The fragrance filtering through my tenders shoots
    Is my utterance

    iii) The desire for shade of some distant tree
    The vision breeds fascinating dreams

Of streams, waterfalls, and cascades
And awakens the thrill of descending undaunted
Without the rope and the chain
Into deep, very deep wells,
Learning effortlessly
To pour down like the monsoons'

iv) Thirst is to plunge headlong
Without learning to swim
Without a barge and a pole
Into the roaring whirlpools

11. What kind of poet is Raghuvir Sahay? Which aspect of his poetry did you find significant?
12. Discuss the satiric style of Raghuvir Sahay's poetry.
13. How do you define 'Stare' or 'Taktaki' and why the author has titled this poem 'Taktaki' or 'Stare'.
14. Discuss the thematic aspect of the poem 'Stare'.
15. How does 'Death' signify in this poem?
16. Discuss this poem as a political poem.
17. Annotate the following:

i) Death does not come to all of us in the same manner
nor do the dead become equal in death
for they were not so before.
The body is the residue of struggle
incorporating in itself one battered eating bowl,
one soiled hair comb and the breakage within
the only element to escape is a cry
which in essence, is an undetermined internal matter
still under study.

ii) What were the words on my lips when I died.
You seem to know them better than I.
You wrote: I had said 'Help'
May be I had said 'Liberty'
now that I am dead I cannot remember.

iii) What makes one hundred fat heads hang--
The load of wisdom?
The weight of reverence?
The burden of shame?
No, I would continue to stare
at the one hundred bald pates in silence.
The fixed stare of my dead machinegun.

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UNIT 3 DINA NATH NADIM : *THE MOON*
TRANSLATION : J.L. KAUL
PADMA SACHDEV : *THE MOMENT OF COURAGE*
TRANSLATION : IQBAL MASUD

Structure

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3.1 Introduction
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we present to you two Sahitya Akademi Award winners, the Kashmiri poet Dina Nath Nadim and the Dogri poetess Padma Sachdev. We have selected Nadim's poem *The Moon* and Padma Sachdev's *The Moment of Courage*. The poems will be discussed in the context of their literary milieu with annotations and critical appraisals. The discussion we hope will give you some idea of the excellence of their creative work.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Jammu and Kashmir is an important state in the Indian Union for its natural splendour, rich culture and history. The two common languages spoken in that state are Kashmiri and Dogri. In the rest of India, there is not much awareness of these two northern languages and the richness of poetry written in their medium.

3.2 A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH OF DINA NATH NADIM

Dina Nath Nadim was born on March 18, 1916, in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. His father died in 1923, when Nadim was only seven years old. His mother came from a village near Metragam, the home of Mahjoor, the great Kashmiri poet of the first half of the nineteenth century. Poverty and weak health troubled Nadim all his life. Supporting him

somehow, the mother was his best friend and teacher till she passed away in 1944.

Nadim got his early education at a Middle School near his home in Srinagar. He passed his tenth examination, 1929, at a Government High School, where he formed a life-long friendship with Ghulam Hassan Beg 'Arif', who later became his mentor. Nadim joined S.P. College, Srinagar, but, due to economic pressures, dropped out after two years. While studying for his graduation as a private candidate, he gave tuitions to needy students. He was also interested in reading Indian and Western literatures. The strong influence of T. S. Eliot, the great English poet, absorbed by him in 1945, can be traced in his writing after 1955. Qualifying as a trained graduate by 1943, he rose to be the Principal of the Lal Ded Memorial School, Srinagar. He was also one of the founders of the Gandhi Memorial College, the first private degree college in J & K.

Among the Urdu poets who influenced Nadim most were Iqbal, Josh, Chakbast and Bismil. He was mainly inspired by their patriotic songs and also by the works of Gorky, Chekov and Mayakovsky, three notable Russian writers. Becoming a member of the Communist Party of India in 1950, he participated in the ongoing political revolution in J & K, and joined the Progressive Writers' Association, of which he was the General Secretary for some time. In 1971, he received the Soviet land Nehru Award and visited the Soviet Russia for a month. He also got the first Kalhana Award in 1985; the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Shihil Kul,* a collection of poems, in 1986; and the Sharda Samman (posthumously) in 1993. Suffering from partial paralysis, he died at Jammu on April 7, 1988, and his last rites were performed in Srinagar.

3.3 AN OVERVIEW OF HIS POETY AND THE AGE HE BELONGED TO

Nadim recited his first Kashmiri poem at a *mushaira* (poetic symposium) held in 1947 at Nishat Bagh, the famous Mughal garden of Srinagar. From that time onwards, he wrote mostly in Kashmiri. Hence, the second half of the

twentieth century is regarded as the Age of Nadim. Up to 1930, Kashmiri poetry existed only in the oral tradition. With the exception of Habba Khatoon (16^{th} century) and Arnimaal (18^{th} century) — two women poets — the poet had no connection with the ruling class. He was closer to the common people. Tyranny under the Afghan and Sikh rule frustrated the Kashmiris, and that encouraged writing of the mystic kind of poetry. The only songs that the people know were Hindu and Muslim devotional poems, satirical verse called *ladi-shah*, the *gul* songs for women's group dance and *chhakree* (chorus) music. The traditional images of *gul* (rose) and *bulbul* (nightingale) recurred in Kashmiri verse.

A new age began with Ghulam Ahmed Mahjoor and Abdul Ahad Azad, in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Mahjoor's great achievement was to make the Kashmiri language acceptable as a natural poetic medium. Others, who till then wrote in Persian and Urdu, turned to Kashmiri at his insistence and due to the success he achieved for himself. This applied to Azad, Arif, Zinda Kaul and Nadim. The new age beings with Mahjoor's *Wolo Haa Baagvano* (Come O Gardner). The poetical revolution that started in 1938 reached its height in 1947. Following the invasion of Kashmiri by Pakistan in late September, 1947, came the call for *Naya Kashmir* (New Kashmir) and the beginning of the Progressive Movement in Kashmiri literature. A new generation of educated young men, influenced by the Marxist ideology and the Indian nationalism of Gandhi and Nehru, became active as writers. Socialism appealed to them more than the romanticism of the past.

The popular Kashmiri poets after 1947 are Nadim, Arif, Rahi, Kamil, Firaq, Nazki, Santosh, Saqi, Khayal and Muzafer Azim. The *gazal* was a common form since it had been used by the great Urdu poets like Ghalib, Iqbal and Faiz. After 1947, the stress on realistic themes led to the rejection of the traditional *gazal* form, and the introduction of the *musalsal* (continuous) *gazal*, which required a central theme rather than disconnected verses. Modern Kashmiri poetry discard the artificial poetic language and prefers the rhythms of common speech. Out of the poets mentioned above, only Rahi, Kamil and Firaq are still writing significantly. But Nadim was the most important poet of this age.

Nadim has been compared to the *deodar* tree (a kind of cedar), which the Kashmiris associate with elegance and strength. B. B. Kachru writes, "The revolutionary fire in him would light up on the platform when Nadim recited his poems of social revolution and change. It was a different Nadim — a *deodar* tree in a storm". He took up every important social and political issue; he used strong propagandist language to support the 'land to the tiller' (farmer) programme of the J & K Government. Nadim regarded his 1951 poem, *Me Chham Aash Pagahuch* (I Have Hopes of Tomorrow), as the very best that came from his pen. He says in this poem that true joy comes from peace for which freedom poverty and fear is most necessary:

I dream of tomorrow
When the world will be beautiful!
---- ---- ---- ---- ----
I dream of tomorrow
When my husband is coming!
I'll run to the door when he calls my name,
And, holding him tight, dance with delight.
Then I'll make him a nice, soft couch of grass;
My husband is coming!

It is an artistically composed poem, consisting of three intimate monologues, spoken in turn by a pregnant woman, a young girl waiting for her lover, and a wife looking forward to the return of her husband from a distant land.

Dal Bathy Bathy (Along the Shores of the Dal Lake) is a tongawala's address to his horse, but which metaphorically express the pain of the dispossessed Kashmiris. Frustration compels the poet to replace the imagery of a day in spring with the darkness of the night. Nadim, Rahi and Kamil are the leaders of the new age of Kashmiri poetry. All the three excell in the *gazal* form, but Nadim alone deliberately uses the soliloquy and monologue as dramatic elements in his *musalsal gazals.* By 1960, he realized that the Marxist socialism was a dream that might not come true in its full form. The opening lines of *Shihil Kul* (The Shady Tree), the Sahitya Akademi Award — winning collection of Nadim's poems, express the soul of Kashmiri life and culture, symbolized by the mighty chinar tree, found all over Kashmir and sheltering birds, beasts and people. *Chaary Kath* (The Tale Told by an Idiot) of 1977 is an excellent piece in the new kind of the short poem. It is interesting to note that, among other things, Nadim also experimented with the Japanese *haikui* form of verse.

Nadim visited Peking in 1952, and there he saw the Chinese class opera, *The White Haired Girl.* On his return to India he decided to write a Kashmiri opera in the same style. The result was *Bombur ta Yambarzal* (The Bumble-bee and the Narcissus), which he wrote in 1953. the story follows the popular legend that the two main characters in the opera, even though deeply in love, are not destined to meet. The opera was staged at the Nedou's Hotel, Srinagar, and the performance was repeated when the Russian leaders, Bulganin and Khrushchev visited Kashimir. After the show, the two distinguished men congratulated Nadim on his great achievement. The next opera that he wrote in collaboration with Noor Mohammad Roshan, was *Heemal ta Naagirai.* It follows the story of a legendary folk-tale of Kashmir. Nadim's third full-length opera, *Vitasta,* came out in 1977. Vitasta (the Jhelum) holds the same place in Kashmir as the Ganga in North India, the Nile in Egypt and the Mississippi in the U.S.A. In February, 1977, the opera was presented at the all India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi. The national praised the performance as a "glorious feat of colour, dance and drama", writes T. N. Raina in his *Dina Nath Nadim,* a monograph published by the Sahitya Akademi.

3.4 NADIM'S POETIC ART

Nadim is a master of language, perfect in his choice of words. Rejecting the worn out poetic conventions, epithets and imagery, he gave a new life to the Kashmiri poetry. He transformed the speech of everyday life into a new poetic language, and gave it a strength it had not known before. In the words of G. R. Santosh, the internationally renowned painter-poet, Nadim became "beyond doubt the foremost modern poet with an unusual mastery of language, using each word with a telling effect". The language he uses is still the spoken language in Kashmiri. He told Zafar Ahmad, in an interview, "Kashmiri poetry needed a new voice and a new idiom, and I could gave it". No Kashmiri poet of the modern times has equaled Nadim in his excellent use of imagery. *Shikil Kul* is a wonderful treasure-house of symbols and images.

Prof. S. L. Sadhu comments, "It is difficult to say which is more beautiful — a scene in nature or its portrayal by Nadim". Here are two unmatched examples.

1. Peak of the mountain ranges blushed red. *(Subahgahee)*
2. Lightening spread her tresses behind the clouds. *(Sonth ta Harud)*

According to B. B. Kachru, "The secret of Nadim's art is an intuition for an effortless use of a limited but highly appropriate vocabulary, a keen eye for the sound of his mother language and, above all, an artist's instinct for combining all this formal apparatus in fresh imagery". Nadim always looks for the right word for any situation, and the main source of his verse is the folk songs and the *vatsun* (marriage songs). In metre and rhythm, he prefers the overtones of the folk dance.

Like Byron, the English poet of the early nineteenth century, Nadim never revised his verse. Shamim Ahmad Shamim, the late Urdu journalist and M. P., called him the "Emperor of Sloth". In 1984, Santosh suggested that Nadim's collected work should be published, but the poet remained indifferent to the idea. Later on, Moti Lal Saqi, another fellow poet, also used his persuasive powers, which ultimately bore fruit. The main work was done by Saqi in making the publication of *Shihil Kul* possible in 1985, and that fetched Nadim the Sahitya Akademi Award. Most of his poems were not lost since these had appeared in several literary magazines of Kashmir.

Nadim was a literary giant of his time, and perhaps the most outstanding Kashmiri poet of the second half of the twentieth century. He surprised the followers of the traditional literary art by his firm belief in the power and potential of the Kashmiri language. He used the speech of the common people as the medium of his poetry. He experimented with and introduced new forms of verse — the sonnet, haiku and opera. At the same time, he drew freely form the old Kashmiri forms like the *vaakh* of Lal Ded (the great mystical poet of the 14th century), the popular *vatsun* of the later romantic poets, and the folk songs of Kashmir. Harivansh Rai Bachchan, the eminent poet, translated two of his poems into Hindi. Prabhakar Machwe, the Hindi writer and critic, said that Nadim was at par with Mayakovsky (Russian), Pablo Neruda (Spanish), Kazi Nazrul Islam (Bengali), Josh and Faiz (Urdu), Shri Shri (Telugu), Vallathol (Malyalam) and Nirala (Hindi).

3.4.1 *The Moon (Zoon)*

Among other non-Kashmiri forms of verse that Nadim experiments with and introduce into his writing is the sonnet. In this respect, perhaps he follows the lead provided by Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal of Lahore, hailed as the national poet of Pakistan after 1947, who composed some excellent sonnets in Urdu. In the *Moon*, Nadim repeats the Italian model of Petrarch rather than the Shakespearean sonnet form. The theme chosen by the poet is the full moon, generally treated as a highly romantic subject associated with young lovers and their youthfull emotions. But Nadim jolts our sensibility by the very first line, where the moon, for its round shape, is surprisingly compared to a 'pancake' or *chapatti*. The reason for this odd simile or comparison is the stark fact of how the moon would appear to a poor hungry man. The succeeding metaphors spring from this very realistic analogy.

The moon looks dull as a worn out cloak of woollen material, woven at Pampore [a suburban town near Srinagar famous for its saffron (kesar) and red chillies].

The shados on the surface of the moon are compared to scratches on a white breast. It is pale as a false silver coin that the contractor pays an ignorant woman labourer, thereby cheating her of the wages for her honest work. Even the hills look hungrily at the *chapatti*- shaped moon as if to devour it. After sunset, the red fire in the west is put out by the gathering dark clouds But, at the same time, the forest fairies start the cooking fires of the moonlight on the eastern hills, in the glow of which the mist rises like steam from boiling rice. The hope of a satisfying meal gives solace to the empty stomach of the poet, who continuously and hungrily looks at the moon in the sky.

The unusual symbolic image of the moon as a *chapati* dominates this sonnet from the first to the last line and, thereby, rounds off the perfect unity of the theme and form of the poem. One wonders at the originality of the imaginative power of the poet by which he transforms a traditional romantic theme into a modern realistic statement of Marxist ideology. The full moon of the universal lovers becomes a hypnotic and attractive symbol of satisfying the hunger of the poor workers of the world. And the dominant image is not special to Kashmir but common to the skies of different lands all over the earth. The guarded reference to the contractor's cheating of the labourer draws one's attention to the universal exploitation of the helpless poor by their rich employers. The last picture of the hungry poet gazing at the moon repeats the main theme of the poem as introduced in the very first line.

3.4.2 *The Bumble-bee (Bombur)*

As has been stated earlier in this unit, Nadim was inspired to write Kashmiri operas or dance-dramas after watching one such performance in Chinese at Pekin (now known as Beijing), the capital of China, in 1952, for his first theme, in this form of writing, he chose that of the bumble-bee and the narcissus flower, both common to Kashmir. The latter, which generally grows near sources of water in moderate climate is an abundantly found spring flower in Kashmir, blooming soon after the winter snows melt away. It has white petals and a miniature yellow cup in the middle, for which the Persian and Urdu poets have compared it to a wide-open eye. The scent of the narcissus is so strong that a small bunch fills a large room with its delicate but unmistakable smell. Hence, quite naturally, it attracts the black bumble-bee wandering in its pursuit of honey, just as the candle attracts the moth. The poet uses this traditional theme to create an artistic composition of great merit and haunting melody. Incidentally, the popular *bombro bombro* song in *Mission Kashmir,* the Bollywood film of 2000, is taken from this very opera, and here you are going to study that song in its English rendering.

"The Bumble-Bee"

O bumble-bee, the black bumble-bee!
Wherefore are you so sad and forlorn?
Getting hold of the slim and dainty narcissus,
We'll put the tornado on the run.
O bumble-bee, the black bumble-bee!
Wherefore are you so sad and forlorn?

Tell us how you feel, O handsome black!
We'll give our life for you.

The garden has withered in autumn:
It might be deserted soon.
O bumble-bee, the black bumble-bee!
Wherefore are you so sad and forlorn?

We'll strive to untie the narcissus with you,
And she'll be able to satiate her longings.
O bumble-bee, the black bumble-bee!
Wherefore are you so sad and forlorn?

The poet asks the bumble-bee why it is feeling so sad and lonely. He promises to seek out the narcissus flower for its sake. And when the two lovers are united, the storm and fierce wind will be forced to run away. There is no reason for the bumble-bee to languish and despair. The lovers of the garden will do anything for the happiness of the black bee. The autumn has accused the leaves of the trees and plants to wither and grow pale; the migratory birds might desert the garden soon and fly away to their winter homes. That is enough reason for the bee to feel sad. But the poet and his friends shall make every effort to unite it with its beloved narcissus so that both are happy together. Therefore, the black bumble-bee should not feel so sad and lonely.

Nadim transforms the conventional theme of the rose and nightingale into a sad tale of two lovers who are destined for separation and the consequent tragedy. They try their best for a union but the revolutions of time and natural upheavals conspire to keep them apart. The bumble-bee is a virtual Krishna who years for the company of a flair Radha, but Kansas of the world put hurdler in the path of their union. The agents of doom in Nadim's opera are autumn, winter, frost and the thunder strong that scatter the petals of the delicate narcissus and prevent her from getting united to her bold and persistent lover. The other flowers of the garden sympathise with her and try to help her but to no avail. At the end of the opera, one is left with a feeling of despair by this engrossing tale of unfulfilled love.

3.5 A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH OF PADMA SACHDEV

Born in 1940 at Purmandal (Jammu) in a family of Sanskrit scholars, Padma was taught by her father, Pt. Jai Dev Sharma, the art of reciting Sanskrit shlokas even before she went to school. This carried a direct influence on the rhythmic beauty of her verse in Dogri and Hindi. As young girl, she would play an amazing game by adding stanzas of her own composition to the folk songs sung by her. Nobody realized the trick played by her as she was too shy to claim the verses as her own. But she was destined to become Padma Sachdev, the first Dogri woman poet and that too of national stature. Unfortunately, she lost her father during the Pakistani attach on Jammu and Kashmir in 1947. In consequence, she had to face very difficult circumstances before the family moved to Jammu.

Padma married twice. First, at a very young age, to a fellow Dogri poet, Ved Pal Deep, but that marriage did not succeeded, leading to a separation. Frustration and mental suffering brought about Padma's ill health, forcing her to undergo treatment for three years at the Chest Diseases Hospital, Srinagar. She had already joined the AIR at Jammu. After a miraculous recovery from tuberculosis, she moved to Delhi, where she met and eventually married Surinder Singh, the younger of the Singh Bandu classical singers. In 1971, Padma received the Sahitya Akademi Award for her first collection of poems, *Meri Kavita, Mere Geet*, published in 1969. She also wrote lyrics for a Hindi film, *Prem Parvat*. Later, she visited London and some other European cities, and compered concerts of Lata Mangeshkar in Canada and U.S.A. Padma got the J & K Culture Academy Award twice for *Neherian Galian* (1983) and *Pota Pota Nimbal* (1988). Another three collections of her Dogri poems, two novels, a collection of short stories and an autobiography, all in Hindi, have also appeared. Besides, she has done several translations from Dogri Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi. Currently, she lives with her husband and daughter in Delhi, and Continues to write in Dogri and Hindi.

3.6 AN OVERVIEW OF HER AGE AND THE ART OF HER POETRY

After 1947, when the political workers in Jammu went to villages to mobilise people for constructive activities, the latter responded enthusiastically if the workers talked to them in Dogri instead of Hindi or Urdu. This realization brought about a change of values. Dinoo Bhai Pant, Ram Nath Shastri, Ved Deep and Yash Sharma started writing in Dogri rather than in Hindi or Urdu, the two accepted languages of literary art till then in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Kishan Smailpuri and Parmanand Almast also joined this movement. When these poets went to small towns and villages and recited their Dogri poems, the local poets also started writing in Dogri. In this scenario, short poems and songs were more effective than the long complex speeches of the politicians. Hence, poems were written by an increasing number of writers to express their patriotic feelings. Songs in praise of the Duggar Desh (i.e. Jammu) were composed, similar in mood and tune to the National Anthem.

The fifties of the twentieth century were a period of consolidation and expansion for Dogri writing. The individual works of Kriparam Sastri, R.S. Samyal, Ved Rahi, D.C. Prashant and V.P. Nagar were published in this

period. Deenoo Panth's poems express the poet's preoccupation with social injustice, the breaking up of the feudalism, and the immediate need for social reform. Shivnath writes in his **History of Dogri Literature**:

> The Old Duggar was a decaying and rotting set-up in which the common people went half-clad and half-fed but Jagirdar and money lenders and the princely class had all that they wanted and he hopes that the new Duggar will be the Duggar of common people. (p.89)

Ramnath Shastri composed none poems, two ghazals and translation of Bhartihari's **Niti-Sataka**, which was very popular in the land of the Dogras. The poems of Ved Pal Deep deal with four main sentiments; unfulfilled love, the communist idealogy, the workers against the capitalists, and the changing moods of nature.

In one of his poems, Dinoo Bhai Panth sings in praise of the Duggar Desh, protected by the tall mountains of the Pir Panchal Range, where green meadows, fields, fruits and flowers add to its beauty. Kishan Smailpuri argues in a poem why talk of heaven, why not sing of the glories of the Duggar Desh. Many other poets wrote songs in praise of the glories of the simple, unsophisticated but handsome and brave Dogra youth. In "Duggar Desh Bachana, Meri Jinde" (We Have to Defend Duggar Desh, My Love), a poem by Yash Sharma, a young couple sing of their determination to defend their land against aggression.

In 1969, the Sahitya Akademi recognized Dogri as an independent literary language of India. This encouraged many new writers to contribute creatively to the increasing treasure of literature in this language. The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages also started patronizing Dogri publications. Collections of Dogri folk-songs, folk-tales, and selections of writings of different kinds were published. The Academy extended subsidies to Dogri writers for making it possible for the common people to have access to their works. The Chinese aggression against India in 1962, and the Indo-Pakistan conflicts of 1965 had a deep impact on the Dogra people, since a large majority of them served in the army. The martial spirit and patriotic feelings of the Dogra's found expression in their poems of this period. There was a spurt in the creative writing which saw the publication of nearly 100 books of poetry, plays, novels, short stories and essays. It was only after this impetus that some new writers like Tara Smailpuri, Madhukar, Durga Dutta and Padma Sachdev appeared on the scene.

Early in her life, Padma discovered the charm of the Dogri language and its treasure of folk poetry, and that helped her to emerge as a poet of great promise. Being a sensitive person she was overcome by the suffering and injustice that her widowed mother had to put up with. She withdrew from the people around her and turned to Nature. The sky, moon, starts, hills, fields, streams and trees became her companions, and these reflected her moods. Padma's first poem appeared in a local newspaper in 1955, when she was only fifteen. She moved from her village to Jammu city at a time when the Dogri poetry of Panth, Shashtri, Madhukar, Deep, Almast and Yash Sharma had become popular all over Jammu. Padma could not remain untouched by the prolific literary activity of that time. One of her early poems "Raje Diyan Mandian" (Palaces of the Raja) is regarded as a classic of modern Dogri verse. The poem is written from the point of view of a mentally deranged woman who accosts the poet, asking the question if the surrounding big buildings

belong to her. Here, Padma challenges the institutions of decaying landlordism, responsible for the oppression of the innocent and helpless common people. It is amazing how, so early in her poetic career, Padma achieves in this poem such intensity and depth of meaning with a brevity of expression. The revolutionary poem exposes the hollowness of royal palaces. For Padma, the red bricks are soaked in the blood of the labourers who build the tall structures, and the lamps burn their life-blood as oil.

The powerful movement of Dogri poetry inspired Padma to express her inner feelings in verses of her own composition, which gave her great satisfaction. Being still young, she wrote poems like "Icchya" (Desire) and "Vijog" (Separation) in her adolescent infatuation with moods of love and its pain. "Do Pakhro" (Two Birds) is an allegorical tale of two young lovers forced into separation by a cruel society. They unite only in death. "Nikre Fungroo, Ucchii Uran" is a beautiful lyrical poem that is direct, intense and touching at the same time. It contains nostalgic references to the joys of life before marriage and criticism of how the mother-in-law and sister-in-law ill-treat a girl after she is married. There is a touch of sentimentality and self-pity in her poems of this period. That is explained by the grief and suffering she had to undergo in the early part of her life. But she boldly faced that phase of her life and emerged successfully out of it.

Padma's poetry expresses the joys and sorrows of the typical Indian woman. Even when conscious of the social injustices that they have to face, her women characters maintain their dignity under all circumstances. Her poems present womanhood in its fullness, as beloved sister and mother. Padma considers poetry to be the spirit of a person, and she feels that one's mother tongue could be the only medium of its expression. Therefore, she works tirelessly for propagating Dogri and the culture it represents. Her desire to introduce this language to a wider reading public encourages her to write Hindi prose. In this respect, she acknowledges her debt to Dharamvir Bharti. It is the same zeal that motivates her to translate from Dogri into Hindi and vice versa.

Today, Padma Sachdev appears as a warm-hearted and affectionate person, who is known for her uninhibited laughter. It only indicates that the sad experiences of life that she has undergone have failed to dim her love of life.

3.6.1 *The Moment of Courage*

This is a very sensitive poem about the close relationship existing between nature and human beings. It also provides some glimpses of the village life, away from the hustle and bustle of the urban society. The elements of nature that one finds in the poem are a hill, the well at its bottom, water covered by the green mango blossom, and the solitary calf that meets a tragic end in the depth of the well. All there are usually associated with the country-side then with towns and cities. The poem also refers to superstition and caste considerations that keep the people away from the well after the drowning of the unfortunate calf. It could be presumed that the calf's body must later have been removed from the well, but nobody would care to go back to it for a bath or a drink of water. The poet is a different kind of person from the common people. She does both these things but only in the darkness of the night. Yet she waits for that courageous moment when she would drink from the well in broad daylight.

The poet writes about the well which is to the right of the village hill and full of water. One particular summer, it got covered by the green mango blossoms. That attracted a calf which wanted to feed on it, and consequently drowned in the well. Since that day nobody drinks the water of that well. But, the poet sometimes goes secretly at night to bathe in it and drink from it. Yet, by doing so, she does not get full satisfaction. She thinks there are in it dark and sad shadows of the girls who stopped going to the well for drawing water. The well too is, perhaps, awaiting that day when, in full sight of all the villages, the poet will dare to extend her hands for a drink of water.

To give voice to her love for the well, Padma Sachadev uses certain pleasing images like the 'shining brimful' water, green mango blossoms, wistful shadow of the maidens, and 'the rope on its nail'. These images give the well a life of it own, and personify it as a human being waiting to welcome back its former friends. There is a touch of sadness in the reference to the maidens who never come back. It recalls the fate of the village girls who get married and go away to the homes of their respective husbands. Gesture of hanging the rope of the well on its nail conveys the sadness of farewell and departure. The poet's own longing for the well is in contrast to the dismissive attitude of the other villagers. She is only trying to rise above her weakness of going to the well only at night and not in broad daylight.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, you must have realized what an important place Dina Nath Nadim has among the Kashmiri poets of the second half of the twentieth century. He not only gives up writing in Urdu in order to allot the Kashmiri language its rightful place as a medium of creative expression, but makes many new experiments that have enriched his mother tongue as well as Kashmiri literature. Nadim's use of native words and phrases recall the nineteenth century English poet William Wordsworth's passion for using the language really used by men. And then his skill in employing the common speech rhythms and, thereby, evoking real life experiences is at par with the art of T. S. Eliot and other modern English poets. Nadim started his career as a realist and revolutionary poet, but he ended as a romanticist who accepted the softer human emotions. His later poems, especially the three operas provide ample evidence of this progression of thought and imagination in a poet who so obviously dominated his age.

Padma Sachdev, on the other hand, is a pioneer for being the first woman writing Dogri poetry. She must be a compelling source of encouragement to many budding women writers all over the Jammu region. Padma has faced the hard realities of life and still evolved a philosophy which gives her a cheerful outlook that infects all those who come into contact with her. Hence, the readers perceive in her work an evolution from sadness to optimism, which is the most welcome feature of her poetry. Apart from this, her constructive efforts towards popularising Dogri language, literature and culture, not only in Jammu and Kashmir but also throughout India, deserve high praise. Both Nadim and Padma Sachdev have contributed greatly to the evolution of their respective mother tongues as mediums of literar writing and their efforts have won national recognition.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Pancake:	somethin like a *chapatti* or *puri*
Robe of Pampore tweed:	woolen *pheran* or gown worn by the Kashmiris.
Collar-band:	neckline of the *pheran*
Counterfeit:	forget or fake
Mite:	small amount of money
Wood nymphs:	kind of fairies poetically associated with forests.
Shoofs:	new growth of plants.
Gazed:	looked constantly
Moon-flooded:	Moonlight spread like flood waters.
Forlarn:	lonely and unhappy
Dainty:	pretty, soft and attractive
Tornado:	fiercely blowing wind, great storm
Deserted:	empty of singing birds
Satiate:	Satisfy
Longings:	desires, wishes
Brimful:	full to the top
Tempted:	attracted, drawn
Quenched:	satisfied as one's thirst after drinking water
Wistful:	full of sad desire

3.9 QUESTIONS

1. Assess Dina Nath Nadim's place in the Progressive Movement in Kashmir.
2. Write a short essay on the position of Kashmiri poetry at the time when Nadim started writing.
3. What is Nadim's contribution to making the Kashmiri language popular as a medium of literary expression?
4. What are the new forms that Nadim introduced into the Kashmiri literature and what measure of success did he achieve?

5. Write a short note on Nadim's experiments with the use of language in his poetry?
6. Attempt a critical appraisal of "The Moon" or "The Bumble-bee".
7. What was the position of Dogri poetry when Padma Sachdev started writing at a young age?
8. What were the hardships faced by Padma in her life, and how did she overcome those?
9. What are the major themes treated by Padma? Elaborate by reference to some of her poems.
10. Assess Padma's contribution to making the Dogri language, literature and culture popular at the national level.
11. Write a critical appraisal of *The Moment of Courage*.
12. Write critical notes on the following verses:

The Moon

(a) The moon looked like a pancake as she rose
behind the hills. She looked dull as a robe
of Pampore tweed worn off threadbare and torn
at collar-band...

(b) The moon looked like a pancake and
the hills looked hungry; and the clouds put out
the fire in the western skies.

(c) I whispered
hope to my hungry belly, and gazed and gazed
with hungry looks at the moon-flooded sky.

The Bumble-bee

(d) O bumble-bee, the black bumble-bee!
Wherefore are you so sad and forlorn?
Getting hold of the slim and dainty narcissus,
We'll put the tornado on the run.

(e) Tell us how you fell, O handsome black bee!
We'll give our life for you.
The garden has withered in autumn;
It might be deserted soon.

(f) We'll strive to unite the narcissus with you,
And she will be able to satiate her longings.
O bumble-bee, the back bumble-bee!
Wherefore are you so sad and forlorn?

The Moment of Courage

(g) Last year
Summer covered it with
The Green
Of mango blossoms;
It tempted a calf
Which fell in and drowned.

(h) At night
Like a thief
I bathe in it;
I cup my hands
And drink.

(i) There are shadows...
Of the maidens
Who hung
The rope on its nail,
But never came back
To draw water.

(j) The dark of the wall
Longs for that moment of courage
When, in full sight of all,
My hands
Will stretch out
For a drink.

3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4 KONDEPUDI NIRMALA : *MOTHER SERIOUS*
TRANSLATION : K. DAMODAR RAO
VIMALA : *KITCHEN*
TRANSLATION : V.V.B. RAMA RAO
K. AYYAPPA PANIKER : *I MET WALT WHITMAN YESTERDAY — AN INTERVIEW*
TRANSLATION: A.J. THOMAS

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Free Verse in Contemporary Telugu Poetry
4.3 Kondepudi Nirmala: Life and Works
4.4 A Critical Appreciation of the Poem *Mother Serious*
4.5 A Brief Note on Translation
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit you will sample Telugu and Malayalam poetry through the poems of K. Nirmala and Vimala in Telugu: *Mother Serious* and *Kitchen* and K. Ayyappa Paniker's poem *I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday — An Interview*.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

You have been introduced to the poetry from the Northeast and Kashmiri, Dogri, Punjabi and Hindi poetry so far. We shall now take up poetry written in two important languages from the South — Telugu and Malayalam. You will notice that there is a strong Indian-feminine voice in both in K. Nirmala and Vimla's poems. On the other hand Ayyappa Paniker takes us on a journey to America and what can be termed as an encounter between the East and the West.

4.2 FREE VERSE IN CONTEMPORARY TELUGU POETRY

Telugu Poetry (Free Verse) in the last three decades of the last millennium has ceased to be the exclusive domain of the elite and the leisurely. . Poetry has undergone a desirable transformation in that it has become totally democratized. Poetry has been seen as a force and a device that can have a sociological purpose to bring about a big change in the attitudes of people towards literature and civic life. In the hands of poets, poetry has come to be a device to whip up courage, enthusiasm and strength to press forward and forge ahead with gusto. The emergence of free verse became inevitable when people from different backgrounds began to give expression to their authentic experiences. Numerous people began to write poetry. Feminist poetry has made rapid strides since1980s.

To study modern Telugu poetry, one has to study both the traditional kind of metrical verse and the new and more popular from of free verse. Secondly, one has to study feminist poetry as an expression of feminist anguish and sensibility. It is a solid contribution to Telugu free verse, which compels attention.

Telugu Free Verse dominated poetry after the 60's of the last century. Changes in society, lapses in the working of democracy, the urgency of social aspirations gave rise to crystallization of fresh expressive devices. Many poets have come under the indirect influence of western poetic achievement. Humanism and psychological realism became popular expressive attitudes.

Feminist trends have led to more and more women taking to poetic expression. Feminist poetry in Telugu is not an offshoot of the Western Women's Lib. Women began to assert themselves. Poignantly conscious of their tribulations, they began voicing forth their grievances in an emerging new idiom, new attitudes and novel turns of expression. New and forceful advocates of feminist thinking like Katyayani Vidmahe and the social enthusiast Volga found committed supporters among the elite too. They became popular poets, writers and even crusaders. Newspapers gave the new writing immense support.

Poets like Savitri (whose poetry was produced in a collection after her death), Jayaprabha, Kondepudi Nirmala, Vimala and host of others found the right atmosphere to come up with a gusto giving rise to a specific, meaningful direction to the gathering currents of women's liberation. It was their idiom and the forthrightness of their nuances that electrified the readers. Their imagery, tone and attitude revealed a determination, never before noticed in women's writing in Telugu.

Jayaprabha's *Yasodhara ee vagapenduke*? (1986), Kondepudi Nirmala's *Sandhigdha Sandhya* (1988), *Nadiche Gaayaalu* (1990), Volga's collection of several women poets' poems *Neelimeghaalu* are some of the most important publications, to name only a few.

Volga's collection where she included the main trends of feminism with a variety of stances and expressive devices in a brave new idiom has come to be

widely discussed and critically examined. Some poets came under severe criticism for the pungency of their diction. Works of Patibandla Rajani, Mandarapu Hymavathi, Jaya and Mahajabeen gathered a large readership though their individual stances differed.

Women began to assert and establish their rights to a free, frank and fearless expression. Some could wield their pens to wring tears from readers. Gone for good are the days for demureness, delicacy and modesty. Figures of speech like Innuendo and euphemism are given the go by. Conveying the anguish, the poignancy of passion for being downtrodden in a hundred ways, demanded forthright attacks. Irony and satire were used extensively. A few examples to make these points clear:

Wouldn't there be oppression
When there is a woman? (Savitri)

As there are pills to drive the milk dry
If there were to be potions the soft sensibility to parch
How nice it would have been! (Patibandla Rajani)

Life should be securely held and protected
Even from the one to whom the heart is given (Jaya)

None come this way, except to eat
My mother is empress of the kitchen
But the name (etched) on pots and pans is my father's! (Vimala)

Cage I'm and a bird too ...
I devise an idiom for the recognition of my existence (Silalolita)

Enough if only this organ could be flung away
Enough if another creation would stop her (Geeta)

Instead of giving his floor a dung wash, we piss on it
Rip open his entrails with the sickle we have tucked in the waist
We'd skin him and with that on the drum play around (Karri Vijyalakshmi)

Feminist writing has various hues and various stances. Vasantha Kannabiran, Jayaprabha, Vimala, Patibandla Rajani, Geeta and others have been writing consistently with their own individual stances though in the main stream of feminist writing. The movement at the hands of these adherents has different degrees of intensity and power. In the mainstream there are radicals, liberals, Marxists and exponents of socialist leanings. The depth of their indignation and impatience with male domination varies. Vasantha Kannabiran in her Sareeram cries out: 'My body became a sacrificial goat/ To the patriarchal tradition" Jayaprabha takes'pallu' sari-end as a symbol of offensive and disgusting inequality. Paita (Telugu) Pallu (Hindi) should be burnt, she says. She calls the poem indignantly *Paitanu Tagaleyyali*. She suggests the termination of the system which reduced woman to a walking corpse in an exploitative culture.

The means adopted by the feminist poets to voice their suffering and the validity of their stances led to a kind of crystallization. For some the hard fact

is that Feminism has come to stay. Now it is all bang with no trace of a whimper.

4.3 K. NIRMALA : LIFE AND WORKS

Kondepudi Nirmala was born on March 26, 1958. She had her education at Vijayawada. She studied in Stella Maris and obtained her graduate degree. She discontinued her study of journalism in Osmania University to become a working journalist and a creative writer too. Today she is known more as a poet than as a journalist. She was inspired by the old veteran Gunturu Seshendra Sarma and the great poets late Devarakonda Balagangadhara Tilak, Aloorui Bairagi and the renowned *bhaava kavi*, Devulapalli Krishna Sastri.

She holds the conviction that poetry is a powerful 'weapon'. She avers that new things and novelty whether in matters of expression or a trend first appear only in poetry.

She has varied experience in Print, Electronic and Web Media. In the area of social work and in the Feminist Movement, her contribution has been significant. The poem prescribed for study is a sample of her very particular stance in the Feminist thinking.

The most significant of her work in poetry came out in four collections so far:

Sandhigdha Sandhya (Hesitant Twilight)	1988
Nadiche Gaayalu (Walking Wounds)	1990
Baadha sapta nadi (River accursed with pain)	1994
Multi-national Muddu (Multi-national Kiss)	2000

Some of the numerous awards received by Nirmala are:

Free Verse Front Award in 1989 and also B.N. Reddy Award 1994 for *Sandhigdha Sandhya.*

Nutalapati Gangadharam Award for 1990 and also Devulapalli Krishna Sastry award in 1993 for *Nadiche Gaayalu*

Kumaran Asan award for her dynamic writing in 1990

The Poet of the Year 1994 from SBR Cultural wing

Mother Serious was first published in the poetry column *Saudamani* in Udayam Weekly on 1-12-1989

Nirmala's poetry has an unusual twang of power in felicitous expression with a capacity for intermingling tropes effortlessly. As a feminist her stance has been to sting the reader into thought with powerful ideas presented in a way that they stick and lurk in the minds of those given to sharp thinking. Her lines sometimes have sharp cutting edges while compellingly drawing tears from the sensitive and the thoughtful.

The poem is an authentic experience of the anguish and dread of being a woman. It is an impassioned utterance:

The moment you enter
The labour room
You see inferno in 3-D:
either hell on earth
or the earth in hell.

A river of pain on each table.
Hands stifling screams.
Cries, calls
Howls. Yowls.
Throes. Spasms.
All normal, quite normal.

....Translated from Telugu by the author and edited by A.K. Ramanujan (Penguin: *In their own voice*)

In the poem 'Help us cross the Moosi' in her anthology *Baadha Sapta Nadi* (River accursed with pain) (1991) there is anguish again for a different aspect of feminine life, for being cursed to be born as a woman:

Mothers are we who made sacrifices
Suffering little doves slip from our wing
Housewives we are taken to flight
Unable to hear the scream of our life-mates
Please help us cross the Moosi..

... .

We are queen Padminis burning in humiliation
We are the ones straggling on the capital's brow
Like wisps of wronged Draupadi's hair.
Closing anguish, closing life, closing tales of the old city
We are on the road for any sustenance meagre
Please help us cross the Moosi.

4.4 A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE POEM *MOTHER SERIOUS*

The title itself is telling. Here is an English title for a Telugu poem on mother — a theme universal and eternal. 'Serious' is a word used widely by speakers of Telugu to signify the condition of a person critically ill. *Mother Serious* denotes the critical condition of her health as also the intense anguish the mother suffers. The poet has expressed, apart from physical suffering, the mental agony the old mother in her terminal illness suffers, powerfully and convincingly. The tropes merge into one another to create an electrifying effect. The emotion behind the expression makes for ease in creating a new idiom. *Mother Serious* sounds like the construction used in telegraphic language.

The speaker of the poem is the ailing old mother, bedridden for quite some time waiting for the inevitable.

The speaker tells her son using an endearing vocative "abbee" that she doesn't have any more desire to live on. She says she would give an answer (an explanation) for his unasked question.

She knows what everyone around has been waiting for. Everyone has been hopefully expectant. She finds in their solicitous inquiries a painful hollowness. Right behind their inquisitiveness is their looking forward for 'that': a relief from the long wait for her death. She doesn't say this straight but uses the powerful device of suggestion. Then she aims a barb at her son too: his fingers pressing on her back she cannot escape finding a kind of compulsion. She tells him straight that the little mouthful of water he makes her gulp is not just water but is the very flow of living and life. She draws his attention to the slow ooze from out of her eyes.

At this point we hear the remarks of a bystander that the old woman doesn't appear to decide any thing either way. Then suddenly she signals everyone to be quiet lest the old lady should hear.

A poet like Nissim Ezekiel uses this technique of introducing a comment of the people around in *The Night of the Scorpion.*

With every movement that the scorpion made
His poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.
May the sum of evil
balanced in this unreal world
against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain
may the poison purify your flesh
of desire, and your spirit of ambition,
they said, and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre
the peace of understanding on each face.
... .

The interior monologue of the mother, the central, helpless character in the poem goes on:

'No need to move
to open my eyes.
My ears like twin-boats
carry the weight of
your words.

Note the strikingly novel use of the term boats for ears, suggesting the burden on the mind of the mother. The mother is then reminded of her breast feeding him even while he was half asleep.

Then there is the repetition of the first line: I don't have the wish any longer to live on, *abbee*! (The translation you have studied has the lines

I have no wish to live any longer, dear son! as the fifth and sixth lines.

When she opens her eyes, she sees people scampering hither and thither and wonders whether she has ever scene so many shapes.

Then comes another jab: In order to test his mother's consciousness level, the son asks her to identify the people standing around her. This offends the mother and she points out that while she is sinking, and her son has given her

a 'brain teaser', a problem to solve. So she suggests that he should consult her pillow which has absorbed all her dreams and her heart which smiles of her tears. The pillow and the heart will together give him all her woes heaped up on a platter, as it were.

She wants her own son to realize how hellish her existence is when she can't move any limb of hers and only her ears are alive.

The last few lines suggest the impending collapse of the mother. The complexity of the similes and metaphors used so effectively makes the poem intensely authentic.

In an interview Nirmala defined poetry as that which ignites thought and creates unrest (in the mind). The expressive devices go far beyond the usual figures of speech. There is novelty in phrases such as — 'as quickly (readily) as giving suck when the kid in sleep turns round' or 'ears like twin boats laden with the weight of words they bring ...' There is many an expression like this which rivet the attention of the reader on the lines leaving a lasting impression.

4.5 A BRIEF NOTE ON TRANSLATION

Evaluating translated texts is a difficult task. Here are some bits of another translation against the one that you studied. Examine the two versions and give your reasons for preferring the one or the other. (If you know the original poem, it is all the better)

The translation you studied	*Another translation sent by the poet*
I will give a reply to your unasked question	I don't want to live any more, my son I will give explanation to your unasked question
Strangely you all seem	Strangely, all seem that they wanted it to be.
expecting it. I have no wish to live any longer, dear son.	
My ears like twin boats carry the weight of your words	Ears themselves come carrying the weights of words like a couple of boats
Now I feel my life, even if eased like the	Now I feel my body alive and as light as the cotton used to blot the wet of the navel of the new baby
cotton that touches the navel blood of an infant, under the weight of my ears, will break down.	and I feel as if it fell down with the weight of the wounds that the ears have made

Feminist poetry in Telugu has several shades and stances. The degree of intensity of commitment varies and so does the intensity of suffered pain and indignation against oppression and subjugation. Nirmala describes the feelings of an old and ailing mother, apparently disillusioned with human relationships.

The poem you have studied is memorable for the intensity of the poet's feeling for the mother's sad plight. A little affection appears to be all that she has been looking for. The poem provokes the reader to think giving a picture of the human condition in general and the mother's in particular. It is an illustration too of the poet's capacity to communicate with novel expressive devices.

4.6 VIMALA : A SHORT LIFE SKETCH

Vimala (b. 1963) was from a middle class family in Hyderabad. She was brought up in a fairly liberal environment where she was left to be mostly herself in matters of study, thinking etc. She was inspired by Marxist ideology. He father was active in the Telengana struggle. Right from her student days, Vimala had a flair for organization. She worked in student organizations.

She took to writing after her graduation in 1983. In 1986 she set to work to revive the Progressive Women's Organization. She was the editor of *Vimochana*, a women's rights journal for nine years. She was committed to the cause of emancipation and empowerment of women. She has been associated with Asmita, an organization of women for women's uplift. Her collection of poems *Adavi Uppogina Raatri* has made an intense impact with revolutionary fervour. The poem 'Digambara ooregimpu' (Procession of the naked) is a powerful indictment on patriarchal violence.

4.7 *KITCHEN* : A DISCUSSION

Free from the dazzle and complexity of thinking, the poem simply ridicules the system where a woman is reduced to a moron and a machine in the kitchen. Kitchen is another symbol of a cage, of cruel subjugation and inconsiderate oppression.

The poem while describing with realism the little place 'where none comes to eat' with all its noise, aromas and nostalgic experiences. The nostalgia is a fine sentiment and a fine memory but the place and its oppression rob the experience of its beauty.

Besides employing devices of irony and satire, the poem brings out the pitiable plight of women, the mother figure. The tropes rise to a crescendo delivering the final barb — this time with severe ridicule: the names on pots and pans (in the empire of the empress, the mother) are the man's.

At the end of the poem, there is a significant change in the tone. There is bitterness and its inevitable consequence, indignation.

Cooking and serving, cooking and serving,
Scrubbing and washing
There's a kitchen in my dreams,
the smell of spices even in the jasmine,
Damn the kitchen.

Then comes the peroration, the nail is hit in the head:

Let's smash these kitchens
Let's uproot these separate stoves,

The forward-looking nature of the poet envisages the future of a new woman which includes today's little girls:

Our children are about to enter
these lonely kitchens.
Come, for their sake,
let's demolish
these kitchens now!

Vimala's poem is about the inequity in our social practice where a woman is reduced to drudgery. The point she makes is applicable to ninety-five percent of women in homes in this country. The 'queen' has only been a sugar coating, a kind of attempt to pre-empt any protest from womenfolk where they are made to slog. The way they are brought up is different even today. The poem has a very strong, carefully and artistically embedded message. Students would not fail to see the difference of approach to the condition of suffering in women as delineated In the two poems they Have studied.

4.8 K. AYYAPPA PANIKER: A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH

K. Ayyappa Paniker (1930-2006)

K.Ayyappa Paniker, noted Malalyalam poet and critic, and an internationally known academic in English language and literature, was born on 12th September, 1930, in Kaavaalam, a small town situated amongst the idyllic backwaters of Kuttanaad, Alappuzha district, Kerala. He took M.A. degree from the Kerala University. In 1971 Ayyappa Paniker acquired AM and Ph.D degrees from Indiana University, U.S.A. under the supervision of Prof. Robert

E.Gross. In 1981-82 he did post-doctoral research in Yale University and Harvard University. He made use of his stay in the US to visit at least 25 Universities; he also got in touch with poets like James Dickey, John Hollander, Czeslaw Milosz and Allen Ginsberg and scholars like Cleanth Brooks, Harold Bloom, Charles Feidelson, Jr., Frederic Jameson and others. He taught English literature for forty years in Kerala University and retired as Head, Institute of English, and Dean, Faculty of Arts.

He has published four volumes of collected poetry (*Ayyappa Panikerude Krutikal, Vols.I-IV*) in Malayalam. His collections of poems in English translation are: *I Can't Help Blossoming* (2003), *Days and Nights* (2000), *Gotrayanam* (1990) *Selected Poems* (1985) and *Kurukshetram* (1960). He has several collections of critical essays in Malayalam and English. Has been Chief Editor of *Medieval Indian Literature: An Anthology* (in English translation) and *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature* (Revised Edition) of the Sahitya Akademi and of the *Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (in Malayalam translation). Edits *Kerala Kavita,* an annual journal that has been noted for its boldness in publishing the works of poets and critics who cannot boast of any proven track record but have the spark, along with those of veteran writers. Recipient of Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, lately the biggest literary award of the land, Saraswati Samman (2005) for his criticism and poetry, besides several other awards, and honours like the Padma Sri.

4.9 HISTORY OF MALAYALAM POETRY UP TO THE TIME OF PANIKER'S ENTRY

Malayalam, the mother tongue of nearly 47 million Malayalees worldwide, of which about 32 millions (Census 2001) live in Kerala — the state situated in the south-western corner of peninsular India — is believed to be more than a thousand years-old and is one of the four major Dravidian languages, the other three being Tamil, Kannada and Telugu. Like Kerala which is so accommodative to foreigners, where ancient Romans, Jews, Syrians, Chinese, Arabs and others and after the Renaissance in the West, the Portuguese, the British, the Dutch and the French found havens for trade in spices, ivory, rosewood and teakwood, its language — i.e., the basic Dravidian stock — also absorbed elements from the languages of the above cultures. Alongside this, there has been a regular engagement between the proto-Malayalam and the Prakrit and Pali of the Buddhist-Jain era of Kerala and with Tamil and Sanskrit in later times, accelerating its evolution into modern Malayalam.

The earliest poetry in Malayalam can be traced to the folksongs connected with religious rituals dating back to primitive Dravidian times, many of which are extant even now, preserving the native musical traditions. The song tradition further developed to include those of different communities like Hindus, Christians and Muslims and of trades and occupations like farm-labour, boating etc. The ballads of the north, central and southern Kerala and the songs related to the hundreds of performing art forms, contributed in forming the foundations of Malayalam poetry.

Ramacharitam of the 12th century AD (some say 14th century), written in one of the earliest forms of Malayalam, is the oldest extant classic in the language.

From the 14th century onwards begins the era of Manipravala kavyas, or, poems written in a language which was a mixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit, used prominently in performing arts like Koodiyaattam, Koottu, etc, and in several Sandesa Kavyas modelled on the *Meghadoot* of Kalidasa. Champoo, a mixture of prose and verse, also developed about this time. Another significant phase was that of the great adaptations of the epics *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata*, spanning a period from the 13th century to the 16th century by the Niranam poets first, and then by Cherusseri, and by Ezhuttacchan, hailed as the Father of Modern Malayalam who served to complete the evolutionary process of the language, standardizing it. Ezhuttacchan, Poontanam Namboodiri and Melpattur Narayana Bhattatiri, more or less contemporaries, were the prominent *bhakti* poets of Malayalam. Aattakkatha (Kathakali texts) by various authors from the 17th century onwards and Tullal verses developed by the great Kunchan Nambiar in the 18th century, further enriched Malayalam poetry.

The 18th and 19th centuries are marked by the contributions of Christian Missionaries and native Christian priests and court poets like Ramapurathu Varier and later, Irayimman Tampi and his daughter Kuttikkunju Tankachy who lived during the reign of the great composer-musician king Maharaja Swati Tirunal of Travancore. The 19th century also saw the rise of the Venmony school of poetry, a predominantly Namboodiri-initiated movement celebrating a libertine, decadent life, devoid of moral strength or high seriousness, and accenting on erotic escapades. But the end of this century saw the flowering of the one-man movement set in motion by Kerala Varma Valiya Koiltampuran, who represents the confluence of two major traditions in literature — the Sanskrit classics and the English/European classics, in Malayalam literature; he is revered even now as a great synthesizer.

The early 20th century witnessed the birth of several Mahakavyas in Malayalam beginning with Mahakavi K.C. Kesava Pillai's *Kesaveeyam*, in the neoclassical tradition. This was also the time of the beginnings of khanda kavyas which reached culmination in the supreme poetic works of N. Kumaran Asan, Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, Vallattol Narayana Menon (known as kavitrayam — trinity of poets) and several others, inaugurating the equivalent of the romantic movement in Malayalam.

The second generation of Romantics, a large number of poets mostly influenced by the style of Vallattol, the most important among them being Nalapat Narayana Menon, G. Sankara Kurup, P. Kunhiraman Nair, Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon and Nalapat Balamani Amma, brought about the exuberant growth of Malayalam poetry in the mid-20th century. Two younger poets of this time, Edappally Raghavan Pillai and Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, blazed a trail of intense romantic lyricism, changing forever the concept of poetic diction. O.N.V. Kurup, P. Bhaskaran and Vayalar Ramavarma were the strong camp-followers of the Edapally school. In sharp contrast was Edasseri Govindan Nair who used a non-romantic diction to present stark realism, although he, along with Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon and P. Kunhiraman Nair, forms the later kavitrayam. N.V. Krishna Warrier, Akkitham Achuthan Namboodiri and Olappamanna followed the Edasseri line.

This was the state of Malayalam poetry as Ayyappa Paniker found it, when he ushered in the era of modernist poetry along with pioneers like Madhavan Ayyappatt and Cheriyan K. Cheriyan in the 1950s.

4.10 AN OVERVIEW OF PANIKER'S POETRY

One of the founding fathers of modernist poetry in Malayalam, Ayyappa Paniker has a poetic career spanning over a half-century from the early fifties of the last century to the present. Noted for his pioneering innovations in form, introducing modern western models right from the time of the Dadaist phase, Paniker gave the young generation back then, the courage to break free from the centuries-old verse form confined to a few traditional metres, to which the Malayalee poet was chained. Not that he discarded metre altogether; in metrical designs also, his new touch left its mark — as K.Satchidanandan observes, he brought back to Malayalam poetry the vibrant Dravidian and folk metres, as well as the ancient, grand Sanskritic metres which were hitherto rarely used. He invented 'metrical collages, rhymeless verse with irregular rhythms, and stylized as well as sinuous, forthright prose'. He also experimented with different existing forms like 'the confessional mode, hymns, lullabies, dramatic monologues and classical ballets'. Meaning took precedence over mellifluous voice; metonymy and paradox overtook alliteration and assonance. With an amazing range from outright romantic lyricism, gentle irony and satire, to biting sarcasm, dark humour and shocking cynicism, Paniker's ouevre is rich in variety of form and content, marking the poet's journey through one of the most eventful epochs of the history of Kerala's society. Successive generations of Malayalam poets owe allegiance to Paniker in one way or the other.

Beginning with Paniker's first important long poem "Kurukhsetram" written over a seven-year period from 1951 to '57, and published in 1960, in which 'the actual and the timeless, the phenomenon and the idea, meet eye to eye in the equivocations of a disinherited mind' the poet progressed through "Pururavas" (1959), 'a dream-work that reinterprets the mythical search of the woeful Urvashi turned into a wild creeper in the valleys of Gandhamadana, under her master's spell'. Other landmark poems followed. "Hey, Gagarin!" is a poem dramatically addressed to the Russian cosmonaut, the first man to go to outer space, and exhorting poetry to reach such heights. In "Mrutyupuja" (Hymn to Death, 1967), a poem interwoven with Hindu and Hebrew myths, written in the 'Dandaka' metre used in Kathakali verse, 'the poet turned singer invites death to take away his breath as the terrible anticipations of the sunless day "Death", "The Night" and "I Know Your Face" find their somber fulfillment'. "Kudumba Puranam" (The Family Legend) takes a look at the history of the human race through his own roots. Satchidanandan sums up Paniker's two American sequences — "Days and Nights" (1970) and "Passage to America" (1972) — as revealing fully 'the possibilities and the limitations of Paniker's poetry — his preoccupation with love, death and the futility of life, his aversion to politics, war and urbanity, his black humour, his frail passions of lust'.

Beginning with the seventies, Paniker advocated the need for evolving an idiom that is 'post-modernist' — in the sense that it comes after the modernist phase. Till then, Paniker's poetry was marked by his natural reaction to old-world sentimental idealism, sensuous imagery and artificially embellished language; it was the quintessential modernist reaction. But as time passed and the contexts changed, Paniker began to write poems free from the deliberate anti-romantic mode adopted in modernist poems — a new kind of lyricism

juxtaposed with ironical expressions began to appear in his poetry. In *Ayyappa Panikerude Krutikal Vol. III* (1981-89) and *Vol.IV* (1990-99), poems with these 'post-modern' features appear predominantly. Introducing cartoon poems, caricature poems and the like, he kept on changing the mode of his poetic utterance, without even once falling into the stereotype of any of the literary movements. Without using strong verbal expressions and sensuous images, the poet employed a naturally flowing syntax and words loaded with suggestiveness. Writes E.V. Ramakrishnan: "In the poems of the 90s, Paniker closely examines the changing nature of Kerala society. The 90s have been a period of widespread changes in Kerala society. Literature has lost much of its centrality, the written word giving way to the omnipresent and omnipotent visual medium, with all its crass philistinism. The migrant Malayalee has created a diaspora of a sort .... The poems Paniker wrote during this period are highly critical of the evolving social scenario. He is at his satirical best when he exposes the vanity of contemporary Kerala society .... Poems like this also chart the changes that have happened to the affluent Malayalee who has grown more self-centred and narrow-minded. Paniker uses prose with telling effect in such poems where irony is inseparable from double-voicedness". Further forward in the essay, Ramakrishnan goes on to say, "There is a more lyrical idiom in Paniker's poetry that may not be easily available for translation. This lyrical mode is metrical and musical, making translation difficult, if not impossible"

I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday — An Interview is a 'dialogue-poem', a form Paniker improvised. This poem relates to his American experience and was first published in the mid-seventies.

4.11 INDIAN BACKGROUND TO WALT WHITMAN

Whitman's Indian sensibility with his understanding of Indian philosophy is seen as early as *Leaves of Grass*. Though Whitman began his serious literary career in 1842, with Benjamin's *New World* publishing hiss *Franklin Evans; or The Inebriate*, a novel, the most important body of his work remains *Leaves of Grass*, the collection of his poems which took aboard his growing corpus of poetry for the rest of his life, so that beginning in 1855, the book went into revised editions in 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871-72, 1881-82, and 1891-92. All his major poems written over nearly a half-century are found in these volumes and form the quintessence of his philosophy.

> Whitman was like D.H.Lawrence in his rejection of cold logic. They were both 'anti-rational,' and glorified intuitive perceptions. He would not belong to any movement, school, dogma or creed. He was the ultimate humanitarian, who believed in the innate dignity of man, and disregarded social conventions and public morality. The entire creation of God was encompassed in his creative empathy. Whitman's concept of democracy consisted in total liberty, equality, and fraternity among humanity. He developed a simple, unadorned, homely language and wove his poems through repetitive words and phrases, bringing the quality of a chant to his works. Through his poems, he went on asserting the common bonds of humanity.

Indian philosophy, especially the *Bhagavadgita*, had influenced him deeply. "Whitman always sought to explore the transcendental nature

of reality. His vision led him into the regions extending beyond the limits of empirical experience. The unknown, the unseen, the unheard and the unexpressed, revealed to his mind the deepest truths about the Ultimate Reality. To an Indian reader *Leaves of Grass* should have a special significance, since in respect of its transcendentalism it carries palpable overtones from the *Bhagvadgita,* which was his constant companion. In *Song of Myself* one hears echoes of Lord Krishna in the *Gita*:

With music strong I come, with my cornets and my drums,
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches
for conquer'd and slain persons....
.....
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous,
I make appointments with all,
I will not have a single person slighted or left away,
The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited.....
There shall be no difference between them and the rest.

"The saint and the sinner, the alms-giver and the beggar, the high and the low- are welcomed by the genuine creative artist who, God-like, receives them all in his arms. The correspondence between the *Bhagvadgita* and *Leaves of Grass* becomes still more intimate when Whitman suggests his potentiality to assume any form. With a peculiar resonance from the *Gita,* one reads;

I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul.
My course runs below the soundings of plummets.
I help myself to material and immaterial,
No guard can shut me off no law prevent me.
I anchor my ship for a little while only,
My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to me.
(Song of Myself)

"Whenever the cause of righteousness shall fail, the Lord will descend upon the earth to redress all wrongs and undo the evil.

.....I rise, from age to age and take
Visible shape, and move a man with men,
Succouring the good.....
(*The Song Celestial- The Bhagavadgita*)

"It is in the same symbolical role that Whitman, representing the Divine Self, proclaims:

Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,
Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the sun...
Helping the Lama or brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols. ..

"Again, if the Lord holds equal both gain and loss, influx and efflux, victory and defeat, joy and pain, so does Whitman equate all opposites:

Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall, battles are lost in the same spirit
in which they are won.

"The wise man is he who can transcend all contraries, and perceive a fundamental unity beneath all diversity. In expressing the unfathomability of the soul, Whitman again seems to echo the voice of the Lord:

I know I have the best of time and space, and was never
measured and never will be measured.....
I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of
things to be. *(Song of Myself)*

And again in "Song of the Open Road", he holds himself above all censure or praise:

Whoever denies me it shall not trouble me.
Whoever accepts me he or she shall be blessed and shall bless me.

"Although Whitman never fully elaborated his indebtedness to Indian thought, he seems to have been intimately conversant with the "Shastras and Vedas" (*Song of Myself*), often imagining "the Hindoo teaching his favourite pupil the loves, wars, adages, transmitted safely to this day from poets who wrote three thousand years ago". (*Salut Au Monde*). *Leaves of Grass* is full of allusions to "the epics of Asia's" and "the elder religions". From the vast store-house of philosophic thought, "the infinite greatness of the past." emerges India as an integral symbol of man's quest for the infinite--India with her "flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions, castes, old occult Brahma interminably far back, and the tender and junior Buddha... ..". (*Passage to India*)

"India, in the same poem, symbolises "primal thought", holding the key to the "aged fierce enigmas". She is like "the Elder Brother", guiding the "Younger" (America) into regions unknown:

O Thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the Light, shedding forth universes,
Thou centre of them,
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,
Thou moral, spiritual fountain-affection's source — thou reservoir...

"But this poem is not a "passage to India" only; it is a "passage to more than India", since it gathers within its symphonic cumulation all that may be best in the great religions of the world, both Eastern and Western. All the great savants and philosophers have recognised the supremacy of the unknown over the known, the transcendental over the empirical. If the senses of the body do not ultimately lead us on to the Divine Self, they have not performed their true function. In his poem "Portals", he asks:

What are those of the known but to ascend and enter the Unknown?

"Whitman always believed that "grander far was the unseen soul of me, comprehending, endowing all those, lighting the light, the sky and stars, delving the earth, sailing the sea (What were all those, indeed, without thee, unseen soul? Of what amount without thee?)"

4.12 *I MET WALT WHITMAN YESTERDAY*: A DISCUSSION

I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday — An Interview is a poem that is regarded as a perfect sample of the various innovative forms of poetry Ayyappa Paniker introduced to Malayalam. It has a special kind of structure, that of an imaginary interview in the reverse mode--with the subject asking all the questions — with a poet dead and gone more than a century ago. The full text of the poem is given below in English translation, with a detailed interpretation of it section by section. The poem is meant to awaken the conscience of the reader to the pretentiousness of our countrymen at a certain period in the development of our progressive society, just before or during the period of the Emergency (1975-77) when this poem was written. Paniker had lived in America for his doctoral research which was completed in 1971; the frame of the interview may have been drawn up in his mind during that period, but the actual writing of the poem was done a few years later.

The poem is a 'dialogue' poem. A dialogue between the legendary American poet Walt Whitman who lived and died in the 19th century and Ayyappa Paniker who was in the US for a couple of years ending 1971, and the interview taking place in Paniker's imagination a few years later! I have also given below a short note on Whitman's life and his connection with Indian philosophy. Well, what do you make of the posture of Paniker as the friendly poet of the later generation from India, visiting Whitman of the last century? Why do you think is Whitman bombarding Paniker with a battery of questions, which, if answered would unravel our real selves? Do you think that Paniker is aiming at social criticism though this poem? Can you visualize Paniker, a short, diminutive, brown-complexioned person, with graying beard and hair, facing the hoary Whitman, with robust, hairy limbs, clad only in his flowing white hair and beard, against the backdrop of the 'rocking Mother sea?'

Though it is called a 'dialogue' poem, there is hardly any dialogue in it. Only once does Paniker call out with 'Hey, Whitman'. And Whitman answers, 'My friend...look...Columbus' geographical error, history's gain...Paniker, I knew you would come again'. For the rest it is an interior monologue by Paniker, and a barrage of questions and a monologue by Whitman. The 'dialogue' take place within Paniker's mind. The sub-title of the poem is "An Interview". Again, apart from the above single exchange, and the questions and monologues, there is no interview. It is rather an encounter. The interview would be completed only when we the readers answer Whitman's questions. The technique is highly dramatic. Anyone with imagination can see Paniker probably paying a visit to Whitman's birthplace in Long Island, near New York, or, his memory of a visit conjuring up such a vision of Whitman, who died in 1892. During a personal discussion long ago, Paniker told me that the expressions, 'Casting his long shadow across Long Island, the poet-patriarch...' and 'the poet-patriarch coming from Long Island' could even evoke the image of Veda Vyasa on the island in Yamuna. It would be a minor exaggeration to say that Whitman is to the Americans, what Veda Vyasa is to us Indians, but the western idea of the 'patriarch' is accentuated by this suggestion.

The intent of this poem is clearly discernible from the set of questions Whitman fires at Paniker. Paniker, through the persona of Whitman, is bringing out the paradoxes inherent in Indians, when facing the reality of the United States — culturally, socially, politically, intellectually, in the spheres of science and technology and so on. Many of the double standards and pretensions of Indians in the United States are brought under the scanner of pungent satire. In the process, we get a glimpse into the real greatness of Indian philosophy which is respected in the US and the world over, though it has been in currency over several millennia now.

For an Indian living in the U.S. during the early seventies, the most prominent of the troubling questions would have been the India — U.S. relations soured then by the Indira Gandhi — Richard Nixon exchanges before and during the Bangladesh War and how Indians were looked upon then in the U.S. by the Americans. Another observation to be made is that the Indian immigrants would not talk to each other, out of sheer snobbery, mutual apprehension of the possibility of the revelation of their respective identities and roots back home, or fearing the eventuality of a less fortunate compatriot seeking help when in dire straits! Another pettiness of the so-called 'high-caste' average Indian in America, is prone to is to look at the African Americans (it is now considered politically and socially incorrect to call them 'blacks' or 'Negroes') like he/she does with a Dalit back home, and consider the white man as belonging to a higher 'caste'. This might have elicited Whitman's question, "Do you prefer whites to blacks?" The fact is that though racial differences and discrimination do exist in the U.S., these are very different from the Indian caste system. The African American almost enjoys, one might say, a better 'equality of opportunity' (Remember the Orwellian dictum, "Some are more equal"!) thanks to the high standards of work culture practiced in the U.S. Yet another point to remember is that India then used to be lampooned in America for claiming to be the ancient civilization which could even dream up an aeroplane like the Pushpak Viman, while in actual fact, we were requesting the U.S. for technical assistance in every field. The self-sufficiency we have acquired now in so many fields has improved this situation very much, though. The Indian attitude of going in for excellence in the western systems of knowledge, in science and humanities, while at the same time, keeping to our traditional knowledge, is also an enigma for an average American. All the paradoxes that emerge during such an encounter between an enlightened American and an Indian in the seventies, have come out in the poem, in the form of the questions posed by Whitman, on one plane. There are many other layers of meaning for every metaphor and its placement. These are for the readers to contemplate on and arrive at. Paniker's poetic techniques of irony and contrast, effected by juxtaposing disparate elements, come out wonderfully in this poem. A detailed analysis below would bring this out.

The poem has two parts.

Part 1 begins thus:

"Yesterday — or the day before — I met Whitman:
met Whitman talking aloud in solitude
about the populace".

Straightaway, the reader gets the image of a prophet from the Old Testament, which Whitman was likened to even during his lifetime. Paniker is using this as a launch-pad.

It maybe noted that Paniker strikes a vague note: "...yesterday, or the day before..." This is to suggest that the time element in this poem is shifting back and forth. A late 20th century poet is in the presence of a 19th century poet who is asking the former a clutch of questions!

The poet-patriarch, standing against the sun, so that his long shadow falls across Long Island (Whitman was born and brought up in Long Island) is counting waves. These are no ordinary waves; each wave represents a generation of the American people. So, standing at the end of the day against the setting sun, (or, at this end of history) Whitman is taking stock of what happened during the past century. The next few lines like 'rocking mother sea', 'wailing seagull' 'lilacs blossoming forth', 'frenzied drumbeats' all allude to expressions generally found in Whitman's poems. The occurrence of these phrases are too numerous to be enumerated here. You could get a copy of *Leaves of Grass* and read the poems; it is a great reading experience.

Paniker calls out to Whitman. Whitman turns to Paniker and describes America, as 'Columbus' geographical error, history's gain'. It is well known that as Columbus landed on mainland America, he sincerely believed that it was India where he had landed. Hence the copper-coloured inhabitants were called 'Red Indians'. Eventually it was called the New World, an addition to the geographical locations, known to man till then. This maybe 'history's gain'.

Whitman shakes Paniker's hand and says, 'Paniker, I knew you would come again'. Paniker pretends that he is surprised, but actually he is not. Because, he is from India, and believes in the doctrine of rebirth. The word 'again' implies that Paniker was certainly there in a previous birth.

After placing Paniker and Whitman face to face, shaking hands, the poet meres on to the latter part, reiterating, *I met Walt Whitman yesterday* and establishing the former. Now comes the 'interview' part. The poet is amazed at the number of questions Whitman is posing.

Apart from the questions I have already paraphrased in a paragraph above, Whitman asks Paniker whether we still have in India those Rishis and Munis who, eating nothing but their 'silences', give sage counsel to the rulers. "Eating only their silences" could plainly mean doing penance fasting for long periods; it could also mean that the Rajagurus of old never took any remuneration for the advise and guidance they gave to kings. It could also, by an ironical inversion refer to the notorious yogis and godmen who controlled the powers that be in the nineteen seventies, and even later, to achieve their own selfish ends. Some of them were indicted by the courts and imprisoned.

The next question is a dig at the snobbish Indian visitor, who would endure any pains to go and visit the Niagara Falls, or other such world-famous tourist spots in the U.S., just for the sake of boast, and may not even bother to visit ancient Indian places like the caves in the Himalayas where the sages of yore did penance.

Look at the juxtaposition of words like 'Atom' and 'Atman' in the next line bringing out the paradox in the sceming double standards about our search after knowledge. The western scientist who is wedded to rational thinkin, would hardly go after metaphysical stuff, whereas several Indian scientists, many of whom are based in the U.S., talk about matter and spirit in the same breath. The basic difference between the Eastern and Western thinkin is brought out here. It might also be seen as a jab at the secret atomic bomb development programme by India, about which rumours were affot for a long time after the Pokhran-I 'peaceful' test of an atomic device in 1974.

As for the American, 'Atom' and 'Atman' are both relevant. As far as 'Atom' is concerned, the Americans are the world masters of nuclear technology and their decisions dominate those of the other countries of the world, as we have seen in the debates around the recent Indo-American Treaty for Nuclear Energy, and how other western nuclear countries are willing to assist India only if and when the US finally wraps up the deal and its Congress ratifies it. 'Atman' stands for all the transcendental knowledge systems that have traveled from India to the US, which is growing strong with every passing year. Paniker, through Whitman's persona, seems to ask the Indians to prefer and uphold the unique moral and philosophical edge we have over the West. As mentioned above, the time of writing the poem, India had already tested its nuclear device in Pokhran-I, and was on the way to self-sufficiency in nuclear technology. Though the poem was written in 1976-77, the main themes are live and still relevant making the poem contemporary.

Whitman says that his questions are coming out in spite of himself and not expected to be answered. As poets, they both are preoccupied, may be with better, poetic thoughts. In their flights of imagination, they are moving faster than time!

Whitman then goes on to extol India for what she is really worth: her Vedic culture. He lists out great American writers and thinkers like Emerson, Thoreau, himself, all belonging to the 19th century and Whitman's contemporaries, and Martin Luther King Jr. , as having cherished the sweetness of this ancient culture. Observe Whitman mentioning Martin Luther King Jr., who died in 1968. Yes; Whitman is certainly speaking somewhere in the mid-seventies!

Such great people, and the elements (here the earth) resonate with the same message of the Vedas. But people who are equipped with sensitivity and intelligence, do not sense it. 'Those who have ears do not listen' is an inversion of an exhortation by Jesus Christ, 'Those who have ears, listen!' This reference seems to be to humanity in general, and not particularly to Americans or Indians. In any case, it will be futile to pinpoint verisimilitude or exactitude in poetry.

The next four lines list different objects. This is a parody of the general structure of many of Whitman's poems. It is a strategy adopted by Paniker to infuse the poem a Witmanesque touch into the poem. Parody here is not used satiricaly; it is more of a sample in demonstration.

The last line of the poem is full of suggestiveness. In those times (and even now), the California coast of the western U.S. especially cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, were considered the cultural centres of America.

All the new cultural movements sprouted and grew in those parts. Comparatively, the eastern, Atlantic coast, where cities which were centres of crass materialism and power, like New York were situated, was looked down upon by intellectuals and artists. Whitman would like Paniker to visit the real cultural core of the US, in the opposite pole of its materialistic, commercial capital New York which is located on the Atlantic coast. This may be the reason for Whitman's exhortation, 'Come, let's walk up to the Pacific Coast'.

As I said earlier, these are single-layer meanings. There can be many more layers. Multiple meanings can be generated through the peculiar placing of words and lines, by a deft artist like Ayyappa Paniker.

4.13 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have studied strong feminist stands in K. Nirmala and Vimala's Telugu poems — K. Ayyappa Paniker's pioneering efforts in modernist poetry in Malayalam. You have studied in details both the free-verse in contemporary Telugu poetry and the innovations in form and content in Malayalam poetry.

4.14 GLOSSARY

Breasted you: suckled you, gave you suck

Stark: open (usually stark naked, means absolutely naked)

I open my eyes piercing through layers of darkness: poetic way of saying, open my eyes s.l.o.w.l.y

Dot in the question mark: at the bottom

Brain-teaser: a difficult problem or question which teases the brain with its toughness (Make a special study of such compounds used by the poet)

Tear-smelling: smelling of tears

Aroma: here, the sweet smell of cooking

Earthen oven: mud *chulha*, The 'ritual' of cooking used to begin with giving the mud 'oven' a cow-dung wash in traditional homes in the past.

Snared: caught in a net or cage

Scrubbing: washing the soot off the cooking vessels, laborious morning and evening chores for women

Populace: local inhabitants; the common people; masses

Seblance: outward appearance; reseblance

Lilac: a shrub which has large sprays of purple, fragrant flowers. The lilac is a recurring image in Whitman's poetry; "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is a famous poem by Whitman.

Atman: the Universal Soul, Absolute Reality or 'Parabrahmam' which Indian thought has projected over several millennia.

4.15 QUESTIONS

Mother Serious

1. Write a note on the significance of the title of the poem *Mother Serious.*
2. Cite two instances of striking expressive devices from the poem.
3. 'Ssh! She will hear! Be silent!' Comment on the use of the quotation marks.
4. There is line that occurs twice in the poem. Why is the repetition significant?
5. Who is the speaker of the poem? Are there more speakers than one?
6. Explain the line: "I breasted you in sleep"

Kitchen

1. When was the kitchen 'wonderful' for the speaker of the poem?
2. What were the wisps of childhood shadows remembered in the poem?
3. What do you think of the expression 'kitchenness'?
4. Comment on the line: "it's no longer a play ground"
5. What is the positive suggestion made by the poet Vimala to save women?
6. Do you consider the poem feminist? Give reasons for your answer.

I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday: An Interview

1. Evaluate Paniker as an innovator in form in the light of the present poem.
2. Critically analyse the poem, *I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday.*
3. How is Whitman portrayed as a 'poet-patriarch' and why?
4. What are the peculiar situations in which an expatriate Indian finds himself/herself in the U.S., as described in the poem?
5. Bring out the paradoxes enumerated by Whitman in his questions.

Mother Serious

6. Annotate the following:

   (i) I will give a reply
   to your unasked question

(ii) My ears like twin-boats

carry the weight of
your words.

(iii) How many figures?
You ask me to tell them by name.

(iv) They will give you
a big desert on a platter

(v) Do you know
how real hell it is
if ears are alive?

Kitchen

(i) from the small change
in the box of spices
we bought ourselves sweets,
played house, played at being cooks

(ii) Her eyes ran out of tears long ago,
Her hands are worn out with endless scrubbing

(iii) How easily, they say, with a flick of the ladle
The cooking gets done.

(iv) there's a kitchen even in my dreams
the smell of spices even in the jasmine.

(v) Let's uproot these separate stoves.

I Met Walt Whitman

(i) Casting his long shadow across Long Island
the poet-patriarch was counting waves;
each wave, a generation.
Each bore the semblance
of the American people.

(ii) All other limbs
enveloped by the rocking mother sea.
Wailing seagull.
Ilacs blossoming forth.
Frenzied drum beats.

(iii) My friend — the voice had drawn near--
look, he said,
Columbus' geographical error,
history's gain.

(iv) Paniker, I knew you would come again.
I feigned surprise.
The rebirth of the human soul
is nothing new to me....

(v) Why do your people
get away when they meet your people
as if they are not your people?

(vi) Do you prefer whites to blacks?

(vii) Have you assigned for others
the ironical humour in buying machinery here
talking all the while about
the glorious heritage of your ancient past?

(viii) Do you have in your land still
those sages, who,
eating only their silences,
counsel their rulers?

(ix) Have you gone in search of Himalayan caves,
you, who hurry now to Niagara?

(x) Atom or Atman--
which of these do your scientists
strive after?

(xi) The glow of
the Vedic culture of old;
Emerson, Thoreau, Martin Luther King and I
have cherished its sweetness, as countless others.

4.16 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 5 RAMAKANTA RATH : *SRI RADHA* TRANSLATION : THE POET SHAKTI CHATTOPADHYAY : *JUST ONCE TRY* TRANSLATION : SIBNARAYAN RAY

Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to study some excerpts from Ramakanta Rath's much acclaimed poetic work, *Sri Radha* (two poems 1* & 7). But we cannot do so straightway, without acquainting you briefly with the Oriya poetic tradition, especially with the development of modernism in Oriya poetry. We shall then locate Rath in the context of modernism in the Indian context. Since Rath is a major Indian poet who writes in Oriya, you will be able to contextualise his role in the shaping of modern Oriya poetry from the 1960's to 1980's.

Subsequently we shall study Shakti Chattopadhyay's poem *Just Once Try* in the backdrop of the history and evolution of modern Bangla poetry.

After going through this unit you will understand the complex nature of the negotiations of the two important poets Ramakanta Rath and Shakti Chattopadhyay with their own times in Oriya and Bangla literary milieus.

* Poem 1 is for detailed study.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Indian literary culture is so diverse, heterogeneous, and unwieldy that people from one linguistic region often are ignorant of the traditions in the other linguistic groups. It is possible that many of you have little or no information regarding Oriya literature, let alone about Ramakanta Rath, one of Oriya's major contemporary practitioners of the poetic craft. While studying his poem *Sri Radha*, one of the points we need to keep in mind is the fact that we are reading Rath in English translation, and not in Oriya. The translation is by Rath himself. At some point we must talk about the problem of reading a text like *Sri Radha* in translation.

5.2 A SYNOPTIC VIEW OF ORIYA POETRY

Like most other Indian states, Orissa's geopolitical boundary as it stands today is a little over 50 years old. But Odissa of the land of the Odras is ancient, and was variously known as Utkal and Kalinga, and its boundary varied with successive conquests and specific rulers. The beginnings of Oriya poetry coincide with the rule of Gajapati Kapilendra Dev, who ruled over a vast stretch of land from the Ganga in the North to the Kavery in the South in the 15th century. Thus, Oriya poetry is about 500 years old, if not more, and it is almost as old as Oriya *literature*. As poetry was the dominant 'literary' mode, transition from the oral to the written tradition became natural. The broad periodization of Oriya literary history is relatively simple: The period stretching over 400 years — from the 15th to the mid-19th century is called "ancient" period followed by the modern period (For our own convenience, we will call this period medieval rather than ancient). Though within these periods, divisions are a little more complicated. There is very little space here to go into the details.

More religious than secular, Oriya poetry traditionally dealt with themes ranging from the retelling of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, to the singing in praise of Jagannath. Sarala Das, belonging to 15th century Orissa of Kapilendra Dev, is considered to be Orissa's *adikabi*. His epic, *Mahabharat* in 18 *parvas*, is not an exact translation from the Sanskrit original, but rather an imitation of the same. For all practical purposes it can also be seen as an original piece of work. It has provided subsequent poets with the necessary foundation for a national literature. It gives a fairly accurate idea about the culture of the Oriyas at the time. Towards the end of the 16th century, Balaram Das's *Jagamohan Ramayan* provided the other pillar on which subsequent literature was to thrive. However, the most influential work was yet to come. It came in the form of Jagannath Das's *Bhagabata*. This was closely followed by Achyutananda's *Haribamsha*. This period stretching from Kapilendra Dev to the time of Prataprudra Dev is the period of the efflorescence of Oriya poetry.

The second phase from the 16th c to the 19th century saw the emergence of descriptive poetry, which in turn can be sub-divided into three kinds: secular writing came into Oriya literary culture with the appearance of Narasimha Sena's *Parimala*. This was followed by the better known *Kanchikaveri* by Purusottam Das and *Chata Ichhabati* by Banamali Das. The second category

comprised largely works which derived from the themes of the classical epics and Kavyas. Yet another set of writings derive primarily from *Bhagabata*, and are based on the Balyalila and Gopalila aspects of Krishna's life.

Numerous lyrics and other shorter forms of verse were written within the third category. The lyricism and emotional intensity of these poems sprang from personal experiences. Relevant to our purpose is the fact that poets wrote love lyrics based on Radha-Krishna love, and also non-devotional love poetry about man-woman relationship. The forms used here were mostly *chautisha*, *chaupadi* and *padabali*. The *kavya-alankar* tradition was so dominant that poets showed their learning instead of letting loose their imaginative vigour.

The first Oriya poet to be influenced by the new world-view was Radhanath Ray (1848-1908), and with him begins the modern period in Oriya poetry. But modernism in Oriya poetry is quite another matter. More of which presently.

Some of these works, especially *Kanchi Kavery*, have been seen by historians as being responsible for the formation of the Oriya identity. Modernity, however, dawned on Oriya culture with the British occupation of Orissa in 1803. With the spread of English education, and the influence of neighbouring Bengal's reformers, modern education spread in Orissa, as did the general awareness of the world beyond.

5.2.1 Modernism in Oriya Poetry — The First Phase

By general consensus, the period between the 1930s and 1970s has been taken as the Indian counterpart of Anglo-American modernism in which poets in practically every language broke away from traditional techniques and themes. This is certainly the case with Oriya poetry. As is well known, Sachidananda Rautray (who liked to be called "Sachirautra") was the founding father of modernism in Oriya poetry. Like many European, and Anglo-American modernists he lived for a while outside his own state in a metropolis, Calcutta and "modernized himself on his own" (to use Ezra Pound's words for T. S. Eliot). By this we refer to his acquaintance with developments in European modernism. He imbibed the tradition of Bengali and Oriya literatures. For the young Bengali, Jibananaada had replaced Tagore as the poetic icon. Rautray could not have been free from the influence of Jibanananda. He was also well-grounded in the traditional Oriya idiom, meter, and *chhandas*, and was therefore confident in his metrical experiments. Deeply involved in the intellectual-political ferment there, he married the two phases of English modernism — the early aestheticist phase pioneered by Pound and Eliot (1910-1930), and the second wave modernism of the poets of the 30's (Auden, Spender MacNeice, Isherwood). Unsurprisingly, he disowned the romantic legacy from Shelley down to Tagore:

> I am Sachirautray
> (neither Tagore nor Shelley)
> I am a poet of this earth and sky...
> ["Raja Jema" ("The Princess")

In keeping with the internationalism that was so typical of modern poetry everywhere, Calcutta, Melbourne, and New York provided him with the necessary cityscape. He gained fame after his 1947 volume, entitled, *Pandulipi*. In many of the poems included there, he expressed concern over developments in Cuba and spoke of China. In one of his famous poems

("Alaka Sanyal") which appeared in the February 1947 issue of *Naba Bharat* he appended a note: "[The historical backdrop is Noakhali. I wrote this poem] in response to the late (Bengali) poet, Jibanananda Das's 'Banalata Sen'. His main aim was to introduce historical realism, which was absent in his poem.

Rautray continued to publish at regular intervals: eleven collections between 1931 and 1962, and seven afterwards. Then, in 1962 he published *Kavita 1962* in which 55 poems appeared along with a prose supplement of about 200 pages. In the Preface Rautray said, "An essay on the background and development of new poetry has been added to the poems... this was necessary... After the barrage of questions that the poet received on the subject of "New Poetry" it was not possible for him to sit quiet for long" (Rautray, Preface). Sections were devoted to imagism, symbolism, the French symbolist movement, vers libre, vorticism, futurism, questions of obscurity, borrowing and imitation (responding to charges leveled against modern poetry), obscenity etc. He sets out to diagnose the reason why contemporary poetry was alienated from the masses from the Marxist point of view, saying that when literature began to serve feudalism, it got alienated from the masses. Poetry or poetic language must be married to the oral tradition and use everyday language.

Along with Rautray one must count Guru Prasad Mohanty, Bhanuji Rao, and Binod Nayak as the chief architects of Oriya modernism. That Oriya poetry was willing to take daring steps becomes evident in poems like Bhanuji Rao' "Breasts". Guruprasad Mohanty's translation/adaptatation of *The Waste Land* (*Kala Purusha*) was influential. In fact, the role of translation/adaptation of Western writing cannot be under estimated. Whereas what one had noticed in Oriya poetry before Sachi Rautray and Binod was mostly sanskritic, or "literary" idiom; now, in the 50's and 60's, one could notice the free use of contemporary idiom, and the "modern image": "Across the sky, pale like a blotting paper/ scattered the little girl a bottle of ink is the image of the tropical cloudy sky" ["Anwesha"]. "Her sari, her blouse/rounded breast, her dark eyes/I keep my mind, body, soul/my manliness crumpled in my handkerchief" (ibid). One also encounters numerous Eliotic images in Binod's poem, ("Gobar Ganesh"), a Prufrockian figure saying, "No, I am not the hero of *Dhupa* [a famous poem by Mayadhar Mansingh]..."; and 'What if she says..."... Intertextualities like those in "Alaka Sanyal", "May be Sachibabu had seen you sometime; I do not know, Alaka Sanyal.... .

5.2.2 The Post-Rautray Phase of Modernism in Oriya Poetry

In the meantime, young poets who grew up with a diet of Eliot-Auden-Dylan Thomas as well as Rautray and Guruprsad, who had begun publishing poetry in diverse Oriya magazines. From among these writers two stood out: Ramakant Rath and Sitakant Mahapatra. Their first collections appeared in 1962-63 coinciding with the Indo-Chinese war and Rautray's *Kavita*. The period 1962-63 is, thus, an eventful one in the history of Oriya publication, as these two young poets were to cast a lengthening shadow over the next three decades of the Oriya poetry scene. Both highly educated urban sensibilities belonging to the Indian Administrative Service had obviously made adequate preparation for writing poetry as is evident from their manifesto-like prose that accompanied their poetry. They were ready to take over the mantle from Rautray. Rath's *Kete Dinara* (1962) carried a long "Afterward", and

Mahapatra's *Dipti O Dyuti* (1963), similarly, a "Forward". Without naming their strong precursor, these two young poets, alluded to and in certain ways attacked Rautray. This was not all. Just as Rautray was self conscious about his role as a pioneer, there was something programmatic about their prose essays too. It may be necessary at this stage to pay some attention to them ahead of their poetry.

Rath begins his Afterword by saying, "According to some... more and more writers are getting alienated from their audience" (Rath: 1962, p. 101): an obvious reference to Rautray's diagnosis of how what he perceived as alienation was the result of the lack of social reference in the poetry of the "Riti" tradition. This tradition, according to Rautray, prevailed up to his time. Rath contradicts this view, and hits out at Rautray by saying that , "the poet's obsession with his self-proclaimed ideals and his infatuation with his own ideas are the real reasons behind self-publicity" (ibid. 107). Clearly inveighing against Rautray, Ramakant pleads for the reinvention of traditional Oriya poetry. (ibid. p. 116). I think the latter was somewhat unfair to the former as Rautray had quoted from the poetry of his younger generation, Rath included, to illustrate his point about how modern Oriya poetry was imagistic. It is possible that Rath was responding to some of Rautray's essays, which were published in newspapers and magazines before 1962, and had not read the new essays, which appeared for the first time in the book. The result of his understanding of the role of a modern Oriya poet can be seen in some of the poems in the volume. It carried a sonnet, "The Lantern"; whose last line became an instant hit: "Can you imagine, how I am burning and burning in acute pain/inside my medium dhoti and ironed shirt sleeves?" ("The Lantern" Rath, p.11). Another striking image appears in "Introspection":

> I well know now, the puzzling secret of his success:
> Every morning he devours with his coffee
> A fistful of butterflies, violet, black, and brown,
> Polka-dotted, and plain,
> any will do so long as they butterflies be.
> ("Introspection" Rath 15).

Rath's blending of traditional Oriya meter and technique with the freedom of modernist vers libre was exemplary. As Haraprasad Das says, young readers and aspiring poets like himself were instantly drawn to Rath's poetry: "He provided us with very sharply drawn images, very strong ideas of a divided self and above all very few of his successors have been able to reproduce the tightness of his poetry". His second collection, *Aneka Kothari* (1967), again carried an Afterword in which he announced that "the progress of Oriya poetry over the last decade has been satisfactory, and the passionate surge for new forms and thought is definitely clearly discernible". (Rath: 1967, 72) Responding to the criticism that modern poets had not paid much attention to reality, he said that enthusiasm for quotidian life could not result in good poetry. He aslo pleaded for the autonomy of art (ibid pp. 73).

Mahapatra in his "preparatory note" addressed questions of what is modernism, and what constitutes obscurity in modern poetry. But, inevitably, he too attacks Rautray, especially the latter's insistence on endearing the audience by bringing in folk elements and insisting on making poetry earthy and rooted in lived experience. He attacked the concept of "people's poet" or "people's poetry", values, which Rautray championed. Alluding indirectly to these, he denies that literature is possible through exhortation and incitement.

> Now the country is wounded by external aggression [Chinese]. The question is, what is the role of the writer at this juncture? A lot has been said and discussed. Hundreds, thousands of stories and poems have been written. Writers are satisfied that they have done their duties toward the country. But I am not sure such war literature would have inspired anyone. (Mahapatra, 1963, p. 18).

Not unlike Rath, Mahapatra too sets out to reject new poetic principles offered by Rautray, both theme and content, without naming the senior poet. In his first poem "Tears and Taste", he says of his poetic persona, "You are no roaring and frothing cataract / you are a wayside public tap...". (ibid. p.1).

Without going into details one can sum up the programmatic aspect of the two young poets (though Mahapatra expressly denies that his Prefatory note is a manifesto), one can note how they insist on a new poetic, valuing intellectualism of a new kind. Needless to say, one can discern in their critical prose the influence of the criticism of Eliot, Lionel Trilling, and Frank Kermode, not to speak of F. R. Leavis. Mahapatra sought to free Oriya poetry from the Eliotic preoccupation with angst, anxiety, neurosis, meaninglessness and so on. Even so, he introduces the Eliotic concept of "the mythical method" without saying so. What Mahapatra recommends is this: "Therefore, we will certainly succeed if we, as far as possible, extract symbols, images, similes, and metaphors from our day to day life, puranic subjects, our myths and culture..." (ibid. p. 20).

Both the poets, thus, sought to and — as it eventually turned out — succeeded in making the "swerve" that Harold Bloom talks about. (Bloom, p. 14) Though living in urban Orissa/India, they wrote about Orissa villages, Oriya culture in an idiom very different from Rautray's. Mahapatra introduced elements of Oriya diction as the medieval poets such as Jagannath Das and Sarla Das had brought them into vogue. As Nityananda Satpathy says,

> Mahapatra very self consciously tried to fuse the idiom of Sarala Das's *Mahabharata* and spoken Oriya of rural Orissa. One encounters such unused and used-only-in-villages vocabulary such as *dushiba, nichipara, kebana, shobhabana, manamara, mitani* ... (Satpathy 13).

In the case of Rath, Satpathy says, the

> diction is highly individual though it is influenced by the English diction. That is, no Oriya poet used such conjunctions as 'and', 'or', 'but', at the beginning of metrical lines in poetry. Shunning the diction of the *Prayogbadi* phase [he] gradually tried to make his diction more evocative/intensive and lyrical....(ibid. 13).

So successful and influential did these poets become that younger Oriya poets wrote in imitation of their style and diction. They succeeded in obliterating the influence of Rautray. I am not here talking about the more successful poets who followed, but the large number of second string poets.

5.3 RAMAKANT RATHA : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Born on the 13th of December 1934 at Cuttack to natural parents, Lokanath Mahapatra and Parvati Devi he was adopted by foster parents in a village in the coastal district of Puri, famous for its temples. He took the family surname of his foster parent, Biswanath Rath and Durga Devi. Rath completed his schooling, studying in different schools, and obtained his master's in English literature in 1956. He served briefly as a lecturer in English in a government college before qualifying for the Indian Administrative Service. After joining the IAS, he served in various capacities in Orissa and Delhi, and travelled widely in India and abroad. The highpoints in his professional career were his tenures as the Chief Secretary of Orissa and secretary to the Government of India. After his retirement from Government service he served as President, Sahitya Akademi.

He began writing very early in life, and some of his juvenilia and early poetry were published in literary magazines in Cuttack, Calcutta and Bombay all through the 1950s. He was during his student days attracted by the Marxist movement, and was perhaps a member of the Student Federation of India. But after he joined the IAS he avoided dealing with any overt political stance. Little is known about his religious leanings beyond the obvious fact that he is a Hindu, Brahmin by caste. He visits temples, and is perhaps a theist.

Rath is primarily known and admired as a poet; his reputation is based on seven collections. *Kete Dinara* (*Long Ago*,1962), *Aneka Kothari* (*Many Rooms*, 1967), *Sandighdha Mrigaya* (*The Dubious Hunt*, 1971), *Saptam Ritu* (*The Seventh Season*, 1977), *Sachitra Andhara* (*Darkness Illustrated*,1982), *Sri Radha* (1985), and *Sri Palataka* (1996). Though each of these was considered to be a publication event in Orissa, it was *Sri Radha*, which brought immense prestige and fetched Rath many an award, and national and international fame.

He won the Kendriya Sahitya Akademi award for *Saptama Ritu*, and the prestigious *Sarala Puraskar* for *Sachitra Andhara*. However, his best known, and perhaps his best work *Sri Radha* fetched him the *Saraswati Samman*.

5.3.1 His Oeuvre : An Overview

Rath produced only two poetry collections over a period of twenty years, between 1950, when he started publishing poems in diverse magazines, and 1970. During this phase his poetry deals with themes of love, lovelessness, loneliness and death consciousness. If the revolutionary fervour of his juvenilia is missing here, it is because of his disillusionment with Marxist ideas. Here the self-conscious attempt to modernize the Oriya idiom is conspicuous, and thus style and technique take precedence over subject matter. At the centre of most of the poems is the persona of the poet-protagonist. The protagonist is defeated, self-reproachful, and ironic. Sometimes he is a caricature of the poet, a role-playing self-ironic modern young man, conscious of his identity as a middle-class intellectual.

The titles in his second collection say something about the poet's subject and method. "*Bagha Shikar*" (Tiger-hunt), *Anant Shayan* (The Sleep of Death), *Biman Durghatanare Mrityu* (Death in a Plane-crash). In most of these poems the dominant *rasa* is that of *Karuna*. In these as well as some of his later poems, one can perceive a reluctance on the poet's part to sing full-throated. There is a recognizable reticence, verging on the silent. In one or more of his Afterwards, Rath speaks of the need for silence, or a whisper, as if heeding the Wittgensteinian dictum: Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.

The Dubious Hunt comprises 32 poems, noteworthy for the complexity of thought. The most memorable, because accessible, of these are, "Mastrani" (The Mistress), "Hemalatara Mrityu" (The Death of Hemalata), "Athithi Satkar" (The Reception), "Bhikarunira Baranugamana Darshan" (The Beggar Woman witnesses the Arrival of the Bridegroom"), and "Madhabira Panchatrimsatama Janmadina" (The 35th Birthday of Madhabi). The Oriya reader found in the transparency of the poems a willingness on the part of the poet to communicate with his audience. The images are drawn from commonplace sights and experiences; their themes, like before, are around death consciousness, love, and deprivation. The first three are undoubtedly about death consciousness. The rest of the poems are open to charges of willful obscurity. But when one goes through the objections raised by even some of the most well-informed readers, one cannot help wondering whether they (the Oriya critics) had taken the trouble to analyse how far poetry had moved away from modernism, and was moving towards the postmodernist mode.

Anyway, the collection contains a long poem which might hold a clue to Rath's method and intent in *Sri Radha,* "Hridayasri" The poem is about *parakiya*. While representing illicit love, the poet takes recourse to the parodic mode, alluding to the tradition of invoking the love as a goddess, and also certain poems in the romantic mode, such as Mayadhar Mansingh. For ages, as Kumkum Sangari has pointed out, casting *parakiya*, which is illicit, in the mode of Bhakti has been prevalent among poets, especially among women poets. These poems of Rath prior to *Sri Radha*, thus, in a way prepare us for the volume under study.

In his 1982 collection occurs a long poem, ("*Tamehni*" or "Only You"), which deals with the subject of love in a way that looks forward to the

woman's perspective in *Sri Radha*, But more importantly, the two poems, "*Kananara Bitanare*" and "Yasoda" indicate Rath's interest in the the Krishna-Radha mythology.

5.3.2 *Sri Radha*: Meter and Technique

The work can be seen as either one long dramatic monologue or a series of dramatic monologues. As you know this is a form that Browning, the English poet had popularized, and which such leading modernists as Ezra Pound and Eliot found congenial to their purpose, primarily because they subscribed to the idea of impersonality.

The meter that Rath has all along been faithful to or consistent with is that of the *payaar*, with minor variations (Eliot's formulation about vers libre. The ghost of some familiar metre lurks in the background, which ….). A *payaar chhand* comprises lines of four four-syllable units (usually two of these, sometimes even more of such units, the nearest equivalent of what is called a foot in English), followed by a six-syllable unit (4-4-6 or 4-4-4-6). Either two lines, rhyming aa bb or four lines rhyming abab Sometimes the lines rhyme ab,ab…., or aa,bb…. Aside from the *payaar*, he also occasionally uses *bangalashri*. It is a traditional line, which many of his contemporaries begin with, but move away from after a few years into newer and more experimental technical innovations. The following line is an illustration of the *payaar chhand*:

Tame mote (4) *jeuthara* (4) *prathame chhuinla* (6) It comprises lines with more than two four-syllable units. Rath's *Sri Radha* uses different lengths of the first meter to carry forward the emotional weight of the speaking voice. Some of the passages are also in prose rhythm.

Like Western modernism itself, the so-called "mythical method" propounded by Eliot in the context of his review of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, made a belated appearance in Oriya literature. The method, said to be as momentous an invention as was Einstein's theory of relativity was by no means used first by Joyce. W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and Eliot himself had done so on a smaller scale in their own poetry. The technique involved, in Eliot's formulation, the "juxtaposition of antiquity and contemporaneity" which, according to him, had made the modern world, an "immense panorama of futility and anarchy", possible for poetry. Following this formulation, or independent of it, poets and novelists in Orissa have been consciously or unconsciously paying much importance to the use of myth. The popularity of the technique can be accounted for by the fact that they have found it impossible to extricate themselves from the two dominant mythologies, the cult of Jagannath, the Oriya *Bhagabata*, and *Ramayana*. In a way, the method is congenial to a culture which is steeped in spiritualism, and whose literary tradition is inextricably connected to religiosity.

However, *Sri Radha*, with numerous references to the river, the kadamba tree, the cows, cattle, cowherds, and the figure of Krishna, breathes the air of antiquity. On the other hand, the contemporary world is conspicuous by its absence, with hardly any modern imagery. The real site of the aforesaid "juxtaposition" is the complex of the emotion and character of the protagonist with numerous references to infidelity, passion, unabashed references to the bodily signs of these.

5.4 INTRODUCING THE POEM *SRI RADHA*

Sri Radha, if taken as one long poem, comprises 61 sections. It can also be considered as a collection of 61 independent poems. In either case, the parts/poems are arranged in a particular sequence so as to convey a congeries of emotions purportedly felt by the protagonist, a lovelorn woman, supposed to be Radha herself for her lover. However, Rath denies that his Radha has anything to do with the literary or mythical Radha:

> I don't think *Sri Radha* is a myth-based work. After two or three poems, the rest of the poems were written on their own and while writing those, Radha was not in my imagination. My objective, then, was to note the feelings of shock and anxiety of an individual, who was perplexed, while searching for the proper place of his endless love in this mortal world.... The Radha I have taken efforts to characterize, is not the Radha portrayed in literary and religious tradition. She is the beloved whose love-lorn feelings are so deep that every aspect of her life unconnected with love, even death remains irrelevant.

Rath further admits that *Sri Radha* was originally not intended to be one "long poem". He in fact says that he had composed some of the poems as separate entities. When he saw that they dealt with the same theme and could be arranged in a particular sequence, he wrote the rest of the poems and published them in the form they are now available in *Sri Radha*. Thus in its organisation, if not original intention, it is long poem. That is to say, various aspects of a single intimate and intense experience, have been brought together through a collective expansiveness and concentrated subjectivity. These experiences are both physical and metaphysical. The poem(s) explore(s) the experience of love as process of self-discovery.

Sri Radha is enmeshed in a kind of intertextuality that goes beyond its links with such prior texts as *Gita Govinda*, Vidyapati, Chandidas, Mirabai, and so on. It is intertextaul in the way one understands the diverse theories enunciated by Bakhtin, Barthes, Foucault and Julia Kristeva. It partakes of the discourses around the figure of Radha, and is a tissue of quotations from a communal archive, that is oral and literal both. As Jatindra Mohan Mohanty says, "[B]ehind the poem lies the familiar backdrop of the Vaisnava cult and the various perspectives, themes, and expressive modes in numerous poems which have been written about the Radha-Krishna love for over 400 years". (p 275). Thus, despite Rath's disclaimer that his *Sri Radha* is not the mythical Radha, one cannot ignore the two traditions of the Radha-Krishna *Parakiya* and *Sahajia* which is indelibly stamped on the Oriya national consciousness. There are lines in the poem which do not make sense if taken out of the context of Krishna *lila*, such as the allusions to Krishna's arch enemy Kamsa, his killing of *Kalia*, Putana, and his saving of the city from deluge, and so on.

For a dramatic monologue, the text seems to be without a specific context: one just hears a voice, though an embodied one. One has to construe a context. The location can be anything from Gopapura to Gopinathpur or Gopaballabhapur. It can be from the Dwaparjuga or Kalijuga. Many, including Rath — as we have seen — have gone to the extent of saying that it is any

lovelorn woman pining for her lover. But, one cannot even begin to understand the poem let alone enjoy it as a whole unless one is aware of the tradition of such poetry as it exists in India. So in the following section, I shall give a brief survey of the tradition.

5.4.1 Who is/was *Sri Radha*?

Though scholars have traced the concept and character of Radha back to the *Rigveda*, the myth of Radha as the lover of Krishna evolved with Jayadev's *Gitagovinda*. Friedehelm Hardy goes back to the 11th century and beyond into several works in South India for the genesis of what he calls "Krishnaism". But as far as Orissa is concerned, for many years, Radha did not find a place alongside Krishna in places of worship. It is believed that the ruler of some princely state installed the image of *Sri Radha* in Sakhi Gopal of Puri. However, it is only after Jayadev and later, Chaitanya's Gaudiya Vaishnavism that the Krishna-Radha cult became part of Oriya bhakti tradition and folklore. *Sri Radha* receives a passing reference or two in Oriya's iconic *Bhagabata*. But there are innumerable references to her in *Bibidhpurana*.

Sri Radha was supposedly the daughter of Brushabhanu, a cowherd king of Gokul near Mathura. She was the so-called wife of one Ayan, a cowherd. Her mother's name was Keertada, though she was not born of her. She was *ayonisambhaba*. She was older than Krishna, and opened her eyes for the first time when Yasoda, with young Krishna in her arms, went to see Radha. There are other myths too about Radha's nativity, and how she met Krishna for the first time. When the word, "Radha" entered literary creation is debatable, with scholars disagreeing with one another. Radha is the recipient of Vaishnavite worship. For them, she is the symbol of love, and is the best way of seeking out Krishna. In fact, she is not even seen as being separate from Krishna: she is a shadow without an identity of her own.

5.4.2 The Tradition

The theme is integral to the medieval Bhakti tradition. In the pan-Indian context of Vaishnavism, especially in the Sahajiya and Radhapyari cults, the all-male community spent their lives dressed as women and took female names, considering themselves reincarnations of Radha or Radha's female friends. Their devotional and mystical practice took the form of love-worship, each imaginatively reconstructing/impersonating Radha and her life with Krishna. Dressed as women, they direct their amorous devotion to the male god/lover. Since these supposed women consider themselves reincarnations of Krishna's paramours, the milkmaids of Braja, their status as concubines or co-wives of Radha gives the all-women community a heteroerotic dimension. On the other hand, these devotees expressed their devotion to Krishna vicariously, through devotion to Radha.

These tropes operate most powerfully in the writings of male mystics who address a male god in the terms of bridal mysticism. Numerous devotees in the Vaishnava tradition address Krishna as bridegroom, themselves taking on the role of his consort or of a woman in love with him. Even devotees like Kabir who take the path of knowledge rather than love, occasionally resort to the trope of bridal mysticism in order to address god. It is a commonplace in Vaishnavism that for the devotional community there is only one male-god, since all the devotees are female in relation to him. This formulation draws on the idea of god as Purusha and nature as Prakriti. It also expresses the

devotee's humility — the same mystics who construct themselves as brides of god also call themselves his servants, slaves or even dogs. This follows from a widely accepted hierarchy in which women are seen as lower than men. So while offering himself as Krishna's lover, the male poet has to assume the role of a woman. The relationship of devotion, even at its most reciprocal, appears to premise difference or the principle of heterogeneity as a prerequisite for union to be desired.

In Orissa, the poetical works of Abhimanyu, Kavisurya and Gopalkrushna deal primarily with the subject of Radha-Krishna love. Also, in them, various dimension of human emotions such as sorrow, sense of deprivation, pangs of separation from the beloved, sadness and anger are expressed through the subjectivity of Radha.

5.4.3 *Sri Radha* : The Poem

Rath says in the Afterward to the poem that

> All the poems in this collection are about Radha. The writing of so many poems on a mythical character in the twentieth century might seem unnecessary and unjustified. But since the poems depend on those aspects of Radha's life which do not feature in any of the well-known legends about her or the *purana*, it might be worthwhile to look for other reasons for the readers' indifference to the poems.

Far from being indifferent to the poetry, the readers are drawn to it, as the figure of Radha grows on them. In this section I shall introduce you to some basic ideas that the poem develops, the thematic drift, and its broad outline, to enable you to come to terms with the excerpts we have selected for you.

The first thing the strikes a reader who comes to the poem after familiarising herself with the other works by Rath preceding *Sri Radha*, is its relative simplicity. One gets the impression that Rath is acutely conscious of the charges of obscurity and complexity that had been leveled against his earlier volumes. However, the simplicity which again is part of the tradition that the poem feeds on is deceptive. If only because the figure of Radha seems to be so elusive, now mystical, now real. Such is the indefinite nature of the temporal and spatial frame of the poem. This in spite of the relative avoidance on Rath's part to use paradoxes and ambiguities. Rather, the sequence interweaves/enmeshes complex states of the protagonist's mind with which the empathetic reader gradually identifies.

The poem follows the well-known sequence of events in Krishna's life, from his nativity to the attempts on the part of Kamsa to kill him, followed by his destruction of his enemies, through his Gopalila, his absence during his involvement in the Mahabharata, to, finally, his passing (*dehatyaga*).

Section 1

The opening lines of the poem are quite dramatic, even more so in the original Oriya idiom:

The morning today
is somehow very different. (1)

After the preamble Radha is in a state of agitation with the premonitory subconscious anticipation of her lover's/Krishna's arrival. She perceives some specialty/uniqueness about that morning, without quite grasping its significance. It is common knowledge that Krishna's nativity succeeded by many years Radha's miraculous "birth". So what is being metaphorically invoked is Krishna's nativity. But it could be read as being also about Krishna's arrival in Gokul. However, the opening lines make an impression on the modern reader as being an expression of any woman's emotional state, not necessarirly Radha's.

The subsequent stanzas go on to show how and why this is so.

What impudence in the sunlight!
The wind's thoughts are wandering,
as though it has seen the long-banished lover
living in disguise
in the neighbourhood. (1)

The image of the lover in disguise also prepares us for the theme, revealing the mind of the speaker. Further details of the changed nature, uniqueness of the particular morning are catalogued through the stanzas that follow.

The morning today
tells me it shall take away all consciousness
from this life
and all the other lives I have yet to live.
It says all this in a strange language —
in words different from all the words I've known. (1)

The strangeness of the morning verges on the miraculous, attributing divinity to, and thus defining the supernatural identity of the lover. These signs are taken for wonders. But, even at the secular level, the speaker could well be spiritualising the worldly love between any two lovers.

In the last stanza, Radha defines her own mortal identity. As against the divine attributes of Krishna, whose arrival is signaled by various signs, the speaker's temporality is defined by references to "old age, disease and death". In a way, she is bereft of any agency, for with her lover's arrival

[She does] not know if a love
annuling all other loves will arrive
and command [her] destiny of old age, disease and death
to stop and retreat to
wherever it came from. (1)

Section 2

In the empty space between sections one and two, Radha interprets the cause and significance of the premonitory sensations. When the second section begins she has become aware of the cause. From anticipation to the actual arrival of Krishna, the scene shifts, from thought to phenomena. What was already in the realm of possibility and conjecture is manifested in the numeral world.

The day was no longer young when I heard the news
That you'd arrived. (2)

But Radha continues to harp on the miraculous amidst the ordinary experiences of cattle herds sent out to graze, menfolk gone to work, and women preparing to go to the river to bathe. There are questions about the strange happenings even here. From the outer macrocosmic world to the microcosm of her body, Krishna's pervasiveness is highlighted:

> As I bathed that morning, I looked through the
> water at my legs and thought: these legs are not
> mine, nothing is mine, this body is not mine, the
> history of all my hopes and despairs is not mine.
> And my husband, my house, my herds of livestock —
> they are not mine. Neither this life nor the
> death that shall surely come someday are mine. I
> am forever a beggar woman, a disturbed void enclosed
> between these two arms that reach into outer space. (2)

The admission here highlights the essential Gaudiya thought: Krishna is a all pervasive void. In trying to embrace him, *Sri Radha*'s arms had to stretch beyond their reach — into outer space. However, this profound thought has a flip side to it, when seen from the perspective of an earthly woman. Deprived of her embodied lover, she realizes the futility of her search.

Section 3

In the third section, there seems to be a jump in the narrative. The scene shifts to the child Krishna vanquishing his adversaries, deputed by Kamsa. The assassins were so ferocious that the people of Gopapura had lost their voice, their ability to even chant the sacred name. But after their death and destruction, they recovered their voice and saw the familiar places in a new light. From the second to the third here seems to occur a certain abruptness in the narrative sequence. The meeting of the lovers has already taken place, and they have grown intimate, by the 3rd section. "I" and "you" are replaced by "we". The promise and possibilities of love are enunciated in the image of the peacock.

Section 4

The fourth section deals with the difference that exists between Radha's response to Krishna's miraculous powers and those of the others in Gopapura. Self-ironical, self-reproachful, she calls herself a "stupid woman", whereas her questioning attitude marks her out as Krishna's chosen one. Her questions are profound and undermine the very efficacy of divine intervention. Instead of being grateful to Krishna for having restored the cripple to health, and saved the city from further destruction, she asks about the irretrievability of those who have already suffered:

> I asked myself, who would take away their past
> From the crippled who could now walk"? Who'd
> Wipe the tears from the eyes of the unborn
> and the ancient dead? (4)

But she hopes that her divine lover would appear behind her after the grateful crowd disperses and whisper all the answers she wanted to hear.

Section 5

By the time we reach the 5th section, the ideas become more and more complex. In the 6th the erotic element comes to the fore. From this section onward the poem breathes more of the flesh than of the spirit, though the latter is never far away from the former. The real world of a married woman's guilt is expressed in no uncertain terms, and in these parts the poem holds the interest of the secular reader. All the experiential world of lovers that the world has been familiar with is evoked with all its familiarity, the coyness of the woman, the unforgiving world, the aggressive lover. And yet, the mystical element comes with the quotidian. The uniqueness, the range of feelings and passion that the first touch of the lover invokes, all these are expressed through sharply and unmistakably drawn images.

Sections 6, 7

The sixth and seventh sections move from the spiritual to the erotic experience of love. Radha retrospectively analyzes the effect of bodily love, when divine aspects of love are experienced in physical terms. In fact, the section is so erotic that there can be no mistaking its modern connotations. Beginning with "When, for the first time, / you touched me", the female lover/speaking voice remembers the first night of love-making, when, her lover "pulled down with lightening..." all her "carefully constructed conditions", asked her "to give up all fear". Using the definite past perfect tense by way of confirming the accuracy of her memory, she depicts her hesitation in giving her consent and articulating the unspeakable, by confusing the tense:

But I knew, too,
when you touched me for the first time,
that maybe today, maybe some other day,
I would make you a gift of my consent. (6)

This seems to be a strategy that she is made to adopt by the male poet who is aware of the legitimate and the illegitimate; he launches a raid on the inarticulate. He is aware of the limits that a female subject is bound by. Soon enough, she admits, in the next section, "When, for the first time I thought I'd touch you, my hands froze". The eternal male fantasy of a woman full of desire yet eternally hesitant, and finally yielding is realized in section 7.

I then collected
all half-formed desires,
joined them together,
rushed towards you like a gale
and entwined my fingers
in your fingers (7).

After the rising emotional intensity, climaxing in a series of passionate unions, the poem reaches and then traverses an emotional plateau, where the subject meditates on the meaning of the relationship, love, and its implication for her, her life and death. The poem gradually gathers momentum and intensifies its meditative thrust, as questions of mortality, bodily decrepitude, youth and old age, evanescence, slackening of passion with time are taken up and contested in relation to eternity, divinity, and permanence. In section 16, she begins to anticipate her loss, her losing of her lover. The poem enacts an emotional

drama, rather than a dramatic sequence of events in a linear plot. The plot here is a series of pulsation, with their ebbs and flows. And yet, there is a recognisable plot. It follows a symbolic progression: anticipation of Krishna's coming, confirmation through the news of his arrival, meeting, union, separation, fruitless waiting, the anticipation of death and finally, the news of Krishna's passing. The emotional crests and troughs are clearly demarcated, sometimes intermingled.

The anticipation, and preparation for the separation, the anticipation of his passing, and finally the news:

Reports of your passing away
have reached us here.
Don't count me
among your widows,
or among those who carry your body (61)

Radha gains her individuality, her uniqueness through her infidelity, which she flaunts. She is courageous in the face of her being open to charges of being unchaste.

The day people said
I was an unfaithful wife I became
Radha, the first and best
among women in love (26)

She is courageous because she knows the consequences of her love for Krishna, because she is prepared to live on after his passing. In fact she celebrates Krishna's passing, as it signals his death as the world knew him. He lives on for Radha, as she knew him, living with him even when he was absent:

That a single unfulfilled night did not matter,
and that you were never closer
or more intimate
than in the moments of absence (15).

He loneliness, her courage to stand up and resist in the face of these aspects of Radha's character, as Rath brings them out, in fact make her stand out in the plethora of traditional representations.

5.4.4 Criticism

Is the use of myth anachronistic, given Orissa's economic and social problems? What is the relevance of a work in the late twentieth century, which depends for its meaning on an ancient myth? Set in a timeless, placeless canvas, steeped in Vaishnavite thought/mysticism, *Sri Radha* is escapist to say the least. Rath's poem can be seen as a modernist reinvention of the age-old theme of Radha-Krishna love. At the same time, its reading cannot be limited to that tradition alone, which in fact it transcends, and even transgresses. The emotional spread of the poem, the psychic state of the protagonist, may display all the familiar signs of the Radha-Krishna cult, but in it is recognisable the complexities of the modernist angst. Critics have also shown

how the male modernist poet has found it difficult to give expression to a certain kind of feeling, for example, loneliness, and homoerotic desire, as a man. So he prefers to use the female persona. This might involve the need to annihilate his male self. Feminists would argue that patriarchy constructs the female subjectivity according to its own ideological imperatives, refusing to subscribe to the spiritual and philosophical arguments. After all, man made woman in his own image.

In a recent review of works by some of these poets the Indian English poet Jayanta Mahapatra makes the following observation:

> Contemporary Oriya poetry appears to be have been dominated in the last few decades by practitioners who haven't found (or possibly did not find) much use for incorporating their own living world into their poems. In other words this highly praised, so called successful poetry, has completely sidelined social and political issues, those that matter to the ordinary individual. The poetry has been one of 'escape', evolving around the same old myths poets were talking about a hundred years ago. Frankly, there were never any reference to history in their poems. This has sadly brought on an unnaturalenss in Oriya poetry, an absence of looking at the world in which the poet or writer lives (Mahapatra: 2001, p. 38).

Jayanta Mahapatra is not the only one, however, to raise these objections. Their point is well-taken, though one cannot afford to be as dismissive about the "so called successful" poets. They have achieved what they had set out to in the 1960. In fact, they had even then anticipated many of these objections in their prose I have referred to. One can go to Ramakanta's "Afterword" in his second collection, *Aneka Kothari* in 1967. What Jayanta may have found objectionable is their obsession with dominant Hindu myths even in the 1990's (Ramakanta's famous works *Sri Palataka* and *Sri Radha*), as if nothing else has happened since 1963.

The feminists might also raise objections to the representation of female sexuality along patriarchal lines. That Radha allows herself to suffer endless agony, that she is ever so forgiving and forbearing, and even forthcoming in surrendering her body and mind can be unacceptable to feminists.

5.5 THE MODERNIST WAVE : BANGLA POETRY FROM JIBANANANDA DAS TO SHAKTI CHATTOPADHYAY

Modernism in Bangla poetry seems to be closely related to a number of modifying factors, the chief of which is a certain kind of loss: generally speaking, the loss of belief, relating to the dubious question of whether the world makes sense anymore, especially after the Second World War and the post — independence partition, famine, and the riots. Tagore's insistence upon an omnipresent point of benevolence in the universe came to be questioned, and this change of attitude brought about a correspondent change in the very form and language of poetry. A pervasive undertone of sadness, even distaste, and finally detachment, and a resulting impulse of exploring the internality of the islanded self runs along the line of development of modern Bangla poetry.

The emergence of the Marxist movement in Bengal initiated another, somewhat related, trend: the weary island within sought to relocate itself within the space of community — seeking what may be called a communion, and an emergent belief in the significance of a conceptual future added an apparent animation to the universe of fragments. Another transformative influence in the climate of Bangla poetry had been that of Western philosophy and literature, especially the principles of Western modernism, which came to be deeply and indelibly transcribed in the experiments of modernist Bangla poetry. It is, therefore, culture-specific indeed; but at the same time is a product of the larger modifying waves that were imperceptibly transforming the world around.

Abu Sayeed Aiyub had ventured to define modern Bangla poetry as 'timewise, post-world war, and concept wise, free or attempting to break free from Tagorean influence' (Adhunik Bangla Kobita, 1940). The rapidly changing socio-political conditions demanded an altered idiom to meet the narrative of this altered existence halfway, and this initiated significant changes, both formal and conceptual, in poetry that was being written during the time. The marked distaste for what appeared to some poets as life without significance can be considered in conjunction with the emergence of urbanity as a motif and a metaphor. The disruptiveness of mechanized urbanity, its invasion within the system of values and morality, the reduction of the importance of the individual in the crowd of millions resulted in marks of despair and morbidity — a kind of world-weariness almost. Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) retreated from the hopelessness of his present into the lanes of history — a kind of atavistic regression — turned away from the mechanized suffocation of civilization, of urbanity, into the tranquility of nature; delved deep within the alienated self to recognize and reconstruct images of love, of the eternal woman who spells assurance for the weary and the hopeless. He describes himself as one who had been 'walking the earth for a thousand years' for that tranquil moment that would bring him face to face to Banalata Sen, the quintessential woman with 'eyes like birds' nests'. Jibanananda Das's poetry had a considerable influence upon the work of Shakti Chattopadhyay, from the point of imagery and the distinctive use of language. The suffocating perplexity, the lone sufferance experienced by the urban human being surfaces in sharp clarity in the poetry of Sudhindranath Dutta (1901-1960), in whose work emotion is repeatedly seen in a pattern of subordination to intellect. This state of immersion within one's own circumscribed, troubled self acquires release and relief through the development of a heightened sense of community, through the growth of awareness of societal processes and interrelations. The lone self of the poet connects with society, with the life of community, and this is one way of surmounting what seems to be an irreconcilable problem of acceptance. Bishnu De (1909-1984) who had described himself as 'Within a forest of people, me, an alien traveller' journeys from this sense of detachment and self-absorption towards a shared space where he can feel himself as a part of the multitude, bolstered by his exposure to the principles of Marxism. He had used quotes from Tagore, situating them in entirely different contexts- ironically commenting, thus, upon the immensely changed socio-political and cultural climate that has rendered Tagore's poetics quite inadequate, and demands a distinct mode of utterance.

This sense of identification with the masses brought about a corresponding tendency to realize and to react against the oppressive extortion over the poor

and the downtrodden, strengthened, once again, by the principles of Marxism. In the pre-independence period, this trend was subsumed within the larger movements of the nationalist struggle; activists like Manabendranath Roy, Bhupendranath Dutta and others were attracted to Marxism possibly because of the fact that the ideal of socialist revolution seemed much more practical and thus acceptable to them than the moderate policy of the Congress. Muzaffar Ahmed had been the key figure behind the strengthening of communist organization in Bengal; his friend and associate, Qazi Nazrul Islam (1891-1976) can perhaps be designated as the first Bengali poet animated by the socialist ideal. For him, socialism spelt another feasible avenue for the freedom struggle. Though it does seem that Nazrul's passionate nationalist fervour- as evident in his poems- far exceeded in its intensity his interest in the theoretical aspects of Marxism, he is undoubtedly the first Bengali poet to emphatically pronounce in his poetry the need for equality, the forecast of the reclaiming of territory by the repressed have-nots. The poetry of Premendra Mitra (1904-1988) expresses the desire of the poet to join the masses on a common plane, to identify with them, to belong together. It is interesting to observe that this has a marked link with a somewhat similar tendency notable in the poetry of Walt Whitman (especially in *Song of Myself*).

It can, however, be said that till the 1930s, the impact of Marxism on Bangla poetry was somewhat limited in scope. Post-1930, the trend of writing articles on topics related to Marxism came to be established as a trend; this was largely inspired and supported by the journal *Parichay*, edited by Sudhindranath Dutta (It has been observed that the plan of this journal was influenced by Eliot's edited journal *Criterion)*. The tenets of Marxist thought came to be deeply ingrained in the creative universe of Bangla poetry only around the mid-thirties. The catalytic factor was, perhaps, the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, and the realization of the senseless cruelty of the situation by the Bengali intelligentsia. This was followed by the rise of the Fascists in Spain under General Franco; anti-fascist movements were gaining ground around the world, and this left an indelible impression upon the creative climate of Bengal. The grimness of the situation underlined, for many of the Bengali poets, the positivity of Marxist thought. The direct effect of this can be seen in the emergence of a new order of words and images relating to revolution, to the occupation of farmers and labourers: Dinesh Das (1913-1985) writes, in his famous poem *Kaste* (The Scythe):

However sharp the bayonet be
Sharpen your scythe, my friend,
However heavy the shells and bombs
Sharpen your scythe, my friend!

A historically aware social vision was the literary ideal that Samar Sen inherited from his deep acquaintance with Marxism. It has been observed, at times in the form of accusations even, that his poetic voice resembles that of Pound and Eliot; Sen, however, had been loath to accept the proposition that his love for Eliot's poetry could clash with the socialist ideal. There is, however, the awareness of a social degeneration, a certain pessimistic trait in his poetry and an overpowering, hovering sense of doubt which is absent in the direct and emphatic pronouncements of Dinesh Das. The impact of Marxism, thus, was already growing along distinct and individualist lines of creative expression. The famine of Bengal in 1943 and communal riots in both east and west Bengal in 1946 were, among others, key events in intensifying the gathering indignation among the poets. The life envisaged by socialism- a

life of dignity and worth- was being challenged by the series of catastrophic events all around, and voices of inspiration to resist and renew started ringing about in contemporary poetry. Subhash Mukhopadhyay, who had already made his mark with his *Padatik* in 1940, projects the images of the hammer and the scythe- already the symbol for communism worldwide — as power that would be able to reckon with extortion, injustice and the senseless cruelty all around:

The sharp scythe, the hammer, asks
A question, straight,
Sucking blood a couple of hundred years
Thirsty, as yet?

Sukanta Bhattacharya (1926-1947), who expressed the same indignation in his poetry with effusive passion, also edited a volume of poetry called *Aakaal* (1943) which contained poems on the famine. Other poets who were stirred by contemporary events, reacted to them from a socialist angle, included Jyotirindra Mortar, Mangalacharan Chattopadhyay and Birendra Chattopadhyay, among others. In independent India, sporadic incidents of repression and torture over communists were reported. This, coupled with a growing doubt regarding the future of the poor under the new government, signaled a new direction for Bangla poetry: the ire of the socialist poets frequently turned against the newly formed government. There is a deep awareness of contemporary times, of society, in some of Shakti Chattopadhyay's poetry too; but in spite of his initial involvement with communist politics, the firebrand note of revolt is rarely struck in his work. He rather takes on the role of an observer, concerned and sympathetic, commenting on a society gone wrong.

It needs to be observed that the mental universe of the poets of the time was being modified, imperceptibly, by their acquaintance with Western literature and philosophy; Mayakovsky's statement of the 'social task that can be accomplished only through poetic work' was adopted readily by the poets steeped in socialism. Other influences could be traced to the works of Pablo Neruda, and perhaps the French poet Louis Aragon as well. Parallel to this tendency of passionate identification, another distinct trend can be discovered: the deep influence of Eliot's poetry and poetic theory that speaks of 'extinction of personality'. Tagore's poetic thought had been, largely, influenced by the romantic ideal, while the modernists traversed a long line of diverse influences — Baudlaire to Eliot, Auden, Spender, even Cecil Day Lewis. But it can generally be said that it was, primarily, the exposure to Eliot's poetry and criticism that facilitated the point of contact with new trends in western modernism. In fact, the strand of modernism that flowed from Baudlaire and changed the poetic climate of Europe to a great extent found expression in Eliot's critical works, and became the staple for many of the contemporaries. The 'escape from emotion' (*Tradition and Individual Talent)* that Eliot insists upon indicates a check on effusiveness, a strict control over feelings, a culture of impersonality almost. This angle was eagerly accepted by Sudhindranath Dutta, among others, though it can indeed be observed that his poetry does not always abide by the rules of impersonality, probably because of his meticulous attention to rhythm and rhyme. But the persona of the ageing, weary, urban man that he creates in some of his poems strongly reminds us of *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* or, maybe, *The Waste Land*

even. In fact, the climate of post-Tagore Bangla poetry was substantially modified by the influence of Eliot and the Imagists. The six directives of composition mentioned in *The Imagist Mdnifesto*, appended to *Some Imagist Poets* as a preface (1915) were adopted by Buddhadeb Basu as guidelines to composing poetry, relating chiefly to its formal aspects. The language of common speech, speech-rhythm, is thus hailed as the proper vehicle of poetry, and systematic avoidance of 'poetic' expressions is insisted upon — *'To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite'* (Imagist Manifesto). This was the time when Bangla poetry entered a phase of decisive change, from the point of form and language. Vers Libre or free verse, practiced by the French symbolists and eagerly adopted by the Imagists in England, began to gain currency in the poetic climate of Bengal. Amiyo Chakraborty embraced Hopkins' sprung rhythm almost as a gesture of liberation from formal verse patterns.

Baudlaire had focused upon the beauty that can be created through the aesthetic presentation of ugliness — the grotesque or the macabre — and had insisted upon the need for the poet to have an 'exquisite sense of deformity' coexisting with an 'exquisite sense of beauty' (in the 1857 preface to Edgar Allen Poe's collection of short stories). The wide influence of Baudlaire's poetics changed entirely the traditional concept of beauty in Bangla poetry: Jibanananda's poetry abounds in images of rottenness- we are reminded of the striking image of the leper licking water from a hydrant. The universe of Bangla poetry had changed drastically; attitudes and applications were never going to be the same again.

The commitment to political and social idealism that continued as an undertone in the poetry written during the 30's and the 40's lost its overture in the work of the poets of the 50's in a notable and significant way. The emergence of the private, self-absorbed identity of the poet marks the distinctness of this age. The attraction towards western poetry and poetics, the tendency to uphold the primacy of intellect, the range of social concern that had animated the poetry of the previous couple of decades had lost their emphatic presence in the context of the 50's. There had been, however, a distinct strand of poetry that had underridden the mainstream of social consciousness even during the 30's and 40's — that of a solitary, self-immersed soul in conversation with himself- related to, chiefly, Buddhadeb Basu and his 'Kobita' magazine. This subterranean trend surfaced, strengthened and spread widely in the 50's. Shakti Chattopadhyay, a major exponent, stands as a key presence powerful enough to configure the poetic character of his age. This was, historically, an age of transition; the disintegration of heightened expectations relating to the freedom of the country, confusion in the political sphere, and a certain social and cultural despair impelled the poets of the time to formulate an idiom of private, almost introverted, self-realization.

In spite of this insistence on the utterance of the private self, it is interesting to observe that the tendency to form poetic circles, or groups, is a characteristic phenomenon that marks the poetic activity of this time. There were, frequently, magazines associated with these groups — spreading their word, as it were: chief among them were *Satavisha* (1951) and *Krittibas* (1953). These two magazines functioned as the launching pad for almost all of the major poets of the time, like Sunil Gangopadhyay, Shankha Ghosh, Alok Sarkar, Alokeranjan Dasgupta, Samarendra Sengupta, and Pranabendu Dasgupta, apart from Shakti Chattopadhyay himself. Sunil Gangopadhyay,

who had been, and still is, the editor of *Krittibas* (the magazine continues to be published till this day, with certain gaps in the interim) recorded the interiority of his evolving self, the shifting, perplexing complex of his emotional life in his numerous volumes — *Aka ebong Koyekjon* through *Ami kirokom bhabe beche achhi*, '*Hotat Neerar jonno*' to '*Chalo jai*'. His poetry seems to open up a space for private communication where the reader shares in his narration of existence, his interface with passion and love and life. He relates to Neera — his eternal woman — with both tenderness and passion, the woman apotheosized into what seems to be an image-ideal that touches upon planes of morality — 'This hand, that has touched Neera's face/Can I sin with it, ever?' Shakti Chattopadhyay had been a co-traveller, in both his private and poetic life, in this confessional journey through the peaks and caverns of love and passion, of life itself. Alokeranjan Dasgupta stands somewhat apart, with his insistence on intellect, his attempt to rehabilitate rhythm and rhyme, and ingenuous imagery; he hardly shared in the characteristic restlessness of the *Krittibas* group. Shankha Ghosh is another significant figure who stands apart, and somewhat alone, between the poles of tradition and contemporaneity. The line of social commitment and responsibility seen earlier resurfaces in his poems. It is not that he emphasizes upon rights and resistance; he rather deconstructs the confusion of his times, unravels the yet unwritten history of the perplexed present, and seeks to narrate the identity of the age. This involves the reinstating of his own self within the social narrative; the interface between two brands of crisis- the private and the social- adds a distinct angle to his poetry that is almost singular.

The 'Hungry generation' movement stands as a significant, if short-lived, strand of development in the sixties. The 'Hungry' poets experimented with a drastically transformed idiom and opposed the established notion that poetry needs to communicate the 'meaning' in life; they, rather, aimed at capturing the non-meaning- or perhaps the disintegration of meaning- in poetry. Hunger, both mental and physical, burst out in their poems, claiming a central significance. The Hungry poets were influenced considerably by the Angry Young Men movement and the poetry and the lifestyle of the American Beatniks. The Beat poet Allen Ginsburg visited Kolkata in 1962, interacted closely with the poets of the *Krittibas* group; this friendship was responsible for the initiation of the Hungry generation movement which stood almost as a poetic subculture. Notable among the Hungries were Moloy Roychowdhury (who was arrested on charges of obscenity for his poem *Prochondo Boidyutik Chhutar)* and Samir Roychowdhury; Shakti Chattopadhyay too, initially joined the group along with Sandipan Chattopadhyay and Utpal Kumar Basu, but later denounced it. Though the movement did not affect the intellectual circles of Bengal in any significant manner, it is interesting to note that it did create reasonable stir in circles abroad; the British Museum and the Public Library of New York preserved photostat copies of the Hungry Generation bulletins. The movement disintegrated around 1968. Upon reflection, it does seem that the Hungry movement originated from a point of deep despair, a pained, morbid helplessness induced by the socio-political situation- Samir Roychowdhury did indicate that the crisis of food countrywide, the hunger, had induced him to be a part of the 'Hungry' movement.

The instant of the present that surrounds the poet, the moving, evolving ring of experience, necessitates the interface between self and society, especially at a time when conditions all around start changing rapidly and drastically. The

freedom struggle of Bangladesh(the then East Pakistan) stirred the intellectual climate of Bengal in the early seventies, as did the restless political situation, culminating in the firm establishment of the Leftist government towards the end of the decade. The Naxalite movement in Bengal also needs to be mentioned in this connection. A virtual explosion in the field of non-commercial little magazines, regularly publishing poetry, was noted: as the numbers of these magazines multiplied, the number of readers increased manifold- as did the number of poets. The new generation of poets were deeply influenced by the stalwarts of the previous couple of decades- like Sunil Gangopadhyay and Shakti Chattopadhyay — who had, by then, reached the pinnacle of fame and had become institutions in themselves. The self-absorbed utterance of experience- a trend set by the fifties- continues as yet, modified, however, by an increased concern about the situatedness of the self in a social-political-cultural matrix.

5.6 SHAKTI CHATTOPADHYAY: LIFE AND WORKS

Shakti Chattopadhyay (1933-1995)

It may be impossible, and perhaps incorrect, to reconstruct the identity of a creative artist from the annals of his life; much has been said about the essential separateness of the private and the creative existence. But for one whose poetry remains as a form of self-revelation, a sequential, intimate account of his emotional life stands to challenge the notional watershed between the private and the creative domains. Shakti Chattopadhyay's poetry rips open this veneer of privacy and shares with the readers the complex history of his growth and development and his encounters with experience. To understand the work of a poet who is so intensely self-absorbed and confessional in its proper perspective, it is important for us to consider the story of his life.

Shakti Chattopadhyay was born in a village called Baharu in south 24 Parganas of Bengal on 25 November 1933, the second child of Bamanath and Kamala Chattopadhyay. He spent the years of his childhood and adolescence in the home of his maternal grandfather Subodh Gangopadhyay, a teacher who also practiced homeopathy medicine. He kept the young Shakti back, close to him, while his mother and brother settled in Kolkata. The rural landscape to which he intimately related during his formative years formed a major influence upon the poetry he was to write later. It resurfaced in his work as 'the village with perspective', reconstructed, as it were, from his childhood recollections. The greenery of Baharu, the wide sky, the rains, had invaded the creative imagination of Shakti time and again; not only in his autobiographical novel 'Kuyotala', but they constitute a felt presence throughout the body of his poetry. His childhood education included a strong insistence upon the

study of Sanskrit texts. This can be linked with Shakti's mastery over rhetoric, his dexterous use of sonorous words usually of Sanskrit origin. The environment of his childhood home may have been directly responsible for the deep, if subterranean, sense of spiritual faith that could not be repressed by the despair and confusion of urbanity.

Shakti encountered death very early in his life, in 1940, in the form of the untimely death of his father. This may have been responsible for the constant re-appearance of images of death, crematorium, and funeral pyres in his poetry. The death of his grandfather, along with the outbreak of the Hindu-Muslim riots, made it essential for him to relocate to Calcutta when he was only fifteen. He was admitted to Maharaja Quassimbazar Polytechnic School, in the eighth standard. The solitary adolescent was introduced to a sense of community, and this may have been instrumental behind his burgeoning interest in the principles of Marxism: he secured the membership of the then Communist Party at what seems to be a very early age. At around this time Shakti joined the workers of Galiff Street tram depot in their trade union movement. His stint with communist politics, however, turned out to be a brief one; it ended as hastily as it began. He was not one to subdue his thoughts, emotions, consciousness to the specifications of any opinion — ideal, to any 'ism', for that matter. He did retain his party membership till 1955, and his involvement with communist politics ended, finally, in 1958.

After clearing the Matriculation exams in 1951, Shakti joined City College to study commerce, only to abandon it after three months. He joined Presidency College, passed Intermediate in Arts with scholarship and decided to continue studies with honors in Economics. But he was barred from appearing in the final exams for his extremely irregular record of attendance. Later, he joined the newly established Comparative Literature department of Jadavpur University on the insistence of Buddhadeb Basu, but here too, the discipline of organized education proved too tedious for him in spite of the lure of the syllabus which included a staple of Blake, Baudlaire, Rilke, Yeats and Kafka, among others. He left, for no apparent reason, and it was only in 1960 that he graduated — that too as an external candidate. His whimsicality, apparent in his inability to pursue an academic course, can be seen as the prefiguration of his self-styled, bohemian way of life that had almost become a myth, inseparably attached to the name of Shakti Chattopadhyay.

At around 1951-52, after entering college, Shakti started trying his hand in both poetry and prose. He published poetry and prose in a magazine called *Banhishikha,* some of these under the pen name of 'Sfulingo Samaddar', and later, a poem called *Yama* in 'Kobita' magazine, run by Buddhadeb Basu. Shakti, who was to become a central name in the history of *Krittibas* magazine, was, surprisingly, not an enthusiast of the movement that the magazine signified, at least in its initial stages. He was more interested, then, to establish himself as a prose writer. At around this time, Shakti wrote a short story called *Kuyotala,* which was later expanded and reframed in the form of an autobiographical novel — published in 1961. By then, the first volume of his poems — *Hey Prem Hey Noishobdo* had already been published, and he had submitted himself — unquestioningly — to the world of poetry. He developed close connections with the *Krittibas* group of poets, and also, briefly, with the Hungry Generation movement influenced by Allen Ginsberg.

Shakti Chattopadhyay started off his job career in 1956, as an apprentice in Saxby Farmer Co., but could not reconcile to the idea of a fixed, circumscribed job. The inevitable effect of this was the abandonment of the job, followed by another considerably lucrative job as Assistant Parts Manager with Hindustan Motors, where he lasted for about a year and a half. It was in 1970 that he joined Ananda Bazar Patrika Limited, a job he was to continue with for the next twenty-five years. This concern was virtually the centre of mainstream literature in Bengal, owning the largest circulated Bangla newspaper and literary periodicals. Shakti continued to write in the home publications, over the years, numerous poems, travelogues and miscellaneous prose. Three years earlier, in 1967, he had married Meenakshi Biswas; the birth of their first child, Titi, roughly coincided with Shakti's joining the Anandabazar group. Meenakshi, over the years, had created with care and concern a secure circle of domesticity for the apparently rootless, bohemian poet- a home which spelt for him an assured and tranquil space to return to, again and again.

An irrepressible desire to venture out and away, far from the exhaustion of urbanity had impelled the poet, throughout, to get away without notice from the mad bustle of Calcutta to the enveloping peace of nature. His famous 'Chaibasa' period began sometime around 1959, when he travelled with Samir Roychowdhury to the latter's haunt at Chaibasa, and later was joined by Sunil and Sandipan Chattopadhyay who followed the poet there. This, and numerous subsequent visits, left their indelible impress upon many of his poems. The hills and forests of North Bengal emerged, later, as another potent point of fascination. In a friend's place at Jalpaiguri, Shakti had composed in a single day — from morning till night — his famous long poem *Ananta Nakshatrabithi Tumi, Andhakare*, on his intense encounters with nature of North Bengal. For him, travel was one addiction; alcohol was another. His lifelong preoccupation with alcohol has become a near-myth, and the poet himself had mentioned how alcohol had brought him, again and again, nearer to communion with poetry.

The first volume of poems — *Hey Prem, Hey Noishobdo* was published in 1961, the second, *Dharmeo Achho Giraffeo Achho* in 1965. In the eighties and nineties, numerous works were published — 22 volumes, in the space of 14 years. He had also written prose, fairly extensively, after the publication of his novel *Kuyotala* in 1961, including seven other novels. Shakti was also an able translator; he translated, and published, poetry of Rilke, Heine, Lorca, Neruda and Mayakovsky, as also Omar Khaiyyam, Ghalib, and Kalidasa. His translations bear testimony to a systematic mind, in direct opposition to what his lifestyle suggests, something that the poet himself called 'inner discipline'. He was awarded the Ananda Puraskar in 1975, the Sahitya Akademi award in 1983 for his volume *Jete Pari Kintu Kano Jabo*. Sambalpur University had honoured him with the Gangadhar Meher award in 1994.

After retiring from the Anandabazar group Shakti joined a magazine called *Binodan Bichitra* as advisor in 1994. Soon after, he was invited to join the Department of Bangla in Visva Bharati University as a guest lecturer, and he joined the post for three months on 15 February 1995. He interacted with the students with enormous enthusiasm, advising them on ways of reading poetry. This rich, unique episode of teaching came to a sudden and unexpected end; Shakti suffered a fatal heart attack on 23 March morning. He died in Santiniketan, which still resonates with the memory of Tagore. He had commented, in a video film just the day before his death, 'There is too much

peace in Santiniketan, not much conflict, there can be no poetry without conflict'. Does this 'conflict' relate to the tremulous core of creativity that Shakti had nurtured, which was challenged by placidity and activated by turmoil?

5.7 SHAKTI CHATTOPADHYAY'S POETRY : THEMES

The themes of Shakti Chattopadhyay's poetry defy classification. A deep awareness of his own solitary, yet connected self, his own times, a conceptual confrontation with the idea of death, a profound wonder in nature and absorbed musings on love — all form thematic strands of his poetry which rarely appear separately. They, rather, co-exist and coalesce in most of his poems producing that intense sense of the vastness and complexity of experience, of life itself. In his love poems, Shakti explores the interiority of love: desire for consummation, the intense urge to come together is subdued by a continued thread of self-immersion, which somehow envisages love as a composite experience, linked intimately with all other coordinates of life and living. It is, as if the poet silently communes with the very essence of life, and it is this ever-present undertone of a totality of experience that helps us to identify the single strand that binds love, nature and death for the poet.

Shakti's love poetry is unconventional in the sense that many of his poems are not really addressed to an actual, desired woman; they are, rather, absorbed reflections on love itself, intimate, even lonely, a soliloquy almost. The present is frequently punctuated by the past, surrealism permeates what is apparently realistic. His first published volume *Hey Prem Hey Noishobdo* (O Love, O Silence) indicates the implied connection between love and silence: silence indicates communion, silence indicates self-absorption and self-knowledge. There is a clear sense of separation and sadness, but no resultant bitterness or despair, as in *Destiny*, a poem included in this volume:

There's a strange smell in the garden,
Come, let's get back,
Unchain your hands, let the bee weep at our feet
This weighty heap of dust, irrelevant now to our mind's language
Let's leave it behind, and imagine a return along our separate ways.

He often celebrates the sheer solitariness of the experience of love — love as a kind of private treasure — 'I'd just carry her in the secret home of my heart/ Her identity? Oh I recall, I do recall' (*Dharmeo Achho Giraffeo Achho)* or, ' I had retained your key with me, / Caringly, now is the time/ Do write, whether you want it back? / Within the irrelevant memories, settled/ Is your face, sparkling with tears/ Do write, whether you want it back? Love is animated by a close interface with nature, and one is often reminded of the quiet, sad voice of Jibanananda Das. For the poet — an eternal traveler — women often become apotheosized into the nurturing, sheltering essence of nature. Attraction and detachment, the twin poles of love, are astonishingly co-existent in his poetry, as are life and death; a deep awareness of death, of mutability, permeates his works. Volumes like *Sonar Machhi Khun Korechhi* convey a sense of the poetic trance which transforms the world of known experience into a surreal universe of fantasy. A much later volume like *Jete*

Pari Kintu Kano Jabo deals with death, with departure, yet returns again and again to signs of attachment, of affection and love:

I guess, it's time to turn around
I have gathered so much blackness in both hands, so long
But have never thought of you as you really are.
Now when I stand next to the cavern at night
The moon beckons: Come, oh do come
I can go;
I can go whichever way I choose;
But why would I?
I'd rather kiss the face of my child
Go, I shall,
But not right now
I will take all of you along
Won't go alone, untimely.

Or,

Piles of wood were burning in the crematorium
I love, I do love to burn,
I want to burn alongside a river!

(Jete Pari Kintu Kano Jabo)

This mixed narration of life and death, again reminiscent of Jibanananda, stands as a defining quality of Shakti Chattopadhyay's poetry. It is interesting to observe that terms relating to travelling abound in his poetry; it is as if, the poet considers life as a continuing journey, a sojourn that connects the twin points of origination and culmination, that is death. This tendency does often remind us of Baudlaire, of his *Le Voyage* especially.

Shakti did not really believe in the social function of poetry; in spite of his early involvement with leftist politics, no 'palpable design' intending to change socio-political conditions is overtly seen to surface in his poetry. Contemporary society, his own times, do appear, however, time and again in his poems. His role is rather that of a pained, sympathetic observer who suffers because of the state of things but does not seek any idealistic solution. Contemporary issues like the freedom struggle of Bangladesh, Indo-China war, and the Naxalite movement appear in his poetry and perhaps serve the purpose of indicating to the poet the progressive decay of humanity. In his volume *Manush Boro Kandchhe* we encounter a core of deep sympathy: 'People are weeping, get human and stand by them/ ...They are lonely, come, stand by them/ ...Come, rise above the waves, stand by them with love': He relates to the loneliness, the pain of the community- in a sense, the community is not a faceless entity for him, there is an individualizing, affective tendency notable in the way he views society. In a sense, therefore, Shakti combines several signposts of his experience- often from differing realms altogether- and creates in his poetry a composite sense of intensely lived life.

5.8 *JUST ONCE TRY*: AN ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

The poem to be discussed combines the experience of love and lovelessness, nature and civilization, spontaneity and artifice to the extent that they cease to exist as binaries but flow into each other, dissolving their separateness,

forming a frame of reference for the evolving human self. The poem, *Just Once Try*, originally named 'Akbar Tumi', was included in the volume of poems called 'Parer Katha Matir Bari' (The Blanket of Borders, The House of Mud) published in 1971. The poem can be read as an address, understandably to a woman, the 'you' of the poem, who is urged to try to love; or, alternatively, it can also be read as a self-directed soliloquy, the voicing of an interior need to acquire the ability to love. Read either way, the poem presupposes an existent premise: a condition where love has become hard to come by, a lack of faith in the power of love has resulted in the waning of the very ability to love, and, consequently, one has to 'try' to love. What should have been spontaneous has now become subject to a willed effort, perhaps due to a certain erosion of belief, a kind of apathy induced by exposure to the hardness and impersonality of civilization.

The poet insists, with conviction, that the world would get transformed once the ability to love is acquired. The known world of experience would change, taking on the quality of a magical reality almost. He speaks of a dramatic transformation of what is made out to be an underwater world, where the very effort to love induces the fishes to shed stones from their heart, stones blue and red, which then change colour- metamorphosed, as if, by the power of love. We do feel initially that there is a clear sense of hardness attached to the image of the stones, signifying an apathy that blocks emotion, obstructs the initiation of love. The stones that lodge themselves within the sinuous fishes and consequently weigh them down drop magically with the effort to love — it is as if a certain lightness, openness is induced, creating a space within, which can now be filled up with love. But after reading the entire poem and reflecting upon it, we sense that the stones can also be symbolic of love that nestles within the heart of the nature-bred fishes which are released only to be rehabilitated within the heart of one who wishes to love. Thus as soon as they are released into the water, we enter a world animated by a myriad of shifting colours, as if they are gems — stones are transformed into treasure, the treasure of love. In fact, throughout the poem, the image of stones seems to be endowed with a dual significance: stone that obstructs and retards emotion, and stone as transformed into treasure that gladdens and heals life.

In the very next stanza the actual, physical weight and feel of stones are indicated in the catalogue of images, and the metaphor acquires an additional, complex dimension: if in the first part of the poem we ever felt that the stones were seen to obstruct love, this negative implication is entirely nullified here through the poet's insistence upon the need to lodge stones within oneself.. Stones are needed to 'echo back' the cry of someone else — to communicate, to connect, that is, with the significant other- mere self-absorption in emotion is not enough, the feelings must be reflected back. An excess of emotion makes the pathways of life difficult to tread; stones, therefore, may be utilized to avoid slips and to reach 'the distant doors of the pale star of autumn'- the phrase signifying a hitherto untraversed area of experience, the unravelling of a mystery that the stony path would lead to. The stones here are likened to naked (perhaps meaning direct or non-covert) use of poetry, waves, and the glittering yet painfully transient idol of the goddess with its brief life before immersion. The purposeful, pragmatic use of poetry thus is seen to pave the way for the journey through emotional life. Waves and the image of the goddess both signify a heaving crest of emotion, intense yet short-lived, followed by collapse and oblivion; there is a sense of the non-eternal in the stones' way. These are intensely intuitive lines which pay court to the sense of

the visual: the undulating scatteredness of the stones can also be seen to be visually likened to the edges of unwrought, unfinished, 'naked' poetry, the curve of the waves, the impressionistic effect of points of light reflecting off the 'sparkling brocade and tinsel' of the image. These lines are, therefore, descriptive and yet deeply resonant with meaning.

The preoccupation with the physical properties of stones continues unabated in the third section of the poem. The nooks and crevices inevitably associated with any visual of a pile of stones are seen to constitute a repository of 'letters'- messages that do not float away, but are firmly planted within the palpable substance inhabiting the heart. Then emerges the image of an edifice -.'one sometimes feels like making a home' — and the image of the stones fall in line as material needed to build the edifice. 'Making' a home may also be related to the 'effort' to love — both are premeditated and non-spontaneous. While the former process is aided by the shedding of stones, the latter utilizes the accumulation of stones.

The statement of the transference of stones from the heart of fishes to the human heart reclaims the sense of hardness and artifice initially seen to be associated to this central image. What follows is the plight of the modern, urban human being who needs 'everything' — mere emotion is not enough, there has to be a substantial signature left upon the history of civilization. Edifices must be built, a 'lasting pillar' be constructed to justify one's existence. Achievement must supplement emotion; stones that turn into jewels, into treasured love, are also stones that build edifices. Stones exist, both within the space of nature and the space of civilization, and that is why the signification of this very powerful image shifts, alternates, and finally gets to coalesce in an intense statement of the multidimensionality of the urban self.

The poem is written in free verse, in the tradition of the French *Vers Libre*, free from traditional restrictions of metrical structure. A conventional metrical pattern is substituted by the cadences of common speech. The form originated in nineteenth century France, among poets such as Arthur Rimbaud and Jules Laforgue, and is closely associated with the works of poets like Ezra Pound, T S Eliot and Amy Lowell, even Carl Sandburg and Marianne Moore. While traditional poetic forms are based on fixed stress patterns and syllable counts, free verse is liberated from the constraint of using a fixed number of syllables for each line, rather it distributes its stress accents in irregular patterns. In this poem, the basic metrical unit is the phrase rather than a line of a fixed number of syllables, and the length of the lines vary according to the sense they carry. The first stanza of the poem has short lines, while the later sections use longer lines to incorporate the sense of flowing thought, indicating the very process through which ideas and images associate with one another in the poetic imagination. There is a similarity with the traditional meter of Bangla poetry called Misrakalabrittya or Aksharbrittya, where the emphasis of breath is considerably less. This induces, therefore, the sense of a flow, a kind of continuity, since the text of the poem is less broken up by metrical stress.

Stones had always constituted a powerful image for Shakti. They appear as a kind of unfixed metaphor, indicating — according to the context — ideas as varied as absence of positive emotion-' The stones are here, lying close to the heart/This is a family of fragmented stones/With the final pronouncement of agony' in *Sundar Ekhane Aka Noy*'; stagnation — 'I will sever all ties with you, at once, if I watch.../ You dropping down, the way stones stretch themselves within stones...' in *Anguri Tor Hiranyajal*. At times stones

become the symbol of heaviness, significance: 'It is hardly easy to become a proper stone/some people get to be mere pebbles' in *Sundar Rahasyamoy*; they also signify the memory of love, nursed deep and carefully within one's heart — 'The stones of love are everywhere in my heart/I used to be happy, in my musings/The stones of love, everywhere in my heart!' in *Ei To Mormormurti*. The present poem oscillates between two apparently opposing significations of the image- relating to spirit and matter, to love and lovelessness — and culminates, finally, in the realization that 'We need everything', indicating thereby the inclusive mosaic of existence that the modern human is resigned to.

5.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have made you gloss through the themes, issues, influences and major poets of the modern Oriya and Bangla poetry. You have, we hope, a better insight into the genius and flowering of the Oriya poet Ramakanta Rath and the Bangla poet Shakti Chattopadhyay.

5.10 QUESTIONS

1. Why does a male poet impersonate a female persona? Is the poet successful in doing so on *Sri Radha*?
2. Why does the poet choose the framework of a myth to express himself in *Sri Radha*?
3. How does a late 20th or early 21st c reader accept the re-invention of the myth of *Sri Radha*?
4. Discuss the significance of images related to spirit and matter in the poem *Just Once Try*.
5. How do the two poets treat love in their poems?

5.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Ramakanta Rath

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Sangari, Kumkum *Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of Bhakti*, New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1990.

Shakti Chattopadhyay

Hey Prem, Hey Noishobdo (1961), *Dharmeo Achho* (1965), *Jete Pari Kintu Kano Jabo* (1983); *Kuyotala* (novel) (1961). Has published more than 20 volumes.

UNIT 6 SITANSHU YASHASHCHANDRA : *ORPHEUS* TRANSLATION : THE POET NAMDEO DHASAL : *A NOTEBOOK OF POEMS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY* TRANSLATION : SANTOSH BHOOMKAR

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 A History of Gujarati Poetry
  6.2.1 Sitanshu Yashashchandra : A Brief Life Sketch and an Overview of His work
  6.2.2 *Orpheus* : An Analysis of the Poem
  6.2.3 How is the Translation?
  6.2.4 Gathering the Threads
6.3 The Tradition of Marathi Poetry
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  6.3.2 Modern Marathi Poetry — The Second Phase
  6.3.3 The Scene after 1960 : Ultra-Modern and Post-Modern
  6.3.4 Dalit Poetry: The Poetry of Rebellion
  6.3.5 Namdev Dhasal: His Life and Works
    6.3.5.1 *A Notebook of Poems*
    6.3.5.2 *Autobiography*
6.4 Let Us Sum Up
6.5 Glossary
6.6 Questions
6.7 Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit is meant to introduce you to modern Gujarati and Marathi poetry through a close reading of three poems. The poems are Yashashchandra's Gujarati poem *Orpheus* and Namdev Dhasal's Marathi poems *A Notebook of Poems* and *Autobiography*. The overall objective is to place the selected poems in the context of Gujarati and Marathi poetry and also in the context of modern Indian poetry as a whole.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The first half of the unit deals with Gujarati poetry. We begin with giving you a brief account of the history of Gujarati poetry and then go straight to Sitanshu Yashashchandra and his poem *Orpheus* where he makes use of the Greek myth of *Orpheus* to depict man's predicament in the modern world. Sitanshu has often used Indian and Greek mythological characters like the Greek prince-warrior Odysseus, the mythic king of vultures, Jatayu and the tribal woman Shabari in such a way that the new narration could present human condition in modern times as he has done in *Orpheus*.

The second half of the unit gives you a preamble of the tradition of Marathi poetry followed by a brief write-up on the development of modern Marathi poetry. Since Namdev Dhasal is a dalit poet, we shall also get acquainted with the factors responsible for the emergence, progress and stages in the development of dalit poetry as well. All this will, we are sure, help you to understand and enjoy Namdev Dhasal's two poems that you are to study.

We hope that this discussion of three poems will whet your appetite for more Gujarati and Marathi poems.

6.2 A HISTORY OF GUJARATI POETRY

The history of Gujarati poetry can be traced back to 11th-12th century A.D. to the works of Hemachandrasuri (1088-1172) who used the form of verse to illustrate grammatical rules in his treatise *Siddha Hema Shabdanushasana.* The verses quoted by him as examples had mytholological and didactic themes and were written in Prachin Apabhramsha, the language of the people of Gujarat and Rajasthan region. Literature written in Old or Prachin Gujarati till mid 15th century comprised forms like fagu, rasa, prabandha etc. was also in verse. Most of the literature in this period was written by Jain monks depicting virtues of their religious leaders and tenets of Jainism. They were well preserved in Jain temples and that is how most of them are available till date. Non-Jain poets had also written on various non-sectarian themes, but not much has survived.

The period from 1450 to 1850 was known as the Medieval period, also as the Bhakti Period practically in all bhasha literature across the country. Gujarat had two eminent saint poets in Narasimha Mehta (1414-1480) and Mirabai (1498-1547). They expressed their devotion to Lord Krishna through songs. Narasimha Mehta's song 'Vaishnava Jana to Tene Kahiye Je Peed Parayi Jane re'... was a favourite one of Mahatma Gandhi and has been sung by many eminent singers including M.S.Subbulakshmi. Akho, Premanand, Samal Bhatt and Dayaram also wrote lyrics and ballads.

Dalapatram (1820-1898) and Narmad (1833-1886) depicted worldly wisdom and new awakening through their poetry. Around the same time began an era of scholarly writing, known as the Pandit Yug. Manilal Nabhubhai (1858-1898), Manishankar Ratnaji Bhatt, better known as 'Kavi Kant' (1867-1923), and Balvantrai Thakore (1869-1952) were scholars of Sanskrit and philosophy., and this got reflected in all that they wrote. Sursinhji Takhatsinhji Gohel, popularly known as 'Kalapi' (1874-1900) and Nhanalal Kavi (1877-1946) wrote romantic lyrics.

A great transformation took place in Gujarati literature with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi. Poets began to write on nationalistic and socio-political themes. The Gandhian era brought in patriotism and Gujarati language underwent a drastic change. Simplicity and communicability were preferred to artistry in language and content. Some of the poems of Jhaverchand Meghani (1896-1947) were directly addressed to Mahatma Gandhi and those who fought against the British rule.

Umashankar Joshi (1911-1988) and Niranjan Bhagat (1926 —) had paved the ground for the 'modern' era of Gujarati poetry in the 1950s. Umashankar's

Chhinnabhinna chhun — 'Fragmented' and Bhagat's *Pravaladveep* — 'The Coral Island' are cases in point. The opening lines of the poem 'Fragmented', translated into English by the poet himself, are as follows:

> I am fragmented, fallen apart,
> Like rhythm striving to throb in a poem without metre,
> Like a pattern trying to emerge upon man's life canvas,
> Like bread crumbs in several homes, not yet placed in a beggar's bowl.

It is generally accepted that the 'contemporary' period of Gujarati literature comes only after 1960. Idealism and romanticism had cast their spell on Gujarati poets before the 60s, hence they were mainly concerned with reforms and society. Umashankar, Sundaram and Snehrashmi of yesteryears, and Rajendra Shah, Jayant Pathak and Ushanas are important pillars of Gujarati poetry.

Niranjan Bhagat gave a new thought to the act of writing poetry. He has rejuvenated it through his sharp sensibility and intellect. In one of his poems he says:

> I have just come to take a stroll, (*Hun to bas farava avyo chhun*)
> I haven't come to do any work of yours or mine. (*Hun kyan eke kaam tamarun ke marun karava avyo chhun*)

Writing poetry for Bhagat is not a mission or commitment. It is a casual act performed leisurely.

Some Gujarati critics like Suman Shah are of the view that 'modernity' is a broad term. It is more of a qualitative term. It does not denote only the timeframe. Similarly, post-modernism also denotes the spirit rather than the time. Suresh Joshi (1921-1986) is considered the trendsetter of modernism in Gujarati literature. He introduced Sartre, Baudelaire and Camu, and even Freud to Gujarati readers through his own writings. According to him it is not the content but the process of form and treatment that is more important. Let us see two lines from one of his poems:

> In the desert sand of darkness
> I roam like a ghost of the dead moon.

Some of his contemporaries and many poets of the next generation wrote in the same vein. The advent of surrealism in Gujarati poetry was the result of Western influence. This was reflected in the poems of Labhshankar Thakar, Sitanshu Yashaschandra, Gulam Mohammad Sheikh, Shrikant Shah and others. This is evident in the excerpts from the poems of Sitanshu and Sheikh given below:

> Stamping the hoofs and sweeping the tails ran
> Pitch black horses harnessed to the white rocky chariot.
> Startled right in front of my eyes as I tried to close the door
> Bang bang bang bang and banged straight in
> Tore the eyelids smashed the rocks crushed the skulls
> And entered to sleep in the depths of my eyes.
>
> Sitanshu Yashaschandra

> People collapsed and turned into dust and
> Thousands and thousands of green, long and yellow

Demons of cacti came out of their stomachs.
Cold breeze ran away after eating the flesh of drumstick tree.
In the rotten holes of Neem trees, like the bent neck of the vultures
The ants built their brown houses.

Gulam Mohammad Sheikh

It is said that it is due to industrialisation and urbanisation that we come across the emotions in modern poetry that portray emptiness, loneliness, mistrust and disillusionment. Many literary forms in the past twenty-five years have expressed the sentiments of dalits. An exploited underprivileged class of the society gives expression to its anger, protest, and at times depicts a 'matter of fact' situation. The latter comes out more forcefully in prose, whereas poetry as a form requires a different kind of handling. However, there are also non-dalit poets who pen the feelings of Dalits.

Ravji Patel, an emotional sensitive poet, died young, had experimented with the form of poetry. Let us see his poem titled 'At Last'.

Felt, as if I've entered an unknown house.
The moment I stepped in,
Walls wept within my eyes;
To whom can I reveal this?
Nothing entered into my vacant vision;
It went to the old bird bath,
Which had also vanished.
But then, someone touched from within,
From the smeared ground as
I was about to leave.

Ravji Patel

Modern Gujarati poetry was extremely rich in the seventies. There were progressive poets who enjoyed experimenting with the form and content of poetry. They were Chandrakant Topiwala, Jyotish Jani, Radheshyam Sharma, Indu Pavar, Manoj Khanderia and others. Dileep Jhaveri, Sitanshu's contemporary studied in the same college. They both wrote poems and were published when they were still in their teens. Dileep's latest long sequence of poems *Vyasochchhvas* (Exhalation of Vyasa) describing different characters from the Mahabharata is a unique contribution in the field of Gujarati poetry.

A lot has been written in popular forms like lyrics and ghazals. The poets of the nineties have made deliberate efforts to write successful poetry. They include Yagnesh Dave, Nitin Mehta, Jaydev Shukla, Harish Minashru. Dalpat Padhiyar, Ashraf Dabawala, Kamal Vora, Rajesh Pandya, and Kanji Patel. Kanji uses a tribal dialect. His symbols and proverbs are also from the tribal life. A number of poets employ the technique of traditional folk songs and rural settings. Pradyumna Tanna, Ramesh Parekh, Anil Joshi, Chandrakant Sheth and Vinod Joshi have been giving the most enchanting poetry of this kind for more than thirty years.

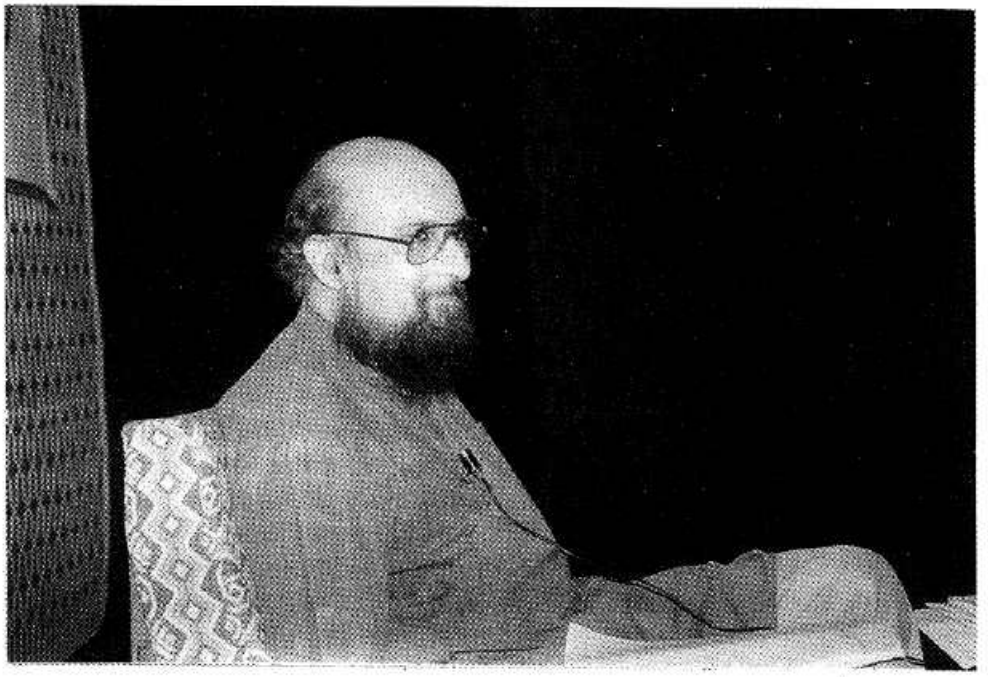
Contemporary women poets are not many. Gita Parikh of an earlier era, and Panna Nayak, Daksha Vyas, Usha Upadhyay, Sarup Dhruv, Sanskrutirani, Varsha Das, Manisha Joshi, Urvashi Pandya and Kajal Oza have been noticed in the recent years.

In this scenario of contemporary Gujarati poetry Sitanshu Yashaschandra holds the ground with his creative contributions. During his stay in the U.S.A. as a Fullbright scholar and later in Paris under the Ford West European Fellowship Sitanshu was not only exposed to Western literature but pursued his studies in comparative literature, aesthetics and Absurd Theatre. Having had training in English literature he came across the influence of Greek mythology evident in the works of James Joyce, W.B.Yeats, Ezra Pound and others. Those in India who took to creative writing during this period could not avoid that strong influence of Western literature. Many modern poets writing in *bhasha* were influenced by Western mythology. Even those who wrote in English like Dom Moraes, Arun Kolhatkar, Nissim Ezekiel and others made use of it.

Sitanshu's greatness lies in reinterpreting Western myths and technique in the Indian and at times even larger human context. He uses mythical method to put together contemporeinity and antiquity. In *Odysseusnun Halesun* — 'An Oar of Odysseus' he associates images and myths and portrays diversities of life at an intangible level. His depiction of surrealistic images has given him a special place in Gujarati poetry.

Let us now take a look at his life and works. This will made it easier to understand his poem *Orpheus.*

6.2.1 Sitanshu Yashaschandra : A Brief Life Sketch and an Overview of His Work



Sitanshu Yashaschandra Mehta was born in Bhuj, Gujarat, on 19th August 1941. He went to several schools in Bhuj, Vadodara and Mumbai, doing his school board finals from Kabibai School in Mumbai, in 1958.He took admission in the St. Xavier's College in Mumbai to study science, but his heart was in literature. He wrote and recited his poems in the Gujarati Literary Circle of the college, received appreciation and encouragement from teachers and senior litterateurs. His middle name Yashaschandra, is his father's name which, as per the practice in Gujarati literary tradition, he uses with his own. After spending two years in the Science stream, Sitanshu realised that science

was not his area of interest. So he changed the to literature. After obtaining his Master's degree, with a Gold Medal, in Gujarati literature from the University of Bombay in 1965, he went to the U.S.A. in 1968 as a Fullbright Scholar. He did his doctorate in Comparative Literature. In 1971 he received the Ford West European Fellowship and was in Paris for a year doing research in the Theatre of the Absurd.

His first collection of poems was published in 1975 entitled *Odysseusnun Halesun*, which received the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad and the State Academy Awards for the best collection of poetry, followed by the collection, *Jatayu* in 1986, for which he received the National Sahitya Akademi Award. His books on literary criticism and theory include *Seemankan ane Seemollanghan*, a collection of essays on Comparative Literature published in 1977, *Ramaniyatano Vagvikalpa*, his doctoral work on aesthetics, published in 1979, and *Asya Sargavidhao*, lectures on theory of literature, published in 2000. Much acclaimed, these works in poetry and criticism as well as his plays earned him Ranjitram Suvarna Chandrak, one of the prestigious literary awards in Gujarati literature, in 1988. Sitanshu has written a number of plays, which include *Aa Manas Madrasi Laage Chhe, Kem Makanji Kyan Chalya? Khagras* and *Ashwatthama,* all performed in different places in Gujarat and abroad and at national festivals of drama in Delhi, Bhopal and Udaipur. Eight of his plays were published in 1998, for which the well-known Narmad Suvarna Chandrak for drama was awarded in 2004. A recent play of his Jaagine Jonn To .... Narasimyo' on the Gujarat saint poet Narsim Mehto received great applause when premiered at Prithri Theate Festival, Mumbai 10th Nov. 2007.

6.2.2 *Orpheus* : An Analysis of the Poem

Analysis of the poem before we study the Gujarati poem *Orpheus* let us find out who Orpheus was? He was a charming young man from Greek epic poetry, who loved to play a magic lyre. His music enchanted birds and beasts, flowers and trees, rocks and rivers. It is said that even stones gathered around him to listen to his music and danced with joy. Orpheus was madly in love with a wood nymph called Eurydice. Another man by the name Aristaeus was also in love with her. On the day of Eurydice's wedding Aristaeus chased her. She ran for her life. On the way she stumbled upon a snake. The angry snake stung her and she died instantaneously. Orpheus was devastated. He followed her to Hades, the abode of departed spirits, the underworld. He wanted his beloved back. He played soulful music and managed to charm the captor. He agreed to let Eurydice go on condition that Orpheus would not look behind until they safely reached the earth. He agreed and began his journey towards the earth. But he was too anxious and impatient to fulfil the condition. He lost Eurydice once again. Orpheus wandered till he was torn to pieces, and sang 'Eurydice Eurydice' till the last breath of his life.

In another version of this story Eurydice followed Orpheus on the dark twisted path leading away from Hades. She was overjoyed at her release but being unaware of the condition was extremely pained that Orpheus did not look at her even once. She reproached him for his coldness and preferred to die. Orpheus could not bear her unjust accusation. He turned to look at her and she died. Orpheus wanted to kill himself but was saved by Cupid who revived Eurydice as well. This version has a happy ending. The couple was reunited

on the earth. They along with their friends sang and danced with joy. That is Orpheus, a romantic character from Greek mythology.

Garuda is another key term in this poem. It has been translated as *eagle*. The poem hinges around eagle. Garuda in Indian mythology is an imaginary god having his upper half like a bird and the lower half resembling a human being. Garuda had made an agreement with Lord Vishnu that he would be above Vishnu and Vishnu had desired to be above him. Garuda, therefore, became Vishnu's vehicle, and Vishnu put him on his flag. Thus both were above eachother! Garuda is regarded as the king of birds. His stepmother Kadru, the mother of snakes had given so much pain to Garuda's mother Vinata that he had taken a vow to destroy snakes. The poet is using the images of eagle and snake as interpreted in Indian myths.

Sitanshu had been interested in the Orphic myth for quite some time when he wrote the Gujarati poem *Orpheus*. What prompted him to pen it was a sense of discontinuity or many discontinuities. These images are presented in the poem. In the Greek myth Orpheus had lost his beloved, regained her with a condition and again lost her. In the modern Gujarati poem *Orpheus* a similar loss, a similar journey and a similar hero are narrated, yet they are dissimilar.

The poem is apparently a lyricsong, which upon a closer look turns out to be both anti-lyrical and anti-song. It is anti-lyrical because many units of lyricality of the original story have been replaced in the poem with their opposites; for example, the melodious magical music of Orpheus is replaced with the shrill cries of pain of the eagles in the first two lines of the poem:

The eagles crying out in sharp shrill notes,
The eagles, confused, are looking for their lost beloved.

The rulers of Hades were charmed by Orpheus' music, hence the relationship between the two was that of 'pleaser and pleased'. That has been replaced with 'killer-killed' relationship of eagles and snakes. This and many other elements make the Gujarati poem a narrative of disruptions that cause a different kind of 'loss'.

The opening lines begin to narrate the mythic story at mid-point. It seems the Orphic eagles have already lost their beloved 'Eurydice', and have, in pain, begun the search. But they have lost something else also: the music. They enter Hades, the underworld, not with any sweet music as in the myth, but with their shrieks of pain and perhaps something else. They are alien to the world in which they have intruded.

The poem begins to emerge as a poem of loss of the mythic means of recovery, the Orphic music. The fact that the poem is a 'song' and not a prose poem or a free verse assumes a tragic-ironic significance in this context. The form of traditional lyric/song assumes a new significance as a modern anti-lyric, anti-song.

The poet has described two-fold violence in the next stanza:

Layers of rock slide on each-other, lava liquid flows cascading down,
Cave-roofs are pushed and splintered,
Mistakes and fine follies howl,
Every eye begets its many dreams,
And no King's ordinance is here honoured.

a) The innate violence of the place, Hades / the underworld, b) The violence caused by the intruder, Orpheus / eagles. The first is described in the myth; the second emerges only in the poem. What does it signify?

Looking closely at the stanza we see that as the Orphic eagles plunge into the underworld:

"Mistakes and fine follies howl,
Every eye begets its many dreams,
And no king's ordinance is here honoured".

It is an image of disorder, mistakes, errors and disruption. Unlike the tragic mythic man of enchanting music, the poem presents an image of the splintered, disrupted, absurd modern man. The poem thus becomes a travelogue of two kinds. It gives a narrative of the Orphic/mythic journey from the land of living to the land of the dead and back. It also depicts the modern man's, eagles' wanderings, absurd, 'laughable', tragic-comic.

The last two stanzas narrate how the gods of Hades/the underworld give the Orphic eagles a boon and a condition, **They granted the boon: the beloved is yours, but do not look behind.** In this the myth and the poem agree, but both, the boon and the condition are dwarfed by the 'human condition' of the modern man. The eagles that have plunged into the underworld have lost something. What they have lost is not a beloved, but love itself. They have lost any possibility of love. The eagles are also blind. They cannot possibly turn back to see and check if Eurydice is coming out of the dead.

The journey of eagles thus assumes significance, which is quite different from that of the mythic journey. One moves from myth to modernity.

6.2.3 How is the Translation?

Since the poet himself has translated his Gujarati poem into English he has taken care to explain the intent of each word. And yet *Paataal* as under-world and *Garuda* as Eagle do not seem to convey the depth and grandeur as depicted in the myths. This is due to limitation of English language and cultural diversity. E.V. Ramakrishnan and Anjana Desai have also translated this poem into English. You can see the difference in their translation quoted below:

The eagle incessantly moaning with sharp piercing cries
The eagle desperately searching for the lost beloved.
Masses of rock shift, lava cascades down,
Cave-roofs splinter
Past follies howl; eyes beget only dreams.
The mind runs blank,
In a sudden torrential descent
Sky-eagles reach the under-world.

The venomous empire of the underworld snakes
Entranced by the fatal music, grants
The boon: the beloved is yours
But do not look behind.

Blind eagles unable to look behind
Grieving eagles bereft of their beloveds
Eagles incessantly moaning
Underworld eagles reach the sky.

Each poem has its own rhythm and flow. And when that is found in the translation, keeping intact the poet's intent behind writing that particular poem, we call it a successful translation. The translator has to be faithful to the original. At the same time the translation should not read like a translation. Some translations read even better than the original but that is not so common.

6.2.4 Gathering the Threads

In this unit we have studied the Gujarati poem *Orpheus* written by one of the eminent surrealist poets of Gujarat, Sitanshu Yashaschandra. He has used the Greek mythological character Orpheus to depict utterly negative emotions of man, quite contrary to what Orpheus stands for. Sitanshu had been interested in the Orphic myth for quite sometime when he wrote this poem in Gujarati. In the Greek myth Orpheus lost his beloved, regained her with a condition and again lost her. In the modern Gujarati poem *Orpheus*, a similar loss, a similar journey and a similar hero are narrated and yet they are different. The poem is apparently a lyric-song, which upon a closer look turns out to be both anti-lyrical and anti-song. Many units of lyricality of the original story have been replaced in the poem with their opposites. For example, the melodious magical music of Orpheus is replaced with the shrill cries of pain of the eagles in the first two lines of the poem. The poem becomes a travelogue of two kinds. It gives a narrative of the Orphic/mythic journey from the land of living to the land of the dead and back. It also depicts the modern man's, eagle's wanderings, absurd, 'laughable', tragic-comic. The poem *Orpheus* thus moves from myth to modernity.

In the section on the history of Gujarati literature we saw that the first verse form was found in the works of Hemachandrasuri written in Prachin Apabhramsha in the 11th century AD, followed by the literature written in Old or Prachin Gujarati till the 14th century AD.

After that was the Bhakti period in which devotional songs and poems were written. Most of them continue to remain popular. Then there were reformists and also scholars. The advent of Mahatma Gandhi transformed Gujarati literature in language and content. Both became simple and down to earth. The poets of this era read Western literature, particularly English and French, and were influenced by it. This is reflected in their works. The trendsetter was Suresh Joshi followed by Labhshankar, Sitanshu and others. Sitanshu's surrealistic poetry, his interpretation of Indian and Western mythical characters, his ingenuity in bringing together contemporaneity and antiquity have contributed towards making him a significant Gujarati poet of the modern era.

6.3 THE TRADITION OF MARATHI POETRY

Maharashtra has proved to be the meeting point of the north and the south by virtue of its geographical location. Marathi is the southernmost Indo-Aryan language of India. The earliest trace of Marathi is found in the *Kuvalayamala*

of Udyotan belonging to the 8th century. The available records enable us to trace the beginning of Marathi literature to the year 1278. The literary works composed during the first period were inspired by religious fervor and devotion to a *guru*. Three different religious sects, viz. the Nath sect, the Mahanubhav sect and the Varkari sect became quite popular in Maharashtra in the 13th century.

The first Marathi poetess, Mahadamba of the Mahanubhav sect, composed the *Dhavalas* or the wedding songs pertaining to the marriage of Lord Krishna and Rukmini. These songs make excellent lyric poetry due to the simplicity in their composition, the delicacy of the attitude and the intensity of the devotional love. There are seven esteemed poetical works in the Mahanubhav tradition. They are: Narendra's *Rukminiswayamvar* (1292-93), Bhaskara's *Shishupalvadha* and *Uddhavageeta* (1312-13), Damodara Pandit's *Vacchaharan* (1316), Ravalo Basa's *Sahyadrivarnana* (1353), Vishwanatha's *Dnyanaprbodha* (1418) and Narayana Basa's *Riddhipuravarnana* (1418). Three of these are narratives, two are descriptive, and the remaining two are philosophical.

The poetry of Varkari saints showed two trends. One was the *abhangas,* sort of lyrical compositions expressing the poet's experiences, emotions and observations in a subjective manner; and the other was the well-composed treatise deliberating upon philosophy, mysticism and spirituality in a style laden with literary excellences. Saint Namdev was the originator of the former and Saint Dnyaneshwar of the latter. All Varkari saints, coming from the uppermost stratum of the society like Changadev the Yogi and Parisa Bhagawat the Brahmin to the lowest one like Chokhamela the untouchable, Janabai the maid servant and Kanhopatra the courtesan, contributed to the former trend whereas the scholarly talented among them like Eknath and Ramdas, contributed to the latter. Tukaram is the culmination of the former trend and *Dnyaneshwari* stands at the zenith of the latter.

Another important tradition of medieval Marathi poetry was the Pandit Kavya or the tradition of the learned poets. It has its roots in the narrative poetry of the Mahanubhav sect, but was accentuated by Mukteshwar in the 16th century and flourished in the poetry written by Vaman Pandit, Raghunath Pandit, Shreedhar, Moropant and others. The distinctive feature of this trend is its imitation of patterns of Sanskrit epic poetry. All these poets had come from the higher stratum of society. They had thoroughly studied Sanskrit poetry and poetics. In their attempt to follow the Sanskrit models, these poets enthusiastically performed numerous experiments in the manifestation of emotive experiences as well as in the stylistic patterns. They maintained that poetry was a language-oriented intellectual form of recreation.

The third current of medieval Marathi poetry belonged to the Shahir poets, who wrote poetry for the masses in the forms *Lavani* and *Powada*. The former form indulged in erotic love in all its aspects and the latter aimed at highlighting heroic deeds of well-known historic figures with a view to instill values such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, valor and nationalism. Both these forms were adorned with rhythmic compositions, graphic descriptions, enriched diction and most of all, enchanting and thrilling experiences that could move common listeners.

6.3.1 Modern Marathi Poetry — The First Phase

Keshavsut (1866-1905), the father of modern Marathi poetry, broke away from pedantic themes and prosody and struck a genuine lyrical note. He looked upon poetry as an expression of one's inner self and an instrument of awakening. Narayan Vaman Tilak (1865-1919) wrote about his spiritual restlessness also, which made him embrace Christianity. Govindagraj (1885-1919), the self-proclaimed disciple of Keshavsut, wrote poetry marked with escapism, excess of sentiment, lavish fancy and an array of linguistic surprises. Balkavi (1890-1918) was a truly romantic poet. He had an ear for the music of words and an eye for the pictorial in nature. Imagery, diction, theme and form combined in an artistic whole in his lyrics. Bee (1872-1947) advocated revolt against the tyranny of the past and of tradition. He sung of not only "new hopes" and "new urges" but also of material beauties. Bhaskar Ramchandra Tambe (1874-1941) wrote lyrics with exquisite songqualities. He was influenced by Rabindranath Tagore and Hindi poetry besides the English romantics and Marathi saint-poets.

By 1920, poetry had once more lost its edge of intensity. It was gradually succumbing to sentimentalism, romance and a casual approach. It had, however, freed itself from the prosodic shackles by employing the elastic *Jati* meters and had ushered in some new forms like the sonnet. At this juncture, the gradual sophistication of the forms of literature such as the novel and short story stimulated young educated poets to refine their art. The poets who started the new era in poetry at this time belonged to a group known as Ravikiran Mandal (a circle of sun-beams). They gave poetry recitals and made poetry popular with the urban masses. They invented new patterns of prosody and content. The emotions of the common man, with his struggle for existence, his domesticity, his limited appreciation of beauty and his moderate range of emotions and experience for the sake of audience — these were some of the characteristics of the poetry of the members of this group. They adorned, with beauty and grace, in their poems, everyday topics such as the mother and child, the wife waiting for her husband, the flower dropped on the road, a patriot behind prison walls, the dying child of a poor man etc.. They accepted the change that had come in the status of women in society, who were no longer mere objects of worship or pleasure. The Ravikiran poets looked upon women as comrades in every walk of life. Madhav Julian, Girish and Yashawant were prominent poets of this group. Madhav Julian translated Omar Khayyam in Marathi. He also introduced "gazal" and "Rubaya" forms into Marathi. However, after a few days, this trend also became monotonous and trivial. Mature readers began to ridicule it. The angularities and limitations of the Ravikiran poetry inspired Keshavkumar to write parodies (1925).

Another important stream of the modern Marathi poetry was the patriotic and nationalist stream. The premier poet within this stream is V.D.Savarkar (1883-1966). An armed revolutionary freedom fighter, Savarkar wrote passionate patriotic poetry and propagated the concept of worship of the motherland.

Two poets, who began writing poetry by 1940 and continued to accommodate new patterns and visions in their own stride till late, deserve a special mention. They are Anil and Kusumagraj. Anil (1901-1982) wrote in an individual, subtle and delicate manner. He practiced and propagated free verse in Marathi. His love lyrics range over all the subtle shades from the agony of suspense to the thrill of fulfillment. His poems contain a synthesis of the awareness of the

beauty of nature and a depth of personal feeling rising to the level of mysticism. Kusumagraj (1912-1999) was a master of word-picture, lyrical intensity and deep understanding. He remained evergreen as he was sensitive to the changing socio-political atmosphere and developed the form of his poetry in tune with the new modes of expression. He became more mature, more socially aware and more reflective with the passing days. He was awarded the prestigious Jnanpith Award in 1988.

6.3.2 Modern Marathi Poetry — The Second Phase

It was B.S.Mardhekar (1909-1956) who revolutionized Marathi poetry after 1945. In content, idiom, diction and imagery, his poetry was so different that the orthodox were shocked. They declared that his poetry was obscene, pervert, incomprehensible and almost criminal. In the commotion, they ignored the echoes of saint-poets like Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram and Ramadas in his diction, his metrical forms and his attitude of urgency. Mardhekar was also influenced by Balkavi, Madhav Julian and the English and French symbolist poetry of T.S.Eliot, Ezra pound, Baudelaire and Hopkins. He adapted the poetic techniques of T.S.Eliot such as sudden juxtapositions, cryptic allusions, use of the lines written by earlier poets with a few subtle and significant alterations in them and imagery derived from the world of machines, physical sciences, scientific inventions as well as the world of literature, religion, philosophy and other intellectual pursuits. The themes that he wrote on were dehumanization, boredom, wretchedness and despair in modern life. Mardhekar blazed a new trail by powerfully expressing anguish, which was personal, social and metaphysical at the same time. He fired the imagination of the young, removed all the taboos on the choice of diction, images and themes and thus inaugurated a "new age" in Marathi poetry.

The poetry of Purushottam Shivaram Rege (1910-1978) presents a contrast to that of Mardhekar. He was a major traditionalist modern poet in the post-war era. His poetry projects a mystical concept of love, which is erotic, emotional, and creative and which transcends chronological time. His subtle and controlled variations of the metrical and stanzaic patterns, his fine sense of music and his archetypal images reveal his modernity.

Sharatchandra Muktibodh (1921-1984) pioneered the third dominant trend in the post-war Marathi poetry. He has a Marxist perspective. He looks upon the present conflicts as products of the capitalist economy, which would ultimately lead to revolution. The image of the Sun as the source of power, hope, purification and creativity, which is so popular in the poetry of 70s and 80s was first used by Muktibodh.

These three trends did not necessarily proceed quite independently and separately thereafter. For example, in Vinda Karandikar's poetry, we find a fusion of the Mardhekar-trend and the Muktibodh-trend.

6.3.3 The Scene after 1960 : Ultra-Modern and Post-Modern

The year 1960 marks the beginning of a change in the literary sensitivity as well as taste. The change was heralded by the little magazines, which broke away from what they called "the tyranny of the literary establishment". *Shabda, Aso, Vacha, Bharud, Phakta, Ata, Yeru, Abakadai* were prominent

little magazines. There was a protest against sophistication in diction and treatment as well as artificiality in themes and attitudes. They argued that the literary establishment was isolating literature from the contemporary reality and was downgrading instinct and spontaneity. The literary protest gradually gave way to the literature of social protest, as a result of which Dalit literature emerged as a distinct identity after 1965. Some of the names that stand out in this context are Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolatkar, Raja Dhale, Bhalchandra Nemade, Satish Kalasekar, Chandrakant Khot and of course, Namdeo Dhasal.

Chitre and Kolatkar have written surrealist-symbolist poetry. Their attempt was to surprise and shock, make dramatic juxtapositions and often write a dream-like intensely personal poetry. Satish Kalasekar and Chandrakant Khot turned the fearless simplicity of Mardhekarian tradition into sheer nakedness. Sexual images and sexual experience without any constraint is the most important factor in their poetry.

Apart from the poets of the little magazine movement, some other poets established still other trends.

Vasant Abaji Dahake calls himself an existentialist poet. His poetry is full of negative philosophy. It aims at the interaction between contemporary individual and society, as well as the futility and vacuum of human life. The most popular and influential poetry of this period, however, has been written by Narayan Surve. Though lyrical at times, his major concerns are social and economic inequality, poverty, and squalor of urban life and a struggle for revolution. He has forged a new idiom and rhythmic patterns based on the living speech of the have-nots and the working class. His diction draws upon the slang of those who live on the pavements of Mumbai and lead a marginal existence.

6.3.4 Dalit Poetry: The Poetry of Rebellion

Dalit is a short form of the Sanskrit adjective Pada-dalit, viz. crushed under feet. The social structure of the Hindu society caused the lowest clans of the hierarchy to be crushed under the feet of the high castes. The atrocities against the lowest stratum reached the maximum limit during the eighteenth centuy. A never-ending fire was constantly flaming in the hearts of the downtrodden. Hatred was piling against the rituals, customs and religious framework responsible for this inhuman treatment. The attitude of rebellion emerged and developed among the Dalits, who were oppressed and suppressed for centuries in the traditional social pattern, mainly due to Dr. Ambedkar's inspiration and motivation. In the sixties, Namdeo Dhasal, Raj Dhale, Arjun Dangle, Vaman Nimbalkar and others founded a socio-political group Dalit Panthers to combat the hideous atrocities towards the Dalits. For them, poetry writing was one of their many weapons to fight their battles and they deliberately used it to attack, ridicule and reject age-old concepts, customs and attitudes of the upper castes. Dalit poetry is the result of this approach. It is a poetry of protest, a call for total rebellion. It is also the poetry of negation, rebellion and revolution. It discards the traditional social pattern, gives a call for violent rebellion and dreams of total revolution. It transparently presents realistic pictures of the horrible plight of the Dalits and expresses fiery anger and pungent hatred towards the so-called glorious tradition of culture and literature dominated by the upper stratum of the social hierarchy. It deals with topics like rejection of scriptures, entry for the untouchables into temples, the problems of food, shelter, faith and respect, the fights for drinking water, the

urge for education, the strength of Dalit unity etc. Dalit poets used straightforward and even abusive language and new unsophisticated imagery to achieve this purpose. It expresses the sarcastic and hateful feelings of these poets towards national freedom, their experiences about the meanness of society, their strong repugnance towards the fetters and slavery suffered by their forefathers etc. Prominent Dalit poets are Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Yashawant Manohar, Arjun Dangle, J.V. Pawar, Tryambak Sapkale, Jyoti Lanjewar, Hira Bansode, Meena Gajbhiye etc.

After the initial spurt, it was but inevitable for the Dalit poetry to become stagnant. Its limitations were lack of reflective thinking, absence of maturity of thought, one-sided acceptance of a particular philosophy, repetitive experiences and repetition of diction and images. Once the shocking anger towards the age-old traditions is understood and accepted, Dalit poetry becomes like a ship without a sail. Just keeping on expressing more and more anger, using more and more abuses does not enrich the poetic experience. However, in the later stage Dalit poetry took a new turn, thanks to the efforts of poets like Yashawant Manohar. He renamed Dalit poetry as **Ambedkari Kavita** and held that, instead of just expressing anger towards the tradition, Dalit poetry should propagate Ambedkar's ideology in a positive manner. Dalit poetry took this new turn and started enriching Marathi poetry further. An example of this new trend of looking forward to a bright future in terms of Ambedkar's teachings may be seen in the poem **Sun-flower giving fakir** by Dhasal (poem). The poem expresses Dhasal's **rejection of the past and the sense of freedom**. As Dalit critic Vimal Thorat says.

6.3.5 Namdeo Dhasal: His Life and Works

Born on 15 February 1949, in a small hamlet in the Khed taluk of Pune district, he grew up in a shabby settlement named Dhor Chawl in Mumbai, near an area called Golpitha, inhabited by prostitutes. Here he was surrounded by small-time smugglers, drug-traffickers, professional murderers, thieves and goons. He studied up to S.S.C. and did a course in printing also. He worked as a taxi-driver for some time. He was a brilliant student at school, but could not

pursue higher education. However, he was an ardent reader and read Ambedkar after his schooling. He came under the influence of Ram Manohar Lohia. Later he read Marx. He married Mallika, daughter of the Communist folk-singer and poet Amar Sheikh. Then veteran Communist leader S.A.Dange became his mentor. After some days, Dhasal became disillusioned with Lohiaite Socialists, Communists, Naxalites and the Congress Party, as he felt that all of them were in some way restricted by their upper class leadership, and co-founded the militant activist movement Dalit Panthers, on the line of the Black Panthers in the U.S. He motivated Dalit youths with a rebellious social, political and cultural agenda. The Maharashtra police were instructed to wipe out the movement. Over 300 cases were filed against Namdeo Dhasal and his Panthers. Namdeo met Indira Gandhi during the Emergency and impressed upon her the need to withdraw these charges. Today, Dhasal is associated with Bal Thackeray and the Shiv-Sena. He has been awarded a Padma-Shree in 1999.

During all these political upheavals, Namdeo Dhasal kept on writing poetry. His first collection of poems **Golpitha** was published in 1972, which, according to poet and critic Dilip Chitre, "is a landmark in the history of not just Marathi poetry but the whole of South-Asian literature". The poems vocalize the voice of the *lumpen* high above the traditional sophisticated poetry and express the exploitation, poverty, ugliness, agony and menace in the metropolitan city. This collection was followed by other collections **Murkh Mhataryane Dongar Halawala** (The Mad Old Man Shattered the Mountain), **Priyadarshini-Amchya Itihasatil Ek Apariharya Patra** (Priyadarshini-An Inevitable Character in our History), **Tuhi Iyatta Kanchi** (What is Your Standard), **Khel** (The Play), and **Gandu Bagicha** (The Sodomised Garden), containing poems that attack hypocrisy in society. However, poems in his latest collections **Ya Sattet Jeev Ramat Nahi** (The Heart does not enjoy this existence) and **Brihatparva** (The Mega-chapter) do not only express his social commitment or political objectives, but also attempt to explore the meaning of human existence as well. **Golpitha** and **Tuhi Iyatta Kanchi** got the State Government Award as well as the Soviet Land Nehru Award. He received the Jeeven Gourav Puraskar of the Sahitya Akademi in 2004.

Dhasal's poetry is very strong, sharp, rebellious and futuristic. With its passionate intensity and straight appeal, it not only makes the reader look inwards, but also shakes him out of his slumber. It presents a startling spectrum of the world beyond the reach of the sophisticated cross section of the society. There are prostitutes, smugglers, slum-dwellers, drunkards, orphans and all sorts of people who are so engaged in their struggle for just living that they neither have any time nor desire to care for the so-called values of the other privileged world. As a result of his passionate outbursts, Dhasal can bend his diction at will and mould it easily to suit his content. He applies the style of the rural dialect and the method of a dialogue in order to use his poetry as a means to achieve his ultimate goal of rebellion as well as to express his passions effectively.

Namdeo Dhasal has also written a novel **Hadki Hadavala**. An impressive book of essays in the form of compilation of his journalistic columns **Andhale Shatak** (the Blind Century) and his interesting memoir *Those Magical Days of Dalit Panthers*, published in a special issue of the little magazine **AbaKaDaEe** are his other literary endeavors. His books **Buddha Dharma: Kahi Shesha Prashna** (The Buddhist Religion: Some Remaining Questions),

Ambedkari Chalaval (The Ambedkarian Movement) and **Socialist Ani Communist** (The Socialist and the Communist) elaborate his way of thinking.

6.3.5.1 *A Notebook of Poems*

This poem appears in the collection **Ya Sattet Jeev Ramat Nahi** (The Heart does not enjoy this existence). The original title in Marathi is *Kavitechi Vahi*. The original Marathi poem has three stanzas, whereas the English translation is printed in two. Apart from this, there are some other insufficiencies of translation, making it miss some of the nuances of the poem The opening line *You do not open the door* can be mistaken to be imperative, whereas it is a complaint indicated by simple present tense in the original. An expression in the present imperfect might have been more appropriate in the translation. Further, in the original, it has been stressed that the "destination" is the *last* destination, which emphasis is missing in the translation.

The poem begins as a dialogue. The poet is talking to somebody in a complaining tone. The poet has reached the last destination, but that "somebody" is not opening the door for him to enter. Hence the complaint. But who is that somebody? Who is that "you"? With whom poet the is talking? Certainly not the God! Namdev Dhasal never talks to the God. The destination is not the destination of a spiritual journey. Then who is supposed to open the door for the poet?

The poet's protest is aimed at the traditional social "system". So, that somebody, the "you", is representative of the "system". Though the poet has traveled the path of his creativity and reached the final destination, the system does not allow him in. He remains an outcaste even at the helm of his creativity. His poetic genius has enabled him to grasp the constellations, but he does not know how he would write the alphabets of these constellations on the same old paper. The constellations represent bright, shining, glorious ideas foretelling bright future. The "old paper" symbolizes the poet's worn out medium of expression. It was all right during the poet's long journey of creativity so far. But now that the poet has reached his final destination and has grasped the constellations, he wishes to write the alphabets on a new fresh paper. However, the system does not let him in. He is stranded at the destination "outside" with alphabets of constellations eager to be written on a new fresh paper.

What has happened to the poet's notebook of poems? Is he not carrying it during his journey to this destination? In the next stanza, the poet explains that he has handed over his notebook of poems to Kabir long back! Why Kabir? What is the significance of this reference?

This second stanza of the poem is a fine example of intertextuality. The reference indicates Kabir's doha:

Kabira Khada Bazaarmein Sabko Mange Khair
Na Kahuse Dosti Na Kahuse Bair

(Kabir is standing in the bazaar,
Wishing well to everyone!
He has friendship with none.
And enmity with none!)

The doha depicts Kabir's detached, yet compassionate attitude towards people in the world. He stands amidst the busy, crowded bazaar, but is not involved in its affairs. Though he wishes everyone well, he is aloof from them. He is neither a friend nor a foe to any person around him. When the poet confesses that he has handed over his notebook of poems to Kabir long back, he not only establishes bondage with him, but also indicates that he himself has reached the same attitude towards the world around him. He is friend to nobody and enemy to nobody. He is all alone in the crowded bazaar, nurturing the dream of wellbeing to all. (This experience of intertextuality is quite conspicuous in the original Marathi poem, as the poet has used two key words "Bazaar" and "khada" from the text of Kabir's doha. Especially, the use of the word "khada" is significant. For, the proper Marathi word would have been "ubha" meaning "standing". Unfortunately, the English translation misses both these key words. At least the word "bazaar" should have been retained to promote intertextuality.) Then what has happened to his previous rebellious attitude? What has happened to his call of setting town after town on fire? What has happened to the innumerable suns ignited in his blood? What has happened to all those strong abuses mutilating the so-called cultural heritage? Perhaps this is the long journey performed by the poet to reach this final destination. Handing over the notebook of poems to Kabir means transcending that rebellious and fiery attitude to reach this detached and futuristic perception. He has liberated himself from the pulls of the impending and contemporary provocations.

However, the "system" is not prepared to accept this transcending transformation of the poet. That is why the door is closed at the destination. The tradition (cruel and insensitive as it has always been) does not accept this promissory note! (The original Marathi poem uses the word *Vachannama* – meaning the promissory note-and not just *vachan*-meaning the promise, another instance of missing the target in the translation). This reference of the tradition not accepting the promise of liberation joins the link with the door not being opened by the "system" in the opening stanza. The poem is filled with a feeling of helplessness, not out of rebellious frustration, but percolating through detached liberation of the attitude. The poet finds himself engulfed in the empire of darkness. The image of the empire of darkness is the artistic culmination of the previous images viz. the closed door and the inability to write the alphabets of the constellations. However, this empire of darkness cannot dominate the poet now. His desire begins to grow wings! Growing wings of the desire is again the culmination of the previous images of reaching the destination and alphabets of constellations. Thus, the pattern of the poem displays the confrontation of two entities — the poet and the "system" .The former entity is mobile and progressive whereas the latter one is static and conservative. The former entity, the poet, travels and reaches the destination, but the latter entity refuses him entry through the door. The former wants to write illuminating messages, but the latter refuses to cooperate. But finally, the empire of darkness spread by the latter is incapable of holding back the dream flight of the former. The desire of the poet wins despite all odds — the closed door, the lack of notebook, the empire of darkness.

The language of the poem is simple, conversational and transparent. Images are not fresh, but come naturally and evocatively. The poem is short, but carries a large content effectively. The content goes beyond the frame of the poem with inevitable and automatic references to Namdeo Dhasal's previous poetry and also to the medieval poet Kabir.

6.3.5.2 *Autobiography*

This is the last poem in the collection **Ya Sattet Jeev Ramat Nahi** with the Marathi title *Atmacharitra*. The poem begins with the assurance that the image in the mirror of water is the poet's own image. This opening line itself is multidimensional as it serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it presents the setting of a scene for the poem. The poet is seated on the bank of a river or on the seashore, staring at his own image in the water. Secondly, it also underlines that the image is shaky, apparently due to constant waves, so much so that the poet feels it necessary to ascertain his identity with the image. This assertion opens the gate of the suggested meaning. The shaky image becomes a symbol of the image presented in an autobiography. Is not the image we find in any autobiography as shaky and uncertain as the image reflected in waves here? Do we not get confused to make out whether the image in the autobiography is really the image of the person concerned?

The white mass of foam on the top of the waves makes the image blurred and momentary. Actually these are the functions of space and time in a person's life. The image presented in an autobiography looks confusing because it is concisely reduced in a very limited space and time. The personality of the real person who has lived a considerable length of life is presented in a few pages of the autobiography, reducing the space and time to a considerable extent. Since the white mass of foam plays the same function here, the poet says that it touchingly passes through the identity of the space and time. (In the original Marathi text, the word *asmita* viz. identity is specifically used, which is missing in the translation). When this happens, the bulwarks of hellish agony slowly collapse. For, as long as the image is clear, the agony, which is related to the person in reality, is firmly rooted like bulwarks. As soon as the image becomes shaky, blurred, momentary and uncertain, the agony is bound to dismantle slowly.

From here on, the poem becomes distinctly metaphoric. The poet begins to feel that he is really seated on the shore of misery and not just remembering his past life, but carving the shapes of wounds. Life has given the poet nothing but misery so far, and remembering the span of life, as is done in an autobiography, is nothing but carving the shapes of wounds. The breeze blowing from the waters of misery is enough to flutter the transparent robe of existence of the poet. The surrounding also plays its part in this experience. It is the time of sunset and twilight, the bordering moment between the light and the darkness. The combat in the game of darkness and light arouses commotion in the mind of the poet. (The specific word *dhumashchakri* viz. combat is missing in the translation.) When darkness falls, birds go away to their nests. Here, the transparent birds of dreams also fly away, and the shapeless sky becomes restless after their departure. (The translated version totally misses this statement. It does not mention the departure of the birds, and also, instead of making the sky restless, it makes it nostalgic!). So we have parallel scenes here presented in the metaphorical style. On the one hand, the evening is getting darker, the light and the darkness combat with each other and create a feeling of sadness, birds go away, and the sky becomes lonely and darker. On the other hand, every detail of this scene has a metaphoric meaning related to the poet's mood and his state of mind while reviewing his past life.

the innermost awareness of the poet true. these flowers have no tragrance, but they are flowers all the same. The negation of fragrance eliminates anything romantic to be associated with the flowers. The flowers symbolize new consciousness arising in the heart of the poet. He has determined now not to feel let down by the agony of the past life. He is ready to take on life with new vigor and zest. He sheds off his skin, like a snake! This is a very beautiful image used by the poet to express the transformation in his attitude at this moment. It is visually evocative and charged with intensity.

Nom th poet becomes one with his image. He even experiences the chill touch of the water. That chill touch snaps the ropes of desire, "Snapping of rope" has a special meaning in Marathi. It has a historical-cultural reference. Shivaji sent Tanaji, his trusted lieutenant, to conquer the mountain-fort of Sinhagad from the Mughals. Realizing that his troops were much smaller to take up a head-on battle, Tanaji climbed an unguarded cliff at the dead of night secretly and launched a surprise attack. In the fierce battle that followed, Tanaji was killed and his troupes began to run back. Tanaji's brother Suryaji snapped the ropes with which they had climbed and made an inspiring speech to turn the troupes back to the battle and gain victory. Since then, "snapping the ropes," means eliminating the possibilities of retreat and rushing into the battle with determination. Here in this poem, the chill touch of the water snaps the ropes of desire. That means, once the poet sheds off his old appearance and determines to face the life with new vigor, he eliminates any chance of retreat thereafter. The last appeal is made to ensure that now there may not be any disturbance even from a sympathizer. Usually, one who wishes to show sympathy to a wounded person tries to give him a soothing soft blow of air through his lips. The poet, here, however, does not want such a soothing sympathy. He fears that his determination to maintain a changed face hitherto will be shattered by such a show of sympathy. This meaning is expressed by the image that the face of the poet's autobiography will be shattered by such attempt.

As compared to the previous poem, this poem contains rich imagery, which is fresh, intense and evocative. Actually, it begins with an image, keeps the tempo throughout with images of increasing intensity and ends with a multi-layered image. The imagery incorporates metaphors and symbols as well. Philosophical, literary and realistic overtones help to enlarge the contents of the poem as it deals with the real personality of a person vis-à-vis the deliberate image presented by him in his autobiography. Moreover, these overtones are directly subjective to the poet and not just theoretical musings.

6.4 LET US SUM UP

In the course of this Unit we have looked at the history of Gujarati poetry and the tradition of Marathi poetry and the rise of Dalit poetry — the poetry of rebellion in Marathi. We have also studied the individual contributions of Sitanshu Yashashchandra to Gujarati and Namdeo Dhasal to Marathi poetry.

We hope the analysis of three poems. One by Sitanshu Yashashchandra and two by Namdev Dhasal has given you a feel of how poets in Indian languages use the resources of myth and calier literature and history to express themselves. You will realize that their language even in translation is far from

being simple. Poetry is seldom easy and a fuller understanding after comes after you have read the poems several times and also pondered over them for some time.

6.5 GLOSSARY

Allusion: A reference in a literary work to a person, place, or thing in history or another work of literature. Allusions are often indirect or brief references to well-known characters or events.

Escapism: Using literary creativity to escape from the troubles and agonies of the real world.

Existentialist poet: Existentialism is a 20th century movement in philosophy. Existentialists are concerned with the study of being. They conclude that existence precedes essence. A man's self is nothing except what he has become; at any given moment, it is the sum of the life he has shaped until then. At each moment, it is the man's will that can choose how to act or not to act. A man is or should be responsible for the consequences of his actions; and each action necessarily excludes the other potential actions for that moment. A poet who displays this outlook is an existentialist poet.

Intertextuality: A term used by Julia Kristeva to describe the preexisting body of discourse that makes an individual text intelligible. Every text is a response to and an interpretation of other texts, and it can be read only in relation to them. The meaning of a text is dependent upon other texts that it absorbs and transforms.

Juxtaposition: Putting two statements or experiences side by side in order to emphasise the similarities or differences between them.

Mysticism: The experience of uniting the Self with the Supreme Self by meditation, contemplation, yoga etc. The spiritual apprehension of Truths that are usually beyond understanding.

Negative Philosophy: Negative attitude, extreme skepticism.

Parody: Humorous exaggerated imitation of a literary work.

Pedantic themes: Themes with an insistence on adherence to

Sentimentalism: The effort to induce an emotional response disproportionate to the situation, and thus to substitute heightened and generally unthinking feeling for normal ethical and intellectual judgment. A pejorative term used to describe the effort by an author to induce emotional responses in the reader, that exceed what the situation warrants.

Surrealist poetry: Revolutionary poetry which argues for complete artistic freedom, for the abandonment of all restrictions which might be imposed on the poet. The poet relinguishes all conscious control, responding to irrational urges of the deep mind.

Symbolist poetry: Poetry, which believes that there is a magical and mystical correspondence between the natural and spiritual worlds. By exploiting the connotative, suggestive and evocative power of words, the poet, through his own suggestive private language, obliquely expresses his correspondence and triggers off a sympathetic vibration in the reader.

6.6 QUESTIONS

Orpheus

1. Why do you think Sitanshu Yashashchandra uses the myth of Orpheus? What purpose does it serve?
2. Comment on the use of symbolism in the poem.
3. What does the poet want to convey through 'lava liquid cascading down'?
4. Why is the image of "blind eagle" significant?
5. Identify metaphors used by the poet in the poem, for example, 'follies howling'. How can follies howl?
6. The poem *Orpheus* has been translated by the poet and also by E.V. Ramakrishnan and Anjana Desai. Which translation do you prefer? Give reasons.

A Notebook of Poems

1. Explain the place of Namdeo Dhasal in Marathi poetry in particular and in Indian poetry in general.
2. Explain how Namdeo Dhasal rises above the monotonous negation and rebellion in dalit poetry.
3. Write critical appreciation of the poems *A Notebook of Poems* and *Autobiography*.
4. Describe the nature of imagery in Namdeo Dhasal's poems.

6.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open
University, Prayagraj

MAEN-116

Contemporary Indian Literature In English Translation

Block

7

TUGHLAQ : Girish Karnad

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

'The past isn't gone. It's here inside me'.

The Fire and the Rain (1994)

This Block will introduce you to Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq*, an acknowledged classic of modern Indian drama and through this play to the fascinating world of post-independence Indian drama and theatre. Girish Karnad is one of the top contemporary Indian playwrights who along with other dramatists like Dharma Vir Bharati , Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar has been in the forefront of the effort to bring a modern Indian theatre into being.

The Block will contain four Units as follows:

Unit 1 Introducing Contemporary Indian Theatre is meant to provide you with background information on post-independence drama in India that will enable you to place the plays of Girish Karnad in their context and also enable you to read *Tughlaq* with understanding and enjoyment.

Unit 2 Introducing the Author and the Play will focus on the multi-faceted achievements of Girish Karnad and then converge on *Tughlaq* and help you to come to grips with the play with the help of a scene-by-scene commentary on it.

Unit 3 Structure, Theme and Motifs will carry forward the discussion of *Tughlaq* and pay particular attention to the structure, theme of power and the motifs used in the play.

Unit 4 Characters and Critical Opinions on *Tughlaq* as Text and in Performance will deal with characters and wind up the discussion with some attention to critical assessment of the play as a written text and in performance over the years

UNIT 1 INTRODUCTING CONTEMPORARY INDIAN THEATRE

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Unit 1 aims to provide you with essential background information about contemporary Indian theatre and also about Kannada drama. This will help you to get an idea of the major trends in post-independence theatre and also enable you to put the prescribed play in a proper perspective. It will also help you to approach the text with fuller confidence.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The cultural renaissance of the post-Independence years gave a fillip to theatre all over India and saw the birth of a new tradition in Indian theatre. Folk, traditional and classical theatre forms already had their own seasonal, ritual or entertainment bases in their respective regions. They took their narratives from Indian mythology and fell broadly into a song-dance-prose format. Costumes and make-up were wildly vivid, acting styles oratorical, and performance spaces informal, having their place within the community's public spaces. The new theatre, which came into being with the country's thrust towards modernity, was powered by the dream of building a nation founded on democratic and secular principles.

India's first acquaintance with formal dramatic literature came in the middle of the nineteenth century with the opening of Universities in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Pune. The youth in Universities were introduced, on the one hand, to the works of Shakespeare, and on the other, to their own Sanskrit dramatists: Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Shudraka, Narayana Bhatta, and others. Aspiring dramatists in the regional languages received apprenticeship by translating, adapting, and emulating Shakespeare and Sanskrit dramatists

There was in 1930's a surge both for modernity and indigenous cultural identity. Symbolic of this time was perhaps the fact that while on the one hand, Le Corbusier was invited to design and create the modernist city of Chandigarh, on the other, the Central Academies of the arts endorsed a so-called return to roots by encouraging the folk and the classical traditions with their patronage. A society setting out to re-mint itself as a coin with two heads facing opposite sides, one looking forward towards modernity, the other turned backward towards indigenous cultural identity, found itself trapped between two dramatic modes: While the realism of Ibsen allowed dramatists to deal with the social and moral problems of an emergent society, the folk and traditional theatre appeared to offer the only cultural roots which the largely urban dramatists and directors could see.

Those who sought state patronage for theatre with an eye on the foreign market, chose the colour, song and dance of folk traditions. European theatre too was turning to the East for its rich theatrical resources, branding its products with the highly-valorized epithet "intercultural". In regions like Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, and Maharashtra, however, where a strong, unbroken theatre tradition had been in place for over a hundred years by the time the country won its independence, the people had the decisive voice on what kind of theatre would be done: for they, not the State, were the patrons of the theatre.

1.2 GROWTH OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN THEATRE

It is very difficult to capture the history of contemporary Indian theatre in a single frame, for the simple reason that there is no single history. Each region has evolved its own way of moving forward while looking back. One can only hope to indicate the whys and hows of these moves, by looking at the thinking and work of some of the most significant practitioners of theatre in the country since Independence.

The history of modern theatre in India begins with Shombhu Mitra, who had achieved legendary status during his lifetime. Fascinated with theatre from his boyhood years, he entered the professional state in Calcutta at the age of twenty-four. Disenchanted with the profit-motivated selection of plays, ornate props, and painted scenery, Mitra quit the scene.

By the thirties, the professional theatre had begun to decline. It made very little sense at a time of global and local upheavals: World War II, the birth of the Azad Hind Force, the bombing of Calcutta, the manmade Bengal famine of 1943, the Naval Mutiny of 1945, and the communal riots of 1946, followed by the brutal killings during the partition of the country in which Bengal suffered a gash straight through the heart. These were the horrors, which were drastically changing people's perception of human life.

It was in response to this, that Mitra joined the 'Indian People's Theatre Association' (IPTA) in the early forties and directed Bijon Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* [The New Harvest, Bengali, 1944)] about the Bengal famine in 1944. This play was a radical departure from any that had been written and staged until then. The use of space and lighting, the style of speech and acting,

even the use of a dialect in stage speech were all new, breaking and re-forming the known language of theatre. With Nabanna, Mitra became the father of modern Indian theatre. In 1948, he set up his own group, Bohurupee, launching Bengal's group theatre movement.

Of all the plays he directed and acted in until his retirement from theatre in the mid-eighties, the one that was hailed throughout the country was Tagore's *Raktakarabi* (1954). In a tribute to Mitra on his 77th birth anniversary (Probe India, August 1992), senior director Habib Tanvir said, "I have had the chance to see many different productions of Tagore's plays, but I feel that no other director has been able to give form to their 'feelings' except Mitra..... his play has had a profound impact on the theatre of the entire country".

Unlike Shombhu Mitra, Utpal Dutt (1929-1993) declared himself a leftist political playwright. He too joined IPTA in the middle of his career, which had begun with English plays. Whereas Mitra was committed to new theatre which concerned itself with the aesthetics of theatre, its verbal, acting and production language, Dutt was committed to "people's theatre", and was concerned with using every theatrical means to awaken people to their condition.

Dutt's *Angar* (1939), about a recent coalmine disaster, was the first play he wrote, directed, and produced. His earlier plays had been either translations/adaptations of Western classics or modern works, or Bengali plays written largely by earlier writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Michael Madhusudan Dutt. *Angar* was also the first play to be staged at Minerva, a professional theatre, which for the first time was filled to capacity without the enticement of song and dance. What Dutt had given the audience, instead, was 'spectacle' – the coalmine setting, the struggle of the miners, and the deliberate flooding of the mines by the authorities.

Dutt continued to stage his political plays on the professional stage until the end of the sixties, when political exigencies forced other choices on him. The upsurge of the Naxalbari movement, supported by China, brought daily violence to Bengal. During the decade, Dutt wrote and directed nearly twenty plays for the popular Jatra theatre. With these plays, he accelerated the hesitant entry of politics into the Jatra repertoire.

The Little Theatre Group, which Dutt formed after parting ways with IPTA, succumbed to internal ideological differences and betrayals. As resilient as ever, Dutt formed the People's Little Theatre. Dutt's first major production for the new group was *Tiner Talwar* (1971). Hailed countrywide by critics and theatre lovers alike for its intelligent use of melodrama, the rich nuances of its verbal text, and its bold use of theatre machinery which had been cast aside by the realists of the new theatre, *Tiner Talwar* was theatre speaking about itself. Accounting for the extraordinary power of this non-political play, Dutt said in an interview with theatre scholar Samik Bandopadhyay, "*Tiner Talwar*... was a statement with which all our actors and actresses had identified themselves. That is how the teamwork and the sincerity of the actors came through so powerfully"

If an exact contrast is to be sought for Utpal Dutt, one finds it in Badal Sircar. He forms the third point of the Calcutta theatre triangle of the sixties and seventies. A civil engineer and town planner by training, Sircar went to the USA with a Jawaharlal Nehru Research Fellowship in 1972, to work on a theatre of synthesis as a rural-urban link.

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* [And Indrajit] (1962), became one of the most widely translated and performed plays of the late sixties. At the very time, however, when he was being hailed as the new voice of the middle-class, he was questioning himself about whether he wanted to be just that. This self-questioning finally led to his giving up the proscenium theatre altogether and committing himself to what he called the Third Theatre, the first two being the middle-class urban and the folk. Since its inception, Sircar's Third Theatre has been an inspiration for many theatre movements all over the country.

Whereas Dutt had proclaimed that political theatre should be performed on every platform available, including the proscenium and the Jatra stage, Badal Sircar was convinced that the nature of the performing space was implicated in the language of theatre and must be chosen to help create that language. In the seventies, Badal Sircar and his group, Shatabdi, stepped out of the proscenium frame and into an ordinary assembly hall to play to an audience sitting on benches on three sides of the performing space. This enabled an intimate dialogue to be conducted between the players and the audience, allowing the latter to become participants in the "reality" of the performance. This was different from their normal role of passively accepting the fabrication of reality that was offered to them on the proscenium stage. The Third Theatre, minus auditorium, costumes, lights, make-up, freed Sircar from the need for media support and from the need to sell his "product". His audience was free to walk in and pay donation if they so desired.

Sircar's best-known and most widely staged play, *Michhil*, was first performed in April 1974 in village Ramchadrapur in West Bengal; his second play, *Bhoma* was first performed in March 1976 in village Ramgabelia in West Bengal; his third play, Baki Itihas [The Rest of History, 1965] was first performed in July 1979 at the Calcutta Theosophical Society Hall.

1.3 THEATRE IN BENGAL

The time of the giants was over. Some theatre practitioners who continue to redefine theatre in Bengal and have been acknowledged on the national level are Rudraprasad Sengupta, Shyamanand Jalan, Probir Guha, and Usha Ganguli. I shall briefly describe here the work of Guha and Ganguli.

Probir Guha's Living Alternative Theatre is, in a sense, an offshoot of Badal Sircar's movement. Based in the industrial town of Khardah, 20 km from Calcutta, the group puts itself directly in touch with the audience through plays that reflect the daily impact of social, economic and political forces on the people. His actors and actresses are socially committed volunteers. Guha believes in fostering positive violence in the bodies of his actors. Towards this end, they are trained in various Indian martial arts systems. In a paper presented at the international seminar, Actor at Work, organized at the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA), Mumbai, in November 1991, Guha said of his theatre,

> I find my themes from happenings and encounters that occur only too often on the streets, in the slums, in train compartments, in village hutments, in workplaces and worksites... I pick these situations up re-mould them to a point of shock and present them to the public. There

is a desire to create a violent effect on the audience so that their complaisance cracks and they discover themselves'.

Despite doing plays in Hindi, Usha Ganguli has managed, over the last twenty-one years of work with her group Rangkarmee, to acquire a large following in Calcutta and elsewhere in Bengal and the rest of the country. A trained Bharat Natyam dancer, she began her career with a group that performed for the richer section of the Hindi-speaking population of Calcutta. This did not satisfy her either ideologically or aesthetically. She realized she wanted to do more consciously committed plays that would reach out to schoolteachers, students, clerks, and housewives — anybody.

Rangkarmee was formed in January 1976. Its members came from all walks of life, but their continuance with the group depended on whether they were willing to be theatre workers as the group name demanded or whether they were there only for the limelight. Those who stayed dedicated themselves to doing socially relevant plays. They were given rigorous training in acting, management, and back-stage work. Over the two decades and more of the group's existence, each of its present repertoires of half-a-dozen plays had had at least a hundred shows.

The most celebrated Rangkarmee production is *Rudali* (1993), based on Maheshweta Devi's short story about professional women mourners in Bihar. The script for the stage evolved through workshops, which included well-known writers, Ganguli her-self, and one of the members of Rangkarmee. Ascetically mounted, without set, lights or music, and performed in the naturalistic style with Usha Ganguli playing the main role, the play has travelled all over India and brought acclaim from critics and audiences alike.

1.4 THEATRE IN MAHARASHTRA

In Bengal, there is a tradition of writer-directors; indeed, of directors who have written in order to do the kind of theatre they want to do. In Maharashtra, on the other hand, there is a strong playwriting tradition in which the playwright is not necessarily directly associated with the brasstacks of theatre. Therefore, when we come to theatre in Maharashtra, it is only right that we should begin with playwrights who have been responsible for changing the language of modern Marathi theatre.

When Vijay Tendulkar (b. 1928) began writing, the new theatre movement in Mumbai was just gaining popularity. Young people, mostly collegians, were raring to put an end to the earlier song-and-declamation and later sentiment-and-diluted social commentaries and to replace them with theatrical expressions relevant to their own times. Tendulkar was in the vanguard of this movement, which included later stars like Vijaya Mehta and Shreeram Lagoo. Unlike most playwrights, Tendulkar was in close touch with the directors, designers, and actors of the stage and was thus able to hone his playwriting craft with their practical comments.

The first Tendulkar play to cross the language barrier was *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* [Silence! The Court is in Session] (1967), which was staged in Bengali and Hindi. In quick succession thereafter came *Gidhade* [The Vultures] (1971), *Sakharam Binder* [Sakharam The Bookbinder] (1972) and

Ghashiram Kotwal (1973). The latter three plays ran into problems with the censors and/or the public. *Gidhade* offended the sensibilities of the middle-class audience with its portrayal of its protagonists, a middle-class family, as vultures. The censors objected to its abusive language and, amongst other scenes, to one in which the pregnant sister enters in a bloodstained sari after being kicked by her brother causing a miscarriage. The censors objected to the abusive language in *Sakharam Binder* too, while his mistress is beating up the audience protested against the protagonist Sakharam's. *Ghashiram Kotwal* angered historians by its portrayal of Nana Phadnavis, Chancellor to the Peshwa, which they said was historically wrong, while it offended the Pune Brahmins because it depicted the Brahmins of that era as lecherous, greedy, and corrupt. Lust for power, greed, corruption and the consequent violence are the themes which Tendulkar explores through the story of *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the North Indian Brahmin who came to Pune to make his fortune. The Chancellor, who had his eyes on Ghashiram's daughter, gave him unlimited power. Once he tired of her, he cut Ghashiram down brutally.

Ghashiram Kotwal became a *cause celebre* in 1980 when it was scheduled to tour Europe. The Shiv Sena, went to court demanding an injunction on the tour on the plea that it would create a "wrong impression" of the country. The court's decision allowing the play to go came just two days before the troupe was due to leave. They were allowed to go on condition that they would make a declaration before the curtain went up on every show that Nana Phadnavis was a great statesman who fought the British tooth and nail during his Chancellor-ship. Everybody connected with the play lived in terror during those days

Tendulkar chose to cast his play in the Dashavatar folk form because he was fascinated by the multiple theatrical uses its idea of a human curtain could be put to. In the Dashavatar, the chorus stands in a semi-circle swaying rhythmically and singing its comments on the action. In *Ghashiram*, the chorus was used both to hide and reveal the action in tantalizing, often bitingly ironic ways. Mime, song and dance from folk tradition, and the sutradhar from classical theatre were used to give the play fluidity and create possibilities to take the work beyond the particular into the universal. *Ghashiram Kotwal* was and is a brilliant piece of theatre perfectly amalgamating a modern theme, a contemporary sensibility and the folk theatre form, but it has been held responsible for spawning a progeny, which uses folk elements to decorate their work in a spurious attempt to make it indigenous.

Mahesh Elkunchwar (b. 1939) began writing plays in 1968, after he saw a Tendulkar play which demonstrated how much power the senior playwright's terse, economic, more-left-unsaid-than-said style of dialogue writing held. A lecturer in a Nagpur college, Elkunchwar made his mark with *Holi* (1970) which Vijaya Mehta directed for her group Rangayan, bringing out the brutality of its depiction of campus violence through ragging.

Several of Elkunchwar's plays including *Holi, Pratibimb* (1987), and *Atmakatha* [Autobiography] (1988) have been translated into Hindi, English, and Bengali. His most ambitious work to date has been his trilogy, which traces, through the fortunes of a small town family of Brahmin landlords, the crumbling of the feudal order, the plundering of the countryside by greedy jungle contractors, and a metaphorical reduction of the region to drought and

barrenness. The first part of the trilogy, *Wada Chirebandi* [Old Stone Mansion] (1982), was directed for the mainstream stage by Vijaya Mehta in 1985. The play was later expanded into a trilogy called Yuganta [The End of an Age] (1994). The entire trilogy was directed for Awishkar by Chandrakant Kulkarni in 1994 to mark the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Marathi theatre.

Elkunchwar is a confirmed realist. He does not see his roots in folk theatre and would consider it a betrayal of his urban individualism and his Western-oriented sensibility to use folk elements in his plays. *Wada Chirebandi* is one of the finest examples of consummate realism in contemporary Marathi dramatic literature.

Satish Alekar (b. 1949) is a biochemist by training and has recently been appointed Director of the Performing Arts, Department of Pune University. He was one of the young members of the Progressive Dramatic Association who split from the parent group over the decision to stop performing *Ghashiram Kotwal* after the public furore against it. The young members including Alekar, Dr. Jabbar Patel, and Dr. Mohan Agash formed a new group, Theatre Academy, and made *Ghashiram* their first production. Satish Alekar wrote and directed several plays for the Theatre Academy, the most successful being *Mahanirvan* (1974). He wrote the play in the Kirtan form; having grown up in the heart of Pune, this form of musical religious sermon was very close to him. His acute sense of irony found in this form a perfect vehicle for its own subversion. The play is an irreverent look at Hindu death rituals, written with the spontaneous zest and quirky humor that marks all Alekar's works.

Mahanirvan, although a highly successful play, is flawed. It has been translated and produced in Hindi and Bengali. Alekar's finest play to date remains the more difficult and therefore less popular *Begum Barve* (1979). It delves into the real and fantasy worlds of two sets of people — a pair of government clerks, and a female impersonator of the old music theatre days and his employer, a ruthless cripple. *Begum Barve* has been published in English translation but performed, apart from the original Marathi, only in Hindi.

Vijaya Mehta (b. 1934) was one of the pioneers of the new theatre in Mumbai, both as a director and an actress. The first plays she directed were realistic. In those days in the context of the dominant theatre, which was melodramatic, musical, declamatory or sentimental and mushy, realism was seen as a bold experiment. The group of young collegians who collected around her looked up to her for leadership. Together they formed Rangayan in 1954. They were themselves like a theatre laboratory and study group. Every new play they produced was preceded and followed by discussions designed to develop the understanding of theatre by its members and cultivate the taste of the audience for this new realistic theatre. In 1971, the group split. The actor-couple Arvind and Sulabha Deshpande and a few others from the old group, notably organizer Arun Kakade, formed a new group, Awishkar. Their first play was a spectacular production of Karnad's *Tughlaq*, translated into Marathi by Vijay Tendulkar, directed by Arvind Deshpande and designed with a stunning set comprising multiple levels by Damu Kenkre.

Mehta, hurt and disillusioned, joined the mainstream stage, where, along with Shreeram Lagoo she was responsible for introducing a new understated acting style. Although she directed many excellent productions for the mainstream

stage, including Jaywant Dalvi's Barrister, which she later made into a film, she could not endure the pressures of touring and the aesthetic compromises of working in the main stream for too long. After quitting the mainstream, Mehta did some visually stunning productions of the classics *Mudrarakshasa* and *Shakuntala*. Bhaskar Chandavarkar composed the music and the artist D.G. Godse designed the sets. She also directed Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* and *Nagmandala* in the mid-eighties.

Although Vijaya Mehta has attempted many forms of thatre including Brecht, and has always done impeccable productions, her forte is still the meticulously planned realistic play where biographies of characters are constructed and the acting graph plotted accordingly. She has been a great team leader and organizer and has been wholly responsible for bringing rigorous professionalism and a serious concern for developing the aesthetics of theatre for the non-professional stage.

Dr. Jabbar Patel is a practicing gynecologist who lives and works in Daund, halfway between Pune and Sholapur. The three plays he has directed for Theatre Academy have all involved large casts, ensemble work, and music. *Ghashiram Kotwal*, under his direction, is by far the most travelled Marathi production of all times. During the twenty-five years that Theatre Academy ran the production, it saw two generation of actors being inducted and trained, although the main role continued to be played by the inimitable Dr. Mohan Agashe as Nana Phadnavis till the production was wound up. Fifty boys were trained to dance and sing and were put through a regimen of exercises to prepare them for *Ghashiram*. Bhaskar Chandavarkar composed the music, a major contribution to the success of the play. So integrated was music, dance, and the prose text that the director had to interact very closely with the composer and the choreographer. The result was a theatrical tour de force very different in character from the naturalistic plays Marathi theatre excelled in. The success of *Ghashiram Kotwal* at the box-office also served to subsidize the Academy's less popular productions like *Begum Barve*.

Patel's next production, *Teen Pashacha Tamasha*, (1977) was P.L. Deshpande's adaptation of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. This production, while excellently performed and sung by Madhuri Purandare as Rangu (Jenny), Nandu Bhende as Ankush (Macheath), and Chandrakant Kale as Peachum, did not enjoy the same popularity as Ghashiram. Dr. Jabbar Patel has been making films for the last twenty years, his latest being a magnum opus on the life and work of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Satyadev Dubey has been one of the most influential directors in Maharashtra. It is not uncommon to hear theatre enthusiasts from small towns in the state say that some chance viewing of some play, such as Shyam Manohar's strangely quirky play, *Yakrut* (1986) changed their perception of theatre and its possibilities completely.

Satyadev Dubey is the only director from the sixties' generation to have stayed in touch with every succeeding generation of writers-directors on the non-professional stage. The playwrights' workshop, which he organized in Pune in 1973, was crucial in bringing together the emergent generation of playwrights. Fifteen years later, he held Sunday workshops for the new playwrights. As a subjective selection from amongst the dozens of plays he

has directed, *Andha Yug* (1962), *Hayavaadana* (1972) and *Aranya* (1984) have been his most outstanding Hindi productions and Elkunchwar's *Raktapushp* [Petals of Blood] (1981), his most sensitive Marathi production.

Something unique happened to non-professional theatre in Mumbai in 1974. Arvind and Sulabha Deshpande managed to persuade the Chhabildas School in Dadar to rent out its assembly hall to their group Awishkar at concessional rates for experimental plays. This school hall soon became a buzzing center of theatre activity, making the name Chhabildas synonymous with the experimental movement in Maharashtra. As the eighties came to an end, theatre activity dwindled and the movement became moribund. The school soon withdrew the concessions it had once offered to young theatre people.

1.5 MALAYALAM THEATRE

K. N. Panikkar (1928 –), is a poet who lives and works in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. His theatre started as an extension of his poetry and even today, draws its strength from his poetic imagination. He writes and directs his own plays for his group, Sopanam, which he established in 1974. He also trains his actors using the innumerable forms and martial arts that abound in the tiny state of Kerala. The martial art called Kalaripayattu is used as the basic system in the training of the actor's body; simultaneously, the actor is also trained in acquiring the inner state of being that is required for the theatre.

Pannikar's most well-known and widely performed productions are Bhasa's *Urubbangam* and his own *Karim Kutty* (1982) and *Ottayan* (1985). His plays work as parables, allowing their traditional folklore content and indigenous theatre language to be imbued with contemporary significance. His answer to the charge of revivalism that critics have leveled against him for using rituals in his work is, "This type of criticism is commonly raised by people committed to a political philosophy. I don't have such a commitment. Also, I have placed no restriction on entering any region of human endeavour for my work. I use ritual as one of the most powerful forms of metrical expression." (Interview with K.S. Narayana Pillai in Contemporary Indian Theatre, Sangeet Natak Akademi)

1.6 MANIPURI THEATRE

Like Kerala in the South, Manipur in the North-East also has its own traditional dance, drama, and story-telling traditions on which Ratan Thiyam draws. Trained in theatre at the National School of Drama (1971-1974), he returned to Imphal to set up his own theatre group, the Chorus Repertory Theatre, in 1976. His most well known works are the Mahabharata trilogy *Urubhangam* [The Shattered Thigh] (1981), *Chakravyuha* [Battle Formation] (1984), and *Karnabharam* [The Burden of Karna] (1989). Of these, his most widely travelled, admired and written about production is *Chakravyuha*, which deals with the death of Abhimanyu, son of Arjun. Like other writers-directors working in post-colonial times, Thiyam too uses theatre to straddle the divide between indigenous theatre traditions and contemporary issues. On the one hand, he sees *Chakravyuha* as a symbol of the conflict between two generations — callow youth pitted against experienced warriors; on the other

hand it symbolizes the conflict between the individual and society Abhimanyu against the seven charioteers. Ultimately, he sees it as a protest against violence and the threat of World War III, which the younger generation faces.

Heisnam Kanhailal expresses the feelings of anger and despair of a neglected people through his work. Manipur's cultural history is dominated by the imposition of Vaishnavism on the local people and its post-Independence political history, by its marginalization on account of its remote geographical position and its people's racial difference from the national mainstream. Kanhailal's strong sense of ethnicity first drove him to steep himself in tradition. Then, under the influence of Badal Sircar, he moved out of the ethnic enclosure into a wider perspective. Finally, he arrived at what he terms the "theatre of transcendence", which goes beyond verbal language and expresses itself through movement, song and dance.

Kanhailal's wife, Sabitri, is one of the finest actresses in India. Nobody who has seen her performance in Kanhailal's most celebrated production, *Pebet,* in which she plays the mother bird anxious for one of her seven babies captured by a cat who teaches it to speak and behave like itself, can ever forget her expressive body movements and her extraordinary voice.

1.7 SOME OTHER PLAYWRIGHTS, THEATRE GROUPS AND THEATRE PERSONALITIES

We shall talk about the Hindi playwright Mohan Rakesh, two theatre groups in Hindi, Habib Tanvir's Naya Theatre and Bansi Kaul's Rang-Vidushak; theatre personality Ebrahim Alkazi and Indian English playwright Mahesh Dattani.

i. Mohan Rakesh, Hindi Playwright (1925 - 1972)

Mohan Rakesh was one of those rare literary personalities who never accept the traditional set-up but always aspire to find and project something, which is challenging and new. Rakesh's language separates him from other Hindi playwrights and puts him of a higher level of competence. His plays — *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (One Day in Early Autumn, Hindi, 1958), *Lehron Ke Rajhans* (Great Swans of the Waves, Hindi,1963), *Adhe-adhure* (Halfway House) — show that his dialogues have a smooth flow, a meaningful depth and an elemental naturalness suitable to his characters. They express the character's mental conflict, frustration, dissatisfaction and the resulting anger in a unique manner. Though some of the dialogues between Mallika and Kalidasa in *One Day in Ashadha* tend to be longer than required and seem to be a little heavy on the audience, they are necessary to the play. As Kalidasa says in the play, "people think that living in that life and atmosphere I have written a great deal. But I know that while living there I wrote nothing. What ever I wrote was a recollection of life here". This lengthy dialogue is necessary for the reader to understand the feelings and moods of the characters. But Rakesh became conscious of this and made an effort to reduce the lengths of the dialogues in his other plays namely *The Great Swans of the Waves* and *Halfway House*. Though in the former play, the dialogues between

Nand and Sundari tend to become longer, in *Halfway House* the playwright seems to be completely in control of the situation. Here the dialogues are short, suitable and to the point. They hit at the subject immediately.

ii. Habib Tanvir and his Naya Theatre and Folk Theatre

Habib Tanvir is one of the Hindi theatre directors who started using folk artists in his plays very early on. Returning from his training in England, he found that most of what he had learned made no sense in his native environment. He therefore began working with tribals from the Chhatisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh using their mother language and some of their folklore in his productions. His group, Naya Theatre, formed in 1959, has been doing plays regularly since, struggling for survival every bit of the way. His most celebrated plays have been *Agra Bazaar* (1970) on the bazaar poet Nazir and *Charandas Chor* (1976) about a thief who inadvertently makes a pledge to his guru never to lie. Two other productions of his are *Mitti ki gaadi*, an adaptation of Sudraka's *Mrichhakatikam* and *Bahadur Kalarin*, based on a Chhatisgarhi legend. Although Tanvir himself has been working in the folk idiom, or rather because he has chosen to do so out of individual commitment, he is severely critical of the folksy trend that started in the seventies in a bid to appear "rooted".

iii. Bansi Kaul and his Rang Vidushak

Bansi Kaul came to theatre from a richly varied background, which included painting road signs and the backs of trucks. Kaul has been fascinated with the idea of the vidushak. His group, Rang-Vidushak, is comprised of members who have outside jobs and come mostly from the lower middle-class. In training them for his proposed theatre of the vidushak, he needed to find sources of body language that were immediately accessible to them. He found them on the streets, e.g., street entertainers and gymnasts. Observation and documentation of their gestures and body language is Kaul's training methodology. His plays tell simple tales energetically and humorously.

iv. Ebrahim Alkazi

Ebrahim Alkazi was trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London. Returning to Mumbai, he set up the city's first amateur theatre group, the Theatre Group in the early fifties. His sensibility was Western, his language English, and his audience elitist. Yet, Alkazi's influence penetrated the local Marathi theatre through Vijaya Mehta's apprenticeship on the advice of her counsellors when she began doing serious theatre. He gave her the visual and performative aesthetics of realistic theatre.

Ebrahim Alkazi's Stanislavskian naturalism, set designs using levels articulated by occasional architectural elements like a pillar or a doorway, the orchestration of costume, lighting, music, and verbal text to arrive at a totality of theatrical effect, came as a radical departure for an audience grown used to star performers, the supremacy of the verbal text, and melodramatic delivery of lines. During his fourteen years in Mumbai, Alkazi staged many of the best-known plays of the West, from the Greeks, Shakespeare, and Moliere, to Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg, and on to Anouilh, Osborne, and Beckett. His first Hindi production came after he moved to Delhi in 1961 as the first director of the National School of Drama (NSD). Two of his most well-known productions during his sixteen-year tenure at the NSD were of Dharmavir

Bharati's *Andha Yug*, dealing with the aftermath of the Kurukshetra war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and Girish Karnad's Kannada play *Tughlaq* in Hindi translation. The latter was performed in the old fort in Delhi, giving the production a grand, spectacular scale.

Whether he staged his production in an indoor auditorium or out in an open environment, Alkazi adhered to the Stanislavkian style of acting, and it was this tradition that he bequeathed to the National School of Drama. Although successors like B. V. Karanth broke this mould by introducing the folk elements of music and dance, the strength of the NSD repertory continues to be realism.

v. Mahesh Dattani, Indian English playwright

Mahesh Dattani (1958 –)is a playwright from Bangalore. He writes in English and has had eight plays published, almost all of them performed in Bangalore, most in Mumbai and a couple in Delhi and Kolkata. Dattani has no hang-ups about using the language of India's ex-rulers. His protagonists are not only Gujaratis like himself, but also Gujaratis from Bangalore. The very specificity of his characters, however, carries his plays beyond those confines to become universally relevant. Realistic in form, complex in structure, many of them are shot through with an unforced humour that makes them generally appealing. He won the Sahitya Akademi award for his book of plays *Final Solution* and *Other Play* in 1998.

1.8 A NOTE ON KANNADA DRAMA

1.8.1 Emerging Modern Kannada Drama

Actually the history of modern Kannada drama begins with Karki Venkataramana Shastri's **Iggappa Heggadeya Vivaha Prahasana** (1887). This play deals with the problems of women, widow remarriage, the futile expenditure incurred in a Hindu marriage and the reformation that has to take place in society. Later, B. M. Shrikantaiah. who was inspired by Greek dramas, rewrote the 10th century Kannada epic **'Gadayuddam'** (written by Poet Ranna) in the form of a Greek tragedy. He intuitively saw the possibilities of a tragic hero in the character of Dhuryodhana and with a few deft changes recreated his personality. Another play of his **'Ashwathaman'** was the best example of his serious effort to bring a tragic experience to Kannada literature. He made some changes for the sake of tragic effect, the most drastic change being the death of hero, Ashwathaman, originally one of the seven immortal men as explained in Mahabharata. This play was a transcreation of Ajax of Sophocles. The third play B.M. Shrikantaiah wrote was **'Parasikaru'**, a straight translation of a tragedy by Aeschylus. The language and rhythm of these plays are unique. The archaic language used in these works magically creates a living dramatic idiom trying its utmost to recapture the vitality of primitive emotions.

The next important play writer was Sami Venkatadri (1898-1934) popularly known as 'Samas'. Unlike other historic plays by subsequent playwrights, the historic substance in Sams's plays was not used metaphorically, nor was it that his plays voice contemporary sound by giving an ironic twist to historical

events. Nothing but the sheer continuity of history must have fascinated Samsa and while following the gradual unfolding of historical events a meaningful dramatic pattern emerged. Of the twenty three plays that he wrote only five have survived. Out of these five, **'Vigada Vikramaraya'** fascinated many critics.

1.8.2 Towards Social Realism

The influence of western drama is quite obvious in both B. M. Shrikantaiah and Samas, but they were also influenced by the Indian classics and history. Their aim was to produce works of enduring value. It was ultimately T. P. Kailasam (1884-1946) and Adya Rangacharya (1904-1985), better known as Shriranga, who brought social realism on the stage. Both Kailasam and Shriranga were educated at British universities and were fully exposed to the influence of the new drama of that time. Kailasam was a popular stage figure in England singing comic songs.

Both these writers started writing plays with a strong protest against professional theatre. Kailasam's short play **'Num Kampni'** (Our Company) was a parody of the professional theatre, which he thought was no longer a theatre. Shriranga's **'Sampushta Ramayana'** ridicules the absurd speeches and gestures of illiterate actors trying to produce a Ramayana Play. Their purpose was to create a new form of drama and a new dramatic idiom, in which task they succeeded. Kailasam's **'Tollu Gatti'** (Hollow and Sound), **'Bahiskara'** (Banish), **'Soole'**, (Prostitute), **'Home-Rule'**, **'Ammavra ganda'** (Henpecked Husband), **'Badvalavillada Badayi'** (Empty pride), and Shriranga's **'Kattale Belaku'** (Dark & Light), **'Harijanwara'** (Cut the Sacred Thread), **'Kelu Janamejaya'** (Listen Janamejaya) were a few good plays of that time. Both these writers changed the content and expression of the Kannada theatre. By using common people's language, they brought new dimension to the stage performances. In all we can say, that the essential form of new drama was initiated by these two writers. Both, in their zest for creating an alternative social value system criticized prevailing social practices. Both attacked popular theatre which according to them was promoting a static social order.

K.V. Puttapa, popularly known as 'Kuvempu' converted Hamlet in to **'Raktakshi'**. His other plays **'Beral ge Koral'** (A Head for a Thumb), **'Maharathri'** (Great Night), **'Smashana Kurukshetram'**, (Kurukshetra graveyard) all are written in blank verse and their themes are borrowed from our mythology. Dr. Shivarama Karant, noted novelist and rationalist wrote musical plays like **'Mukta Dwara'** (Open Door). All these playwrights developed drama as a literary form and therefore their works reflect the literary tendencies and attitudes of the age.

G. B. Joshi popularly known as 'Jadabharata' in theatre circles started writing plays after Indian independence. His **'Mookabali'** (Silence Victim), **'Kadadida Niru'** (Disturbed Water), **'Nane Bijjala'** (I only Bijjala) and **'Sattavara Neralu'** (Shadow of the Dead) brought the new theatre movement to Karnataka. The all time great director B.V. Karant directed these dramas with imagination that made this theatre successful. Girish Karnad continued this new trend in the seventies and eighties. As we have to discuss Girish Karnad later in detail, we will conclude this chapter with an account of new trends in Kannada theatre.

1.8.3 New Trends

New trends in Kannada theatre started emerging in late 1970's. Dr. Chandrashekhara Kambara derives his strength from the folk plays of northern Karnataka. His **'Sangya Balya'** is one of the most popular dramas even today. His other plays include — **'Rishyashringa'**, **'Jokumaraswamy'**, **'Jai Siddanaika'**, **'Nai kathe'** (Dog Story), **'Kadu Kudure'** (Forest Horse), **'Harakeya Kuri'** (Scapegoat), **'Samba Shiva Prahasana'**, **'Siri Sampige'**, **'Huliya Neralu'** (Shadow of a Tiger). These are all distinguished dramas of Kannada theatre. The use of folk techniques, folk music and folk language have made his dramas popular.

The significant departure from Shriranga or Kailasam is that of Lankesh. For Lankesh, playwriting was an extension of his literary pursuits, but interestingly, Lankesh used theatre to vivify the socio cultural milieu of the middle class family that was failing to grapple with the facts of modern urban life. Through **'Kranthi Banthu Kranthi'** (Revolution Came Revolution!), **'Nanna Tangigondu Gandu Kodi'** (Give a Bridegroom to My Sister), and **'Giliyu Panjaradolagilla'** (Parrot is not in the Cage), Lankesh has tried to explain to us that the inadequacies of the individual do not allow us to adjust with the changing social situation. In the labyrinth of the male world, the suffocated woman aspires for liberation and she walks out in **'Nanna Tangigondu Gandu Kodi'**. Even in his play **'Sankranti'**, the historical intercaste marriage is de-contextualized, and folk narratives, so that the characters that appear in the narrative are not only projected as alternative cultural icons, but they are also used as weapons to battle against the dominance of western intellectual paradigms. **'Manteswamy'**, **'Madari Madaiah'** and **'Mahachaitra'** are other important plays of his.

One of the most interesting theatre stories of post-Independence India is that of K.V. Subanna's *Ninasam*. Subanna and his friends formed this amateur group in 1949, fired with the idea of contributing to the making of new India through theatre. Located in their remote village Hegoddu, 350 km from Bangalore, they worked enthusiastically for ten years with the encouragement of the family and the community. Then with the general post-Independence disillusionment that set in throughout the country, *Ninasam* grew apathetic and crumbled.

In the sixties, a literary movement, *Navya*, was born in Bangalore. Sensing an all Karnataka cultural renaissance, *Ninasam* woke up in 1967 and has never closed its eyes since. Over the years, the repertory expanded its activities to include a training center for actors and an itinerant repertory, *Tirugata*, which caters to all nineteen districts of the state. *Ninasam* also has a film society and its own annual film festival.

K. V. Subanna stands for community-specific theatre. In the paper he read at the *Actor at Work* seminar at the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in 1991, he confessed that he was partial to the new literature and realistic plays which confronted social issues, but his associates and the local community preferred company-style plays with a loud gesture language and voice projection. A middle road was found in the selection of plays through confrontation and discussion. Even the politics or the lack thereof of the *Ninasam* repertoire and "also the style of our productions... evolved through

this kind of confrontation, quarrel and resolution or synthesis". Distinguishing between *prekshaka* (audience) and *samjika* (community), he went on the say, "You can speak to an audience, but your intimacies can be shared only with a community through a homogeneity of culture." Given this belief, he finds concepts like pan-Indian, national, international and cross-cultural extremely naïve.

Indian theatre today is as richly varied as its languages and its terrain. What is common to all the theatres described here is their perpetual struggle to survive. Theatre practitioners like to console themselves with the thought that always being on the edge is what theatre is all about. Yet, a wider patronage would do Indian theatre no harm.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

There were many kinds of plays from the 1920s till date. There were Sanskrit plays translated in to many Indian languages. During 1930s the socio-political plays gained popularity. After independence, theater activities focused on national identity, Indian myths, folktales, rituals, history and motifs from popular culture occupied an important place in theatre. What we have outlined above are theatre activities in some major languages like Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, Manipuri.

The foregoing discussion is not meant to be exhaustive.

But I hope the outline of major trends in post-independence theatre and the work of some important theatre personalities has given you some idea of the rich variety and vitality of theatre activities in Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, Manipuri, Kannada, Hindi and English in major centers in the country. The quest for a true authentic Indianness is on. I am sure you are now ready to take on Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*.

1.10 QUESTIONS

1. Write down some of the important milestones of the contemporary Indian theatre.
2. Assess the contributions of the Bengali playwrights to the growth of Indian theatre.
3. How was the theatre in Kerala and Manipuri different from other states?
4. Examine the major challenges that contemporary Indian theatre is facing.
5. Write a note on the contribution of Chandrasekhar Kambar to Kannada theatre.

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Deshpande, G.P., ed. *Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology*.New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. Contains a 10-page introduction by the editor. [includes *Listen Janameyjaya* by Sriranga, *The Vultures* by Vijay Tendulkar, *One Day in Ashadha* by Mohan Rakesh, *Evam Indrajit* by

Badal Sircar, *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad, *The Lone Tusker* by K.N.Panikkar, *Siri Sampige* by Chandrasekhar Kambar, *From Sunset to Sunrise* by Surendra Verma, *Aurangzeb* by Indira Parthasarathy, *Mahapoor* by Satish Alekar, *Mareech, the Legend* by Arun Mukheerje, *Hunting the Sun* by Utpal Dutt, *Whirlpool* by Datta Bhagat, *Mother of 1084* by Mahasweta Devi, and *Roads* by Govind Purushottam Deshpande.]

Tendulkar, Vijay. *Five Plays: Kamala, Silence! The Court is in Session, Sakharam Binder, The Vultures, Encounter in Umbugland*. New Delhi: Oxford, 1992; Oxford India Paperbacks 1995; rpt. 1998. Contains a 13-page introduction by Arundhati Banerjee.

Dharwadker, Aparna Bhargava. *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, Urban Performance in India since 1947*. New Delhi: Oxford, 2005. [This is an indispensable book on post-independence Indian drama]

UNIT 2 INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR AND THE PLAY

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Girish Karnad and his Works
  2.1.1 Girish Karnad: Important Dates
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall introduce you to Girish Karnad and his plays, discuss possible approaches to a play. We shall then converge on the prescribed text, *Tughlaq*, providing you with a scene by scene commentary for your detailed study and comprehension.

2.1 GIRISH KARNAD AND HIS WORKS

2.1.1 Girish Karnad: Important dates

1938: Born on 19th May at Matheran in the Konkani region of Maharashtra.

1958: Graduation from Karnatak University, Dharwad.

1961:	*Yayati*
1963:	Rhodes scholar at Oxford.
1963:	*Ma Nishad*
1964:	*Tughlaq*
1963-1970:	Assistant Manager, Oxford Univ Press and then Manager; resigned to devote himself full time to writing and film making.
1970-72:	Homi Bhabha Fellowship for Creative Work on Folklore
1970:	President's Gold Medal for the Best Film for *Samskara*
1971:	*Hayavadana* (Kannada); Eng trans.1973
1974-75:	Director, Film and Television Institute of India
1974:	Padma Shri
1976-78:	President, Karnataka Natak Akademi.
1977:	*Anjumallige*. Director, Nehru Centre, the cultural wing of the High Commission for India.
1987-88:	Fullbright Playwright in Residence and Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago.
1988:	*Naga-manadala*
1988-93:	Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi
1992:	Padma Bhushan
1990:	*Tale-danda*
1993:	The Guthrie Theatre of Minneapolis presented his *Nagamandala* for its 30th Anniversary Celebrations and commissioned *The Fire and the Rain* for the next year.
1994:	*Agni mattu male* Padma Bhushan.
1999:	Bharatiya Jnanpith Award.
2000:	*Tippu Sultan kanda kanasu*

2.1.2 List of Plays

Here is a list of plays by Girish Karnad. The language in which they were written and the date of translation in English is indicated in the brackets.

1961:	*Yayati* (Kannada). Remains untranslated into English
1964:	*Tughlaq* (Kannada) Eng. trans.
1971:	*Hayavadana* [Horse Head] (Kannada); Eng. trans.1973.
1977:	*Anjumallige* [Driven Snow] (Kannada)
1980:	*Hittina hunja* [Dough Rooster] (Kannada]
1988:	*Naga-mandala* [Play with a Cobra] (Kannada). Eng. trans. 1988
1990:	*Tale-danda* [Death by Decapitation] (Kannada); Eng. trans. 1993
1994:	*Agni mattu male* (The Fire and the Rain) (Kannada); Eng. trans. 1998.
2000:	*Tippu Sultan kanda kanasu* [The Dreams of Tippu Sultan] (Kannada) Produced by the BBC during the Fiftieth Anniversary of Indian Independence.
2002:	*Bali: The Sacrifice* (Kannada) Commissioned and first produced by 2002 Haymarket Theatre, Leicester, UK. Published in English with *The Dreams of Tippu Sultan*, 2004.
2005	*Odakalu Bimba* (Kannada) (*Broken Images*) (English) 2005.
2005:	*The Flowers* (Kannada, English and Hindi)

(The names in Kannada and in translation and dates to be checked by Dr Billi Male.)

2.1.3 Notes on the Plays

i. Yayati

Karnad's first play, *Yayati* (1961), was originally written in the Kannada language. This play was published in the sixties when the Navya (Modernist) movement was at its peak in Karnataka. Poetry and short story were the two genres that were affected by it most. Gopala Krishna Adiga taught poetry to sing in new rhythms and the interpretation of this poetry was a challenge to the intellectuals. For the first time, the Kannada poets discovered that new thoughts demand a new kind of idiom for their expression. The modernity for Kannada poets means a new way of thinking rather than the prevalence of a new sensibility. It is not surprising that drama for a time being was not affected by the new movement, perhaps because dramatic language has to be more communicative than that of poetry. We do not know whether Karnad, who was one of the youngest writers of that time, had consciously realized it or not. His first play Yayati, like the plays of Jean-Paul-Sartre, has a conventional form it closely resembles the form of popular drama in Marathi, but new in its import.

Yayati re-tells the myth of Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, in modern terms. The ancestors of the Pandavas like Pururava, Nahusha, Yayati or Dushyanta enact the myth of immortality in its various aspects. Yayati's is a more interesting experiment. He falls in love with Devayani, the daughter of a Brahmin and also her friend, Sharmishtha, the daughter of demon king Virupaksha. Yayati's marriage with Devayani is fatal because it honours the humiliating conditions of Devayani that Sharmishtha should be her servant. But Yayati, who loves both, gets children by both of them. Devayani who is angered by her husband's betrayal, complains to her father, who curses Yayati that he should suffer old age. Yayati exchanges his old age with his son's youth and continues to enjoy life for a long time. Puru is the ideal son who is ready to sacrifice his precious youth for the sake of his father. Yayati borrows his son's youth with an unconscious desire to imitate gods, because gods are both immortal and ageless. Yayati's lust or Puru's sacrifice seems to have been born out of the system of the values of the epic poetry.

Karnad's play protests against this symbolic value system. The protest is voiced through Puru, who is the protagonist of the play. He returns victorious from a swayamvara along with his wife Chitralekha. But he is critical of the whole setup of chivalrous culture. He had won the bride not because he was valiant and heroic but because he was the son of Yayati. Puru in this play is not a man of action but is withdrawn and meditative. He accepts his father's old age not with a sense of sacrifice but because he is psychologically and prematurely old. Puru is sick of the palace life, its pomp and glory. He is still groping in the dark for the meaning of life. He is sick of the felicity of life, but has not perceived any truth beyond it.

In the original epic Mahabharata, Yayati takes thousand of years of to return youth to Puru. But in Karnad's play he returns it soon and the realizations are like a flash of lightning. In the epic, Puru is still a bachelor, while in the play he is married. But Puru who has lost his youth cannot love his wife. It is his wife, Chitralekha who challenges Yayati, questioning the morality of the exchange of youth and age. She also insists that the father who has borrowed the son's youth, should also take her as his wife. The rational of her arguments

morally unnerve Yayati and the moral implications of his new relation terrifies him. Karnad's play goes a step further towards Chitralekha's death. This end makes the exchange of youth and age and the realization and everything that precedes it absurd and meaningless. The main strength of this play is in characterization. The mythical characters that are archetypal have become fully individualized in the play.

ii. *Ma Nishad*

Ma Nishad (1963) is a one-act radio drama in which Karnad depicts the importance of the ordinary man for the hero Rama in the Ramayana.

iii. *Hayavadana*

Girish Karnad's third play *Hayavadana* deals with the problem of human identity. Karnad has borrowed the theme for this play from an old collection of stories — *Vetala Panchavimshati*. Critics pointed out that Karnad has received this plot through Thomas Mann. The original story in Sanskrit is a comic one, in which the riddle is more important than the plot. But it has become all the more comic in the mock-heroic style of Thomas Mann. Mann's story gently ridicules the mechanical notion of the real distinction between the body and the spirit. For Mann the organic unity of the body and soul seems to have been manoeuvered by nature for the realization of human destiny. Nanda and Shridamana who's heads are transposed in a comic accident and thus their destinies are also changed. But the situation remains the same even after the transposition of the heads. The transformed young men do not change in nature and the story becomes as Mann comically puts it, "another example to describe the gruesome guiles of Maya". The only transformation that takes place in the story, is that the two protagonists suddenly become antagonists for the sake of Sita, a beautiful damsel of 'broad hips'.

Karnad has, more or less, taken the same theme and has added a sub-plot of a 'horse-man' who in search of completeness becomes a horse at the end. The main story of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, works out the problem of human identity through fascinating details. The two inseparables, Devadatta and Kapila, are still in the process of individuation. These friends are already antagonists in the making, in the sense, that each is complemented by the other, and also they oppose one another. They are bound by mutual love and live like one individual in two physical frames. The problem of identity does not bother them as long as they are friends. But Devadatta falls in love with Padmini and marries her, and from this moment the relationships get complicated. Padmini is devoted to her husband but she is also attracted by the excellent masculine form of Kapila. Fortunately, the plot does not end up in the situation of a 'love-triangle', nor does it get a tragic twist by the theme of a jealous husband. The characters of this play live in a world different from ours, the difference being not historical but only spiritual. The hysterical suicide which Devadatta commits, believing it to be a sacrifice to Goddess Kali, is as comic as the erroneous transposition of heads done by Padmini.

In the original story, there is a riddle, which contains an ethical question. Whom should Padmini accept as her husband? Should she accept the person who has the head of Devadatta or the head of Kapila? The solution to this problem is given by a sage: the identity of human beings is established by the

head, which is the holiest part of the human body. Thomas Mann retains this situation for the purpose of ridiculing it. This situation is not there in *Hayavadana*, because it is not relevant here. Karnad treats the problem of man's identity as an intellectual and a spiritual problem. Padmini, in order to get the complete satisfaction of love has to love two persons. Only for a brief period she lives in perfect happiness with one Devadatta, who has the head of Devadatta and the body of Kapila. But she soon realizes that perfection is only an illusion because the very organic unity of body and soul brings about the change in Kapila's body. Karnad for the first time used a number of theatrical images in his drama. These images do not develop into symbols, at best they are ideational equivalents. But they are powerful enough to create a world of their own for the manifestation of the plot. The play is filled with half formed beings, right from the elephant-god which the play invokes, to a man with the head of a horse. Dolls speak the comment like human beings, while the son of Padmini rarely opens his mouth to speak. The yawning goddess careless creates and recreates the world, allows the heads to be transposed and transforms the horse-man into a complete horse. The only glory allowed to this kind of life is the lusty but monotonous movement symbolized by the horse and the idiotic rider moving round and round the stage.

What is important about *Hayavadana* as a play is that it doesn't depend solely upon language to convey its significance. In one of his interviews Karnada said, 'language is one of the many factors of drama'. Theatrical images, miming and stage-property also can be used for the purpose for conveying the undertones. The play also uses the conventions and techniques of folk-drama.

iv. Anjumallige

Uses the myth of Yama and Yami in the Rig Veda to explore the problem of incest. The play is located in England. But both the problem and the violence of the play are not convincing. The play doesn't seem to have been very successful.

v. Hittina Hunja

This play is convincing as a dramatic interpretation of Yashodhara Charite of Janna (1230 AD). But the claustrophobic setting of the play doesn't allow the freedom of the narrative and becomes a bundle of arguments echoing and reechoing in a Jaina temple.

vi. Naga-mandala

Naga-mandala is based on two folktales Karnad heard from A.K.Ramanujan. A playwright is cursed to stay awake all night in the temple and as he attempts to do so, he meets the spirit of a story who has slipped out of an old woman's mouth as she snored. The story is that of a young bride who is neglected by her indifferent husband and attempts to win his affection with a love potion; instead, she enchants a king Cobra who begins to meet her every night while her husband is away.

vii. Tale-danda (Death by Decapitation)

"*Tale-danda*" literally means, "Head Price/Tax". Though not on the scale of *Tughlaq*, *Tale-danda* is based on a theme which is very relevant to present day Indian caste-based and communal politics. The play is set in the 13-14th

century Karnataka, where the political situation is in a state of turmoil. The plot relates to the saint-poet-philosopher-minister, Basvanna, his life and times. *Tale-danda* keeps in tradition with Karnad's selection of plots — from popular Indian folklore as in *Nagamandala*, mythology, as in *Yayati* and *Agni mattu male* (The Fire and the Rain) or socio-political themes as in *Tughlaq* and the present play. In essence, *Tale-danda* captures the entire history, especially the later part of Basvanna's life in a play, which is something remarkable, as there are countless books and theses written on Basvanna. Specifically, *Tale-danda* depicts the struggle of one man for social reformation — this is just the surface. A deeper look into the play provides immense food for thought, what with tales interwoven into the play, and how the destiny of a society is swayed by the whims of a few. *Tale-danda* brings out the intricate complexities of a social order prevailing during that period, when the caste system was at its rigid worst. The best part of *Tale-danda* is its pre-climax (which incidentally is powerful in all Karnad's plays) when the protagonist faces a moral dilemma. Karnad has pictured it with depth, that each reading furnishes new meanings, and new possibilities.

viii. Agni mattu male (The Fire and the Rain)

Karnad bases his *Agni mattu male* [The Fire and the Rain] (1994) on the little known story of Yavakri from the Mahabharat of a seven-year-long fire sacrifice It is an obscure story which a certain sage narrates to the Pandavas, and to a lay reader, passes off as insignificant. What Girish Karnad has done, however, is to transform it into a masterful piece of drama by depicting conflicting human emotions through the characters. It is an excellent combination of the elements — human, metaphysical and supernatural that constitutes the core of the play. Karnad successfully makes use of the divine element — especially in the climax where the hero holds a conversation with the Gods, and the final result of the rain pouring on a drought-ridden land. The play also focuses both on the negative and positive human emotions — jealousy, betrayal, deceit, as well as selfless love (evidenced by the hero and the heroine, Nittile) and sacrifice. The hero, like most of Karnad's heroes, is a man torn between moral righteousness, love and duty. It is interesting to trace this path of the hero to its fitting end. Karnad has stated that "the play lived in my mind for 37 years" before assuming its present form. It is a splendid culmination of his creative intelligence.

Ram Gopal Bajaj, formerly Director of NSD once remarked that after Tagore's *Muktadhara*, and Dharm Vir Bharati's *Andha Yug*, Karnad's play *Agni mattu male* deserved a place among the international masterpieces of our country.

The play was adapted and filmed by Arjun Sajnani with Jackie Shroff and Raveena Tandon and Amitabh Bachchan under the name Agni Varsha.

ix. Tippuvina Kanasugalu (The Dreams of Tippu Sultan)

This play is based on the Mysore King, Tippu Sultan, who died in a war with the British army in 1799. This play is about the early days of colonialism. It explains how colonization began. Tippu Sultan, a king who ruled Mysore state from Shrirangapattana, engaged himself in importing new technologies and technicians from foreign countries. He wanted to establish friendly relations

with his neighbours. On the other hand, the British wanted to win the war in order to overcome their humiliations, or to increase their wealth. The play portrays Tippu as a noble king interested in the welfare of his subjects, whereas the British are depicted as treacherous and cunning.

x. Bali: The Sacrifice

The play was commissioned and first produced by 2002 Haymarket Theatre, Leicester, U.K. It is based on an ancient Jain myth in which a king is horrified to discover that his queen has an affair with an elephant-keeper. To avert the evil consequences of the adultery, he is to sacrifice a cockerel to the gods but being a Jain, he cannot bring himself to do so and he sacrifices a bird made of dough. The play is concerned with the morality of substitution.

xi. The Flowers

The play is a dramatic monologue and is a triangular tale of loyalty and lust. It uses the famous legend of the priest Veeranna of the Chitradurga region, who is involved in an extramarital relationship with a courtesan. The flowers of the title are the flowers with which the priest decorates the Shivalinga before the young Chieftain comes to the temple and later the naked body of Chandravati, the courtesan. He is torn between his love for God and erotic love, between his wife and unlawful mistress, between his duty to the king and his duty to his wife.

xii. Odakalu Bimba Broken Images

Like *The Flowers, Broken Images* is a dramatic monologue. Moving away from myth and folktales and history, Girish Karnad breaks new ground by dealing with contemporary issues like the politics of language and how images constantly thrown at us by the modern electronic age affect human relationships. The play concerns a struggling Kannada short story writer who for once writes in English and her work becomes a bestseller. The inner tension is dramatized when her mirror image shown on the television screen on the stage starts questioning the successful writer. The play in Hindi translation was presented on 7 March 2008 at the Ramayani auditorium and was very well received. (The Hindu, Metroplus, 2, Saturday, March 8, 2008)

Karnad has been a playwright for the last forty years and is growing as an artist and, one hopes, he will produce yet another masterpiece in line with *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*. In both these plays he has created a drama verging on the theatre of the absurd by fusing comedy and tragedy. Apparently Karnad is not at home in realistic drama and the reason, perhaps, is that he feels that realistic drama cannot express fully what the playwright feels about life deeply.

2.1.4 Girish Karnad's Films

Girish Karnad won the Presidents' Gold Medal for the best feature film *Samskara* in 1970. His directorial debut was with *Vamsha Vriksha*, along with B V Karanth and he later moved to Hindi films to work with Syam Benegal for his films *Nishant, Manthan* and *Kalyug*. His award winning film *Kaadu* (The Forest, 1973) is a violent rural drama about rivalry between two villages as seen through the eyes of a young boy, Kitti. The boy, who is staying with his uncle Chandre Gowda and aunt Kamali, notices his uncle's

secret visit to his mistress in the next village. This affair escalates into a larger confrontation between Chandra Gowda and his rival Shivaganga, which eventually leads to violence, the death of aunt Kamali and the arrival of the police. The boy cannot distinguish the specifically man-made violence that surrounds him from the more primeval threats presented by the dense forest which, according to legend, contains a killer bird that calls out its victims by name. In a fantasy ending, the boy imagines the bird calling him and he follows the call, ignoring the frantic voices of his parents who want to take him home. Another award winning film of his *Cheluvi*, (The Flowering Tree, 1992) is based on a Karnataka folktale. A young woman, Cheluvi, living in abject poverty with her mother and sister, can turn herself into a tree yielding an endless supply of blossoms as long as they are picked very carefully. Kumar, the son of the village headman, seduced by the scent of the flowers, marries Cheluvi and they enjoy her flowering in strict privacy. During Kumar's absence, the headman's younger daughter Shyama forces Cheluvi to disclose her secret. Unable to comprehend the delicacy and beauty of the event, the children destroy the tree, leaving Cheluvi's body a mutilated tree-stump. *Ondanondu Kaladalli* (1978), *Utsav* (1984), and *Kanuru Heggadathi* are his other award winning films.

Awards

Some of the many important awards won by Girish Karnad are as under:

i. Sangeet Natak Akademi award for playwriting (1972)
ii. Bhartiya Natya Sangh award for *Hayavadana* (1972)
iii. Padma Sri (1974)
iv. Padma Bhushan (1992)
v. Sahitya Akademi award for *Tale-danda* (1994)
vi. President's Gold Medal for film *Samskara* (1970)
vii. Jnanpith Award (1999) for achievement in Indian drama.

2.1.5 Girish Karnad as a Playwright

A multi-faceted personality

Girish Karnad is a multi-faceted personality. He is among the top three contemporary Indian playwrights, the other two being Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar. But among contemporary Indian playwrights Girish Karnad has had what Aparna Dharwadker says 'the strongest life outside the theatre, in films and television'. He has been a fine actor, has written and also directed several films and television serials in Kannada and Hindi. He has been a cultural administrator too — having been the head of the Nehru Cultural Centre, Indian High Commission in London, among other assignments. However, he has repeatedly said that he has done films to make money and that his primary love has always been theatre. When asked what worried him about the new situation of theatre in India, Karnad said: 'What worries me really is that there is no theatre — a theatre that may sustain a playwright and save him from drudging in films, bad serials, or whatever to keep his body and soul together'. ('I am trying to create my own tradition'. Interview with Girish Karnad by Chaman Ahuja HYPERLINK "http://www.tribuneindia.com" March 21, 1999.) In an earlier interview, he pointed out that one couldn't earn a comfortable living even from a successful play. *Tughlaq* has been

enormously successful, both critically and in performance. 'Playwrights in the West have been able to retire on such successes or at least, to devote themselves to that activity entirely. I can't, and that irritates me'. Interview with Aparna Dharwadker, Jul 1993; published *New Theatre Quarterly*, Nov 1995).

Karnad's love of theatre goes back to his childhood days when he saw plays in his small town of Sirsi, staged by strolling groups of players called Natak mandalies or Natak companies. He was lucky to have parents who were addicted to these plays. He also sat up with servants at nights watching the more traditional Yakshagana theatre. The love for theatre apparently stuck and has continued till this day.

At sixty Karnad said: 'I've had a good life. I have managed to do all I could wish for even be a government servant. Now I feel whatever time I have left should be spent doing what I like best writing plays. ('Girish Karnad' www.imagination.com) (italics added) His writing continues unabated. Two dramatic monologues of his — *The Flowers* and *Broken Images* appeared in 2005.

As a very young man, Karnad wanted to be a poet in English and be like Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot but when he was about twenty-one or so he realized that he would never be one. He did achieve international fame not for writing poetry but plays — and in Kannada.

In his introduction to *Three Plays* (1994; 2004) Karnad refers to the shattering experience of seeing Strindberg's *Miss Julie* directed by Ebrahim Alkazi when he came to Bombay for studies. Nothing, he says, had prepared him for 'the power and violence' of seeing 'the inner recesses of the human psyche' laid bare on the stage. Also, instead of the usual torches or petromax lamps lighting the stage, he saw new technology in the form of dimmers 'that could gently fade the light in or out'. These two things together, he says, 'defined a stage that was nothing we had known or suspected. I have often wondered whether it wasn't that evening that, without being actually aware of it, I decided I wanted to be a playwright (2).

Choice of language

Karnad's mother tongue is Konkani but he grew up speaking Kannada. And he has written almost all his plays, except the play *Dreams of Tippu Sultan* in Kannada. This play was commissioned by the BBC and was written in English. *Broken Images* which he himself directed at Bangalore was written in both Kannada and English. Except for *Yayati* (1961), he has translated all his plays into English himself. His plays have been available in other languages also. All this has ensured an all India audience for Karnad's plays.

On Translations

Translations, says Karnad, are always welcome: 'The world has thousands of languages and translation is inevitable and essential. There are some very good translations available. Without it, we would not know so many Greek and Sanskrit stories'. ('Karnad's images for the new age'. www.hindustantimes.com He himself translated *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar.

His play *Broken Images* was done in both Kannada and English and staged in Bangalore simultaneously. This led to interesting results. Arundhati Raja. who played the lead role in one of the versions, said that people who watched the English version would come to watch the Kannada version as well and vice versa. That was just to see how the story was presented in the two languages.

About his experience of translation he says in a note to Naga-mandala: I write in Kannada. English is the language of my adulthood. This translation must therefore be seen only as an approximate to the original (Introduction *Three Plays* 20)'.

Politics of language

Karnad is of course aware of the politics of language, particularly of the politics of English. His concern with it is expressed in his recent play *Broken Images* (2005) which deals with a professor of English who is a writer in a regional language but who produces a bestseller in English.

Use of myth, folktale and history

At one place Girish Karnad facetiously said: 'I cannot invent plots therefore I use myths. I cannot invent stories and hence go to history. (HYPERLINK http://www.expressindia.com, 1999). But jokes apart, it is true that most of his plays are rooted in myth and folktale and history.

For a writer writing in post-Independent India, it is only natural that he should want to view the new nation's concerns and his own concerns in terms of the country's past. When on getting the Rhodes scholarship for study at Oxford he was faced with his personal dilemma between his obligation to his family and his own desire for freedom, he found himself using the old Puranic myth of Yayati and discovered how well the myth reflected his anxieties.

'While I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back, I am amazed at how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at that moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrificed my future. By the time I had finished working on Yayati, the myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally. Whether to return home finally seemed the most minor of issues; the myth had nailed me to my past'. ('Introduction': *Three Plays*: 3) (italics added) The last sentence is important: the past has continued to provide him, as it has done to numerous other authors here and elsewhere in the West, archetypal situations and parallels through which he could articulate contemporary concerns. The first play in post-independent India that used myth to make a contemporary statement and which has become an acknowledged classic was Dharmavir Bharati's *Andha Yug* [The Blind Epoch], written for the radio in 1954. But that was only the beginning. There have been other retrospective representations too. Those of you who are interested in exploring the use of myth in post-independent drama in India could read *Theatres of Independence* (Chapter 6 on Myth, Ambivalence, and Evil) (2005) by Aparna Dharwadker. For details of Karnad's own use of myth and history, you could refer to the notes on individual plays given earlier.

The 'Double' as the central motif

In an interview with Dr Ashok Pai, who is a psychiatrist, Girish Karnad said that it was only when he wrote his third play, that he realized that certain themes recurred in his plays or that 'certain themes seemed to stimulate me themes with the 'Double' as the central motif'. He said he had read Freud, Jung and Adler but that his 'fascination with the complexities of the human psyche comes from the Mahabharata and my study of Dostoevsky'. Karnad's preoccupation with the essential incompleteness of human beings and with the duality of human personality is patent. This duality can be seen in Tughlaq also. (Indian Psychiatric Society Karnatak State Branch Newsletter, May 2005, 4-5)

Girish Karnad's achievement

Girish Karnad's great achievement lies in re-interpreting the country's past, both its myth and folktales and history, to comment on matters of contemporary interest and also offer insights on human condition in general.

When asked what his legacy would be, he saw a legacy of his generation: 'I am happy to belong to a generation that had a Dharma Vir Bharati, a Mohan Rakesh, a Vijay Tendulkar, and I. Together we can claim that we did create a national theatre for modern India'. (*India Today*: 12 April, 1999)

2.2 HOW *TUGHLAQ* CAME TO BE WRITTEN?

The play owes its origin to the words of the noted Kannada critic Kirtinath Kurtkoti in his book *Nadedu Banda Dari* (1959) in which he said that Kannada had produced no good historical plays, none that was in any sense significant' (*Enact*: 54: 1971). Girish Karnad was at that time, i.e. in the early sixties, studying at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes scholar and he accepted the challenge. He set about reading up pre-modern Indian history for a possible subject and zeroed in on the fascinating figure of Muhammad Tughlaq who has been described as 'the wisest fool'. 'This is marvelous, I thought' and he read through all the historiographical materials available at Oxford. His sources included Ziauddin Barani's Tarikh-I-Ferozeshahi. Barani himself appears in the Girish Karnad's play. In an interview in *Enact* in 1971, He said: 'What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. The fact was that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come to the throne of Delhi...and one of the greatest failures also'.

The reference to failure is important because as Karnad said, 'though contemporaneity and all that is fine, one picks on a theme because somewhere it hits one. And I think basically, as a person, I am very much afraid of failure; and this particular point in Tughlaq, of a person struggling against failure and failing more, somewhere must have found an immediate echo in me'.

As for influences on him, he listed the following: Anouilh's Becket, Camus's Caligula, Shakespeare. He also listed Ivan the Terrible, the Eipstein film.

The text of *Tuglaq* used in this Study Material is included in *Three Plays : Naga-mandala Hayavadano Tughlaq* 1995; Sep. 2004 New Delhi: OUP, 141 – 221).

2.3 APPROACHING THE PLAY

Creative Reading

Drama, unlike poetry and novel, is a collaborative art and the words on the page spring to life fully only on the stage. From the simplest to the most profound speech, every utterance achieves its complete meaning when it is skillfully uttered in front of an audience.

As students learning through the distance mode, you have to try to bring your experience of reading the text as close as possible to the experience of a person watching the play on the stage. If you get an opportunity to watch a real performance, there is nothing like it. But if that is not possible, you could try collaborative reading and if that also is not possible, you could make a solo effort and read aloud. Even reading the lines by yourself as you think Muhammad, or Najib or Barani would speak them would help. This would help you to convert words into living images. The aim of all your effort is to get at the heart of the play. Once that becomes clear, all other elements can be related to this central point.

Three Questions to ask

In his essay entitled 'On Reading Modern Plays', Anthony Caputi says that every playwright writing a play makes three distinct kinds of artistic decisions. First is the choice of the subject matter. Why does a writer select one particular subject and not another? What is it about the story, its characters and the interaction between them that suits the purpose of the writer? In this case we could ask: Why Tughlaq? Capute has called such decisions *substantial decisions* — decisions about the substance of the play.

Next come what he calls *representational decisions*. What is it that writer decides to represent on the stage and why? Similarly what are those elements which he decides merely to report and why? This question could be asked about the first scene of Tughlaq. For instance, the Sultan, we are told, has made several announcements but why does he show only the announcement relating to the decision against the Sultan himself in favour of a Brahmin and not others? Such decisions would determine 'what was to be represented, in what order the various events were to be represented, and in what scale and proportion they were to be represented. Answers to these questions would determine the ultimate shape of the play.

Finally, a writer has to make what are called *focusing decisions*. After the subject matter has been chosen and after decisions have been taken about the basic shape of the play, 'there is a host of more limited decisions that sharpen particular qualities, highlight particular issues, embolden particular elements, in other words, that focus the action and its peculiar power'. (ed. *Modern Drama*.1966, xiii)

These questions could help you reach the heart of the play. You could start by asking these questions about this play.

Writing a History Play

One question to ask about this play is: Why do dramatists write a history play? What is their motive? Do they write it to celebrate a historical personage and his achievements or the achievements of an age? Shakespeare's Henry V could be cited as an example of this. Is our play celebratory in intent? Or do they write a history play to make sense of the past that seems relevant to our concerns in the present? If that is so, what are those concerns and in what way does this play illuminate the present times? Girish Karnad himself found Tughlaq to be a fascinating figure for being 'the most idealistic' and 'the most intelligent' king of Delhi and also 'one of the greatest failures'. We shall discuss the whole question later in the study material. Meanwhile keep these questions in mind as you read the play. And do keep notes as you go along.

2.4 DETAILED COMMENTARIES ON THE PLAY

[Part One]
SCENE ONE

Popular response to the new king's idealistic, innovative, secular policies; shadow of dissent and misuse.

The first scene introduces us to a conversation among ordinary citizens of Delhi about the new king's idealistic, innovative, secular policies after one of the many royal announcements made. The time is A.D.1327 and the place is the yard in front of the Chief Court of Justice in Delhi.

While there is support for the king, especially among the young, there is also dismay at some of his secular ideas. His policy of compulsory prayers five times a day is generally welcomed. But his decision not to charge jiziya from the Hindus, his decision to ensure impartial justice with a human face to all (of which we see a practical example) and his idea of transfer the capital to Daultabad on strategic grounds of its central location and on grounds of its being a Hindu city puzzles and even bewilders the Muslim populace.

After the announcement of the acceptance of the suit against the king and an award of five hundred dinars and a job as compensation, the king himself appears and talks of his ideal of moving towards greater justice, equality, progress and a more purposeful life. His idea of shifting his capital to Daulatabad was, among other things, meant to strengthen the bonds between Muslims and Hindus.

The death of Sultan's father and brother, already a subject of public discussion with Sheikh Imam-ud-din openly accusing the king of murdering them at Kanpur a week back, is talked about. A certain likeness of gestures or mannerisms between the Sheikh and the king is also referred to.

Already chinks could be seen in the well-intentioned policies. Near the end we discover that the Brahmin who has won his suit against the Sultan is Aziz, a Muslim dhobi from Shiknar. He had bought the land that had been confiscated from a brahmin and predating his contract had filed a suit against

confiscation. Aziz asks his friend Aazam, who is a smalltime pick-pocket, to join him in all his moneymaking plans right up to Daulatabad, a suggestion to which the later agrees.

It is good first scene: tightly constructed and economical and while it puts us in possession of essential details of the past it also prepares us for the drama that is to follow. Most of the major characters are either introduced or referred to. The opposition to the policies of the king anticipates the much greater unpopularity that follows later on. We have a glimpse of reported criticism of the king by Sheikh Imam-ud-din, which prepares us for the conspiracy against the Sultan later.

Exercises/Questions

Make a list of incidents/episodes that are reported and not represented before us.

1. In what sense can we call the scene economical?
2. Pick out the sentences that suggest that the Sultan was idealistic.
3. Why does the Sultan want to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad?
4. The use of the prayer motif in the play seems important. Prayers have been compulsory and yet the Sultan is accused of murdering his father and brother while they were praying. Doesn't this remind you of Hamlet?
4. Is there any element of performance in the first scene?
5. What does the presence of two thieves Aziz and Aazam in the play suggest to us?

SCENE TWO

The Sultan's discusses the twin issue of the invasion of Ain-ul-Mulk and the disaffection of Sheikh Imam-ud-din with advisers; a clever move is hinted at.

In contrast to the previous scene, Scene Two is set in a room in the palace. The focus here is the danger posed by Ain-ul-mulk's marching to Delhi and by the open criticism of the Sultan by Sheikh Imam-ud-din, referred to in Scene One.

The Sultan is elated at having solved the most famous problem of chess. When his stepmother suggests that he had better write to Ain-ul-Mulk about this, he tells her that Ain-ul-Mulk, his childhood friend and fellow champion of chess is marching towards Delhi. However the Sultan doesn't seem overly worried about it. On the contrary when the stepmother says she is worried about his keeping later hours, his reply shows him to be a visionary – he makes a theatrical speech in which he imagines himself climbing to the tallest tree and asking his people to confide their worries in him and share their joys with him. He in fact proposes a complete merger of their bodies and his. But one life is too short for this momentous task. So he says he can't waste time in sleeping.

In the course of the conversation he discovers that his stepmother too suspects that he had murdered his father and brother. He obviously doesn't like it.

Vizier Muhammad Najib and historian Ziauddin Barani are announced. Najib informs the Sultan that he has been able to collect more than six thousand soldiers—he doesn't say against whom. He also informs him that Sheikh Imam-ud-din is in Delhi and that he is openly critical of the Sultan as being incompetent and that he has become a backbone of the rebels, adding that Barani could give him more information about the Sheikh. But he clearly wants the Sheikh eliminated.

Barani is shocked at being spied upon but he admits hearing the Sheikh and that the Sheikh thinks the Sultan to be a disgrace to Islam and also that he had murdered his father and brother. Barani tries ineffectually to defend the Sheikh, saying that the Sultan must ignore these little things. The Sultan however is aghast at the accusation of murder and at the crooked minds of his accusers.

The discussion about Sheikh Imam-ud-din brings out the difference between Najib and Barani. Realistic and ruthless, Najib correctly assesses the danger the Sheikh poses to the Sultan and wants him to be eliminated. The Sultan himself is against any action against him. And Barani, honest and generous, agrees with him saying that the people will respond to the Sultan's courage, honesty and justice. But no one pays any heed to it.

Finally, Najib darkly hints at the resemblance between the Sheikh and the Sultan and the Sultan apparently gets his message. The moment is significant. The Sultan just stares at Najib and later says: 'You are a devil, Najib'. Barani looks on uncomprehendingly. The mind of the two prime movers has been made for the Sultan wants their army to leave for Kanauj the day after the following day. Here we can have a glimpse of the politicking at the highest level, the ruthlessness with which decisions are made and the inability of a mere academician to understand the goings on in the power play.

Do we notice a decline in the Sultan's idealism or do we get to discover another side to his complex personality? Read the play and make up your mind. There is obviously a ruthless side to his character. The exact plan will uncover itself later. But the Sultan's sentence — You are a devil, Najib. — implies his tacit approval of Najib's clever move that kills two birds with one stone. In this way the Sultan will checkmate the danger posed by his childhood friend and fellow chess champion and solve the problem of the Sheikh's dissent. The writer's use of the motif of chess is clear.

An important fact comes to light here. The Stepmother doesn't like the influence of Najib. He will look after the administration of the kingdom during the Sultan's absence. Additionally he has asked Shihab-ud-din, the Prince of Sampamshahr, to be in Delhi to look after the affairs of the state. The true significance of the arrival of Shiahab-ud-din will become clear later. The Stepmother not only extracts a promise from Barani not to leave the Sultan under any circumstances but also openly suggests the murder of Najib. The Sultan, Najib, Barani , the Stepmother — everyone seems to have his or her own agenda.

Exercises/Questions

1. What is the point of the reference to chess?
2. Why does Muhammad express his visionary ideas theatrically?
3. Choose adjectives that can be used to characterize the Sultan, Najib, Barani and the Sultan's Stepmother.

4. Why doesn't she want the Sultan to call her stepmother? What is the nature of the relationship between the two?
5. In what way does the scene prepare us for the coming action?
6. Which two motifs have been made use of in this play so far?

SCENE THREE

The public meeting fixed for Sheikh Imam-ud-din fails. The Sultan vocalizes his vision of unifying all his people on a basis broader than Koran. The Sheikh agrees to go and persuade Ain-ul-Mulk to desist from invasion.

Preceding the third scene is an announcement on behalf of the Sultan calling people of Delhi to attend a public meeting where Sheikh Imam-ud-din will analyse the administration of the Sultan. The Sultan will himself be present at the meeting. But no one turns up. The reason will become clear as you read the scene.

This scene must be among the most tense scenes in the play. Two formidable adversaries, Sultan and the Sheikh are face to face. The Sheikh, fearless as ever, says the God has given the Sultan 'power, learning, intelligence, talent' and that he should use it to spread the kingdom of God on earth, following the Islamic injunctions. The Sultan however says that his kingdom has millions of Muslims, Hindus and Jains and that there is dirt and sickness in his kingdom which he, not, God must clean. He refutes the Sheikh's charge that he was trying to be another God. He also talks of his deep admiration for the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. The latter's poetry had opened up vision of a world, which, he says, even Arabs or the Koran could not give him. He frankly refuses to excise the Greek part in him or the visions of Zarathustra and Budha.

If he had put the Saiyyids and the ulemas behind the bars, it was because these religious figures had tried to play politics.

Finally, using the Islamic card, the Sultan is able to persuade him to go to Ain-ul-Mulk as his envoy in the name of Islam and help in bringing peace or else Muslim blood will flow. He presents the Sheikh with the new robes, which bring out his resemblance to the Sultan even more strikingly.

As becomes clear later, the failure of the Sheikh's meeting is engineered by the Sultan. By sponsoring the meeting himself on the one hand and prohibiting them from coming to the meeting the Sultan has successfully cut the Sheikh to size. But his move doesn't end here. By sending him as an envoy to Ain-ul-Mulk he practically ensures that he will get killed. The chess metaphor continues.

The Sultan's view that religion and politics be kept apart from one another is an important element in his convictions as a king. He says that he has never denied the existence of God but he doesn't want religious clerics to interfere in politics.

Exercises/Questions

1. How does the Sultan ensure that Sheikh Imam-ud-din will not turn down his suggestion to go and meet Ain-ul-Mulk as his envoy?

2. How, in the Sultan's view, are religion and politics related?
3. Pick out lines that support the idea that Muhammad is an idealistic ruler.
4. Towards the end of the scene the Sultan tells Sheikh Imam-ud-din that he is 'an incompetent fool' and then offers him the robes ordered for going to Kanauj as an envoy. Why does he call himself 'an incompetent fool'?
5. What are the accusations against the Sultan?
6. Do think this is a powerful scene? Why?

SCENE FOUR

Sheikh Imam-ud-din is mistaken for the Sultan and is killed. Eventually the Sultan wins the battle and forgives Ain-ul-Mulk. A conspiracy against the Sultan is afoot.

The scene opens in the palace with Shihab-ud-din reading a few letters. The Sultan's Stepmother comes in and expresses her satisfaction at the way he has looked after Delhi in the absence of the Sultan.

Shihab-ud-din's adopted brother Ratansingh comes in from the front and tells them the Sultan has come back and that Sheikh Imam-ud-din has been killed.

The Sultan who comes in soon after along with Najib and Barani is very grave at the death of the Sheikh and describes how deeply affected he was when his dead body was brought into his tent. He announces that Delhi will observe the following day as mourning for the Sheikh and that there will be no victory celebrations.

As for Ain-ul-Mulk, the Sultan tells them that he had forgiven him, much to the dismay of both Najib and his Stepmother. He explains that Ain-ul-Mulk took just half a minute to discover a flaw in the problem of chess that he thought he had solved, which pleased the Sultan mightily and he forgave him. He also gave him back his kingdom and promised not to send him to Deccan. This gesture wins the approval of Barani who admires the Sultan for his courage. The Sultan then leaves along with Najib, Barani and his Stepmother.

Left alone with his adopted brother Shihab-ud-din, Ratansingh calls the Sultan an 'honest scoundrel' and shares with him the real story of the engagement with Ain-ul-Mulk and how the Sheikh got killed in the action.

When he saw him at Kanauj, the Sultan wasn't particularly pleased. The following day he found himself posted in the front rank of the platoon, which almost always means certain death. The Sheikh approached Ain-ul-Mulk in full royal splendour sitting on an elephant as an emissary of peace and stopped a hundred yards from the enemy, looking very much like the Sultan. Just then a trumpeter from their own side sounded the charge and the battle was on. The enemy thought that the Sheikh was the Sultan himself and after killing him they tried to chase them. This led to a bloody massacre and an eventual defeat of Ain-ul-Mulk. As for the Sultan himself, he had been hiding behind some hills with the rest of the army.

We need to watch every move made by the Sultan. Do you now see the whole point of sending the rebellious Sheikh who is also a look-alike of the Sultan to Kanauj? The calculations of both Najib and the Sultan prove to be true. The

enemy takes the Sheikh to be the Sultan himself and they kill him and thinking that they have killed him, pursue them, which leads to a terrible massacre and eventual defeat. An astute, clever move that checkmates both Ain-ul-Mulk and the Sheikh.

Before going Ratansingh informs Shihab that the nobles of the court and important citizens of Delhi were holding a secret meeting — we are not told about what — and that he had accepted an invitation to attend it. Ratansingh believes that his adopted brother might also like to join them because the Sultan had tried to kill him off. At this Shihab turns pale.

Exercises/Questions

1. Who calls the Sultan 'an honest scoundrel'? And why? Is that a correct reading of the Sultan's character? How does the Sultan's conduct here square up with his professions of idealism earlier in Scene Three?
2. Ratansingh says: 'A Sultan's scowl is a terrible thing'. What does he mean by it?
3. Why does the Sultan order a day of mourning for Sheikh Imam-ud-din?
4. Why does Shihab-ud-din turn pale at the invitation from his adopted brother to attend a meeting of the rebels?

SCENE FIVE

The conspirators persuade a reluctant Shihab-ud-din to lead the conspiracy and at the suggestion of Ratansingh decide to kill the Sultan while he is praying.

This scene deals with the Amirs and Sayyids trying to persuade Shihab-ud-din to lead the conspiracy. He is an outsider and as such an ideal person to lead the conspirators.

He repeatedly says no and tells them of the good things that the Sultan has done and agrees to throw in his lot with them for public reasons.

The scene lays bare the motives of the conspirators. The Amirs are upset at having to leave Delhi, which is their home and where they are strong. Moreover Daulatabad is a Hindu city and they will be helpless there. Then they are required to pay far too many taxes. As one of them unselfconsciously says, 'You can't even cheat without your having to pay for it'.

Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim, a venerable old man, seems to be the only man from Delhi who is genuinely concerned about the welfare of the people and the growing tyranny of the Sultan's rule. He gives several instances of the Sultan's tyranny including the death of Sheikh Imam-ud-din. In reply Shihab-ud-din says that if the Sultan is responsible for that death, the Amirs and the people of Delhi are no less responsible for it. They were too cowardly to attend the public meeting he was to address. At this the old Sheikh uncovers the Sultan's designs and explains how the Sultan's soldiers had orders to prevent citizens of Delhi from reaching the auditorium. He shows Shihab a wound that he himself had received on his shoulders in trying to go to the

meeting. When Shihab says that the Sultan has done him no harm, he appeals to him not to think of himself but about the people. Ratansingh also joins the others in persuading him.

At this stage Ratansingh unfolds a scheme to murder the Sultan during compulsory prayers. Even the soldiers have to lay down their arms while praying. Ironically, the god-fearing Sheikh who had tried to exhort Shihab for the killing now pleads with him not to agree to the sacrilege. But Shihab can't withdraw now. It is too late. They start working out the details.

Exercises/Questions

1. Does this scene ring a bell in your mind? Doesn't it remind you of a similar scene in Julius Caesar? Conspirators everywhere, it seems, have to look for a leader who has no personal axe to grind.
2. What makes the conspirators choose Shihab-ud-din as a leader?
3. What are the good things that Shihab says about the Sultan?
4. Note the use of the motif of prayer here and at other places in the play.
5. Can you see any hint in the scene that will lead to the failure of the conspiracy?

SCENE SIX

The conspiracy is defeated. The leader, Shihab-ud-din, is ruthlessly stabbed by the Sultan himself.

It is a powerful scene full of tension. Knowing about the conspiracy as we do, we watch the goings-on with bated breath. Barani notices that both the Sultan and Najib are tense and at this stage we suspect that they know about the conspiracy. But though they behave with great self-restraint, the Sultan's impatience and fury come through increasingly as the scene progresses.

The Amirs come in and the Sultan informs them with obvious warmth that a descendent of the Abbasid Khalifs, Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad is coming to India. Shihab-ud-din compliments the king on his 'wisdom' — a word to which the Sultan objects. He says that he has invited him not to 'placate the stupid priests', as he puts it.

The Sultan then asks a question about what lends legitimacy to his kingship, which shows the big hiatus that exists between the Sultan and the conspirators.

Am I a king only because I am the son of a king? Or is it because I can make the people accept my laws and the army move to my commands? Or can self-confidence alone justify it? I ask you — all of you — what would you have me do to become a real king in your eyes? (Silence)

The conspirators have no answer to this and they all keep silent. The Sultan then explains that until he has the answer, he has to continue to rule but that he is not happy. He adds that he is turning to history and tradition to seek an answer and seek the blessings of the Abbasid Khalif.

The Sultan's responses bring out his increasing impatience at the opposition of the people and the Amirs to his policies. When Shihab implores the Sultan not to take the capital to Daulatabad, he says his empire cannot flourish from Delhi as his capital and then adds: 'But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven't even opened their eyes to the light of today'? Later he makes a fervent speech asking the Amirs to trust him and cooperate in the building of new future for India and ends by melodramatically kneeling before them. The

entire scene is meant to discredit the conspirators. To use the metaphor from chess, they are checkmated.

The Sultan's vengeful fury against Shihab-ud-din is well-founded. He had sent for him to assist Najib in administering the state in his absence, which shows that he fully trusted him. He is furious to discover that that very man should betray him. The additional stabs that he gives to Shihab's body after Shihab has died not only show his deep frustration but also his cruelty. When the kind-hearted Barani covers his face with cloth, the Sultan removes it saying that people should see the wounds. Obviously he wants Shihab's death to be an object lesson for all against treachery.

But if the Sultan is furious, he knows how to turn adverse events to his advantage. This is clear from his directions on handling Shihab's treachery. It will be given out that there was a rebellion in the palace and that Shihab had died a martyr's death in trying to save the Sultan.

The conspiracy has another fallout. He now orders that people should start moving to Daulatabad within a fortnight. His statement — Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now — reveals how he is now bent upon implementing his ideas ruthlessly in spite of all opposition.

Exercises/Questions

1. Why does Barani sob at the end of the scene? Account for his behaviour throughout the scene.
2. The exposure of the conspiracy has been deftly handled. There is a similar scene in Henry V. An important item in this respect is the sense of timing. Do you agree?
3. What is your own response to the Sultan's behaviour in this scene?
4. The motifs of prayer and chess are employed most clearly in this scene.

Public Announcement about Shifting to Daulatabad.

The public announcement after the failure of the conspiracy is on expected lines'. When the Sultan had addressed the people in the first scene, he had said: 'This is an invitation, not an order. Only those who have faith in me may come with me'. Now he leaves the citizens of Delhi no choice: 'within the next month every citizen must leave for Daulatabad'. (italics added)

It must however be added that the Sultan says he has taken care of all the needs of the people including their medical needs.

The remaining seven scenes of the play are set either on the way from Delhi to Daulatabad, in the hills or in Daulatabad itself.

[Part Two]

SCENE SEVEN

The scene between Aziz, an officer in the Sultan's employ in the guise of a Brahmin and Aazam gives us an idea of the privations of the people during the transfer of the capital. The introduction of copper currency gives Aziz ideas.

The purpose of the scene is chiefly informative. The tension of the previous scenes is over. The officers entrusted with providing facilities during the

shifting of the capital are corrupt and the poor suffer. With copper currency replacing the silver currency Aziz thinks of making counterfeit coins.

Aziz's comments on the emerging new profession of politics are highly relevant — to these times as they were to the sixties when the play was written. Politics, he says, was full of brainless people but could ensure 'wealth, success, position, power'. Compared to the god-fearing Aazam, Aziz is a hard-boiled villain and will lose no opportunity to make money.

Comments/Questions

1. Read this scene with Scene One when the duo first makes their appearance.
2. Do you agree with Aziz's estimate of politicians?
3. There is a bit of humour too. Can you pick out an example of it?
4. With people like Aziz as officers or as profiteers what do you think are the chances of success of the new measures?

SCENE EIGHT

The Sultan besieged by insurrections is in conversation with Barani and looks for a solution for his harassed kingdom.

The scene is midnight at the fort at Daulatabad five years later in A.D.1332. It opens with a conversation between two sentries in which they talk about the new fort and the road from Delhi to Daulatabad. Also, the old sentry from Delhi reminisces about his family and the losses he suffered on the way.

This preliminary conversation is meant to serve as a prelude to a serious conversation between the sleepless Sultan and Barani. The Sultan is a troubled soul, restless and in need of company, any company. The young sentry reminds him of his own youth years ago and so obsessed is he with his past dreams that he talks about them to the young sentry before Barani comes. He particularly shares with him his memory of a mystical moment one night at the fort (when he was twenty-one) when the torch burning nearby, the half built gate, the fort and the sky all melted and merged and flowed into his blood stream. That moment has gone forever. The Sultan has been trying to recapture that mystical moment but has been unable to do so. When the sentry confesses that he hasn't understood him, he turns away from him in disgust. This conversation underscores the fact of the growing lack of communication of the Sultan with the world.

The Sultan confesses his restlessness to Barani and asks him to prescribe a medicine for what he calls his 'honeycomb of diseases'. Poetry no longer interests him. There are several uprisings one after the other. The new copper currency has turned every Hindu home into a domestic mint. The drought in Doab is spreading from town to town. He can't trust anyone except Ain-ul-Mulk and Shihab's father. Barani tells him that he belongs in the ranks of learned men, not in 'the market of corpses'. The Sultan responds by saying that he is too engrossed in the struggle to withdraw.

The Sultan does some soul-searching. But he doesn't like to admit that he has been in the wrong. Barani emboldened by the Sultan's confidence accuses him of going back on his ideals and of heedlessly indulging in bloodshed. He, however, persists in believing that he has done no wrong and that he has

'something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history but I have to do it within this life'. Apparently this self-belief is what keeps him going.

Just then he receives the news of another calamity — the murder of the loyal Vizier Najib.

Exercises/Questions

1. The Sultan accuses every Hindu home of being a domestic mint. But so far as this play is concerned it is Aziz who is shown to be a criminal in this respect. Knowing him as we do, he must be among the biggest makers of counterfeit currency.
2. Pick out the sentences that present the Sultan as a visionary.
3. The process of alienation of the Sultan from others is on.
4. Who killed Najib? It should be easy for you to identify the killer?
5. How would you describe Barani's relationship with the Sultan? Is he disillusioned with the Sultan?
6. The Sultan has fallen from his ideals and his fall has been steep. Does he still command the sympathy of the audience/readers?
7. How does this scene prepare you for what is to follow?

SCENE NINE

Aziz is another pretender to power. He kills Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid who is on way to Daulatabad and decides to go in his place.

The scene is in a hideout in the hills. It introduces us to an uncommon crook who we have met before and who now aspires to power.

Aziz has obviously given up his disguise of being a Brahmin and instead he and Aazam now rob travellers of their money. But Aziz's sights are set much higher. He is sick of running and hiding. He wants to be able 'to rob a man and then stay there to punish him for getting robbed', as he puts it. He wants power. When Aazam suggests he could be 'a court thief', he is simply delighted.

Soon an opportunity presents itself in the form of Ghiyas-ud-din, a descendent of the Abbasid Kalifs. He is brought before them bound hand and foot by mistake. This gives him the idea that he could go to Daulatabad in his place. Ghiyas-ud-din is remorselessly killed and Aziz dances with joy at the opening palace doors.

Exercises/Questions

1. Do you notice any growth in Aziz's character?
2. What is the point of the scene? Does Aziz's bid for power suggest a parallel to the Sultan's wresting of power after the murder of his father and brother? Is this scene meant to be an ironic contrast to the Sultan's quest for power?
3. Pick out lines that suggest Aziz's love for power.
4. How does he express his joy at the idea of going to Daulatabad in place of the descendent of the Khalif?

SCENE TEN

The Stepmother admits having murdered Najib; is sentenced to be stoned to death. This highly dramatic scene takes place between the Sultan and his Stepmother. with Barani coming in at the end.

The scens shows how the move for a new copper currency has misfired with people having taken to minting copper coins on a large scale. When the Stepmother draws his attention to the cartloads of copper coins outside the palace, he expresses his helplessness saying that they will not go to the treasury but will be heaped up in the new rose garden. This use of the rose garden will mean the death of one of his dreams. His chief worry now is to find out who murdered Najib.

It is an intimate scene in which both the Sultan and the Stepmother uncover their secret selves to each other. At first she tries to worm out whatever information he has about the murderer and adds that it was a good riddance, for in her view he was leading the Sultan 'astray'. Later she confesses that it was she who had killed him saying that 'it was easier than killing one's father and brother' and it was 'better than killing Sheikh Imam-ud-din'. She then explains that she killed Najib because it was he who was driving him to murders (Look at your kingdom now. It's become a kitchen of death — 'all because of him'.)

The Sultan of course cannot believe her and explodes into admitting that he had killed them but had done so for an ideal. But he also confesses to have suffered for those killings. Lately Najib too had been telling him to hold back his sword. But he has not been able to do so. After the killing of Shihab, he seems to have realized that 'not words but the sword — that's all I have to keep my faith in my mission'. His killings, he says, had a purpose — they gave him what he wanted — 'power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act'. But her killing has not only been futile, but it has led to his astounding discovery that she also wanted power, power to control him. He says he had only three friends in the world — Najib, Barani and the Stepmother. Now he feels betrayed by her — '...I love you more than I have loved anyone in my life'. In his uncontrollable fury he sentences her to death by stoning, a punishment awarded to adulteress.

This is a scene of great power because it lays bare the tortured soul of Muhammad in all its complexity — its sense of mission, its hunger for power and his growing need to resort to violence.

The scene also highlights the essential loneliness anguish of a man of power whose hands are red with blood and his need for a power greater than his own. That is why he falls down on his knees, makes a confession and prays to God for mercy.

Barani's entry brings to the Sultan's mind that by praying he is violating his own injunction not to pray. But Barani gives him what he considers to be the joyful news that Ghiyas-ud-din, a desecendent of the Abbasid Kalifs is reaching there within the coming month. But the Sultan is not cheered by the news and is torn apart by his gnawing, growing guilt.

Exercises/Questions

1. Can you pick up any lines that show some trace of poetry in the Sultan?

2. Why lesson does the Sultan learn from killing Shihab?
3. Why did the Sultan want power?
4. Why does the Sultan consider his stepmother to be 'worse than an adulteress'?
5. Note the prayer motif again. Why does he say he was trying to pray but the words left no echo in the heart?

Announcement

The public announcement describes Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid as a saviour and signals the restarting of prayer. The desperation behind the need for the blessing of a descendent of a Kalif is clear. But of course the hope is stillborn.

SCENE ELEVEN

The imposter Aziz is recognized during the ceremonial welcome of the descendent of the Kalif. The starving crowd breaks into a riot.

The scene is set on a plain outside the fort of Daulatabad. It is a crowd scene in which we see the people asking for food and not prayer. They have no use of prayer. The discontent shows no signs of abating and leads to food rioting at the end.

The Sultan stares at Aziz and it seems that he doesn't quite recognize him. But whatever be his private thoughts, he goes through the motions of receiving the descendent of a Kalif. His last sentence shows his hopeless hope: 'Only you can save me now, Your Holiness, the dust of your feet on my head can save me now'.

While the Sultan fails to recognize Aziz, the Hindu woman of Scene Seven does and shouts but as always no one pays much heed to her.

Incidentally, Aziz is a totally imagined character. Ironically, while his fortune is rising, that of the Sultan is on the decline.

SCENE TWELVE

Aazam, the more timid of the two imposters, develops cold feet and wants to run away from the city of starving people.

The scene is the palace.

Aazam who is supposed to be the disciple of Ghiyas-ud-din wants to run away to safety and has actually ordered two horses to be brought. He has been to the city and gives a harrowing report of the weeklong food riots in the city — violence, heaps of corpses, burning houses. Aziz is still unconvinced and wants to stay on to enjoy the taste of power.

Aazam also draws a graphic picture of the Sultan digging his fists into the heaps of counterfeit coins and letting them trickle out from his raised fists.

Finally Aazam goes out himself.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Barani seeks the Sultan's permission to leave on the pretext of attending his mother's funeral. He sees through Aziz's fraud and forgives him and speaks of his plan to go back to Delhi.

The scene is set in another part of the palace. It opens with the Sultan in conversation with Barani. Later Aziz is brought in.

The gentle Barani seeks the Sultan's permission to go away to attend his mother's funeral. She has been a victim of the riots, though he hasn't said anything about it to the Sultan. When the Sultan asks him if he will come back, he keeps quiet. His reluctance to return is clear. Barani's departure will leave him without sound advice or a restraining hand.

Aazam Jahan's death is reported. When Aziz is called, he frankly owns up to what he is — a dhobi from Shiknar. Unabashedly, he tells of his career of crime saying that he has been the Sultan's 'true disciple' — a dhobi disguised as a Brahmin, officer on the way to Daulatabad, maker of counterfeit currency, farmer in Doab, robber in the hills, and finally a descendent of the Abbasid Kalifs. As a state servant who handled corpses of important people, he says that he had a revelation once: 'One day, suddenly I had a revelation. This was all human life was worth, I said. This was the real meaning of the mystery of death — straw and skin!'

Muhammad is particularly struck by his reply about the revelation that he has had about the mystery of death in his new mood of resignation of a man who finds himself driven into corner: 'Sweep your logic away into a corner, Barani, all I need now is myself and my madness — madness to prance in a field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence. ... I have a Companion to share my madness now — the Omnipotent God'. So while the otherwise soft Barani calls for the direst punishment for Aziz, the king forgives him. The Sultan also tells Barani of his plan to return to Delhi.

The play closes on a beautiful sombre note. The Sultan is tired and wants to sleep. He asks Barani to pray for him before he goes. Soon he falls asleep. An attendant comes and wraps a shawl round him. Just then the Muezzin's call for prayer is heard. The attendant stops but decides not to wake him up. After the Muezzin's call fades away, the Sultan suddenly opens his eyes and looks around dazed. It is as if his unconscious had nudged him awake at prayer time.

There was a time when he didn't have time to sleep. Now he is so dead tired that he goes to sleep just before prayer time. It is touching to see a thoughtful servant preferring to let the Sultan sleep even when it is near prayer time. The suggestion is that natural needs are far more important than political necessity.

Exercises/Questions

1. Why does the Sultan want to restart public prayers?
2. The Sultan uses the chess metaphor in the scene. Can you spot where?
3. What is your final impression of the Sultan?
4. Why doesn't Barani want to come back?
5. In what sense are the Sultan and Aziz alike?

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In spite of his many forays into the world of film and television and also in that of cultural administration, Girish Karnad remains deeply committed to playwriting. His themes chiefly drawn from myth and folktales and history have been an attempt to define the Indianness of Indian theatre.

The most obvious reason for Karnad's choice for writing a play on Tughlaq was the contemporaneity of Tughlaq's history. As he said in an interview in *Enact* in 1971, 'here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi...and also one of the greatest failures'. According to U.R. Anantha Murthy 'the play reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country'.(Introduction to Tughlaq) While this general statement is true to an extent, it needs further, closer examination.

The critical commentary on *Tughlaq* has also, we are sure, enabled you to see Girish Karnad's dramatic artistry at close quarters and prepared you to see the play as a whole and discuss the structure of the play, its theme and the motifs of chess, prayer and performance used in it.

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Karnad, Girish. *Three Plays: Naga-mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq*. New Delhi: Oxford, 1994; Oxford paperbacks 1995; rpt. 2004. [includes an 18-page long Author's Introduction]

Karnad, Girish.*Tughlaq*. New Delhi: Oxford.

Dodiya, Jaydipsinh., ed. *The Plays of Girish Karnad: Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Prestige, 1999. [Contains 7 essays on *Tughlaq*]

UNIT 3 *TUGHLAQ* : STRUCTURE, THEMES AND MOTIFS

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Plot Structure
  3.1.1 The Sequencing of the Scenes
3.2 The Theme of Power and its Tragic Misuse
3.3 Symbols/motifs used in the Play
  3.3.1 Chess
  3.3.2 Prayer
  3.3.3 Disguise and Resemblance as Dramatic Devices
  3.3.4 Theatrical Images
    3.3.4.1 Performance
3.4 Let Us Sum Up
3.5 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall discuss the plot structure of *Tughlaq*, the sequencing of the scenes followed by a discussion of the focal theme, symbols/motifs and the dramatic devices that make *Tughlaq* a well structured play. After reading the unit you will be able to appreciate the play's everlasting appeal.

3.1 PLOT STRUCTURE

Tughlaq has been described as a well-structured play. Rajendra Paul calls it a beautifully structured play. The scenes, he says, are so juxtaposed that 'you are not allowed to be either carried away by your hatred towards Tughlaq for his Machiavellian machinations or by your sympathy or admiration for his idealism'. (*Enact*: May 1973) The scene placement is entirely functional. As Rajinder Paul has pointed out, 'Each scene is like a brick serving a particular role and helping in the total structure'. The scenes are necessarily episodic but they all converge on to producing a complex picture of the Sultan as it evolves during the five years of his rule shown in the play. The key figure in the play is of course the Sultan and the principal focus is on him and his policies. But it is also important for the audience for us to know what the common people and the nobility think about him.

3.1.1 The Sequencing of Scenes

The structuring of the play was influenced by Parsi theatre. In this respect Girish Karnad's own comments are illuminating. According to him, the Parsi model demanded a succession of shallow and deep scenes. The shallow scenes gave prominence to lower characters and were comic and were supposed to be played in the street represented by the foreground of the stage. The deep scenes set in palaces and royal parks featured important characters. The spatial division, Karnad says, was 'ideal to show the gulf between the rulers and the ruled, between the mysterious inner chambers of power politics and the open, public areas of those affected by it. But, as the writer points out, as he wrote the play he found it difficult to maintain what he called 'the

accepted balance between these two regions': 'Writing in an unprecented situation, where the mass populace was exercising political franchise , in however clumsy a fashion, for the first time in its history, I found the shallow scenes bulging with an energy hard to control'. The deep scenes, he says, became emptier as the play progressed. And 'the comic lead' Aziz appeared 'at par with the protagonist himself'. This, he says, was 'the result of the anarchy which climaxed Tughlaq's time'.

As a historical play its canvas is wide and there is a large variety of characters and places represented in it. Out of a total of thirteen scenes as many as seven are set in the palace. Five scenes are in the open. The conspiracy scene (Scene Five), which is the thirteenth scene, is necessarily set outside the palace; it takes place in a house in Delhi. Roughly, the scenes in the palace alternate with the scenes in the open. The scenes in the open generally have common characters but this is not true for Scene 3 which takes place outside the Big Mosque but which shows the Sultan in conversation with Sheikh Imam-un-din. On the other hand Scene Twelve is set in the palace but presents commoners Aazam and Aziz talking to each other. It is only in the last scene that the two worlds — the world of the royalty and the world of common men come together.

The alternation of scenes provides variety and sustains readers'/audience interest and avoids long stretches of tension.

The first six scenes deal chiefly with the Sheikh Imam-ud-din's open revolt against the Sultan. His 'management' of both Ain-ul-Mulk and the Sheikh is the work of master strategist.

The remaining scenes show us the gradual decline of the state into chaos. Scene seven shows the privations of the people on way to Daulatabad and the way how parasites like Azis and Aazam plan to fatten themselves on the miseries of the poor.

Scene eight is set at Daulatabad and shows Barani suggesting to Muhammad to abdicate and keep the company of the learned. But Muhammad finds himself excessively embroiled in the affairs of the state to withdraw. Of the remaining five scenes only one scene deals with Muhammad and his Stepmother. This is also the most tense scene in the second half of the play. The remaining four are concerned with the tricksters Azim and Aazam — Scene Nine, Scene Eleven (Aziz in disguise) and Scene Twelve. Aziz also figures very prominently in Scene Thirteen. This is an alarming number of scenes to be given to Aziz and Aazam but as Girish Karnad himself points out, the ascendancy of Aziz is an index of the decline of the state into chaos. Barani is the last friend to leave Tughlaq never to return and his departure is significant. Equally significant is the fact that Muhammad has already acquired a new kind of lieutenant in the form of Aziz — he is soon to be an officer of the state. One can imagine what the state of affairs is going to be when the people begin their long weary march back to Delhi.

3.2 THEME OF POWER AND ITS TRAGIC MISUSE

A major theme in Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq* is inevitably power. Bertrand Russell said in his *Power: A New Social Analysis* that power is the capacity to achieve intended results. It will be worthwhile exploring how Tughlaq used

the power that he had acquired and why he failed to achieve the results that he had set out to do in the first instance. Tughlaq is unusually self-reflexive about kingship and the authority that it gave him. And our enquiry would hopefully give us an interesting glimpse into the psyche of a medieval king who would be different.

There are at least two Tughlaqs in the play and accordingly two faces of power. One of them was a visionary who had dreams to fulfill for his people; the other was a pragmatic politician whose entire politics was based on considerations other than morality or ideology. We shall deal with the idealistic Tughlaq first.

Tughlaq wanted to be different from the Sultans that had ascended the throne of Delhi, who wanted to use power for the people and thus rewrite history. Later he says that he killed his father and elder brother for 'an ideal', so that he could have 'power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize myself'.(Scene Ten: 204) Read the following exchange between Muhammad and his Stepmother.

Muhammad: ... I am not worried about my enemies. I'm only worried about my people. (italics added)

Stepmother: Pompous ass! As though other kings didn't do that.

Muhammad: No, they didn't. Look at the past Sultans of Delhi. They couldn't bear the weight of their crowns. They couldn't leave it aside. So they died senile in their youth or were murdered. (156-57)

This Tughlaq was a dreamer with the soul of a poet. In his imaginative moods he likes to soar high into the sky and contemplates a state in which he finds himself addressing his people to share their joys and sorrows with him:

....I want to climb up, up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people: "Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys. Let's laugh and cry together and then let's pray".

He goes further and imagines a sort of mystical union with them:

'Let's pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with — ours now....Come! I am waiting to embrace you all!' (Scene Two: 155)

At a more mundane level Muhammad wanted to be an architect of a new secular and progressive India without distinction between Hindus and Muslims:

'My beloved people, you have heard the judgment of the kazi and seen for yourself how justice works in my kingdom — without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. My this moment ...light up our path our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace...not just peace but a more purposeful life'. (Scene One: 149)

Tughlaq's self-reflexivity about power shows that he is aware of the responsibilities of a ruler. In Scene Six, faced with rebellion from the Amirs, he raises the question of the legitimacy of power:

'I have been asking myself just one question. I am a king. I wear the royal robes. I have honoured myself with the title of Sultan. But what gives me the right to call myself a king? (The Amirs are baffled.) Am I a king because I am the son of a king? Or is it because I can make the people accept my laws and the army move to my commands? Or can self-confidence alone justify it? I ask you — all of you — what would you have me do to become a real king in your eyes? (Silence)...You are all silent. The others only tell me what I should not do but what I should. Until I know what else to do, Shihab-ud-din I have to go on clutching the scepter in my fist. But I am not happy'. (Scene Six: 181)

Muhammad is furious with the Amirs and the questions that he is putting to them are not questions to which he is not really seeking an answer but clearly he is conscious about the need for legitimizing the power of even a hereditary ruler and also that the ultimate legitimacy lies in a commitment to the people.

The more familiar Tughlaq is one that sees power as a game of chess in which there is someone who wins and someone who loses and the whole effort is to stay in power and if possible to enhance it. Naturally the politics followed was based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations or what has come to be known as realpolitik. This is the more familiar face of power and Tughlaq can be seen doing what rulers have always done.

Chess as a game and later as a metaphor for political manoeuvring first occurs in Scene Two and at several places openly or implicitly till the end. The way Tughlaq aided by the wily Najib uses low cunning and deception to get rid of the troublesome Sheikh Imam-ud-din and also solves the problem posed by Ain-ul-Mulk with one master move could be called , to use the terminology of the game, checkmate. Another brilliant example of checkmating is furnished by the turning of the tables on the rebellious Amirs led by Shihab-ud-din.

For all his idealism Tughlaq cannot reconcile the two selves in him, the dream and the reality. We can see the idealist Tughlaq slipping into his more practical counterpart. Read this exchange:

Muhammad: So, Najib. What do you propose?

Najib: I can't think of anything right now, Your Majesty — except that the Sheikh has a striking resemblance to you. (Muhammad, startled, stares at Najib.)

Barani: What has the Sheikh got to do with this?

Muhammad: (Slowly) You are a devil, Najib! (Pause. Then briskly) Good. W'll think about that.... (Scene Two: 159-60)

Later, Muhammad, conscious of Barani's praise of 'his courage, honesty and justice' is compelled to explain:

Muhammad: Forgive me if I let you down, Barani, *but I must play this game my own way* .... (160) (italics added)

And 'my own way' means doing what is dictated by realpolitik, resorting to low cunning and deception so that the Sheikh could be eliminated.

Tughlaq fails in his mission for several reasons. First, he is not able to reconcile the two faces of power in his mental make-up. Moreover, the visionary in him gets mired in self-righteousness. He has an outsize ego and he acts from a settled conviction that he alone is right. This together with his impatience in getting quick results makes him intolerant of criticism and dissent. A favourite scheme of his that became an idee fixe with him was the transfer of the Capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. This is also the major cause of the rebellion led by Shihab-ud-din. His self-righteousness becomes clear in his handling of the rebellion. When Shihab points out that the people of Delhi were very unhappy with the transfer, he says: 'I have explained every reason to them, shown how my empire cannot flourish with Delhi as its capital. But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven't opened their eyes to the light of today? Let's not waste more time over that. They'll see the point soon'. (Scene Six: 180-81) He of course proceeds to crush the rebellion with an iron hand without bothering either to probe the causes of the rebellion or assessing the mood of the people. He is convinced about the rightness of the step and according to him that should be enough for everybody.

His continuing to stab Shihab long after he is dead brings his cruelty and vindictiveness to the surface. This vindictiveness assumes a more generalized form when we see the ruler who had invited the people of Delhi to go to Daulatabad voluntarily (Scene One: 149) now orders them to leave immediately (Scene Six: 185-86).

Muhammad: Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft. I can see that now. They'll understand the whip. Everyone must leave. *Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi.* (italics added)

He will now use naked power as an instrument of exemplary punishment. When Barani spreads a silken cloth over Shihab's face, Muhammad prevents him saying: 'Don't cover him, Barani. I want my people to see his wounds' (186).

This is a key scene in another way. His prohibition of prayers indicates another feature of his exercise of power — its arbitrary nature. The reason he gives is that 'our prayers too are ridden with disease, and must be exiled'. The reference apparently is to the association of prayer with murder from which he has escaped. But the whimsical nature of the interdiction cannot be questioned.

This scene then marks a watershed in the career of Muhammad. Commitment to an ideal which included commitment to the people was what had justified even the murder of his father and brother in his own eyes but the same Muhammad is well on his way to a complete estrangement from the people.

In the latter half of the play we have a glimpse of Muhammad's use of power which is punitive and which is both arbitrary and excessive. In Scene Eight Barani who manages to tell Muhammad the truth about himself says: 'Your Majesty, there was a time when you believed in love, in peace, in God. What has happened to those ideals? You won't let your subjects pray. You torture them for the smallest offence. Hang them on suspicion. Why this bloodshed? Please stop it, and I promise Your Majesty something better will emerge out of it' (196).

But he doesn't turn back, he cannot turn back. This shows the addictive nature of power, particularly when there is no morality to restrain, to use Bertrand Russell's words, 'anarchic self-assertion'. There is only one occasion when he questions the punishment that he has inflicted on others — to kill his Stepmother by stoning for killing Najib. : 'Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud?' This is part of the prayer that he tries to offer but cannot.

I think his growing emotional isolation has also something to do with his addiction to violence. His mother doesn't talk to him. Barani is a trusted friend but his advice often doesn't suit him. The only person who had an emotional hold on him and who could have exercised a restraining influence on his is his Stepmother and he feared she was trying to rival him. Bereft of all friends, Muhammad has only his 'madness to prance in a field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence'. (Scene Thirteen: 220)

We have a third, perhaps a more contemporary face of power too in the play, illustrated through the spectacular rise of Aziz. From a dhobi he becomes a revered state guest who is welcomed as a descendent of the Abbasid Khalifs and who is supposed to purify the land and restart the banned prayers. There are two aspects of Aziz's aspiration to power. First, he graduates from money to power. A remark by Bertrand Russell in his introduction to Power: A New Social Analysis illuminates this graduation: 'When a moderate degree of comfort is assured, both individuals and communities will pursue power rather than wealth...' In the beginning he wants money and becomes a robber. A stage comes in his career of the petty criminal when mere wealth doesn't satisfy him and he wants power ('I am bored stiff with all this running and hiding. You rob a man, you run and hide. It's all so pointless. One should be able to rob a man and the stay there to punish him for getting robbed. That's called 'class' —.that's being a real king'.) (198) (Italics added)

Second, Aziz wants power for self-indulgence, for what it will get him. Muhammad wanted power to fulfill his dreams for the country and the people. But he has no such pretensions. He wants to enjoy having and exercising power and all the other luxuries that it will bring. During his journey to Daulatabad he tells his friend Aazam that he has 'discovered a whole new world [of politics] — wealth, success, position and power'. (Scene Seven: 190) He manages to acquire this position and power through all possible means with no holds barred and is very brazen about it. In that sense Aziz has a contemporary touch about him. He murders Ghiyas-ud-din, a descendent of the Abbasid Khalifs, who is on his way to the new capital at the invitation of the Sultan and is received at the palace with great deference. The imposture is discovered but the crowning irony of the play comes when Muhammad has to continue to connive at this masquerade. This seems to suggest that the Sultan cannot disown the mirror image of himself. Aziz is the bitter harvest he has produced and he must reap it. Aziz represents power at its ugliest.

3.3 SYMBOLS/MOTIFS USED IN THE PLAY

Girish Karnad, in this play, has used some symbols which are not literary but theatrical symbols. They form integral parts of the play's action. Disguise and resemblance and Muhammad's sleeplessness are such symbols. The play

begins with the disguise of Aziz, who comes at the end of the play as Ghiyas-ud-din. Sheikh Immam-ud-din is killed while he goes in disguise. Disguise is a very effective symbol for hypocrisy, role-playing and also imitation. Muhammad's sleeplessness is indicative of his vigilance a price a politician cannot help paying. Muhammad sleeps only at the end when all his energies are exhausted.

But the most important symbol is that of the game of chess. Muhammad is seen in scene two playing chess and thinking of defeating his friend. But here the game of chess is a part of dramatic action. But the whole play imitates the structure of the game of chess. Muhammad, like the king of the chessboard, moves towards the centre of the board for his safety by shifting his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. Aziz, like a pawn also moves towards the centre. If the king moves down the pawn moves up and the king ultimately is checkmated by the pawn. The king cannot be killed, but can only be checkmated.

Satyadeo Dube, the well-known director, has something meaningful to say about this play. In a paper on contemporary Indian drama, he said that the characters of modern Indian drama do not measure up to the characters of Ibsen and Strindberg because of the historical and sociological circumstances. The only exception, Dube writes, "which immediately comes to my mind is Girish Karnad's Tughlaq. This play...has in the character of Tughlaq a depth of exploration which can stand up to quite a few great characters created in the western theatre". These remarks neatly sum up the achievement of the play. The character of Sultan Muhammad is a sure index of the development of dramatic consciousness in Indian theatre.

3.3.1 Chess

Life, particularly political life, has often been compared to chess. Muhammad Tughlaq is represented in the play as an accomplished chess-player. It is only appropriate therefore that the chess metaphor should play an important part in the play. When Scene Two opens, Muhammad is seen playing chess solo. He has just solved the greatest problem in chess and is excited over it. Soon with the help of Najib he is going to solve the problem posed by Ain-ul-Mulk. That is one of the most brilliant moves made by the Muhammad — Najib duo for not only do they get rid of the troublesome Sheikh Imam-ud-din but also make friends with Ain-ul-Mulk. The other is the forestalling of the conspiracy led by Shihab-ud-din. Here we have a perfect example of checkmating. The conspirators, apparently unstoppable, are checkmated in the nick of time. At this point Muhammad is at the peak of his success.

But his decline has already started. However, the only time Muhammad admits to being checkmated is by Aziz the dhobi from Shiknar. The king has been checkmated by the 'pawn'. The irony is that with all his skill in chess and political manouvring Muhammad's graph of success falls steeply where the Aziz's graph shows a corresponding steep rise. He has murdered Ghiyas-ud-din, the last descendent of the Abbasid Khalifa who was on way to Daulatabad on invitation from the Sultan and has come disguised as Ghiyas-ud-din. Earlier Muhammad and Aziz made their moves separately, their paths touching each other only tangentially. Now they come together and we can only imagine the kinds of moves they will make. The only certainty is that the losers will be the people, who are mere pawns and victims, as they have always been.

3.3.2 Prayer

A major motif in the play is the motif of prayer, which the playwright has woven into the structure of the play. As U.R. Ananthamurthy has pointed out, Karnad's treatment of the motif is unhistorical.

Killing a man at prayer is considered sacrilegious. Witness Hamlet's hesitation in killing Polonius while he is praying. Here was a chance for him to avenge the murder of his father but he spares Claudius's life because killing him while praying would send him to heaven. There is no such misgiving in the minds of the conspirators in Tughlaq.

When Ratansingh lays bare his plan to murder the Sultan while he is praying, it sounds attractive because prayers being compulsory, the whole palace will be unarmed at that time. The only serious objection comes from a man of religion, Sheikh Shamsuddin, who says that it would be sacrilegious; it would pollute the time of prayer which was sacred time. But the objection is overruled. Eventually the conspiracy is uncovered and the Sultan is outraged and gives condign punishment to the conspirators. The irony is that the Sultan has himself been guilty of the same offence when he had his father and brother murdered in order to seize power while they were praying. The dramatic point being made is that Tughlaq's power is corrupt at its very source. In a burst of fury Muhammad bans all prayers. (Scene Six) He had hoped that every act in his kingdom would be a prayer, 'every prayer to become a further step in knowledge, every step to lead us nearer to God'. But he says that their prayers have become diseased and 'must be exiled'. (Scene Six)

It seems that the wheel has come full circle. After five years when Muhammad finds all else failing, he resorts to religion and invites the last descendent of Abbasid Khalifa, Ghiyas-ud-din to come and purify the land. The visit will also mark the restarting of prayers. But the real descendent of the Khalifa, Ghiyas-ud-din has been murdered and it is the murderer Aziz disguised as Ghiyas-ud-din who comes and is received in the palace. It is he who is slated to lead the prayers. Muhammad is shocked at Aziz's brazen confession but he is left with no option but to connive at this public deception. The moral degeneration of authority is complete. Prayers are essential but they have been reduced to a mere empty public gesture, nothing more. The great irony is that Muhammad is offering the people prayers when they actually want food. (Scene Twelve)

We also get a chance to look at prayers from the point of view of personal need. While prayers are banned, there comes a time when Muhammad feels an inner need to pray and calls for divine guidance. But he admits the hardness of his heart and his inability to pray:

'I was trying to pray — but I could only find words learnt by rote which left no echo in the heart. I am tethering on the brink of madness, Barani, but the madness of God still eludes me'. (Scene Ten) This unenviable situation when one desparately need to pray but can't is a measure of the distance Muhammad has traveled on the road to damnation.

The closing moments of Scene Thirteen witness a reversal of sorts. Prayers have restarted and the Muezzin is heard calling the faithful to prayer. But the

Servant realizing that the Sultan's great need to sleep chooses to violate the prayer order and lets him sleep. This simple gesture reestablishes the essential humanity of Muhammad and his vulnerability as a human being.

3.3.3 Disguise and Resemblance as Dramatic Devices

Both disguise and resemblance have been widely used as devices in drama, particularly in comedies. In this play both have been pressed into service for serious purposes.

Resemblance first. Because of the striking resemblance between Sheikh Imam-ud-din and the Sultan, Najib lights upon a plan to kill two birds with one stone. They would be able to buy peace with Ain-ul-Mulk and also get rid of the dangerous Sheikh Imam-ud-din who is proving to be a centre for subversive activities in the state. The plan works perfectly and Sheikh Imam-ud-din gets killed as a result of mistaken identity.

While resemblance is used only for an isolated episode, disguise is employed more centrally. A character puts on disguise to hide, trick or to spy on others. Here Aziz assumes two disguises to trick others — first as Pandit Vishnu Prasad who files a suit against the state and wins it in the first scene; and second as the last descendent of the Abbasid Khalifa, Ghiyas-ud-din whom he has killed and whose robes he has stolen and who arrives in Daulatabad to purify the land in Scene Eleven. Aziz is a dhobi of Shiknar but who is ambitious and who first tries to enrich himself in various ways and later sets his sights at position and power.

On the first occasion no one is able to pierce through his disguise. The suggestion is that he is able to hoodwink the whole people. It is only when his old friend the pickpocket Aazam looks at him closely that he is able to recognize him. At this stage he is intent only on money and they join hands to go for it.

On the second occasion again when Aziz appears as Ghiya-ud-din as the Saviour from the land of the Khalifas, no one is able to see through his disguise – except one Hindu woman who he did not allow to go to look after her sick child while they were on the road to Daulatabad: 'He killed my child! Those eyes ... I'll never forget them...he killed my child ... (Scene Eleven) But he is properly exposed only by Muhammad himself when he tears the mask from off his face in the last scene of the play: 'Who are you? Who are you? How long do you hope to go on fooling us with your masquerade?' The irony is that in spite of the exposure of Aziz and his subsequent brazen confession of all his villainies, Muhammad has no option but to let him go on with his masquerade. The disguise is off but he sees a close resemblance between Aziz and himself. As he tells Barani: 'All your life you wait for someone who understands you. And then — you meet him — 'Later: 'But I am not alone, Barani. Thank Heaven. For once I am not alone. I have a companion to share my madness now'. (Scene Thirteen)

3.3.4 Theatrical Images

Girish Karnad's Tughlaq deserves a close scrutiny as it highlights one of the fundamental concepts of theatre i.e. that theatre is an illusion, a fleeting shadow, a vision and a dream-like experience. There is a close parallel between life and theatre and quite often life is theatre-like and vice versa. But

at no time life is theatre and theatre is life. The thin line of demarcation between good theatre and life is very often not perceived and hence the confusion and misunderstanding that both are the same or both are interchangeable. A skilful playwright, even when he is realistic, makes us conscious: Look here! You are only watching a play. There are several ways of bringing in this awareness into the audience. Girish Karnad uses theatrical images in Tughlaq to achieve an effect that is comparable to the achievement of John Osborne in Luther.

3.3.4.1 Performance

There are many references to acting, theatre, and performance in Tughlaq. Muhammad behaves and speaks like an actor. His public appearance and his private moments are like that of an actor. In the opening scene itself there is a reference to his theatricality. He appears before the crowd properly heralded, and waxes eloquent. He speaks of "justice", "peace", "purposeful life" — rather he uses cliches to describe his desires. He makes an "exhibition" of his sense of justice. When he leaves the scene, the Guard disperses the crowd shouting at them

"All right, all right. Go home! What are you waiting for? The show's over! Go home..."

The Sultan's public appearance, his sense of justice, his plans are all a part of the show. The crowd is the audience for the Sultan. It looks more or less like a scene from the street-theatre. Even after the actors have moved into another part of the city the audience sometimes lingers on and comments on the players and their performance. The Guard's appraisal of the situation is clear and incisive. Just as the Guard judges the situation, in Scene Two, the stepmother sees Sultan as an actor. She laughs at his performance and that is a positive sign of the acting potentiality of the Sultan as an actor. She asks a simple question: "Then what do you do all night?" and the reply is a lengthy, theatrical monologue. Girish Karnad, in his Stage Directions, italicizes the word theatrical. The speech is poetic, stagy and full of grandiose statement:

"Then again I want to climb up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people: "Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys. Let's laugh and cry together and then let's pray. Let's pray till our bodies' melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with-ours now! Let's be the light and cover the earth with greenery. Let's be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations. Come! I am waiting to embrace you all!"

This is not an address in the Durbar, nor is it a king's message to his citizens on his birthday. The scene takes place in a room in the palace. The only person listening to him is the stepmother. So, no wonder, she laughs and tells him: I can't ask a simple question without your giving a royal performance.

The gestures and speech behaviour of Muhammad are theatrical. He plays a "role" now, then changes costumes, and plays another "role". Before Sheikh Imam-ud-din, he plays the role of a true ruler interested in establishing a "new world". He plays it so well Imam-ud-din tells him: "You know, Sultan, I'm just beginning to understand why they saw you are the cleverest main in the

world". Scene Six opens with silence. "Muhammad is restless and paces up and down. When the Amirs enter, the restlessness is gone. He welcomes them "with obvious warmth". Every emotion is to be shown. It is an actor's responsibility to make things obvious for the audience, either directly or indirectly. The pensive, restless mood is replaced by an imposed cordiality. Like a skilful actor, Muhammad keeps changing roles. Where there is an opportunity, he becomes theatrical in his action also. In Scene Four, when Shihab-ud-din perceives Muhammad with a mere bow, Muhammad brings in the actor's touch:

That's no way to welcome, Shihab. Come — They embrace.

In Scene Six, when he pleads with Amirs to support him in his plans, much to the surprise and embarrassment of the Amirs, he kneels before them. "The Amirs almost recoil at this sudden gesture". They are taken aback by his theatricality. Like an actor winning applause of the audience by an unexpected gesture, Muhammad outsmarts them. We must remember that Muhammad is aware of the conspiracy of the Amirs at this moment. We are told of his knowledge of the conspiracy only later in the play. So, here is a Sultan, who knows that Amirs have come to kill him and yet stage-manages a "play" before them. He could have easily arrested them in the beginning of the scene itself, but he likes to enjoy the climax of the play, and he would love to exhibit before his audience, how he plays the climax. So he allows the call to prayer. When the Amirs step forward to attack him, the Hindu soldiers overpower them. "While all this is going on, MUHAMMAD goes on praying unconcerned. Only after finishing the prayer does he step down from the throne". In Scene Eight, Muhammad is given a long poetic monologue, which unravels the anguish of a visionary whose vision has fled. He makes the speech dramatic.

In Scene Eight, Muhammad goes to the Fort in search of an audience. He sends for Barani and talks to him. He tells Barani: "When I came here, I felt needed an audience". He is a "demanding companion" to the young watchman. There is a constant desire for an audience.

Another important image that highlights the relationship between life and theatre is "role-playing". Disguise in Tughlaq is a symbol of role-playing. The parallel comic plot of Aziz and Aazam and the main plot converge at one point. Muhammad asks Aziz:

Who are you? How long did you hope to go on fooling us with your masquerade?

Muhammad recognizes a fellow actor in Aziz who is also a genius in "role-playing". When he forgives Aziz, Muhammad says: "I don't know why I am acting like a fool". The various roles played by Aziz — that of a Brahmin, of a victim, and more significantly that of Khalif — are pointers to the fact that Aziz converts life into a stage and goes on with his role-playing. Aziz is Muhammad's "shadow", his "other". He tells Muhammad: "I insist I am your Majesty's true disciple". Aziz checkmates Muhammad and sends him into "a guffaw". He recognizes the genius of Aziz, forgives him and makes him an officer of the State. What is made very obvious in the case of Aziz, is made subtle in the case of Muhammad. Muhammad also wears and disguises himself. There is a basic dialectics in Muhammad's personality: the visionary and the politician; the idealist and the realist. The whole play is a projection of

Muhammad's divided self". The whole play is a projection of Muhammad's "divided self". U. R. Anantha Murthy rightly observes:

"The whole play is structured on these opposites: the ideal and the real; the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue. Tughlaq is what he is in spite of his self. Knowledge and an intense desire for divine grace. He is aware of the irony of his life when Aziz, the only character in the play who has skillfully used all the schemes of Tughlaq for his own designs, kills Ghiyas-ud-din and comes in his guise as a holy messenger of peace to purify the land and revive the banned prayer". ('Introduction of *Tughlaq*'. *Three Plays*, 144-45).

K. S. Ramamurthy also comments on the divided self:

"He is at once an idealist and crafty politician, a humanist and a tyrant, a man who has murdered sleep and yet not a Macbeth haunted by supernatural solicitations, a man who thinks and broods too much and yet not a Hamlet incapable of action or guilty of delay" (Literature Critics, (1979), 17).

The "divided self", pointed out by Anantha Murthy, has to be seen on the stage. To visualize the "divided self" in terms of "role-playing" is a popular English theatrical device. John Osborne does that in Luther. The man behind the revolution is a person in conflict with himself and his parents. Martin's rebellion is a mask that provides him an opportunity to suppress the familial conflict and fight it out in another ground.

In Karnad's Tughlaq, Muhammad is at war with himself. He is basically a visionary, a poet and not a ruler. He loves chess, a rose garden and enjoys reading poems. He reads the Greeks. He is aware of the "Greek in me". He speaks of his visions — of finding a "new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran". He builds a Utopia in his visions. His visions are like "the visions which lead Zarathustra or the Buddha". He is constantly talking about "tomorrow", "a new future". Muhammad tells the young watchman in Scene Eight:

"Nineteen. Nice Age! An age when you think you can clasp the whole world in your palm like a rare diamond. I was twenty-one when I came to Daulatabad first, and built this fort. I supervised the placing of every brick in it and I said to myself, one day I shall build my own history, like this, brick by brick. ...Suddenly something happened — as though someone had cast a spell. The torch, the gate, the fort and the sky — all melted and merged and flowed in my blood stream with the darkness of the night. The moment shed its symbols, its questions and answers, and stood naked and calm where the stars throbbed in my veins. I was the earth, was the grass, was the smoke, was the sky".

Barani sees the visionary in Muhammad. He sees him behind the mask. When Muhammad wants to know the cure for the "honey-comb of diseases", Barani prescribes:

"You are a learned man, your Majesty; you are known the world over for your knowledge of philosophy and poetry. History is not made only in statecraft; its lasting results are produced in the ranks of learned men. That's where you belong, your Majesty, in the company of learned men. Not in the market of corpses.

This learned man, the philosopher, Muhammad, speaks through symbols. To him every rose is "an image of Sadi's poems". That is one of the reasons why Muhammad's language is poetic. He has a poet's vision in his heart. He cannot follow Barani's prescription because that means he must give up playing the Sultan:

"I have often thought of that myself-to give up this futile seesaw struggle and go to Mecca. Sit there by the Kaaba and search for the peace, which Daulatabad hasn't given me. What bliss! But it isn't that easy. It isn't as easy as leaving the patient in the wilderness because there's no cure for his disease".

Muhammad feels that he still has "something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history".

Aziz too has his moment of epiphany. He suddenly realizes that human life is just "bodies eaten-up by corruption", like the Sultan's moment of revelation in the rose-garden. Both Aziz and the Sultan suffer identity crisis. The Sultan, a visionary, deliberately dons the robes of a ruler. He kills his father, kills the conspirators and makes Sheik Imam-ud-din a pawn in his game of holding the scepter in his fist. He plays a tyrant but very often the role slips by and makes him a civil servant. The act of forgiveness is the real Sultan. He is a poet who has compassion and a comprehensive vision to tolerate human weakness. But when he plays the Sultan, he kills mercilessly even his close relatives — his father, his stepmother and Shihab-ud-din. The conflict is between the visionary and the ruler and the struggle of Muhammad is to achieve a synthesis between the two. Tughlaq is an excellent tragedy that depicts the struggle and failure of a poet who wants to become a ruler, a visionary who desires to establish a Utopia. The struggle becomes significant as it ends in the failure to affect a synthesis between the poet and the ruler and the failure to found a "new world".

3.4 LET US SUM UP

This play in the main gives us a peep into the nature of power and its relationship with kingship and the people and what happens when power-wielders go awry.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. In what sense is Tughlaq a well-structurred play?
2. What use does Karnad make of the motif of chess?
3. Write a note on the use of the motif of disguise and resemblance in the play?
4. Discuss the theme of power in the play.

UNIT 4 CHARACTERS AND CRITICAL COMMENTS ON THE PLAY

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Characters
4.2 Critical Opinions on *Tughlaq* and its Performances
  4.2.1 *Tughlaq* as a Text
  4.2.2 Play in Performance
4.3 Let Us Sum Up
4.4 Questions
4.5 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will focus on the different characters in the play and bring out their chief characteristic or what has been called the spine. It will also give some idea of how the play has been received in production over time.

4.1 CHARACTERS

Muhammad

So much has been said about Muhammad before. So we are giving only points that could be developed.

1. Muhammad is an idealist and visionary as also a crafty manipulator who will shrink from nothing to acquire power.
2. His idealism goes with a self-righteousness — that only he has the right answers to the problems of the state.
3. His impatience with the people and intolerance with dissent.
4. His view of the people as mere cattle — his increasing alienation from the people.
5. His resorts to violence in order to enforce his will.
   (Add other points that you think have been left out.)

Vazier Muhammad Najib

Najib comes through as an astute politician and master manipulator who is ever-vigilant and whose integrity and loyalty are beyond question. His master moves are: the elimination of the dangerous Sheikh Imam-ud-din and peace with Ain-ul-Mulk. And though nothing is mentioned about his role in quelling the conspiracy against the Sultan, he must have played a major part in it. The Stepmother has him poisoned because she doesn't like his influence on Muhammad. She believes that his kingdom had become 'a kitchen of death — all because of him'. (Scene Ten) But if Muhammad is to be believed, '[Najib] had been advising him against violence. He wanted him 'to hold back [his] sword for the stability of the throne'.

It could be said that in spite of what the Stepmother says, in his death the Sultan lost a loyal, clear-eyed politician who could manage the affairs of the state in a sensible way.

Stepmother

Muhammad's Stepmother brings a touch of femininity to an otherwise all-male world of the play. Muhammad's relationship with his Stepmother is quite strong and intimate. She is solicitous about his welfare and is worried about his late nights — that he doesn't sleep as much as he should. And he shares his vision of a mystical union with his people with her. (Scene Two)

She doesn't like Muhammad's predilection for violence and attributes it to the growing influence of Vizier Najib on Muhammad. She consults with Barani to exercise his restraining influence on her son and gets a promise from him never to desert his Sultan. She waits for a while after which she has him poisoned.

Muhammad's reaction to the murder of his trusted lieutenant shows how fragile his ties are even with those he loves ('...I love you more than I have loved anyone in my life'.) (Scene Ten) He suspects that her Stepmother also wanted power for herself — a sort of a rival centre of power, and he couldn't tolerate any rival. The only language that he knows to deal with dissent is violence. So the punishment that he gives her is the worst that he can give her — punishment for adultery, which is death by stoning. How intimate his feelings are is clear from his great need to pray and his inability to do it ('I was trying to pray — but I could only find words learnt by rote which left no echo in the heart'.) (Scene Ten) For the first time perhaps we have a feeling for the genuineness of Muhammad as a human being.

Since Muhammad is still single and since his father and brother are already dead, the Stepmother's death signifies the drying up of the springs of human affection in him.

Zia-ud-din Barani (Pronounced Barni)

The presence in the play of Zia-ud-din Barani who was a historian at the court of Muhammad Tughlaq, presents the point of view of a critical insider who has watched the events taking place from a ringside seat and who's both sympathetic and detached. In Muhammad's Stepmother's words, he is 'a sober man, ... level-headed and honest' (Scene II: 160) She adds significantly that he (The Sultan) needs friend like him. Though Barani promises her never 'to leave him-ever-whatever he does', a time comes when his mother dies in the food riots raging in the country and he uses the opportunity to quit. His departure is the departure of the last of the faithfuls and is a signal for the ascention of opportunists like Aziz.

The fact of the matter is that while Barani is a friend of the Sultan — The latter counts him among the three friends he can trust, the other to being Najib and the Stepmother (Scene Ten: 204), he is neither consulted, nor is his advice heeded. Scene two highlights the disjunction between the policies followed by Najib and Muhammad, and the moral values upheld by Barni. The Sultan is faced with the serious problem — one in dealing with the growing rebellion of Sheikh Imam-ud-din and the other to placate Aim-ul-Mulk, who is marching

to Delhi with thirty thousand. Barani suggests the old world values of patience and magnanimity and even offers to go as an envoy to Ain-ul-Mulk to sort out any misunderstanding that there may be. But Najib and Muhammad have other ideas.

Read this exchange

Muhammad: So, Najib, what do you propose?

Najib: I can't think of anything right now. Your Majesty — except that the Sheikh has a striking resemblance to you. (Muhammad, startled, stares at Najib)

Barani: What has the Sheikh got to do with this?

Muhammad: (slowly) you are a devil, Najib! (Pause. The briskly)

Good. We'll think about that. In the meantime, the army should be ready to march. Will start for Kanauj the day of tomorrow in the evening?

Muhammad: forgive me if I let you down, Barani, but I must play this game my own way .... (Scene Two: 159-60)

Going 'my own way' — here means resorting to deception and murder. A mere glance from Najib's is enough to tell Muhammad of the plot Najib is hatching to get rid of Sheikh Imam-ud-din — to exploit the resemblance between the Sultan and the Sheikh and to have the latter killed. Najib and Muhammad's plans are not immediately clear to Barani but he knows that something sinister is afoot and he is horrified: What's all this, your Majesty? I can't follow a thing. But my heart tremble for you.

Muhammad whose courage, honesty and justice; he had praised sometime before is compelled to own up: "Forgive me if I let you down Barani, but I must play this game my own way".

The gap between profession and actual practice is appalling. Here and elsewhere in the play Barani is best seen as a benchmark for political morality.

Barani is naturally very discrete in his comments and criticism and never offers advice unsought. But when his advice his sought, he can be very forthright. When Muhammad asks him for a remedy for the diseased polity, he suggests abdication — a remedy that Sheikh Imam-ud-din had also suggested more indiscreetly.

"History is not made only in state craft; its last time result are produced in the ranks of learned men. That's where you belong. Your Magesty, in the company of learn at men. Not in the market of corpses." (Scene Eight: 195)

Later we reminds him of his earlier idealistic days:

Your Majesty, there was time when you believed in love, in peace, in God. What was happen to those ideals? ..... Why this bloodshed? Please stop it, and I promise your Majesty something better will emerge out of it (Scene Eight: 196)

Barani remains free for bitterness till the very end of his stay in Tughlaq's scot even when his own mother is killed in the food riots. He just wants to go away — for good and he does.

There is one occasion when Barani becomes really furious — as he listens to Aziz "tale of his criminal rise and prescribes the harshest punishments for him. But ironically Tughlaq himself belongs to the devils league and he knows it. So who will punish whom?"

Barani describes himself as 'a humble historian'. He is a historian but his also a moral presence in the play.

Sheikh Imam-ud-din

Sheikh Imam-ud-din is the Sultan "most vehement critic. He considers him to be incompetent, says that he is a disgrace to Islam and most of all that he has forfeited the right to rule by murdering his father and brother at prayer.

The Sheikh is apparently a brilliant orator and his inflammatory speeches have caused a riot in Kanpur. He has now become the backbone of rebels and his presence in Delhi is obvious a cause for great alarm to Najib and Muhammad. He is tough nut to crack as can be seen in Scene Three.

However for all his toughness, Sheikh Imam-ud-din is not able to see through the designs of the Sultan. In a clever move the Sultan tries to clip his wings by openly asking all Delhi to come and listen to him but privately sending his soldiers to homes to prevent the people from going to the meeting. The result is that there is no one to listen to the Sheikh — non except the Sultan.

But this is only a trailor to the real drama that unfolds later. The Sultan is able to successfully to persuade the Sheikh to go to Ain-ul-Mulk as his envoy of peace by appealing to him in the name of avoiding shedding of Muslim blood. The essentially simple minded Sheikh falls into his trap and goes on the peace mission. There is a melle, he is mistaken for the Sultan and he gets hilled. This resemblance was what Najib and Muhammad had banked on.)

Sheikh Imam-ud-din comes through as a fearless critic who minces no words to tell the Sultan the truth about himself.

Shihab-ud-din

Shihab-ud-din is the Prince of Sampanshahr and could be called the reluctant leader of the conspiracy against the Sultan.

He has come to Delhi at the invitation of the Sultan to look after the administration along with Najib during the Sultan absence. This invitation is meant to be a move to mollify the Princes father.

Shihab-ud-din himself has no grievance against the Sultan nor any personnel ambition. Though he is requested by the rebellious Amirs and is egged on by his adopted brother Sardar Ratansingh to lead the conspiracy he remains reluctant to do so till almost the very end. In fact he has words of praise for the Sultan:

But he has done a lot of good work Built schools, roads, hospitals. He has made good use of the money. (Scene five: 174)

For the Amir's he has nothing but content:

Come, Ratansingh, let's go. This is worse than I thought: They don't deserve to kiss the hem of the Sultan's dress (175).

He agrees only when Sheikh Shihab-ud-din appeals to him in the name of Islam:

Sheikh: 'will you only think about yourself, Shihab-ud-din'? You are the strong, the powerful in this country. The citizen of Delhi don't wish to go to Daulatabad, but they are weak. Will you do nothing for them? How many people like Sheikh Imam-ud-din have to die before you'll be ready to act? (176)

(No reply) .....

Ratansingh: You accuse the people of Delhi of cowardice and yet you won't raise a finger to correct an obvious wrong.....

Amir: You must help us, Shihab-ud-din

Sheikh: Islam needs your help. (Scene Five: 176-77)

Though Shihab agrees, he continues to have misgivings till the end: .....All right, let's get down to the details. We have to work everything out carefully. (Suddenly). Must we do this, Ratan, must we? (179)

All this comes to nothing, however the irony is that Shihab-ud-din himself becomes a victim of a private conspiracy engineered by his own adopted brother Ratansingh. He informs the Sultan about the plan of the rebels. This is his vengeance for the death if his father by Shihab.

Though Shihab is a traitor, his death will be mourned as the death of a martyr who died fighting the rebels. This shows how even the dead are not free from politics.

Aziz

Aziz is one of the most absorbing figures in the play. Starting as a dhobi from Shiknar, his spectacular rise to power and position betokens an revocable moral decline and chaos in Tughlaq regime at the end of the play.

Aziz is a rank of opportunists who exploits all the schemes of Tughlaq to his own advantage. In this process he resorts to masquerade, minting coins, robbery, murder and blackmail. In all these activities his constant though reluctant partner is Aazam who has been a small time pickpocket.

In the beginning Aziz is just interested in making money of more money. When in scene one the Sultan announces the brotherhood of all religions and showcases a decision in favour of a brahmin against the state as an example of it, we find that the winner is Aziz masquerading as a brahmin. Later he shifts to the more lucrative business of minting newly introduced copper coins and still later to farming and collecting farm subsidy.

At one stage he and his friend had the job of shifting corpses of the rebels executed by the state and hanging them up for exhibition filled with straw.

Money doesn't satisfy the ambitious for long, however. As Bertrand Russell suggests in his Power: A New Social Analysis; "when a moderate degree of comfort is a sort, both individual and communities will pursue power rather than wealth"

This proves to be true for Aziz who now wants power. Instead of money. In scenes seven we see Aziz already cherishing dreams of joining politics:

"Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world — politics. My dear fellow, that's where our future is — politics! It is a beautiful world — wealth, success, position, power — (190).

In scene nine when they one robbers he is still restless:

Aziz: I am bored stiff with all this running and hiding. You rob a man, you run, and hide. It's also pointless. One should be able to rob a man and then stay there to punish him for getting robbed. That's called 'class' — that is being a real king! (198)

When the royal guest on way to Daulatabad Ohiyas-ud-din is brought to him bound and a foot, he sees his chance. The royal guest is killed and he puts on the royal robbes and asks Aazam:

'How do I look eh?' The great grandson of the Khalif?
Laugh, you fool, laugh. Celebrate! What are you crying for?
Look, look at the palace doors. They are opening for us Dance,
Dance, you son of an ass ... (201).

When they go to Daulatabad, they are royally received. Even the Sultan is deceived for sometime. What distinguishes Aziz from other criminals is the complete brazenness with which he confesses to every misdeed if his. He claims that he alone understands the Sultan and could be said to be a mirror image of him.

What's more he has the Sultan in a cleft stick. Having welcomed him as a saviour and having bowed before him, the Sultan cannot undo his earlier actions and must now become a part of the high level masquerade. This is the biggest irony in the play. The Sultan who had earlier checkmated Sheikh Imam-ud-din and Ain-ul-Mulk is himself checkmated. He's in a trap for which there is no easy escape.

By the time we reach the end the morality of the play has turned up side down. Tughlaq's high moral ground that he held in the beginning is long gone. All his noble dreams lie in a shambles. He is in fact conniving at an importune that is ceremonial in value without any substance whatsoever.

Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid

Ghiyas-ud-din is a descendant of the Abbasid Khalifs who are supposed to be the last of the Khalifs.

He has been invited by the Sultan to come and bless the land by his holy presence. As he says in scene Six, he is 'turning to tradition and history now and seeking an answer there — in the blessings of the Abbasid Khalifa'. (181) This can be seen as an attempt, even a desperate attempt, by the Sultan to use a symbolic religious figure to consolidate his hold on the people.

But Ghiyas-ud-din turns out to be a poor symbol and even this travesty of a symbol falls into the hands of the murderess duo — Aziz and Aazam and gets killed. So what we have by way of the visit of Ghiyas-ud-din in Daulatabad is the mockery of a holy visit by Aziz and his lieutenant. Significantly the importure is discovered by Hindu women who had lost her child because of Aziz long before it is done by the Sultan.

4.2 CRITICAL OPINIONS ON *TUGHLAQ* AND ITS PERFORMANCES

4.2.1 *Tughlaq* as a Text

Girish Karnad himself has drawn attention to several features of the play: its contemporary relevance, the structuring of scenes and the influences on him. This was in 1971 in an interview with Rajinder Paul for Enact. Later that year in his brief introduction to the play for the OUP edition of three plays of Karnad's U.R. Ananthamurthy was all praise for the play: It had 'an interesting story, intricate plot, scope for spectacle, and uses dramatic conventions like the comic pair Aziz and Aazam (the Akara and Makara of Natak performances), to which theatre audiences respond easily'.(143) Following Girish Karnad himself, Ananthamurthy also refers to the play as a political allegory but the primary interest for him lay in what he called 'the ambiguities of Tughlaq's character'. He also drew attention to the motif of 'prayer' in the play and shows how the play is built round opposites — 'the ideal and the real, the divine inspiration and the deft intrigue'. He points out that the irony in the emergence of Aziz who after murdering Ghiyas-ud-din comes as a holy messenger of peace is deeply tragic.

G.H.Nayak in his article entitled Karnad's Tughlaq (Enact 193-94, Jan-Feb 1983) says that the play provides 'insights into the universal truth concerning the relationship that exists or takes shape between Power and Man'.

Tughlaq has been compared to western plays. M.N.Naik's essay on 'The Limits of Human Power' compares and contrasts it to Camus's Caligula. (Studies in Indian English Literature: 1983) Ashis Sengupta has compared Arthur Miller's play The Ride down Mount Morgan and Tughlaq as political allegories. (Notes and Queries, Vo.9, May 2005)

Aparna Dharwadker used Tughlaq (1964) 'to chart the complex textual and cultural ramifications of postcolonial historical fictions'. (PMLA Jan 1995).

Ashis Sengupta has also written an insightful essay on 'Being and Role-Playing: Reading Girish Karnad's Tughlaq in Indian Literature, Jan-Feb 2003.

Psychiatrist Dr. K.A. Ashok Pai with whom Girish Karnad made the television serial 'Antaral' has drawn attention to the depth of psychological understanding of the behaviour of his characters displayed in Karnad's plays. Karnad's plays. he says. Possess the potential for interpreting them as examples of psychoanalytical studies in human behaviour. He cites the examples of Yayati, Hayavadana, Tughlaq and his 2005 play A Heap of Broken Images. When during the course of an interview with the writer, Dr Pai asked him if he agreed with the view that the fragmented image seems to be his metaphor for the human personality, this is what he said: 'It was only when I wrote my third play that I became conscious that certain themes recurred in my play or (since I didn't invent the plots) certain themes seemed to stimulate me — themes with the "Double" as the central motif'. According to Dr Pai, 'Tughlaq is 'a case study of split personality representing the deep-rooted dualities of human nature'.(Newsletter: The Indian Psychiatric Society, Karnatak State Branch, No.9, May 2005)

There has been a dissenting voice also. The noted Kannada novelist S.L.Bhyrappa has accused Karnad of being untrue to history in order to curry favour with the establishment. It seems there was a controversy about his depiction of Tippu Sultan in his play The Dreams of Tippu Sultan in the Kannada newspaper Vijayakarnataka. But nothing much has come of it.

Tughlaq has been acclaimed both critically and in performance.

4.2.2 Play in Performance

Written in Kannada in 1964, it was first produced at the Indian National Theatre at Bombay in Kannada in 1965. There was another Kannada production at Delhi at Kannada Bharati under B.V. Karanth (1966). The same year the play was produced in Urdu by Om Shiv Puri for the National School of Drama. Om Shivpuri played Tughlaq.

Girish Karnad was persuaded to translate it into English by Alyque Padamsee and the English translation was first staged by the latter for his Theatre Group at the Bhulabhai Auditorium Bombay in 1970. The production was a major success. Later the play was produced by Ebrahim Alkazi for the NSD in 1972 and later in 1974 and 1982 also. The last production was in London. Arun Kuckreja produced it for Ruchika in Delhi in 1975.

Tughlaq in Marathi translation by Vijay Tendulkar was performed in 1971 and later and in Shyamanad Jalan's Bengali translation in Calcutta also.

The play is available in Kannada, Hindi-Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati and English editions.

A few words about some of the performances would be in order here. The impact, says Rajinder Paul of the 1966 production of Om Shivpuri, was 'quite tremendous'. Alkazi's production of the Urdu version at the NSD's open-air theatre in 1972 came with a new cast. Shivpuri's set had a historical and architectural resemblance to the period. It also had massive platforms, steps and arches, and the tall Shivpuri in the tailor-made role of Tughlaq. Alkazi had Manohar Singh as Tughlaq. 'Alkazi depends a lot, in this play on

spectacle. Amal Allana's costumes are just breathtakingly beautiful'. Alkazi also physicalized the entire direction. 'There is a lot of pulling, muscling and manhandling of and between actors. I liked it quite a lot — the whole action sinking into the growing sadism of Tughlaq — death and killing come to Tughlaq as naturally as metaphors to a poet'. (Enact, May 1973) Naseerudin played Aazam and Uttara Baokar the Stepmother.

Alyque Padamse who produced *Tughlaq* for the Theatre Group in English in Bombay in 1970 recalled his production some 24 years later, describing it as 'a play of enormous stature'. Kabir Bedi, then 24, who had impressed him with 'his stage presence and his magnificent voice' was cast as Tughlaq. The play became what Padamsee called 'the biggest sensation on the English stage, with queues of teenagers waiting for Kabir's autograph at the door backstage'. (*The Independent*, 23 Feb 1994) Alyque's innovation consisted of a prologue that showed "'man –a bare forked creature' standing nude with his back to the audience in a solo spotlight. He is dressed in the royal robes of the monarch and finally turns to face the audience, fully clad as the Emperor Tughlaq. This clued in the audience to my interpretation of Tughlaq turning from a young callow youth into a mythic figure."

Arun Kuckreja's production of the play in December 1975 was not just a dusty page of history but 'a play about the basic questions of our own times'. That was why it was produced so close to the audience at the Triveni Garden. 'At Triveni he created the atmosphere of an arena by placing the audience on three sides of the area usually intended for seating....The action took place in front of this but spread out on occasion to include the parapet on the left and the verandah on the first floor of the Triveni building'.

Another production worth recalling is Arvind Gaur's direction of the play for Asmita in the Sri Ram Centre Basement in April 1994. Ebraham Alkazi had 'given Tughlaq a very grand historical scale full of the glitter of old traditions and costumes, by staging it in for the first time in Delhi's Old Fort'. Gaur dispensed with fancy sets and props and concentrated on bringing out the contemporaneity of the play: 'to draw comparisons between the social, economic and political situation of a period as old as 88 years ago and of our modern times'. 'The plot highlights the clash between power, politics and religion in which neither side gains. and a third party is left with an opportunity to exploit the situation. This party has neither any morals nor any vision of life. It is also thoroughly materialistic and coupled with degenerate values, represents a true picture of our modern times'. What impressed one about the production was the honesty of the actors and the director in focusing on the characters, rather than the externals of technical support.

Try Play Reading

What you as a student can do is of course to see the play if possible. But if for some reason a performance is out of reach, create your own performance. You can do it by getting two or more of your friends together, choosing a scene that you particularly like and reading it out as you think the lines should be read. This exercise will help you to come near to the heart of the play. Play-reading can be a very exciting activity.

4.3 LET US SUM UP

Tughlaq is a deeply absorbing study of one of the most enigmatic figures in medieval history. As a play it is both brutally objective and deeply sympathetic. The commentaries and the questions raised in the course of the scene-wise analysis of the play have, I hope, helped you to discover the fascinating character of the Sultan — his love for power, his idealism and his self-imposed mission for the people, which co-existed 'with his impatience, his cruelty and his feeling that he had the only correct answer'.

A final word about Girish Karnad's achievement

Karnad's great achievement lies in re-interpreting the country's past, both its myth and folktales and history, to comment on matters of contemporary interest and also offer insights on human condition in general.

When asked what his legacy would be, he said: 'I am happy to belong to a generation that had a Dharma Vir Bharati, a Mohan Rakesh, a Vijay Tendulkar, and I. Together we can claim that we did create a national theatre for modern India'. (*India Today*: 12 April, 1999)

4.4 QUESTIONS

1. 'There was synthesis of opposing extremes in the character of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq'. Comment
2. What are the causes for the failure of Sultan Muhammad?
3. "People did not understand Sultan Muhammad as his ideas were in advance of his times". Do you agree with the statement?
4. Write a note on the contemporary relevance of *Tughlaq*.
5. Discuss the relevance of Aziz-Aazam episodes in the play.
6. Do you find the episode of Muhammad stabbing Shihab-ud-din repeatedly even after he was dead revolting? Was it dramatically necessary? Discuss.

4.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This Block will introduce you to important varieties of non-fictional prose in contemporary Indian writing in transtation. The varieties represented here are biography, autobiography, pen-sketch and travel writing.

The pieces chosen for your study are: Amrit Rai's biography of Munshi Premchand entitled: *Premchand: Kalam ka Sipahi* (Hindi), Bama's autobiography called *Karukku* (Tamil), Saadat Hasan Manto's pen-sketch of Ismat Chughtai called *Ismal* (Urdu), and Umaprasad Mukhopadhyaya's account of his travels to the lake and peak of *Manimahesh* in Chamba District in Himachal Pradesh.

Amrit Rai's biography, though written by a son, gives an objective account of one of the greatest writers of modrn Indian and is highly readable. The autobiography by Bama disturbs us deeply as it reveals what it means to be a poor Dalit woman even today. Manto's Ismat is a delightful piece in which one great writer writes intimately about another both as a person and a wirter. Finally, Umaprasad Mukhopadhyaya's travel account tells us of the treasures that lie waiting to be explored in our own country.

The excerpts from the longer texts have been kept conveniently short so that you can read them with enjoyment and also have time to reflect on what you have read.

The different genres of non-fictional prose on offer here have always been popular and are incressingly coming to tbe seen to be a look of the part of literature. They are all excellent examples of the creative to reflect on of the word and they all come to you in first-rate translation. So have read.

UNIT 1 AMRIT RAI : *PREMCHAND : HIS LIFE AND TIMES*
TRANSLATION : HARISH TRIVEDI

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
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1.3 Introduction to *Premchand: His Life and Times*
1.4 A Note on Biographical Writing in India
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to introduce you to one of the important forms of non-fictional prose namely. **biography**. The text chosen for your study is *Kalam Ka Sipahi*. Premchand's biography, written by his son Amrit Rai in Hindi. After reading the unit you will get to know Premchand's major concerns.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit contains an intimate account of Premchand's life as seen by his son over a period of time. We have chosen four chapters for your detailed study and have provided an analysis of the content and style. There is a separate note on the biographical writing in India. We are also reprinting a few photographs of Premchand taken from Amrit Rai's biography of Premchand in Hindi.

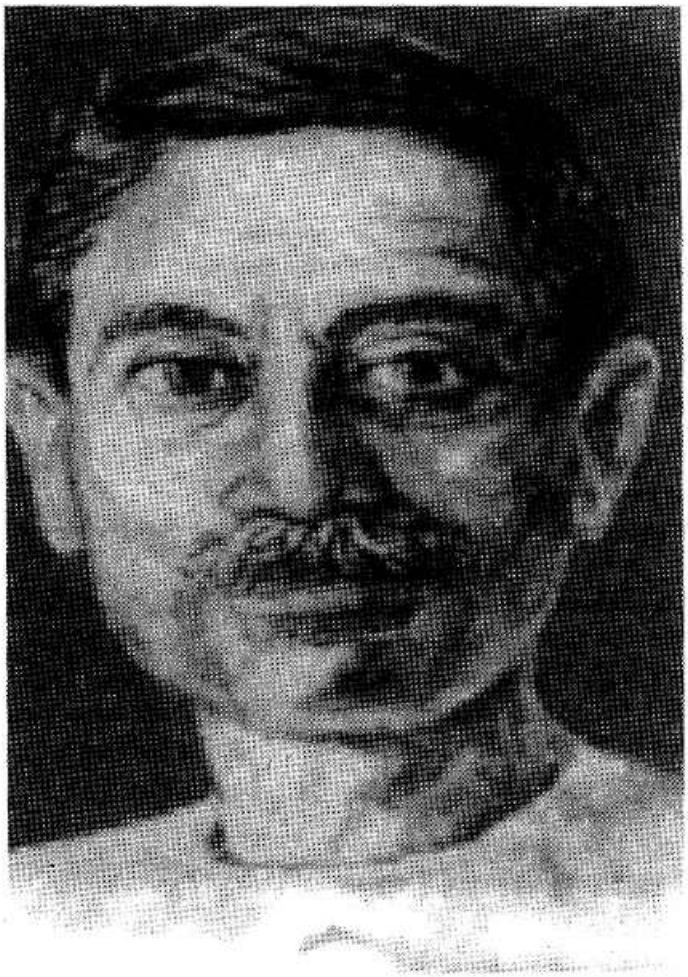
1.2 AMRIT RAI: AN INTRODUCTION

Amrit Rai is a prolific Hindi writer, whose well-earned reputation tends to be overshadowed by that of his illustrious father, Munshi Premchand. A professed Marxist, he has carved out a niche for himself in the Hindi literary world as a novelist and short story writer, dramatist, biographer and translator. He has many published works to his credit. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963 for his father's biography, *Kalam Ka Sipahi*, the Soviet Land Nehru Award in 1971 and the Nehru Fellowship during 1977-79, to enquire into the earliest origins of Hindi and its subsequent bifurcation into Hindi and Urdu, which stood him in good stead in his translations. Some of these are **Novels**: *Beej*; *Naagphani Ka Desh*; *Hathi Ke Daant* [The Elephant's Teeth] (1956); *Bhatiali* (1969); *Jungle* (1969); and *Sukh-Dhukh* [Joys and Sorrow]. **Short Story** collections: *Ithihas* [History]; *Kasbe Ka Ek Din* [A day in a Town] (1953); *Bhore Se Pahle*; *Katghare* [Cages] (1954); *Geeli Mitti* [The

Wet Earth] (1955); and *Chitraphalak*. **Translations**: *Agnideeksha* [Fire-Initiation] (1954); *Adividrohi* [Spartacus] (1957); *Ravindra Nibhandhmala*; *Hamlet* (1963); *Samargatha* (1973).

The translator of *Kalam Ka Sipahi* is Prof. Harish Trivedi of the Department of English at the University of Delhi. Prof. Trivedi is a renowned critic and translator.

1.3 INTRODUCTION TO *PREMCHAND: HIS LIFE AND TIMES*



Munshi Premchand (1880-1936)

Munshi Premchand (1880-1936) is easily the greatest novelist and short story writer in Hindi and Amrit Rai's biography of his father is said to be the first authentic, dispassionate biography of the writer. It has been acclaimed as a classic of Hindi biography and was indeed the first full-fledged modern biography in Hindi of any writer.

It was written in Hindi in 1962 and later an abridged version of it [The original is 640 pages] was translated into English by Harish Trivedi and published in 1982. The excerpts that you are to read are from this English translation. In addition to the Introduction, the chapters are 2, 12, 19, 25 and 33. These chapters bring up important concerns in the writer's life and

writings — his early addiction to reading and writing and his discovery of the power of the pen, his convictions as a writer, influence of Gandhiji, the writer as a *kalam ka sipahi,* and his views on language, particularly about Hindi-Urdu hostility and his efforts to bridge the widening gulf. According to the translator, Amrit Rai writes 'a lively, supple, and highly idiomatic style'. The translation, I need hardly say, is highly competent, but I would still suggest that those of you who can access the book in Hindi, should savour the full flavour of 'the zest and the relish' of the original as well. But those who read the original need to remember that the numbering of chapters in the original Hindi version is different from that in the English translation.

Here are the details so far as the chapters in your course are concerned.

Hindi original	**English version**
Chapter 2	Chapter 2
Chapter 11	Chapter 12
Chapter 17	Chapter 19
mid-Chapter 27 (page 427-439)	Chapter 25
Chapter 36	Chapter 33

Amrit Rai was a novelist and he considered his biography to be not so much a documentary as a "creative" work. Dismissing the suggestion that in his preface to the biography he called it

> a novel whose hero was a man named Premchand, with the difference that he was not a figment of his imagination but a figure of flesh and blood..., that I was not at liberty to kill him off or let him live, or to turn and twist him any which way I pleased, or invent events and episodes, but was well (or ill!) and truly tethered to a solid peg. But that was no cause for complaint, for I knew I wasn't entirely free even when writing a novel, for even there the narrator was in any case tied to the peg of life, to the peg of probability. With each act of creation goes its own discipline and its own code of restraint. But that doesn't impair the joy of creation...And such joy I have known in this work too, and in full measure (Quoted in Eng trans, xix).

This statement, according to Harish Trivedi, 'may account for many features of the biography which make for its distinct and unusual savour: a none too linear chronology, the occasional digression or speculation, and the author's readiness to reflect and soliloquize on his own behalf as well as, his subject's. In short, here is an uninhibited play of the privileges of an omniscient narrator' (xix). Evidence for these features is widespread in the biography.

The original Hindi title of the biography was *Premchand: Kalam ka Sipahi.* The subtitle, literally translated, would be 'A Soldier with a Pen'. Harish Trivedi had come up with 'The Pen as the Sword' but both he and Amrit Rai rejected it as it 'sounded a little corny'.

Whatever be the reasons for the choice of the present title in the translation, the original Hindi subtitle 'Kalam ka Sipahi' is highly appropriate. It suggests several things at once. If there is any leading metaphor in the book it is the use of the pen as a weapon to fight with. One can see many of its echoes and variations in the text. Premchand did cast himself in the role of a fighter — a fighter against the evils that bedevilled the Indian society and also a fighter for freedom. Premchand was 'inveterately a man of the family and for the family'.

But he did not wish to 'confine himself in a narrow and individualistic world' (111). He considered himself a member of the larger family of the nation as well. The use of the word sipahi' also suggests a humble foot soldier, in the serevice of the nation. At one place Amrit Rai says that Premchand's well-regulated life was 'more like the life of a peasant than that of an artist, with the difference that instead of a spade he wielded a pen' (119). The idea of everyone joining in with his/her little contribution comes through in the manifesto that Premchand wrote a fortnight before that start of the Dandi march on 25 March 1930 to the new journal *Hans* that he was taunching.

> As the legend has it, when Lord Rama was building a bridge across the sea numerous beasts and fowl had contributed their might by bringing in their *little portions* of the earth. The battle that rages in the country now is far fiercer. India has blown the bugle for a peaceful war. *Hans* too abandons the serenity of its legendary abode, the Mansarovar, and with its *little beakful of earth* goes forward to bridge the sea and to contribute to the battle for independence' (Italics added) (255)

Clearly, public events moved him profoundly, but he also knew that writing was his fortc. He had discovered the power of his pen when he was thirteen (chapter 2) and its was through his writings that he chose to give the best of hiself in the cause of the country's freedom and its future.

An important feature of Amrit Rai's biography is its objectivity that comes through clearly in the book For instance, he is unsparing in his criticism of Premchand for his obsession with the idea of having a press of his owr. Premchand's finances were poor but yet he chose to stake his all on a venture that was not likely to succeed. Notice that the biographer doesn't try to diminish the foolhardiness of the enterprise.

'He could easily have gone on writing his novels, his stories and articles would have brought him forty or fifty rupees a month... But no, there is after all such a thing as an obsession'! And this is an old obsession, on3e that has been bugging him for years altogether (175). The biographer's impatience and exasperation are clear. Later: 'He could never be accused of taking a plunge with his eyes closed; on the contrary his distinction lay in the fact that he always took his plunge with his eyes open!' (175) Notice the ironical tone here. Then: 'What a cruel mirage this was which he kept chasing all his life!' (176) The word 'cruel' conveys so much that remains unsaid. Finally: 'Only a simpleton could have thought of starting a press in Premchand's circumstances' (178). However, Amrit Rai also concedes that 'we all run after some illusion or the other' and what Premchand ran after was 'neither money nor authority nor any kind of false social prestige' ... (176). The figure that emerges from this episode is that of a person who is intensely involved in what he is doing and also intensely human.

1.4 A NOTE ON BIOGRAPHICAL WRITING IN INDIA

India does not have a tradition of biographical writing as it is known in the West. In his introduction, which is sadly omitted from the English translation. Amrit Rai laments the absence of good biographies in Hindi. He begins by saying that this work should have been done much carlier and preferably by someone else. He goes on to say that we shy away from writing biographies

In all the developed **countries the genre of** biography writing has made considerable advance. But our language [Hindi] is famished in this respect. Either we do not know what good biographical writing is, or we have an *idée fixe* in our minds that it is not a creative genre. Or else fear, just fear of the impediments in the way.' There was no important writer, scientist, artist, or public leader who did not have several biographies written about him, he said. He then goes on to say that Stefan Zweig (1881-1942) was alive as much because of his short stories as for his biography of Balzac. Shelley's biography by Andre Maurois, *Ariel* was well-known to all readers. No less well-known was Irving Stone's biography of the Dutch painter Van Gogh, *Lust for Life* (1934). He also refers to Emil Ludwig (1881-1948)) who, he said, had made a special place for himself in European literature because of his biographies including those of Napolean and Goethe. Hundreds of biographies written by talented persons came out every year and they were read even more avidly than novels. But as for India, he described the state of the Indian biography by comparing it to 'an untouchable who stood in a corner outside the entrance, forbidden to enter' ('Bhoomika' [Introduction] *Premchand: Kalam ka Sihpahi*, 10). Later he goes on to affirm that writing a biography was no less creative than writing a novel.

Writing in a similar vein, Ramchandra Guha, historian and biographer says that in contrast to the novel, the art of biography remains undeveloped in South Asia. This is perhaps due to the Indian tendency either to eulogize a person or condemn him or her completely. In his essay, 'Why South Asians don't write good biographies; he says: 'We know how to burn our dead with reverence or bury them through neglect *but not to evaluate, judge or honour them.*' *Himal South Asian*, October 2002 (italics added). He aptly called it 'a world governed by deference, not discrimination.' The second half of the twentieth century has been called the era of great biographies but as the Calcutta historian Rudrangshu Mukherjee says, this has 'left Indian writers and scholars unaffected'. We tend to think of people in either black or white. There are no shades of grey for us. And when someone ventures to point out the hero's weaknesses, we resent it and become intolerant and go overboard in expressing our prejudices. A recent example of it is the fate of Hamish McDonald's biography of Dhirubhai Ambani, *The Polyester Prince* published by Allen and Unwin in 1998. According to Sucheta Dalal, the book was an 'accurate portrait' of 'one of the most colourful, controversial and brilliant of Indian businessmen' but because it was not a hagiography, the book is still not available in Indian bookstores. The Ambanis, she says, have threatened to take legal action against for anything they perceived as defamatory in the book. As a result we have taken a long time in coming to the writing of critical biographies in India. Ramachandra Guha lists only two outstanding examples — S. Gopal's biography of Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (1989) and Amrit Rai's biography of Premchand (1962).

The genre of biography writing combines the authenticity of history with the aesthetics of literature. It is therefore a most difficult genre.

A good biographer must be sympathetic to the personage he/she is writing about and he must try to know all about him. But he must also put him in the context of the life around him and give a picture of the person, which is at once complete and critical. He must not slur over inconvenient facts and must refrain from whitewashing reputations. It is from this point of view that Amrit Rai's biography of Premchand is considered to be a masterpiece.

1.5 ANALYSIS

i. Introduction

The introduction begins with three anecdotes underlining the utter simplicity of Munshi Premchand even when he had become a great writer. He never assumed airs. This utter simplicity remained with him till the very end. A characteristic photograph of his shows him seated along side his wife. He has a cap made of some thick material and is wearing a kurta and dhoti and canvas shoes on his feet with laces tied irregularly. There is a big hole in the left shoe through which his toes can be seen protruding. Premchand, half-smiling, seems totally unaware of the state of his shoes. This photograph available between pages 408 and 409 in Chapter 26 of the unabridged Hindi version, speaks for the writer's utter simplicity and much else. The well-known Hindi satirist Hari Shankar Parsai has written a piece entitled 'Premchand ke Phate Joote' on this photograph, which is worth reading.

Premchand Ke Phate Joote

ii. Chapter 2: Premchand discovers the power of his pen...

Outline Summary: Nawab's childhood pranks at his village Lamahi, bringing down mangoes, ripe and unripe from the trees — playing with Kazaki, a mail runner who would tell him and other children tales of all kinds — at 8, starts learning Urdu and Persian — is fond of sugar cane and jaggery — loses mother, father remarries — mother's loss reflected in his writings later — at 13, develops a new interest in reading tales of magic and suspense and romance — starts writing stories of social relevance — his first piece of writing is about a philandering uncle, who gets beaten by the villagers for trying to molest a charwoman of the house — Nawab writes a burlesque in the form of a play on the incident, that proves effective in sending the uncle away

bag and baggage — discovers the power of the pen — his pen to be his shield as well as his sword.

Comments

This is an important chapter because it tells us how from being footloose in Lamahi, Premchand became an avid rambler in the story land of fairies and magic and romance and later a writer of social relevance. Amrit Rai has presented the entire transition graphically.

Unfortunately, he lost his mother when he was not yet eight and his father remarried. The vacuum thus created was difficult to fill in, for the memory of it remained buried in Premchand only to surface years later in his novel *Karambhoomi* (1932). Childhood is most certainly a seedtime.

When he was 13, Premchand took to reading and he read enormously, or rather voraciously. Fed by his grandmother's tales and the tales told by the mail-runner, Kazaki, he read *Talisma Hoshruba* by Maulana Faizi, humourous tales of Maulana Sajjad Husain and works by Mirza Ruswa and Ratan Nath Sarshar. Thereafter he turned his attention to the *puranas* in Urdu translation.

Inevitably such reading led to writing but surprisingly when he started writing at 13 he chose to write not tales of magic but of social relevance. Here one can see genius at work, though Amrit Rai explains the discrepancy between his reading and writing by saying that 'some impulse larger than himself guided him to choose the path that he did'. As a proof of the writer's choice of the credo of social relevance, the biographer quotes the writer's own account of how he came to write the burlesque on his philandering uncle. Premchand made an astounding discovery — that his writing could move people. Notice Amrit Rai's crisp depiction of the discovery:

> It proved enough to drive the uncle away, bag and baggage. Nawab was still weak in body but this was probably the first time that he had known himself to possess a strength which was mightier far than brute force. A pen could succeed where a stick or a staff might have failed...What a fine discovery he had made!... *From now on, his pen would be his shield as well as his sword* (22). (italics added)

Questions

1. Several times the biographer uses the metaphor of the pen as a weapon in the hands of the writer. Make a note of the occasions when he does so as you read the biography. (Hint: Chapter 12, page 119)

2. How do you like the original Hindi title of the biography — *Kalam ka Sipahi*?

3. How does the biographer explain Premchand's choice of the path of social relevance for his writings?

4. When does Premchand realize the necessity of writing about the life of a peasant with which he had been surrounded right from the beginning?

iii. Chapter 12 — Happy days are back again at Gorakhpur, 1916, both personally and as a nation.

Outline Summary: Second Master at Normal School — birth of a son — domestic feud between wife and stepmother — meets Mahavir Prasad Podar, realizes the greater potential of writing in Hindi — upward swing in health due in part to national resurgence — Premchand's family was his world but his was not a narrow individualistic world — nation was a larger family — profoundly moved by public events but chooses to influence the people through his pen — Congress session in Lucknow in 1916 — reconciliation between Congress and Muslim League and between the Moderates and the Radicals within the Congress — emergence of Gandhi on Premchand's mental horizon as a new kind of leader who really serves the people — influence of Tolstoy — Gandhi's ideals of truth, non-violence and renunciation his ideals too — highly successful as a teacher — nationalistic content — punctuality — free mixing between his children and the children of Muslim employees.

Comments

This chapter tells us of important changes and developments in Premchand's thinking. Three of these are:

i. We see an important shift in Premchand moving from Urdu to Hindi as having greater potential, through a friend Mahavir Prasad Podar, who becomes his publisher in Hindi. This opening up of another language is going to have a far-reaching effect on his career later.

ii. Premchand is described as a man of the family but at the same time he considers the nation to be a larger family and so is profoundly moved by public events. He knows he will serve his country through his pen.

iii. Premchand thinks of Gandhi as a new kind of leader who really wants to serve the people. Gandhi's ideals of truth, non-violence and renunciation were his ideals also. He presents such a mahatma in *Jalwa-e-Isar* and through several other characters in his fiction.

All these new realizations come to us in Amrit Rai's clear, unhurried, unaffected style. But he never loses an opportunity for humour. Notice how he reports the birth of a son. This event took place in the verandah of their new house where they were put up for the night: '...his fears proved true. Right on the verandah where they had been accommodated for the night, his older son Dhunnu (formally to be called Sripat) announced his intention to be born!' (107)

Amrit Rai also livens up his description of Premchand's childhood days with small but interesting details that make the narrative so graphic and so realistic. This is what he says about Gorakhpur, where he had spent several years of his childhood: '...it was here that he had smoked his first cigarette, at the age of thirteen, and here, too, that he was probably initiated into the delights of filthy talk in the company of the usual street urchins' (108-09).

We have also an early glimpse of Premchand's attitude in letting his children mix with those of his low-paid Muslim employees.

We also have a glimpse of Premchand as a teacher. Most importantly, the writer likens the regularity in Premchand's life to that in the life of a peasant. The chapter closes with the biographer reiterating the metaphor of the pen as a weapon in the simplest of words: 'A highly wellregulated life, which was more the life of a peasant than that of an "artist', with the difference that instead of a spade he wielded a pen' (119).

Comments

1. How is the metaphor of the pen as a weapon elaborated in this chapter?
2. What drew him to Gandhi?
3. Premchand is described as a man of the family and for the family. How then does he relate himself to the nation?

iv. Chapter 19 — All about *Rangbhoomi*

Outline Summary: *Chaugan-e-hasti* [Rangbhoomi] written during Oct. 1922-Apr. 1924; his nationalistic concerns reflected in the novel — Surdas, a blind, old beggar, a projection of the writer himself and of Gandhi; other likenesses with the Nehrus, other people — charges of plagiarism levelled against him — Premchand defends himself; becomes literary adviser to Ganga Pustakmala, a publishing house in Lucknow at Rs.100/- per month.

Comments

1. In the introduction we had drawn your attention to a distinguishing feature of the biography — namely 'the author's readiness to reflect and soliloquize on his own behalf as well as, at times, his subject's' (xix). The first page of the chapter offers a clear example of the biographer's reflections. With Premchand's novel *Rangbhoomi* in the foreground, Amrit Rai is reflecting on *the chief characteristic of Premchand's writings — his topical relevance.* He could also be speaking for Premchand himself. Notice how he begins by stating the chief characteristic of his writing and goes on to reflect on the future and the flow of time.

> Whether one considers it a fault or virtue, topical relevance was the chief characteristic of Premchand as a writer. He wrote in the present and for the present and for the good reason that he cared for the future. There is no short cut to the future, except through the present....Time is continuous and eternal, as is man with his joys and sorrows. It is an ever-flowing stream from the beginning to infinity — and we who are conditioned by time and space can merely gather up in our palms a little measure from the stream and dedicate it to the sun, the source of life, and then restore it to the eternal stream. With a peaceful and tranquil heart we can float a little earthen lamp on the eternal waves, and that is our tribute to the future.

Later he comes back to his starting point:

> No one has ever conquered time by turning away from the present. We must accept life as it has been given to us, answer

> the questions that the age poses before us — questions of what is just and unjust, what is beautiful and what is not — and forget the rest (193).

Later he uses the metaphor of life as a battle to reinforce the same point:

> Life is a battlefield and we are all mere soldiers. A soldier must only look to the battle before him....

2. The biographer then tries to illustrate this by relating Premchand's new novel *Rangabhoomi* (completed, August 1924) to the mood of the nationalistic movement of the time and to his own life. The central character of Surdas, he says, may have been suggested by a blind beggar whom Premchand had seen doing the rounds of the streets but he argues that through this creation, Premchand speaks of 'his own life-long suffering and his own understanding of his life.' Surdas, he says, he has created out of his own blood and represents Premchand himself. Later he goes on to suggest that in his sublimer aspects Surdas can also be identified with Gandhi. The entire argument is presented in a convincing manner and the biographer quotes chapter and verse to substantiate his point of view.

3. Finally the biographer talks about the charges of plagiarism levelled against Premchand. Here again there is no attempt to dismiss the charges out of hand and he represents the whole controversy fairly.

Questions

1. What exactly does the writer try to say in the long reflection on pages 193-94?

2. Can you spot other examples of this reflection/soliloquy from this or the other chapters of the book?

3. How does the biographer handle the charges of plagiarism made against Premchand?

V. Chapter 25 — Premchand's call to his countrymen through *Hans* and other writings, to prepare to fight for Swaraj, 1930.

Outline Summary: After the Viceroy gives a curt reply to Gandhi's ultimatum in 1930, the nation prepares for a fight in the form of defiance of Salt Tax law — Dandi March led by Gandhi begins 25 March 1930 — Premchand, a rebel, uses his pen to call upon his countrymen to be ready to fight for *Poorna Swaraj* through *Hans*, his new literary-political monthly and other writings — stories and articles flow from his pen — living next door to the Congress office in Aminuddaula Park, Lucknow, Premchand puts a Gandhi cap on the satyagrahis, his wife applies tilak on their foreheads — his press publishing *Hans* asked to deposit security of Rs.1000/- for seditious writing — his wife, Sivarani Devi, becomes a Congress activist, is arrested while picketing at Lucknow, 20 Nov 1930 — Premchand appeals to the younger zamindars as *kshstrivas* to stand up for the people.

Comments

1. A characteristic feature of Amrit Rai's style is to produce evidence and then draw conclusions. Notice his description of Premchand as 'an inveterate rebel', 'a passionate fighter for freedom' (255). But before he brings himself to say this he quotes the writer from his manifesto in the inaugural issue of the journal *Hans*. There are other quotations too to substantiate this. Later we are also informed that his wife Sivrani Devi also courts arrest (261). All this is really an extension of Premchand's decision to resign his 21-year long government job during the non-co-operation movement. (For an earlier evidence of this strategy see how Amrit Rai reports Premchand's discovery of the power of his pen in Chapter 2, pages 20-22.)

2. While announcing his decision to launch a new Hindi journal *Hans* Premchand admits: 'I know it is sheer folly, whith lot of headache and no gain, but I am tempted to be foolish. All my life I have gone from one folly to the other, so why not one more' (255). He is obviously referring to his dream project of acquiring a press of his own. But having talked about it in earlier chapters (chapter 17, for instance) Amrit Rai wisely decides to keep mum and let Premchand speak for himself. Moreover Premchand's persistence over his project is a mark of genius. A lesser mortal would not have ventured at all.

Questions

1. Pick out the sentence that uses the metaphor of the pen as a weapon. In what context has it been used here?

2. What metaphor does the biographer use to indicate the fight with the British rulers?

3. Examine the text closely and find further evidence for the biographer's strategy discussed in point 1 under Comments above.

vi. Chapter 33 — Premchand is deeply disturbed over the widening gulf between Hindi and Urdu.

Outline Summary: Premchand in Delhi with Jainendra Kumar Jain on Holi — inaugurates the Hindustani Sabha at Jamia Millia — is concerned about the widening gulf between Urdu and Hindi — is persuaded to agree to preside over the Progressive Writers' Association, Lucknow, April 1936 — his address an exposition of the elements of the true, the good and the beautiful in literature — presides over the Aryabhasha Sammelan at Lahore, same month — again speaks of the dire need to bridge the gulf between Urdu and Hindi — also speaks at the Hindustani Sabha — takes part in the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad at Nagpur, April 1936 with Gandhi in the chair — *Godan* is published — health deteriorates.

Comments

1. This chapter gives a glimpse of two passionately held convictions of Premchand — about a new vision of truth and beauty in literature and

about the need to bridge the widening gulf between Hindi and Urdu. Keeping his own comments to the minimum, Amrit Rai lets Premchand's words speak and what an effective speaker he must have been! Rejecting the narrow idea that 'beauty lies in a lovely woman' out of hand, he suggests an alternative vision of it: 'Art has been and still is taken to mean a narrow aestheticism....Its view is not yet wide enough to comprehend the sublime beauty of the battle of life....For it, beauty lies in a lovely woman, but not in that plain poor mother of many children who has put her baby to sleep at the edge of the field and is now sweating in toil....If this view of beauty undergoes an enlargement, it will be found that if painted lips and cheeks hide vanity and heartlessness, these parched lips and the tears on these withered cheeks reflect self-sacrifice, reverence and forbearance' (349).

Premchand is equally passionate about the paramount need to bridge the gulf between Hindi and Urdu.

This was a radical vision of truth and beauty that was highly relevant to the hard times that the country was passing through and that is relevant in some ways even today. 'The Temple of Literature', he went on to say, had 'no place for devotees of wealth and splendour' nor for those who hanker after fame and prestige. The writers were 'all foot-soldiers, marching on with the banner of society in our hands...' (350).

Amrit Rai's comment on this radical vision is restrained: 'This is a new, balanced and vital vision of truth and beauty which was being so clearly expounded here for the first time in this country' (349).

2. The issue of the widening divide between Hindi and Urdu preoccupied Premchand in the last years of his life. He lamented the fact that Hindi had come to be identified as the language of Hindus and Urdu of Muslims and that each community had turned its back on the language of the other. So strongly did he feel about the issue that it made the travel-shy writer go to various places and plead for bridging the gulf between the two languages. At Lahore he said:

> It is necessary for both the sections among ourselves to learn both the scripts and both the languages. When we can sacrifice fifteen years of our life in acquiring English, can't we spend even a month or two on learning a script and a literature on which may depend not only the progress of our nation but its very existence? (353)

Wise words these but unlikely to have much effect then as now. The proceedings of Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad presided over by Gandhi at Nagpur in April 1936 highlighted another facet of Premchand's personality — the courage of his convictions. Gandhiji had proposed that 'Hindi or Hindustani' be the medium of its proceedings. But the use of the word Hindi was an anathema to Urdu writers, though no one was prepared to come out openly against Gandhiji. Premchand then stood up and made 'a strong and passionate speech in favour of using Hindustani' (355) as the medium of the work of the Parishad. His stand may have made him unpopular with Hindiwalas but he held on

to that position till the end. This chapter presents Premchand as a peacemaker between Hindi and Urdu, a task which was very dear to him but at which he failed.

3. The chapter ends with Premchand writing to his young writer-friend Jainendra Kumar about his newly published novel *Godan*. He asks him to write an article on it if he likes it. 'But if you don't like it, just write to me and don't write the article' (358). Amrit Rai's comment is brief and apt: 'What an extraordinary man!'

4. The chapter closes on a sombre note with a sentence that has a double meaning.

Questions

1. What exactly is Premchand's vision of truth and beauty?

2. Describe Premchand's efforts to bridge the Hindi-Urdu divide.

3. What impression of Premchand's character do you form after reading this chapter?

1.6 LET US SUM UP

These chapters give only a glimpse of one of the most remarkable writers of modern India. Do try to read as much of the biography as you can. Though a son, the biographer has not slurred over any inconvenient detail nor has he tried to whitewash his father's reputation. Simple and unassuming in his habits, Premchand emerges as a person who had the courage of his convictions and who could oppose even Gandhiji when the occasion arose. He was a commoner extraordinary, if ever there was one.

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. Amrit Rai has presented Premchand as 'a commoner extraordinary' Discuss.

2. In what way do you consider Amrit Rai's biography as being objective and dispassionate? Do you think that his being Premchand's son interfered with his work as a biographer?

3. Bring out the distinctive features of Amrit Rai's biography of Premchand.

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 BAMA (FAUSTINA MARY FATIMA RANI) : *KARUKKU* TRANSLATION : LAXMI HOLMSTROM

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 A Note on Dalit Literature(s)
2.3 Bama and Her Works
2.4 *Karukku*
  2.4.1 Summaries (Chapters 1-9)
  2.4.2 *Karukku*: An Analysis
2.5 Conclusion
2.6 Let Us Sum Up
2.7 Questions
2.8 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we will be studying the Tamil Dalit writer, Bama, which is the pseudonym of Faustina Mary Fatima Rani. This is also meant to introduce you to Dalit writing from Tamil Nadu in particular and Dalit writing from across India in general. By the end of this unit, you would have thought deeply about the nature of Dalit life and writing, about the relationship between activism and literature. You would also have learnt to complicate issues by looking at them from different perspectives — here, because of the nature of Bama's work as a Christian Dalit as well as a woman writer, both of which give a tangentially different understanding of Dalit experiences. (You will also have learnt to appreciate a different style of writing, both in terms of language and technique. The testimonial form of writing (about her own life and that of her community in this instance) creates a generic challenge — is this fiction or not, or is it an autobiography? The answer to that would be to treat this work as autobiographical fiction, a literary work that is an offspring of both genres, its value truly dependant on its perceived truth of expression, its complete fidelity to lived experience. (Perhaps, this is why you find this work in a block on non-fictional prose!)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we will look at Dalit Literature(s), and then at the entirety of Bama's work. We will then summarize all the chapters of *Karukku*, look at the work as a whole, and then look closely at the two chapters that are prescribed in order to see her theme as well as technique. I will give you a few comments about her use of language but only to give you an idea of what she does in Tamil. Otherwise, it makes very little sense to talk of her use of language when we are reading a translation, but a major creative strategy among Dalit writers in all languages is to work on the language itself, to go against both established form and established literary language. But first, we will also look briefly at the category of Dalit literature(s) and see how Bama fits into it.

We have in the course two excerpts, Chapters 4 & 8 from her work, *Karukku* translated by Laxmi Holmstrom. L.H. was born in 1935 in Salem and holds degrees in English from Madras and Oxford universities. She has translated *Karukku* from the Tamil original to English. Her critical articles have found acclaim in a number of journals in India, Europe and the U.S. Her translations of Tamil novels and short stories have been published by Katha, East-West Books, Virgo, Heinemann and Cambridge University Press.

2.2 A NOTE ON DALIT LITERATURE(S)

While it would be difficult to talk of all Dalit writings or the complexity of issues involved in such a brief introduction, it is important that you know some of the issues involved and the aims of this movement in various literatures in our languages. The first question to ask is if we know the meaning of the word "dalit" and if we know who used it first and why it was adopted by the people.

"Dalit" means "ground", "crushed" or "broken into pieces", and is a Marathi word with a Sanskrit root. The term refers to those who fall outside the Hindu caste system, the "outcastes" or the "untouchables". Dalits have been referred to by different names, the most famous being "Harijan" or children of God, which was coined by Mahatma Gandhi. However, Dalits prefer to call themselves by this name, acting out the oppression and the rebellion in the very term that refers to them.

"Dalit" may have been used for the first time in this manner by Jotiba Phule (1827-90) in the nineteenth century, but its more famous use was by Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), the father of the Indian constitution and the greatest of Dalit leaders. It was in his journal, *Bahishkrut Bharat*, that Ambedkar first defined dalithood as "life conditions which characterize the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalits by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper castes' Brahmanical ideology". It is interesting to note that Ambedkar used different terms for Dalits in different contexts — "Scheduled Castes" was the term he used in politics and is the term used in the Constitution of India; "Depressed Classes" was what he used when addressing the British rulers; "Bahishkrut" (outcaste) was what he used to upper-caste Hindus, and "Pad Dalit" (crushed underfoot) was the term he used with fellow-Dalits.

The term "Dalit" found favour with activists, and the manifesto of the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra, published in 1973, defines Dalits as "members of scheduled castes and tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion". In other words, this broad definition includes all the oppressed. What is important to note is that this broadening takes the term beyond the Hindu fold to embrace Dalits who have converted to Buddhism, and in later years this would also embrace those who converted to Islam or Christianity.

The Dalit literary movement was born in Maharashtra in the 1960s and slowly spread to the rest of India. This movement made a late start in Tamil, coming to the fore only in the 1990s after the celebrations of the birth centenary of Dr

Ambedkar. This was because of many reasons, some of which are the collapse of the communist bloc and disaffection with the policies of Dravidian parties. For a long time communism was seen to represent the interests of lower castes who were almost automatically lower class, but this was now felt to be untrue. The same was the case with the Dravidian anti-brahmin movement for self-respect, which seemed to address the inequities that Dalits had been subjected to, but the material realities of their lives convinced the Dalits that their welfare issues were not being addressed by those in power. Perhaps, the most influential reason was the publication and circulation in Tamil of the writings of Dr Ambedkar as part of the centenary celebrations.

Raj Gautaman, a Tamil Dalit critic, assigns two major tasks for Tamil Dalit literature: to awaken the Dalit in every reader (i.e. to make every reader share the Dalit experience), and to be the Tamil, Indian link in the chain of worldwide literatures of the oppressed. Interestingly, the Tamil Dalit writers did not come only or even majorly from the Hindu fold (if being outcastes can be called that). Bama, whom you are studying in this unit, is a Christian, as are other writers like Vidivelli (who was also a nun for a while), and Markku (who is a backward caste Christian, accepted by Dalit critics as a Dalit writer). Some of the other prominent Dalit writers are novelists Sivakami, and Imayam, and the poet Raj Kumar and the dramatist Gunasekaran. Mention must also be made of Dalit critics and theoreticians like Raj Gautaman, Ravi Kumar, and Tirumaalavan.

2.3 INTRODUCTION: BAMA AND HER WORKS

Bama is perhaps the most prominent of Tamil Dalit writers and also figures among the best known Dalit writers from across India. She shot to fame with her autobiography novel, *Karukku* (1992). It won the Crossword Award for the best fiction in Indian languages available in English translation in 2001. This translation by Lakshmi Holmstrom is what you are expected to read. Do read the original Tamil if you can, for it is always interesting and instructive to read the original along with the translation.

Bama is the pen name of Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, who was born in a Roman Catholic family in 1958, in the village of Puthupatti in Tamil Nadu. It may not be apparent in English but her pseudonym, Bama, is made up from

the different sounds from her Christian name. Hers was a Dalit Christian family, her grandfather having converted to Christianity. The status of the family did not change much and they remained landless labourers, working for upper caste landlords. However, Bama's father was in the army and this made some difference to their lives. Like all children, Bama played many games with her four siblings, her favourite game being "Kabaddi". Her reason for liking the game is typical of her attitude to life and writing — "I liked the whole business of challenging, crossing over and vanquishing the opponent", she explained in an interview.

If her father, an Indian army personnel was instrumental in educating her and her siblings, her brother, Raj Gautaman, who is a leading Dalit theoretician, literary critic, encouraged her to read. While Bama read Jayakantan, Akhilan, Mani and Parthasarthy — all Tamil writers — she also read Kahlil Gibran and Rabindranath Tagore. Bama also wrote poetry when she was in college. After finishing her college, Bama became a schoolteacher because she wanted to educate very poor girls. However, at the age of 26 she decided to enter the church, and took the vows to become a nun. This was a well thought out decision to pursue her mission to educate poor Dalit children. It was also an attempt to further herself from bonds of caste which were invidious in social life. "I felt that at the seminary I would be able to carry forward my work with the poor", she says. However, her experience in the convent disillusioned her and she walked out in 1992, after seven years. She felt that she had lost everything. Her only good memories were those of childhood. One of her friends, Father Mark, who listened to her laments, suggested that she write her childhood memoirs. Almost as therapy, Bama began to write *Karukku* and completed it in six months.

Her next work, *Sangati* (1994), a novel, dealt with her life as a Dalit woman. This is further explored in her collection of short stories *Kisumbukkaaran* (1996). In her next novel, *Vanmam*, Bama writes of the rivalry between two Dalit communities, the Pallars and the Paraiyars. As the writer C.S. Lakshmi (who writes under the pen-name of "Ambai") writes, Bama is more than a writer, she is "a chronicler and recorder of Dalit life and struggle in Tamil Nadu". (*The Hindu Literary Review*, August 3, 2003, p. 6).

2.4 *KARUKKU*

By now, you must have read the excerpts from *Karukku* that have been prescribed for you. Even the excerpts would have revealed to you that this is no ordinary piece of fiction. This autobiographical narrative, which gives you testimony about a life, has to be treated as a different literary genre — to be seen as both an attestation of truth, a social critique, as well as a carefully structured and written literary narrative, to be appreciated as you would any powerful work of fiction. I wonder if you have read any Dalit literary work other than those prescribed for you in this course. If you have read any other prose work, this is the time to pause and reflect. What was your experience of reading it? Were you shocked? Did you like reading the work? Wherein lay its importance to you? And this for even those who haven't read any other prose work written by Dalits: what did you expect from *Karukku*? What were your initial reactions? Disbelief? Shock? Do you consider this a powerful and significant work of literature? What does the book actually do?

Since you may not have read the entire book (though I strongly urge you to) at this point, I will attempt a summary of the work.

2.4.1 Summaries (Chapters 1-9)

Karukku is divided into nine chapters and also has a preface (both in the Tamil and English versions) and an afterword (only in the English version). The introductions to the book are also worth reading (Lakshmi Holmstrom's in the English, and Markku's and Jayaraj's in Tamil).

"Preface"

Bama begins the preface by comparing *Karukku* (palmyra leaves, whose serrated edges make them like double-edged swords) to her own life. The word *Karukku* also contains the word "karu", which means embryo or seed. So the very oppressive life that she had to face, carried within the seeds for her literary work. Bama tells us in the preface that it was the difficulties she faced and her desire to break free of oppressive bonds that led to her writing the book. Bama refers to "The Epistle to the Hebrews" (New Testament) where the Word of God is described as a two-edged sword. The reference is to this statement: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart". (Hebrews, 4:10) She feels that people's hearts are hardened and non-responsive to God now. She feels that Dalits must speak up now, function as God's word, and pierce the hearts of the oppressors.

Chapter 1

"Our village is very beautiful". Thus begins the first chapter of *Karukku*. However, the village is not named, nor is the narrator. Chapter 1 sets the scene and alerts you to Bama's narrative strategy (about which we shall talk later). In the very first paragraph, which is only four sentences, she lets us know that the village has seen no progress and that there are many different communities who live there but that she would come to the issue of castes and communities only after she tells us about her village. But the description of the village cannot escape references to castes and communities because the very names of various places point our attention to ownership or use by people of different communities. While she seems to be nostalgic about the past, and painting a romantic picture of her village, a close reading will reveal that she constantly looks at the natural surroundings as sites of work and scenes for acts of discrimination. If she describes the rocks that are "round about" her village, we see that one of them was named after washer men, actually "boys [who] would wash clothes there, steaming and whitening them" (1). After describing some fields that belong to a Naicker, Bama mentions that her people are labourers. If they could not find work, the beautiful woods on the mountains would beckon them to gather firewood (1). This is not the fate of upper castes. Even when it rains and her village gets more beautiful and the fish is plentiful, in her street they bought and cooked the "cheapest we could get", while the upper castes ate all sorts of fish (2). While she continues to describe the natural beauty of her village, she moves on to share anecdotes about a person called Bondan, who used to live by his wits, stealing from the landlords. She sketches a life of superstition, belief in spirits, and of almost unquestioning acceptance of the oppressive caste system. The landless labourers knew every

field in their village (fields which were owned by Naickers) and would unfailingly turn up for work at the right field at the right time. This caste system is written into the social geography of her village — "I don't know how it came about that the upper-caste communities and the lower-caste communities were separated like this into different parts of the village". The Dalits would go to the other side when they had work to do there. "But, they never, ever, came to our parts". They had no reason to since all institutions like the post-office, school, the church stood in their part of the village (6). Bama gives a critique of village life even as she seems to describe it with nostalgia and yearning. She tells us the nicknames of people, their eccentricities, and then ends the chapter with the recounting of a local legend — of a younger sister who is resented by the brother's wife and who is finally forced to commit suicide along with her seven children when her sister-in-law turned them all out. The brother killed his wife and built a temple for his good younger sister (named Nallathanga — meaning precisely that, good younger sister) and her children. Bama says that the temple exists till date.

Chapter 2

Bama mentions untouchability for the first time in the opening sentence of the second chapter. She says she saw it in practice and was humiliated by it when she was a young child, walking back from school. In her usual fashion, she describes her walks back from school, how she used to dawdle and watch the goings on around her. She gives us a view of what all used to happen in the market place those days. But one day when she entered her street she saw that a threshing floor had been set up and the Naicker was overseeing the work. She saw with amusement an elder from her community walking towards the Naicker carrying a small packet of "vadai or green banana bhajji", "holding out the packet by its string, without touching it" (13). The child Bama wanted to laugh at such an antic by an elder, but her elder brother explained to her about untouchability. It is then that she burst out against caste practice and oppression. She recalls that both her grandmothers worked as servants for Naicker families and recounts their routine humiliations. They worked hard for the Naickers, from dawn till dusk, with almost no reward. Even the food that they got was leftover food from the Naicker home, food which was given almost as a favour. It is her elder brother, who was already studying at the university, who educated her about caste practices and exhorted her to study, demonstrating through his own life that education broke down caste barriers and practices.

Bama shows how prejudices and caste practices are so much a part of the system that lower caste children are discriminated against almost naturally even in institutions like the school and the church. The school and the church sided with the upper castes in their very physical locations in the Nadar Street. Harijan children, Bama says, were treated as contemptible but used as cheap labour (16). She gives us an anecdote about when she was labelled a thief unjustly, because a coconut had fallen when they were playing. The headmaster's caste, as a Chaaliyar, becomes important here since the Chaaliyars and the Parayars (Bama's community) were locked in a battle at the time over a cemetery. Even the priest to whom she goes for justice, tells her that she must be a thief because she is a Paraya. She says things were no better in the high school she attended in the neighbouring town. The lower caste children were discriminated against and humiliated in very many ways.

She found even the governmental policy of identifying and helping Harijan children as humiliating. The only time she found some pride in it was when she was marked out as the best Harijan student in the district. Even in college, she felt the pricks, especially when a lecturer asked all Scheduled Caste students to stand and identify themselves since the Government wanted them to have special tuition. She refused this offer in anger since she felt that this only continued to identify her by caste. She found that she gained the respect of her peers and her teachers by studying well. Even when she finished her B. Ed and joined a (convent) school to teach, she found that the nuns disdained her as well as the Dalit students who made the majority in the school. After five years of teaching, Bama was filled with a desire to become a nun herself in order to help Dalit children. So, she joined an order against the wishes of her family and friends who warned her that caste discrimination was rampant within the church. Soon enough she realised that there was a disjunction between her and the order; and that the nuns looked down on Tamilians to begin with and that Tamil Parayas were the lowest of the low. The very first convent that she was sent to, after acceptance into the order, was a shock. Catering to the rich, it had Dalits doing all the menial jobs and being treated as less than human. Bama was full of anguish because she could not bring herself to tell the other nuns that she too belonged to a lower caste when she heard them speak insultingly about lower castes.

Bama ends the chapter on a poignant and anguished note about the status of Dalits and calls for action to "crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission", and to bring about a "just society where all are equal" (25).

Chapter 3

This chapter delineates the conflict between Parayars and Chaaliyars over the cemetery that Parayars had traditionally used in Bama's village. This cemetery was next to a Chaaliyar community school. The upper caste Christians had a different cemetery. The Chaaliyars wanted the cemetery so that it could become a playground for their school. Hence, there were frequent skirmishes between the two communities. Bama recounts an incident that blew into a major clash and brought forth unjust police action against the Dalits, when she was eleven years old. She details police brutality and the resilience of the women of her community. She remembers how even the Church sided against them, with the priest even refusing to loan some money for the court hearings. She ends the chapter by commenting that there are often such frequent clashes between Pallars (another lower caste) and Parayars. This leads to killings and court cases. Bama's lament is that the upper-caste men are having the last laugh here — "Instead of uniting together in a village of many castes, if they keep challenging each other to fights, what will happen to all these men in the end?" she asks (41).

Chapter 4

This chapter is in your course. It is about work — about the hard labour that constitutes the life of lower castes, and about the exploitation and the little reward they get. The chapter begins with a seemingly simple straightforward statement: "From the time that I was a small child, I saw people working hard; I grew up amongst such people" (41). This is the beginning of an astute and damning critique of caste practices and their relationship to labour and

ownership of resources in our country. She details various kinds of labour — agricultural, construction, working with leaves or at the brick kilns, and foraging for firewood – that constituted the life of her community in her village. The lands are owned by Naickers, and the Parayars are bonded labourers. She says that in her village only the Pallars and Parayars had to work so hard in order to be able to eat and survive. Only the families of teachers "lived with any degree of comfort" (42).

Bama's grandmother "was a true and proper servant" (42). She worked hard from dawn to dusk, six days a week, and even seven when called for. All this for a little gruel. Even Bama, as a schoolgirl, had to do manual labour to help out. She describes her experiences of harvesting the ground nut crop – hard work for a maximum of five rupees a day. Shelling the groundnuts was equally hard work and paid about the same amount. She would also collect thorny twigs or go with other children to collect firewood in the jungle after bribing the forest guard. This was again very hard work for very little money or for a little fuel. Bama recollects that even her mother used to collect firewood and that in one instance, she brought home a bundle of firewood and "began vomiting vasts gobs of blood" (45). Bama comments that "it was only by toiling like this, without taking any account of their bodies as human flesh and blood, that people of my community could even survive" (45). Children began to work as soon as they were ten or twelve. The girl children would look after the home in the absence of their mothers who had to go out to work. Boys would graze sheep or cattle and then go off to work when they were older. Bama says that they would very often be paid in kind for their work and then the Nadar shopkeepers would cheat them. So, their "hard work was exploited half the time by ... [the] Naicker employers. The rest of the time ... [they] were swindled by these tradesmen" (46). So used was Bama to this hard work that she enjoyed it. Such hard work should have enabled the community to prosper, but exploitation has kept them in exactly the same place for centuries. The discrimination extended further to women, who were paid even less. She says that this is a community that enjoyed life and was born to work. But work was their lot. It is even worse now. No longer do tiny tots do small chores at home, leave alone go to school, they go off to work in a match-box factory where they work from dawn till dusk. This is the life of labour that Dalits are born into.

Chapter 5

This chapter deals with the recreation and pastimes available to Dalits in Bama's village. She tells us of the pretence games they used to play as young children and about dolls they used to make. The world of reality dictated the contours of their pretence games — e.g. when they played at being married, the husband would come home drunk and beat the wife and the police would arrive and beat him up, or when they played at working, some boys would become Naickers and humiliate the rest!

Only boys could go to the cinema. And, when they grew up, girls could not go out to play any longer. She then describes the pastimes of the adult men – from silambam to cards to kabaddi. She speaks of how they would celebrate festivals by singing and dancing and taking out processions. Hunting was rewarding pastime as well.

In the next section of the chapter, Bama tells us how the festivals are celebrated differently now. She begins with the disjunction between the Church and the community, and also how the community is now more interested in the cinema than prayers at the church. At New Year, the Dalits had to give presents to the priest and the Mother Superior and they would buy them expensive fruits that they had never tasted themselves — all for receiving the sign of the cross on their foreheads. She notes that people no longer remembered the hymns, and an incident involving an infant and a nun makes her realise afresh how little of Christ's love and forbearance there is in the Church. People complain that earlier priests would give them sweets and calendars in return, but now the priest wants them to buy the calendar. Even the Mother Superior acts superior and her gifts of small drawstring cloth bags only rouses ill-feeling among the community. And finally, instead of going to evening mass, the people are keener to see the movies that have been promised to them. No longer do the youth put up plays — it is cinema and toddy or arrack that provides the pastime now.

Chapter 6

It is in this chapter that Bama mentions her father for the first time. He was in the army and this ensured that, at least when he came home, the family had plenty to eat. Bama describes their daily diet and how poor she felt when she went to the hostel to study in high school and how supportive her parents were. But they did not believe in sending her to college. They preferred her to train as a teacher. But a nun who had taught Bama in the eleventh standard made a fuss and sent her to college after forcing Bama's mother to pawn the earrings she was wearing! Her father washed his hands off her and she had to live in the same clothes for a week. Her performance brought her the respect of her classmates and teachers once again. She speaks of her sense of deprivation which was balanced by her sense of achievement. She had enough money after finishing her B. Ed and joining a school as a teacher. She realised that if only Dalit children could be given a decent education they too could live a life of moderate comfort like her. This was the impulse which made her enter a convent. It is only later that she came to know that the convent did not care for the poor and that the vow of poverty that the nuns took had no relation to reality. But life wasn't easy for Bama when she left the order. Everything had changed. She had no money or job either. She began to share the same difficulties as all other Dalits. Even the poor of upper castes have a tough time she says. Poor Parayas have it even tougher because there can be no hope for them. Children can only work in such a climate, not seek an education. She speaks with despair about how the wealthy live off the work of the poor. She even wonders how one can fight for justice in this situation "when one is hungry and thirsty" (69). She says that even the Church has let the Dalits down.

Chapter 7

In this chapter, which is the longest in the book, Bama speaks of her bhakti and belief in God, and how it has changed over the years, and of forms of worship and the changes they have undergone. When she was young she used to pray exactly as her family and the priests had taught her. Prayers punctuated their daily life and attendance at church was enforced by the beatings delivered by teachers at school. She remembers an incident when a visiting white priest was pleased by her recitation of prayers — he lifted her up and

kissed her and gave her five paise. What pleased her most was "that the priest touched me and lifted me up" (71). Bama says that she used to be afraid to be in a church alone. This was because the Sisters had told the children at school that the Devil kept a list of all their sins and that if they committed too many sins they would peel the skin off their backs! She says that the nuns never told them any cheerful stories. Thus, Bama obeyed the Sisters in all things, in order to be less sinful. Even in confession, and even though she may have had nothing to confess, Bama repeated what had been taught to her. Slowly, Bama lost faith in what the nuns told her. The nuns acted like a brutal supervisory force keeping order in the ranks. The children would be beaten (or pinched when they were older) to keep them awake during church services. Bama talks of how repressive and frightening it was. Also, they had to walk some distance to and from the church, which was in the streets of the upper castes.

Bama says that she used to come first in all Scripture tests and that she was full of devotion for Jesus even if she too told prayers only out of a sense of duty. Her belief was strong, so strong that when she received a shock while inserting flowers into the holes of a plug point, she thought that God was punishing her for stealing the flowers! She then recounts how the church at Chinnamalai came to be built because of a miraculous vision granted to the local priest. On the first Friday of every month, there would be a prayer at the church there and children would go off on Thursday evening itself, spending the night in the church. A festival was also celebrated every May. She describes the festival scene in all its animated detail. While the festival still takes place, Bama feels that "the devotion to Our Lady is manifested chiefly in choosing and wearing new clothes, and feasting on a newly slaughtered chicken or goat" (84). She hears now that people arrive drunk and start brawls. She says that she enjoyed herself in these pleasures in Chinnamalai till she grew up and commonsense told her that it was preferable to worship at home. Bama then describes the Easter celebrations. She ends this section by saying that no one seems to realise the significance of these festivals any longer. Devotion now "is merely a matter of doing things out of a sense of duty" (87).

It was when she left her village and joined the boarding school in her IX class that her devotion underwent a change. She lost her "bhayam" (fear) for God, and began to feel "paasam" (love) instead. She wanted to enter the convent right after school, but one of the Sisters told her to consider it only after completing her college education. However, in college her devotion began to wane. She did not believe any longer that God came to her through the priests and nuns. She began to question all forms of ritual and worship. But her faith in God did not diminish. She felt that ritual was sham, and that God should be felt directly through the mind's eye. She no longer had the desire to become a nun. When she began to teach in a school, the behaviour of the nuns repulsed her. The nuns ran a boarding school, which was nominally for the sake of destitute children. However, they made the poor children do all the menial tasks. On top of this, there were caste, class, and linguistic divisions amongst the nuns themselves. Bama feels that the nuns should have taught the Dalit children more than what the curriculum called for, made them aware about their situation in the world. Instead, "everything they said to the children, everything in the manner in which they directed them suggested, that this was the way it was meant to be for Dalits; that there was no possibility for change" (89). This only forced the children to accept their unjust situation as their fate. The result of this was to make Bama want to become a nun so that she could

bring some difference to the way these children were taught and treated. She continued to have love and devotion towards Jesus and Mother Mary. When she read the Old Testament and the New Testament through once again, she realised that Good had "shown the greatest compassion for the oppressed" (90). Jesus Christ had mainly associated himself with the poor. However, the Church did not emphasise this. She makes the important point that the Good they were told about was one who "is loving, kind, gentle, one who forgives sinners, [is] patient, tender, obedient" (90). Whereas, God is also "Just, righteous, is angered by injustices, opposes falsehood, never countenances inequality". This God no one ever spoke about. Bama says that the "oppressed are not tautght about him, but rather, are taught in an empty and meaningless way about humility, obedience, patience, gentleness" (9)). This inspired her further to become a nun, to take the true Jesus to the Dalit children. Even though every one advised her against it. even though she knew that no convernt was going to allow her to act the way she wanted, she entered an order- "like one who was falling into a well, blindfolded" (91).

Bama says that the three years of training were not bad. They discussed various issues and thought with some urgency about what they should do to alleviate suffering. She thought constantly of the oppressed people and was convinced that "it was meaningless to repeat prayers in beautiful and decorative language, and to live without that correspondence and connection between prayer, worship and life". She waited for her chance to serve the poor. However, she was sent to a prestigious school and asked to teach there, to serve the rich. She felt that there was no love for the poor and the humble in the convent. She felt that the convent said one thing and practiced another, that there was no true love in the Church, nor forgiveness. There was injustice and there was punishment for those who did not obey. She found that instead of practicing poverty, there was a lot of importance given to material wealth and food. She critiques the order strongly, calling them hypocrites who were "so habituated to their play-acting that they can no longer distinguish between the role and the reality" (93). She feels that the priests and nuns have lost touch with what Jesus stood for, and would not understand his questions if he were to appear before them to castigate them as they deserved. She feels that the Church is made of the upper castes while the laity. the believers, are mostly lower castes and Dalits. The clergy imposes blind belief and devotion on the lower castes to propagate the caste power structures. She says strongly that "In the name of God they actually rob from the poor who struggle for their very livelihood" (94). They do not allow the lower castes to open their eyes or to stand tall. She feels that all this will end sooner than later. Dalits have begun to understand the way the world works — "They have realized that they have been maintained as the stone steps that others have trodden on as they raised themselves up" (94). Dalits have realized that this is not God's message. They know "that they too were created in the likeness of God". She ends by saying that there is an urge amongst Dalits "to begin to live again with honour, self-respect and with a love towards all humankind". This, she says. "alone is true devotion" (94).

Chapter 8

This is the second chapter that is prescribed for you (Chapter 4 being the other one). This chapter is about Bama's experiences in the holy order, in the convent in which she became a nun. She begins with a one-sentence summary of her previous life:

I was born in a small village as a Dalit girl, I grew up, I studied, I worked for five years, and then, as I have said befor, I entered a convent.

The order she joined had been founded by a woman who had loved the poor and the lowly and had educated the children of the poor and helped them in their lives. Once inside the convent, she realized that her family members who had warned her about the conditions in the convent were right. She found herself in a different world in the convent. While they talked of **Jesus. and** Mary, they lived in great comfort, eating lavish meals, with **dishes whose** names Bama did not know, or, if she did, could not pronounce! She says that the convent was so big it could have accommodated all the people from her community in her village. She felt as out of place there as she would have in an upper-caste home. Nor could she go about her work in peace, for convent life was full of politics and intrigue. The convent was about enjoyment, not about alleviating the suffering all around. Even your status within the convent was dependent on how rich your family was. The school attached to the convent was no better. They took only four or five poor children as a token and these children were discriminated against by all. The vows of poverty, chastity and obedience that nuns had to take "became a means of control and enslavement", according to Bama (97). There was no sense of poverty within the convent, Bama says that the nuns were "within ... luxurious cages, trapped in comfort" (97). The love that the Church professed was only for the rich — if challenged, the authorities would say that God's love was not only for the poor and that God had said, "The poor are with you always" (98). The vow of obedience was what kept people like Bama in check. The nuns could hardly lift their heads, so submissive had they to be. Bama was forced to serve the rich, not the poor as she wished, because she was told to learn obedience and faith. The training that the nuns received had no connection to the lives they had to live later. If the nuns found it hard to fit in, they were told that they did not have the calling. Bama feets that the Church had no connection with the lived reality in India, the authorities had been "indoctrinated during their studies in Europe and in America" (99). Not only did the convent have no idea about Dalits, they spoke disparagingly of them. Bama served for three years in the first place. Then, she was transferred five times within a month. At the end they again placed her in a big school for rich children. Bama couldn't stand it and after five months, she left the holy orders. Neither was it easy to leave, nor was llife outside the convent any easier.

Chapter 9

The convent, in spite of all Bama's contentions, was a secure and comfortable place. Qutside, she had to endure hardships and work for the next meal. She felt out of place in the world outside. The first place where she was interviewed. she was told the salary was a paltry four hundred rupees a month. But even this job was denied to her because she was a Dalit and the school was run by the nadar community and they wanted to appoint only Nadar women (101). Bama becoans the existence of such caste-based schools and wonders where the Dalits are to go since there are no Dalit schools. Even Catholic schools do not take too many Dalits becauses they feel that standards would fall. Bama found it even more difficult to move around in the outside world because she was not only a Dalit but also a woman.

But. Bama says, she has not regretted leaving the comforts and security of the convent. the convent was alienated from the suffering of the poor. But Bama feels that she had been brainwashed at the convent which is what made it difficult for the to adjust to life outside. She had changed so much in character that she was a stranger even to herself However, she feels a contentment outside the convent she is in ther natural elements again like a fish back in water. She ends the book with the thought that even if she is like a bird with broken wings she is optimistic about the future she is certain that it is possible to live a meaningful life a life that is suseful to others" (104). She is no longer leading a hypocritical life.

"AFTERWORD"

In the "Afterword" to the English edition, Bama writes that many changes have taken place in the seven years since she wrote *Karukku* in Tamil in 1992. She says that "even though there are a thousand difficulties which beset a Dalit woman living on her own, yet the truth is that in my position as an independent woman, there are many opportunities for me to spend my life usefully, and especially, to work for the liberation of Dalits" (105). She has discovered strengths within herself, seen the progress of the movement for Dalit liberation, and been inspired by many other Dalit women. Thus, the "Afterword" confirms the validity of the optimism that the book had ended with.

2.4.2 *Karukku* : An Analysis

What is the first thing you noticed about my summary? If you thought that it was full of repetitions, then you were right. If you felt that I had struggled to summarise the book, you were right again. If you thought that my summary did not give you a sense of linearity of narrative, things happening one after the other in a certain order over various chapters, you were right again. *Karukku* as you would have realised by now, is a very different kind of book. Almost like chewing the cud, the narrator mulls over various events in her life again and again from different perspectives. As Lakshmi Holmstrom points out in her introduction, Bama groups the events in her life "under different themes, for example, Work, Games and Recreation, Education, Belief, etc". (p. vii) It is almost like watching the ripples that result when a number of stones are hurled into the water of a pond. Every time that Bama thinks of her life new ripples form and speed across the surface of her life making her take stock of a large part of her life rather than the impact of a single incident in itself. Her life as a Catholic Christian girl and woman is mediated by the fact that she is a Dalit. On the other hand, her growing awareness of the Dalit identity marks her forays into the Church, and provokes her reassessment and reconstruction of what devotion to God means, of the role of faith and belief in her life. This then is a work that charts the growth and education of the narrator, a bildungsroman, from childhood and innocent faith to adulthood and understanding of the ways of the Church and the world. The narrator is taking stock of her life at a particular climactic moment of her life, after she has left the convent, and she reflects on various events and how they have shaped the contours of her life and impinged on her self understanding and socio-political awareness.

As a child, Bama grew up in an atmosphere imbued with faith and religion. Christian rituals punctuated the day and festivals marked the year. However, religion comes with a sense of duty and obedience (enforced with strict

punishment), as also an idea of class and caste identity. She learns very early what it means to be a Daht in Indian society, and soon enough, what it means to be a Dalit in the Catholic Christian society. However, as a believing Christian, one who had chosen to become a nun even if one of her main aims was to make a difference to Dalit children, Bama does not give up on the vision or message of Christianity and, instead, critiques the Catholic institutions that preach one thing and practice another. The message and aim of Christianity, according to her reading of the scriptures, is love towards all, which implies equality, and social justice. She thinks that God chose to side with the poor. She entered the convent precisely because she thought she could work better for the poorer sections of society, especially Dalits, by working with the resources and the message of the Church. The convent fails her and she leaves the convent; but these reflections on her life make her understand the Church had always worked in this manner in her lifetime, and that social, political, and economic inequality had always marked all the internal boundaries of her beloved village life, from invisible boundaries that demarcated castes (and created rules of untouchability) to highly visible ones that marked out landed possessions. This awareness of injustice that permeates the life of our land does not bring despair, for Bama realises that her own experiences and the resultant awareness is part of a larger Dalit consciousness raising a larger movement. However, *Karukku* is first and foremost a work about life as a Christian Dalit, and about the hypocrisies and double standards of the Catholic Church, about caste discrimination within it. Even as she attacks the Church, she bemoans the rise of consumerism and lack of belief that marks contemporary life. *Karukku* is the story of a Christian Dalit woman who realises that her identity as a Christian is heavily mediated by her identity as a Dalit, and that she must fight the discriminatory practices both within the Church and outside, and that this is all the tougher as a woman.

Analysis of Chapter 4

I suggest that you read Chapter 4 carefully and write a summary. Re-read the summary I have already given of this chapter. Are we in agreement as to what Bama says in this chapter? If you were to give this chapter a heading, what would you choose?

I cannot guess your answer to the first question, though I hope that we are broadly in agreement. As to the second, again I cannot guess your title, but I can say with conviction that it would have something to do with work. It is a chapter that deals with the hard work that is the life of Bama's community in her village. As I said in my summary, this chapter is an astute and damning critique of caste practices and their relationship to labour and ownership of resources in our country. I suggest that wherever you live, you should look around and observe all kinds of physical labour, and try to estimate how much reward labourers get for their work. Do you think a worker at a construction site or one building a road can change their station in life easily? Do you think they earn enough money to live in comfort at some point of their lives? Do you think their caste has a role to play in their being confined to such lives? These questions are inevitable if you read Bama's work.

You will notice that Bama does not denigrate work. She talks of how people were surprised that she didn't hesitate to help her mother in carrying head loads of firewood even though she had finished her tenth class in a convent.

Her reaction is interesting: "I don't know why they were so surprised. In those days, I really enjoyed that kind of hard physical labour" (47). Do you think this is a typical attitude of the educated? Does our education system take people away from and make them look down on physical labour, or does it encourage us to practice and appreciate it? The answer, in my opinion, is that our education system encourages us to look down on physical labour as the lot of those who have failed to improve themselves. So Bama's reaction is interesting. She does not look down on the work that her community does, she is only aghast at the fact that society does not recognise or reward the importance of this labour. Re-read the first paragraph of the chapter – she starts off by saying that from the time she was young she has lived among hard-working people, like her own mother and grandmother who "laboured from sunrise to sunset, without any rest". She then says that even today men and women in her village "can survive only through hard and incessant labour". While labour is enjoyable, it is not paying, it is exploited by others who control the levers of power.

In her usual style, she then describes the work that is available in rural Tamil Nadu. However, she moves smoothly to the specific – she speaks of her village and her people who, if no other work is available, must "go up to the hills to gather firewood" or do other work "in order to eat". She then describes the work done by other "backward" castes, and says that it is only people of her community who had "to work so hard". Hard work is a way of life for her family, with her grandmother waking as early as two in the morning to do household chores before going to work at the Naicker household where she was a servant and coming back only after sunset. Notice her description of her grandmother: "Everybody said that my Paatti was a true and proper servant". Her grandmother is not being described even in terms of her labour (let alone her individuality or character as a human being or in relationship to her family) but in terms of her carrying out her duties to her masters, to the family that she was bonded to.

This is why you must pay particular attention to Bama's writing — more than most other writers, Bama's writing thrives on simplicity and, curiously for someone who uses what has traditionally been seen as non-literary or even impolite language, she more often than not makes her points with a certain indirectness, almost without emphasizing them. You may remember that Bama talks of her grandmothers in Chapter Two as well, where she also describes the way this grandmother was treated by the family she worked for. It is in the reiteration, in the repetition of what I called the ripple effect, that emphasis and the strength of feeling emerge.

Bama's method is visible again in the way she goes off to describe all the hard work she used to do as a young girl in order to augment the family's meager income. This is when she talks of exploitation by the Naicker employers and the Nadar tradesmen. She also talks once again about untouchability as a set of rules she had learnt to observe — "All the time I went to work for the Naickers, I knew I should not touch their goods or chattels; I should never come close to where they were, I should always stand away to one side".

Another point that Bama repeatedly makes, as did Ambedkar, is that it is education that is the way out for Dalits, in it is their salvation. Notice how in this chapter, after speaking of her hard work and of untouchability, she talks about her convent school, where she didn't have to do this kind of work — "I

ate my meals, and I studied; that was all". Not that she learnt to look down on physical labour, during her holidays, she says, "I did all the chores that fell to me customarily". She then says how much she enjoyed hard physical labour.

It is then that she talks of how this incessant labour does not improve the lot of Dalits; that this is what they have to do even to survive. She also points out how there is discrimination between men and women in terms of even these paltry wages. She points out that her community is still cheerful and seems to take this hard life uncritically, but then when do they have the time to stop and think? After quietly pointing out that upper caste society couldn't survive without this labour, Bama finishes on a pessimistic note, since now even tiny tots are sent off to match box and fire-cracker factories and have no time to study.

Bama's technique then reinforces her theme, the place of hard physical work (in this chapter) in the lives of Dalits from childhood till death and even the chance for education, their only hope to break free of the cycle of exploitation, receding with increasing work load on children.

Analysis of Chapter 8

Re-read my summary and compare it with your reading of the chapter. The beginning of this chapter demonstrates once again that the book is a series of reflections by Bama on her own life from childhood till a little after she left the convent. As I said in the summary, the focus of this chapter is on Bama's experiences in the holy order.

The order she joined had been founded by a woman who had loved the poor and the lowly and had educated the children of the poor and helped them in their lives. However the convent functioned with very different values. As the first sentence of this chapter should have alerted you, Bama's primary identity is as a Dalit and a woman from rural India ("I was born in a small village as a Dalit girl"). She judges the convent from this perspective and finds it wanting and insensitive. She finds a lavish lifestyle instead of the poverty that the church talks of and the poverty that she had experienced in her life – she speaks of the strange, rich, and lavish meals as also of the size of the buildings. The church seems far removed from the material reality of the life of her community that formed the largest part of the laity. She felt as out of place there as she would have in an upper-caste home.

On top of that, the convent was extremely hierarchical — almost like the society outside. Apart from the intrigue and politics that ruled the place, Bama points out that till she took her vows she "had to run about a young child, dance to everyone's tune, take upon yourself every menial task they pushed at you with their feet". She realized that service to the country and to the poor was the farthest from the minds of the nuns. The church valued wealth and influence among the upper castes. Bama says that even the school attached to the convent was no better. The token four or five poor children they took were a poor miserable lot, completely isolated from the rich brats.

Most importantly, Bama critiques the way the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience that nuns had to take actually separated them from "the reality of ordinary lives" and "put them at a great remove, as if they belonged to a

different world". The convent was cut off from the social reality around and had no understanding of or sympathy for the poor. The nuns were "trapped in comfort". Bama particularly chafes at the vow of "obedience" because this is used to keep nuns in check, to keep them submissive even in the face of injustice or insensitivity and their own commitments. Bama was forced to serve the rich, not the poor as she wished, because she was told to learn obedience and faith.

What Bama found in the Church was a disjunction between what was professed and what was practiced. As she says, the training that the nuns received had no connection to the lives they had to live later. If the nuns found it hard to fit in, they were told that they did not have the calling. As pointed out in the summary, Bama feels that the Church had no connection with the lived reality in India, the authorities had been "indoctrinated during their studies in Europe and in America". Not only did the convent have no idea about Dalits, they spoke disparagingly of them. In fact, if they "had to speak about something unpleasant or ugly, they tended to categorize it as Harijan". After serving in one school for three years, Bama was transferred five times within one month. Then, after another five months in a rich children's school, Bama left the convent for the world of social inequity and difficulty that she had hoped that the Church would work to alleviate.

This chapter reads like a brief summary of what we have already been told in other chapters. However, we should note that this particular reflection is focused and speaks of the authority of the Church over its nuns and how the very Christian principles that are meant to motivate its good work among the people are used to coerce and govern those who have taken holy orders to serve the Church and the people. Also notice how it is in this chapter that she spells out some of the opinions of other nuns about Dalits, quoting five statements about Dalits that were common within the convent. This is a hard-hitting chapter on the vulgarization of values within the Church, and the impossibility of serving the people from within.

2.5 CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Bama's *Karukku* is as much about her as it is about her community. Her gender and her religion are added factors in her sense of disenfranchisement as a Dalit. She writes as a Dalit woman about the experiences of Dalit women in her works. Her gender complicates her Dalit identity as much as her Dalit identity complicates her position as a woman and a feminist. *Karukku* is a path-breaking work that explores the various facets of exploitation of Dalits, specifically of Paraiyars in Tamil Nadu, even within and by the Church. One must remember a salient point about conversions to other religions by Dalits — they usually convert as an entire community, as a caste based in a certain location. Hence their identity as a caste is carried over, unfortunately, into the new religion. Equally unfortunately, converts from upper castes seem to carry their caste-attitudes into their new religious identity. Thus, caste practices, and prejudices are found in all religions in India. Neither religion nor legal, constitutional intervention seem to provide any answers to the Dalits.

In an interview with Suchetra Behal in *The Hindu* (March 6, 2003), Bama said that she began to write in 1992, the year she left the convent, because she felt

"a sense of total alienation from society because for seven years I was within the convent premises and the lifestyle was different" and she said that when she came out she was not "able to fit into society". She said that those "were terribly painful moments for me and even for the next day it was a question of how I am going to live" and that she felt that there "was no hope of a future". It was then that she was filled with a great sense of nostalgia for her "childhood days in the village" — "I wanted to lead that life again". It was then that she took her friend's advice and began to write, for herself and not for publication. She was initially hesitant to publish it because "it was not only about me, but my people, my family, my village". As a matter of fact, her own community was outraged for a while after the publication of the book.

Karukku created quite a stir in Tamil literary circles after publication. According to Bama, "*Karukku* was radical because I have used the local dialect of the people and not the formalised text. This is a departure in Tamil literature". Critics have agreed with her and actually criticized her for it! One can do no better than to quote Bama's English translator, Lakshmi Holmstrom, on Bama's use of the Tamil language:

> Bama is doing something completely new in using the demotic and the colloquial regularly, as her medium for narration and even argument, not simply for reported speech. She uses a Dalit style of language which overturns the decorum and aesthetics of received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout, elides words and joins them differently, demanding a new and different pattern of reading.

As you can see, this style is extremely difficult to translate into English and the major stylistic (perhaps even thematic, because the language performs the rebellion) device is more or less lost in the English translation.

According to Sharankumar Limbale, Marathi Dalit writer, critic, and historian, Dalit literature is characterized by the "three values of life — equality, freedom and solidarity" and these values "can be regarded as constituting the essence of beauty in Dalit literature". The literature of the oppressed is always a literature with a cause. As Bama says, the main aim of her writing is "to share with people my experiences. I use writing as one of the weapons to fight for the rights of the underprivileged". This is done in the language of the oppressed people, and in the language of the oral narrative, including turns of phrases and proverbs, folk songs and other ritual songs of the people being represented. Little wonder that Bama was accused of using a coarse language unbecoming of a woman. In Bama's *Karukku* the language has another interesting factor — the influence of the Catholic Church. As Lakshmi Holmstrom points out, Bama uses the language of popular Catholicism, not the language of theologians.

Much of Dalit writing that gets translated is testimonial in nature — it is the lived lives of the writers that seem to add truth value and hence literary worth in the eyes of translators and publishers. While it is true that the oppressed will write about their lives in order to assert their quest for "equality, freedom and solidarity", the autobiographical is not their only mode of writing. There may be a certain kind of politics at work here, in the visibility of the Dalit autobiography, in that upper caste readers, critics, and publishers may want

the Dalits only to give ethnographic information about their lives, not to create literature and hence may only be publishing (and translating) testimonial writings. However, these testimonies are not simple straightforward life-narratives (if there can be any) but usually well-crafted literary works, as in the case of *Karukku*. I urge you to read other Dalit literary works available in your language(s).

I must leave the final word to Bama herself who, in *The Hindu* interview I have been quoting throughout this section, says this about herself as a writer:

> I identify myself as a Dalit woman writer ... There are many writers available to write about other issues but few for Dalits and there are many issues that have to be tackled. If and when Dalits are respected and treated as equal human beings then only can I write about other things.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

This Unit is meant to sensitize you to what is means to be a woman and that too a Dalit in India today. It gives an account of the sufferings and indignities of a Christian Dalit woman — Bama. You might like to read Dalit literature further and if you do, we would like you to sample any of the Marathi Dalit autobiographies mentioned earlier or Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan* in Hindi available in English translation also.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Write a short note on Bama's views about the life of Dalits. Does she consider their lives to have become better or worse? Why?
2. Why did Bama leave the Church?
3. Comment on Bama's stylistic techniques, as evident in your reading of Chapters Four and Eight. Do you find any difference in the tone of the two chapters?
4. What are the aims of Dalit writing and how well does *Karukku* achieve them?
5. Comment on Bama's writing — is she sentimental, inflammatory, controlled, and/or realistic? Would you describe her writing differently? How and why?

2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 SAADAT HASAN MANTO : *ON ISMAT* TRANSLATION : SHOBHANA BHATTACHARJI

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is two-fold: to acquaint you with a new genre in Urdu literature, i.e. pen-sketches (*muraqqa nigari*) which combine biographical facts about the person with his distinction in his or her chosen field of work in order to present a fairly full picture of the person. The other objective is to help you read Manto's pen-sketch of Ismat Chughtai with understanding and enjoyment. You will see here how Manto, the famous Urdu writer, draws the character sketch of his contemporary writer, Ismat Chughtai and unravels different facets of her character and art. After reading the unit you will be able to understand the genre of pen-sketches in Urdu.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

We start the unit with a biographical note on Manto that tries to assess the status of the writer in the tradition of Urdu literature. This is followed by a discussion on the genre of pen-sketches in Urdu literature. After this, different aspects of the pen-sketch prescribed for you have been discussed.

Manto and Chughtai were two renowned fiction writers in Urdu who were contemporaries. Their lives touched the lives of many other writers of their generation. Besides being writers of renown they were also known for their very colourful personalities. The prescribed piece of writing, *On Ismat* was written in 1949, and it draws an endearing portrait of the writer and the individual that she was. In an oblique way, it also creates helpful contexts — biographical, historical, literary — which help us understand and appreciate the sketch well. The sketch has been discussed and analysed in terms of the following elements:

a. Structure — the writer has organised historical, biographical and literary materials in an order that would present the subject, i.e., Ismat Chughtai, in her true colours.

b. Contexts — to appreciate the pen sketch properly, familiarity with its different contexts will be very helpful.

c. Social document — the pen sketch provides meaningful insights into the literary values, morals and conventions of the contemporary society.

d. Issues/themes — while discussing Ismat Chughtai's personality and art, Manto takes up other issues and themes that are pertinent.

e. Style — style characterises the man. Manto uses a unique style to make the sketch both interesting and informative.

3.2 SAADAT HASAN MANTO: AN INTRODUCTION

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955)

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912 - 1955) was one of Urdu's most powerful writers of fiction in the twentieth century. By the time he began writing, Urdu fiction had divested itself of its obsession with romance and the world of fantasy through the pioneering work of Munshi Premchand, and later, it was given a firm bedrock of realism through the works of Manto's great contemporaries – Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander and Ismat Chughtai. However, even among them he has a special place. The depth and density of some of his works is comparable only with the best in world fiction. His works enable us to look critically at history and India's partition nation, politics, sex and some of our assumptions about them.

Manto had an ordinary and rather undistinguished childhood, which did not hold any promise for future greatness. He was born in a conservative family of Samrala, Punjab, in 1912. At the Muslim High School in Amritsar, his wayward nature and love of mischief earned him the nickname "Tommy". He liked to read books which had a pronounced subversive intent, particularly those considered unsuitable for boys of his age. He failed twice (in Urdu!) in his matriculation exam. After passing in his third attempt, he was admitted to Hindu Sabha College, but his performance there was no better. Indifferent to his studies, he paid more attention to films and books outside the college syllabus. He skipped out with his friends to watch Hollywood films and make imaginary plans to get to Moscow clandestinely. It was at this time that he met Abdul Bari Alig whom he regarded as his literary mentor. Bari, an itinerant journalist and a dilettante of sorts saw the spark of brilliance in him and introduced him to the classics of English, French and Russian literature. Manto read avidly from the works of Oscar Wilde, Chekhov, Pushkin, Maupassant, Victor Hugo and others. Seeing his enthusiasm Bari asked him to

translate Victor Hugo's *The Last Days of the Condemned*, a play opposing capital punishment. He next co-translated Oscar Wilde's "Vera", another work with a revolutionary intent.

Manto entered Aligarh Muslim University in 1934. His stay there was short as he was incorrectly diagnosed with tuberculosis and was sent to a sanatorium in Kashmir. On his return from there he worked briefly with the newspaper, *Paras* in Lahore. But he soon got tired of the yellow journalism and shifted from there to *Musawwir*, a film magazine published from Mumbai. Manto worked as the editor of *Musawwir* till 1940. Besides editing the magazine he also began to work in the film industry. He got a job as a dialogue writer with the Imperial Film Company. The film world excited Manto's imagination and he loved being a part of it. But he soon realised that neither journalism nor working for films could give him the deep satisfaction of writing serious literature. He began to write short stories at this period. Most of the stories pertaining to this phase of his life, written in the realistic tradition of Maupassant and Chekhov figure either in *Manto ke Afsaane* [Short Stories of Manto, 1940] or *Dhuaan* [Smoke, 1942].

In 1940 he lost his job at *Musawwir* and joined All India Radio, Delhi. Manto's joining AIR marked a turning point in his career. At that time many literary luminaries like Ahmad Shah Bukhari, N.M. Rashid, Miraji and Upendranath Ashk were associated with it and provided a very stimulating environment for a promising writer like Manto. Writing features and radio plays on a daily basis provided him an opportunity to hone his art. He wrote too fast and was often too confident and proud of his skills as a writer to even take a second look at the script.

An event during this phase of his career that left a permanent scar in his mind was the death of his son, Arif to whom he was deeply attached. Besides this, his edginess and his touchy temperament were often a source of complication between him and his colleagues and employers. Nevertheless, the eighteen months that he spent in Delhi were greatly productive in terms of literary output. Two collections of short stories, more than a hundred radio plays filling four volumes in print and his first collection of essays *Manto ke Mazamin* [Essays by Manto, 1942] appeared during this period. Manto's career with the AIR came to an abrupt end following an altercation with Upendranath Ashk, his boss who he considered to be an inferior writer, and he returned to Mumbai.

Manto's second sojourn in Mumbai was marked by a deeper involvement with the film industry. He began to edit *Musawwir* once again, and to freelance as a screenplay writer. Meanwhile, several lawsuits were brought against him at the Lahore Sessions Court for the alleged obscenity in his stories, "Kali Shalwar" [Black Shalwar], "Dhuaan" [Smoke] and "Bu" [Odour]. Later on, similar charges were brought against his stories, "Thanda Gosht" [Cold Meat] and "Khol Do" [Open It]. In the winter of 1945, he travelled from Bombay to Lahore in the company of Ismat Chughtai who was being similarly tried for her story, "Lihaf"[1] [Quilt]. Both of them were acquitted, though Manto had to pay a fine.

[1] "Lihaf" is about the relationship between Begum Jan and her maid, Rabbu. Begum Jan, a beautiful woman from a poor family is married to an old nawab. The nawab ignores her and shows more interest towards young boys. Frustrated and desperate, Begum Jan turns to Rabbu for her emotional and sexual needs. The story became controversial because of its alleged obscenity and lesbianism.

Manto's essentially secular and humanistic vision received a rude jolt by the partition of India in 1947. The Bombay he had known was no longer the same. The atmosphere was rapidly getting communalised. The film industry which always took pride in its secular credentials was also getting infected by this communal canker. A combination of circumstances made Manto leave Mumbai and migrate to Pakistan. However, the fratricidal violence witnessed by him during Partition scarred his psyche and he wrote some of the most powerful stories on this event, the better known among them are —"Toba Tek Singh", "Khol Do" "Titwal ka Kutta" and "Thanda Gosht". Manto died in Lahore in 1955, a disappointed and broken man, abandoned by his relatives and fellow writers, and thoroughly ignored by the Pakistani Establishment.

What is Manto's world-view, his philosophy of life? Though he has propounded no coherent philosophy of life through his fictional and discursive writings, a close study of them will reveal that he gives a higher status to certain values and concepts that include: frankness, honesty, discrepancy between appearance and reality, i.e., what people say or preach in public and what they practise in their private lives, the validity of sex in life, the ethics of human relations and the ambiguous nature of reality. The humanity that shines through in his writings about downtrodden people living on the fringes of society is an integral part of this vision. His acerbic wit and humour and his pitiless irony are the weapons he uses against the spurious idealism and hypocrisy that vitiates social interaction. About his view of Man, Mumtaz Shirin, one of Urdu's finest critics, says:

> Manto is not interested in hallowed angels. Manto the writer does not have much to do with pure and innocent angels who can never possibly commit sin. Manto's human being is neither an angel, nor a devil. He is an earthling, a creature of the earth who has the potentiality of Original Sin, mischief, murder and mayhem. But God had ordered angels to pay obeisance to him.
>
> (Mumtaz Shirin, *Saadat Hasan Manto: Noori na Naari*, ed. by Asif Farrukhi, Karachi: Maktaba Asloob, 1985, p. 80; my translation)

Selected Works by Manto

Collections of Short Stories

Atish Pare (1935), *Manto ke Afsaane* (1940), *Dhuan* (1941), *Afsaane aur Drame* (1943), *Chughad* (1948), *Lazzat-e Sang* (1934), *Siyah Hashiye* (1948), *Badshahat ka Khatimah* (1950), *Khali Botalein, Khali Dibbe* (1950), *Nimrud ki* Khudai (1950) *Thanda* Gosht (1950), Yezid (1951), *Parde ke Peechhe* (1953) *Sarak ke Kinare* (1953), *Beghair Unwan ke* (1954)

Plays

Aao (1940), *Manto ke Drame* (1940), *Janaze* (1942), *Tin Auratein* (1942), *Karwat* (1946).

Letters and Essays

Manto ke Mazamin (1942)
Manto ke Khutoot (ed. by Ahmad Nadim Qasimi, 1962)

3.3 *ON ISMAT* ("ISMAT CHUGHTAI") — A PEN-SKETCH

(i) **Introducing the genre of pen-sketch**: Drawing pen-sketches (which is known in Urdu as *muraqqa nigari*) is an interesting genre in Urdu-literature. It combines biographical details, personal eccentricities with interesting anecdotes of daily life to draw a fuller and more intimate portrait of a writer or a celebrity than mere biographical facts can ever do. It often deploys humour, understatement and hyperbole as convenient devices to bring into sharp relief the different facets of the personality in question. Manto, Krishan Chander, Upendranath Ashk, Ali Sardar Jafri, Ismat Chughtai and Sahir Ludhianvi have all written pen portraits about their contemporaries.

Manto is said to have have taken to this genre after he was hounded in Pakistan for stories like "Thanda Gosht" (Cold Meat), "Khol Do" (Open It) and the partition vignettes known as "Siyah Hashiye" (Black Margins). Writing pen portraits was an innocuous diversion that would not raise the hackles of the custodians of law and conventional morality. Published in two volumes, *Ganje Farishte* (Bald Angels, 1952) and *Loudspeaker* (1955), Manto's pen portraits evidence his interest in his contemporaries, the diversity of his acquaintances, his unmistakable eye for detail, and his unquenchable thirst for all kinds of experiences. The title, "Ganje Farishte" is also indicative of his intention to demythologise and deconstruct the personalities and expose their feet of clay. Some of these sketches were of Manto's friends or acquaintances from the Indian Film Industry. The portrait that he draws of Ashok Kumar in the eponymous sketch is quite contrary to general expectations. Ashok Kumar whose image on the screen is that of a suave and urbane gentleman turns out to be quite opposite in his personal life – rustic and rude, a visitor at race courses and given to ogling women. However, the lasting impression that stays with the reader is that of a hard working, methodical actor with a truly secular vision, unhampered by any narrow, sectarian considerations. Manto also wrote pen-sketches of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the creator of Pakistan, and Agha Hashr Kashmiri, the great playwright and theatre personality.

(ii) ***On Ismat*** — *On Ismat* (original title in Urdu is, "Ismat Chughtai") is a pen portrait of one of Urdu's most celebrated writers, i.e, Ismat Chughtai. You have already been introduced to Ismat Chughtai and her works in the unit on

Tiny's Granny". Manto and Chughtai had a lot in common: both excelled in the genre of the short story, both were associated with the film industry, both were rebels at heart and delighted in shocking people, both were "progressives" who had serious conflicts with the more inflexible and orthodox members of the Progressive Writers Movement, and both wre accused of obscenity and taken to court. It is because of this similarity that many people expected them to be married to each oither. It is interesting to see how these two mercurial, volatile and fearless writers, who managed to live their lives on their own terms without compromising their integrity, forged a relationship based on total candour and mutual respect. Polite disagreement was the very stuff of their relationship, and both being wits of the first order, their verbal exchanges had all the ingredients of fireworks. However, one thing was certain - nothing could threaten their mutual trust or the solidarity of their friendship. In fact, when Manto left for Pakistan at the time of Partition, Chughtai felt it was no less than a betrayal on his part of their friendship and of the principles and values they lived by. She records this sense of betrayal and hurt in the pen-sketch oif Manto, "Mera Dost Mera Dushman" (1960), that she wrote several years after Manto wrote hers. However, the most memorable pen-sketch written by Chughtai is that of her elder brother, Azim Beg Chughtai, to whom a reference has already been made. The title of the pen sketch is "Duzokhi" [Hell-bound] and some consider it to be the best pen-sketch ever written in Urdu[2].

> As indicated earlier, you will study the pen-sketch "Ismat Chughtai" which was originally written in Urdu, in English translation. The translator of the piece is Shobhana Bhattacharji. This translation figures in Sukrita Paul Kumar and Sadique (eds.), Ismat: Her Life, Her Times, New Delhi: Katha, 2000. pp. 156-172. An alternative translation of the pen-sketch is available in M Asaduddin, Manto: Black margins, New Delhi: Katha, 2004. A comparative study of both the translations will yield important insights into the process of complex cultural and linguistic negotiations involved in the process of translation, and help the students arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the text.

3.3.1 Structure

Manto organises disparate materials like biographical and historical facts, imaginary dialogues, narrations of actual events, literary criticism etc into one whole in such a way that the widely different elements of the sketch hang together without any impression of any element sticking out from the rest. Similarly, he introduces many real-life persons in the sketch and the discussions about them could have pulled the sketch in different directions. But despite these digressions, the overarching presence of Ismat Chughtai and, to some extent, the personality of the writer, i.e., Manto, ensure a certain unity of impression so that at the end of the sketch the reader realises that whatever has been said there, even the apparent digressions, have a certain bearing in exploring some aspects of Chughtai both as a woman and a writer.

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[2] Both these sketches – "Mera Dost Mera Dushman" and "Duzokhi" are available in English translation in,
M. Asaduddin (ed. & tr), *Lifting the Veil: Selected Writings of Ismat Chughtai* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001)

3.3.2 Context/s

Usually, Manto's fictional writings are devoid of too many realistic details. "Ismat Chughtai", however, is located spatially and chronologically in a recognizable and historically verifiable context. The initial setting is the Adelfi Chambers, Claire Road in Bombay (Mumbai) and the time-frame, that of the Quit India Movement of 1942. It also traces the beginning of Ismat Chughtai's literary career that came to general notice only after her short story, "Lihaf" was published in the journal, *Adab-e Lateef*, and then takes the reader on a roller coaster ride through the early phase of her career and her reception in Urdu literary circles.

Manto also brings in Chughtai's contemporaries like Krishan Chander, Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi and Dr Rasheed Jahan and presents the reader with a slice of the literary life of the time. Krishan Chander records the typical reactions of male writers at the emergence of this powerful woman writer. These reactions were characterised by both a tendency to dismissal and a feeling of insecurity. Her own brother, Azim Beg Chughtai, a humourous and satirical writer, has also been introduced and the extraordinary and controversial pen portrait that she wrote of him after his death, point to the rebellious and unconventional streak in Chughtai's personality, even if she is dealing with a sombre and solemn subject like the prolonged illness and death of her own brother.

3.3.3 Social Document

The pen-sketch may also be considered a valuable social document, as it contains vignettes of the contemporary society, its conventions and values. One issue that created a furore in Urdu literature in the forties and fifties of the twentieth century is the alleged obscenity in the works of Ismat Chughtai and Manto. This led to banning of their works and court cases against them. "Ismat Chughtai" touches on this issue and describes how both of them had to travel to Lahore to defend themselves, and the public reaction to the court cases. It also contains vivid snapshots of the contemporary film world in Mumbai and records the camaraderie that existed among directors, actors and writers. The following extract offers just such a snapshot:

> ... In the meantime there was a sudden commotion, and the film producer Mukherji from Filmistan, his enormous wife, and some others came and attacked us. In a few moments we were all beyond recognition...
>
> We all went into the bazaar. Holi was well under way on Ghorh Bunder Road. There was a virtual shower of blue, yellow, green and black. Ismat was in the forefront. She even rubbed tar over a fat Bengali female's face... Then, in the manner of a general, Ismat cried, "Let's mount an attack on the house of Pari-chechra".
>
> In those days Naseem Bano was working in our film, *Chal Chal Re Naujavan*. Her bungalow was nearby on Ghorh Bunder Road. Everyone liked Ismat's suggestion. And so, in a few minutes, we were all inside the bungalow. As was her wont, Naseem was fully made up and draped in a bright georgette sari. She and her husband Ahsan came out when they heard the racket created by us. Looking like a multi-coloured monster, Ismat said to my wife who, I think, wouldn't have looked very different with some extra colour on her, "Safiya, Naseem is indeed a beautiful woman".

3.3.4 Personality

Manto has been able to present Ismat Chughtai vividly before us with all the dominant traits of her personality. The foremost among these traits are her refractory attitude and her stubbornness that have been dramatised by Manto through the imaginary dialogue that comes in the beginning of the pen-sketch. Manto was no less stubborn. Their competitive stubbornness is evident in the incident relating to their debate about the meaning of 'daraz dasti'. Both of them also had the courage to display absolute honesty in matters of portraying sex and stood firm in the face or stiff opposition, even from the members of the Progressive Writers Movement of which both of them were members.

Manto is honest enough to bring out the contradictions in Ismat Chughtai's character, and in doing so he points to such contradictions in his own character as well. While she supports Manto's contention that it is ridiculous for adult men and women to forge brotherly-sisterly relationships, the fact remains that Manto addressed her as Ismat Behn and Chughtai addressed him as Manto Bhai. In addition, while extolling the virtue of their own writings Manto also exposes, in a self-deprecating manner, their own feet of clay. Temperamentally, both of them were against any kind of pretentiousness and pomposity.

3.3.5 Issues/Themes

Though the main objective in drawing a pen portrait in words is to highlight the most prominent aspects of the person in question as it appears to the writer, the way he presents these aspects bring to the fore certain themes or issues that were closer or pertinent to the subject. Manto takes quite a bit of space in discussing the finer points of Chughtai's fictional art and the essential ingredients of that art. The devices she uses, particularly those related to the tonal and sonic patterns, have been culled by the writer from a wide range of Chughtai's works.

In the first part of the sketch Manto compares his own art with that of Ismat Chughtai. Krishan Chander's remark about them is the most pertinent: "In disguising courage, drowning their readers in astonishment and restlessness, and then all of a sudden, finally converting this restlessness into happiness, Ismat and Manto are very close to each other, and in this regard very few Urdu short story writers can compete with them". Manto shows this affinity through textual illustrations from Chughtai's works as well as those of his own. Then he goes on to explore how she demonstrates her ability to get into the depth of the female psyche and express their innermost feelings.

Manto believed that Chughtai had a natural talent for storytelling but she lacked 'art' or craft. Thus, he tells her that the last line of the story, "Lihaf" was redundant, and took away much from the telling effect of its ending.

Manto also takes this opportunity to comment on the essential nature of art and how the gender of the writer influences it. Taking recourse to the example of George Sand[3] he comments that writers cannot and should not try to transcend their genders, as they can be both confining and liberating. What is

[3] Pen name of Amandine Aurore Lucie Duderant (nèe Dupin. 1804-76). French novelist and author of such works as *La Mare au Diable* (1846). she was a champion of women's rights.

necessary is that they should be true to their selves and their experiences must be authentic. The following comments by Manto illustrates his deep-seated belief in this regard:

> If a woman becomes a George Eliot or an Ismat Chughtai it doesn't mean that the effect of her being a woman is not to be considered in her writing...
>
> Ismat's being a woman is present in every detail of her writing and guides our understanding of her work at every step. The positive and negative points of her writing ... cannot be separated from the gender of the writer, nor is there any critical, literary or chemical method available for doing so.

To Manto, Chughtai's strength lies in the fact that she writes about the intimate and personal experiences of women, and they ring true and authentic because as a woman she has natural insights into those experiences.

In the context of the reception of Chughtai's works, Manto describes the general climate of Urdu literary criticism that was marked by impressionistic and arbitrary opinions. He points out how even some of the leading critics of Urdu literature missed the salient points of Ismat Chughtai's writings. Manto refutes the charges levelled by them against Chughtai and stoutly defends her right to write the way she wanted to. One finds evidence of a fine literary critic in Manto in the way he unravels the meaning of some of the works by Ismat Chughtai.

The incident involving Mr Vaish highlights the prevalent atmosphere of literary piracy and lack of protection of the author's rights, a phenomenon that still plagues the literary scene in the sub-continent.

3.3.6 Style

Manto has adopted an informal, conversational style. The piece of writing is of a personal nature and this style suits it. Manto's tongue-in-cheek mode of humour and his tendency to use witticism (known in Urdu as "fiqr-e baazi") are amply evident here. The objective of "fiqr-e baazi" is to dazzle the reader with startling innovation and an illusion of eloquence which may not be accompanied by a corresponding depth of meaning. Though some of the original flavour is understandably lost in translation, yet the following extract is illustrative of Manto's non-fictional prose:

> Shahjahan had the Taj Mahal built to keep the memory of his beloved intact. Ismat wrote "Dozakhi" in memory of her beloved brother. Shahjahan had others to lift the stones for him, had them carved, and erected a gigantic monument over the corpse of his beloved. But Ismat herself collected her sisterly emotions with which she raised a high platform upon which she tenderly laid her brother's bier. The taj seems like a naked marble advertisement of Shahjahan's love. But "Dozakhi" is an absolutely sensitive, pure and beautiful sign of Ismat's love, that paradise about which the title gives no indication, but which fills the entire article.

Manto's flair for conceiving delightful situations and writing interesting dialogue is very much evident in the sketch. The tone of the entire sketch presents a balanced amalgam of intimacy and distance between the narrator and the subject of narration. While describing their friendship Manto exudes

great warmth and affection necessary to build lasting personal relationships, but when it comes to refuting the puerile assertions of Chughtai's detractors, Manto takes on the mantle of a stern literary critic. Moreover, he is not content with merely expressing judgments, but quotes extensively from Chughtai's works to prove his point. The style used in the sketch can also be called autobiographical, because while talking about Ismat Chughtai, Manto reveals quite a bit of his own life and his own art. The reader gets to know as much about him as about Chughtai. He discusses his own writings alongside those of Chughtai in the earlier part of the sketch to highlight both commonality and difference in their art. In the latter part he discusses the tenor of their life in Bombay. If you follow closely, you will find a subtle modulation of tone when Manto moves from one subject/ topic to another in a freewheeling way as we normally do in informal conversations. Manto writes a limpid and lucid prose and his directness of style make it easier for the reader to follow the drift of his argument.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

By temperament, Manto was an iconoclast. He was averse to hero worship and exposed the feet of clay of many revered and venerable personalities in his two volumes of pen-sketches. On the other hand, he would find humanity even in the most despicable and the lowliest of the low. His immortal characters show a fine combination of lofty human ideals and common human weaknesses. What he tries to do in *On Ismat* is to present Ismat Chughtai with all her strength and warts. He highlights the remarkable qualities of her work, but at the same time draws attention to the lack of formal sophistication in her art. He describes her stubbornness, her unconventional nature, her eccentricities, her innate sense of humour, and above all her deep interest in life and the people around her. What the reader gets in bargain is a complete picture of Ismat Chughtai, the person and the writer.

You may have also noticed the fact that Manto cannot resist the opportunity to talk about himself or his writings. Though his central subject here is Ismat Chughtai, he manages to talk about himself and his art quite a lot. Whatever his virtues as a person and as a writer, self-effacement is not one of them. He comes out as an egoist with a tendency to self-praise. But his style, his humour and his remarkable insights into the real nature of things camouflage this and the readers do not really mind this human weakness in him.

3.5 GLOSSARY

Ahmed Nadeem Qasimi: Ahmed Nadeem Qasimi (1916-) is a kind of father figure in Pakistani literature. He started his professional career as a sub-inspector in the Excise department, but left it soon enough. An autodidact, Qasimi wrote largely in the realistic mode about people in the countryside, their joys and sorrows, the exploitation of the poor by the rich, the pangs of urbanisation and loss of simplicity in rural life. He spearheaded and nurtured the Progressive Writers Movement in

Pakistan. In addition to creative writing, he has also edited four literary journals – *Adab-e Lateef*, *Savera*, *Nuqoosh* and *Funoon*.

Upendranath Ashk: Upendranath Ashk (1910-1996) was a well-known Urdu-Hindi novelist and short story writer. His corpus also includes poetry, criticism and translation. He was a prolific writer who left behind him nearly a hundred volumes of writings. He is mainly known for his seven-volume novel *Girti Divaren* (Falling Walls, 1947-96).

Krishan Chander: Krishan Chander (1914-1977) was one of the most popular and prolific short story writers of Urdu. He produced well over 80 volumes of literary work, which include thirty collections of short stories and twenty novels. He was a committed Marxist, and the Secretary-General of the Progressive Writers Association in India for a long time. He wrote about a wide range of contemporary issues. Among his better known collections are — *Nazzaré* (1940), *Purané Khuda* (1944), *Kitab ka Kafan* (1956), *Dadar Pul ké Peeché* (1965). The stories in the collection,' *Hum Wahshi Hain* (1987) deal exclusively with the theme of partition, among which the story "Peshawar Express" has been appreciated because of its vivid imagery and its unconventional style. He wrote a number of novels among which *Shikast* (1943), *Jab Khet Jaagé* (1952) *Ek Aurat Hazar Deewané* (1957) and *Ghaddar* (1960) have received wide acclaim. His politically engaged novels — *Ek Gadhe ki Sarguzasht* (1957), *Gadhe ki Wapsi* (1962) and *Gadha Nefa Mein* (1962) set a new trend of political satire in Urdu in which animal and men locked horns to highlight some bitter contemporary realities.

Shahid: Shahid Latif, Ismat Chughtai's husband who was a film maker.

***dast darazi*:** 'dast' means hand; 'dast darazi' means violence, oppression, violation (of honour)

***Chotein*:** The second collection of Ismat Chughtai's short stories published in 1942.

3.6 QUESTIONS

(a) What is a pen-sketch? What are its essential elements?
(b) Discuss how Manto compares his own temperament, artistic disposition and writings with those of Ismat Chughtai.

(c) What qualities of Chughtai's writings appeal to Manto most?

(d) Can the piece *On Ismat* be regarded as a social document recording the values and conventions of the contemporary society?

(e) What is your final impression of Ismat Chughtai as a person and a writer after reading this sketch?

(f) Comment on the important ingredients of Manto's style as you find them in *On Ismat*.

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4 UMAPRASAD MUKHOPADHYAYA : *MANIMAHESH* TRANSLATION: SANJUKTA DAS GUPTA

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to introduce you to the art of travel writing through an excerpt from a travel narrative in Bangla. Yet another form of non-fictional prose, Manimahesh gives you a graphic account of Manimahesh which is both a peak and a lake in the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh. It will hopefully not only engage your interest but also whet your taste for travel accounts.

4.1 UMAPRASAD MUKHOPADHYAYA : AN INTRODUCTION

Son of Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay and Smt. Jogmaya Devi, Umaprasad was born on 12 October 1902 in Bhowanipur, Kolkata. He studied English for his bachelor's degree but chose Ancient Indian history as his subject for his

master's degree. He also did his L.L.B. He won many academic laurels throughout. After teaching in the university for sometime, he practiced at the Bar. In 1958, he gave up legal practice, in pursuit of wanderlust, and a spiritual quest for peace, human values and the true meaning of life. This started in the Himalayas, and throughout his life, he was attracted to the Himalayas repeatedly. His passion for travel was an upshot of his restless spirit that was not content to be stationed in one place, and his genuine love of nature. He has written prolifically about his travels, capturing the ambience of the locale and sensitive to everything around. He was associated with the *Bangabasi Patrika* throughout his literary career. His minute observations and the authentic historicity of his narration in his book *Manimahesh* (1969) won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1971.

Umaprasad Mukhopadhyaya (1902-1998)

The wealth of Mukhopadhay's travel descriptions provide hours of happy reading and urge us to read on. Yet there is no imaginary romance or storytelling in it. It is not only the genre that he used or his distinctive stance that makes his travelogues so popular. He also makes the places he journeys to, their natural surroundings and human beings familiar and holds them as a mirror before the reader. The reader happily wanders with him in the inaccessible reaches of the Himalayas, in Vaishno Devi in Kashmir, in the Parashuram Kund in a forest–covered area in Nefa, in the North East Frontier Provinces, in Khyber pass, at the source of the Kaveri in the South, sometimes outside India on a Buddhist pilgrimage in Simhala, or near some primitive brook in a hazardous and lonely forest path. The descriptions of the innumerable diversities of nature and myriad human societies in his travelogues has opened up a new horizon to scholars of Bangla literature. He died in 1998.

The Travel Writings of the Author

Umaprasad Mukhopadhay's travelogues are available in Bengali in five volumes called Bhraman Omnibus, published by Mitra & Ghosh between 1983 and 1993. However, listed below are some of his major travel writings, although he has also written biographies, essays on the freedom movement and two volumes of autobiogaphical reminiscences:

Himalayer Pathe Pathe (On the tracks of the Himalayas) — 1962
Gangabartan (Circling the Ganga) —1966
Kuyari Giripathe (On the Mountainous Paths of Kuyari) — 1967
Manimahesh — 1969
Triloknather Pathe (En Route to Triloknath) — 1971
Gupteshwar (Secret Deity) — 1974
Sherpa-der Deshe (In the Land of the Sherpas) — 1974
Muktinath Panchakedar — 1975
Kailash o Manas Sarobar (Kailash and Mansarovar) — 1977
Afridi Mulluke (In the Kingdom of the Africans) — 1976
Kaberi Kahini (The Story of Kaveri) — 1979
Baishnodebi o Anyanya Kahini (Vaishnodevi and Other Stories) — 1979
Alochhayar Pathe (A Passage Through Light and Shadows) — 1985
Dui Diganta (Two Horizons) — 1986
Jaljatra (Travels through Waterways) — 1989
Arabsagarer Tirey (On the Banks of the Arbian Sea) — 1992

4.2 TRAVEL WRITING

4.2.1 Its Popularity

Some kind of travel writing within narratives in other genres has existed from Classical times. In our own epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the self-imposed exile or banishment of the protagonists from their legitimate kingdoms provides the basis for their wanderings and explorations over different kinds of terrain as well as opportunities for encounters with exotic, sometimes strange creatures very unlike themselves. In Classical Greece, Homer's *The Odyssey* describes the amazing adventures of the epic hero on his voyage home from the Trojan wars. Warrior heroes have always been known to move from place to place in quest of extending their kingdoms as well as a kind of self-fulfillment. During the Renaissance, when voyages of discovery proliferated all over Europe, stretching to all parts of the world, travel once again percolated into the literature of the time. Often, tales about travelling would be fictitious and fantastic, like in the English classics *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. They have, however, been followed by very true-to-life children's stories about extraordinary journeys and trips, like R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. It is, therefore, a genre with multifarious possibilities.

Despite all this, the genre has gained respectability on its own merit only over the last few decades. Travel writing has come to be recognized as a popular genre that is no longer considered as just a recreation for the lay reader but an important part of mainstream literature. It is a literary field that increasingly continues to interest the scholar and the critic, and there is a substantial corpus of academic discourses on the subject. Though always part of popular literature, it was hitherto hardly ever taken seriously by scholars and academics. With the growth of New Historicist criticism over the last two decades, there has been a far-reaching widening of the literary domain, and texts that were once considered outside the mainstream have now come to be accepted as part of the canon. Receiving more and more critical attention, it is a great cultural resource that contributes to interdisciplinary studies combining history, literature, and anthropology, among other subjects. There are

prestigious journals *like Studies in Travel Writing,* and academic courses on travel writing are now available in British and American universities.

4.2.2 What is Interesting about Travel?

If we are going to look at the text as a travel narrative, we must first address ourselves to certain questions: what is it about travel that rouses/ stimulates/ awakens/ stirs the curiosity of the common reader? Is it only a thirst for information and data one could just as well get from travel brochures and guide books? Or is it the hope of being able to participate in a vicarious pleasure by reading about the writer's experiences of lands and peoples one has never visited? Could that fantasy be fulfilled by any writer who has visited that particular region? Would they all have the same homogenized account to narrate about the place? Or does one expect each travel writer to have his/ her unique experiences, and a special manner of recounting a journey or a stay in a place that is not one's home, adding to the description a distinctive colour and flavour? This is usually the case, for a travel narrative is not a catalogue of objective facts. In fact, a travel narrative has other dimensions — it often posits the writer's engagement with the self. It, therefore, warrants classification not only as 'non-fictional prose' but can also be included within the broad category of 'autobiographical writing'. But we will get back to that later.

When common people make some special effort to go for a holiday or undertake a trip to a far-flung or even a nearby place, why do they do it? It is usually to escape the monotony and the regimen of home and work, and to relax in a congenial ambience. Some extras that are thrown in are nature in the form of countryside greenery or sun-drenched sea beaches, art and architecture associated with a rich cultural heritage, and the sense of adventure in trekking through high altitude mountains or river rafting. More generally, it is to partake of a rhythm of life that is different from the tedious routine of the place one lives in with its stressful demands on one's body and mind. The last bit is particularly true of people living in the metropolises with high profile professional images to sustain. However, going on a vacation is perhaps equally necessary for those people who, enervated/ drained by the drudgery at home and work can barely make ends meet. But in India and in a third-world context, their finances do not permit them to take a break, which is a luxury/ prerogative that only the rich can afford.

4.2.3 The Inexhaustible Variety of Travel

The exotic and the inaccessible has always fascinated the human imagination. It is exciting to read about far away places where the geographical terrain, as well as the ethno-cultural communities which inhabit that terrain, are totally different from what we see all around us. In India, our landscape, linguistic and cultural groups are so diverse that one need not venture beyond the country's frontiers to encounter new and stimulating experiences. Within the national boundary of India, one could potentially go on travelling forever without exhausting one's list of where to go. The writer of this piece, Umaprasad Mukhopadhyay, is one such traveller who does not tire of undertaking journeys to various parts of India. At times, he self-confessedly claims to have visited the same place two or three times, and since his

experience is widely different each time, he even writes about them twice or three times over.

Umaprasad Mukhopadhay has specifically written about the Himalayan region in many of his travel accounts. There is virtually no fictitious element in his reminiscences, and aspects of folklore are acknowledged to be as such. He underscores and collates all the mythological, historical as well as socio-anthropological information related to the places and people he visits. While he mostly finds hilly people friendly and contented with their lot, the romantically alluring mountains, rivers and forests of the Himalayas inspire him to write a kind of poetic prose.

4.3 TRAVEL LITERATURE IN INDIA

In India, travel writing as a separate genre actually started in the nineteenth century, and shows a sporadic trajectory despite an abundant output in the twentieth century. Travel writings can be classified under two categories — the first dealing with visits abroad, mainly England, and the other with journeys within the country. Two travel accounts — K.M. Munshi's *Mari Binjaab dar Kahini* and Kaka Kalelkar's *Himalayano Pravas* represent both the categories. In Assamese, the only travelogue worth considering was *Bilatar Cithi*, an account of a trip to England. In Sindhi, there is N.R. Malkani's *Kashmir jo Sair* (1925) and M.K. Khilnani's *Hind jo Sair* (1925). In Punjabi, there is Lal Singh Kamla Akali's *Mera Valati Safarnama* (1936). In Tamil, the only mentionable work is A.K. Chettiyar's *Ulakam Currum Tamilan* (1940), which literally means the Tamilian who goes round the world. In Telugu, the earliest travel account dates back to 1938, with *Kasi Yatra Carita*. In Marathi, Pandita Ramabai's works on England and America were published in 1833 and 1836 respectively. The first important Gujarati travelogue was *Inglandno Pravas* by Mahipatram Nilkantha in 1862. In the twentieth century, the noted travel writers were Vishnubat Godse, N.C. Kelkar, Anant Kanekar, Kaka Kalelkar, Mahadeo Shastri Joshi, Gangadhar Gadgil, R.B. Joshi and P.L. Deshpande. Travel writing in Oriya emerged fully in the middle of the century, although some travel writing appeared in the journal *Sambada Bahika* and *Naha Sambada* (1886-87) and in the works of Fakirmohan. Traveloue writing started in Kannada with K. Venkataraman Sastri's *Dakshina Bharat Yatri*. V. Seetharamaiah's *Pampa Yatri* (1925) was followed by V.K. Gokak's *Samudradaceyindu* and important writers like Sivaram Karanth and A.N. Moorthy Rao. In Malayalam, the first work in the genre is *Varthamanappusthakam* or *Roma Yatra* by P. Thoma Kathanar (1736-99). In the twentieth century, K.P. Kesava Menon's *Bilathi Visesam* (1916), N.J. Nair's *Bhupradakshina Vrantam* (1938) and Kuttan Nair's *Jnana Kanda Europe* (1936) are worth mentioning. After independence, A. K. Gopalan's *Nan Oru Putiya Lokam Kantu* (1954), K.M. Pannikar's *Apalkkaramaya Yatra* (1944), *Rantu Chainayil* (1956) and Joseph *Mundasseri's Chaina Munnottu* are works on travels through Russia and China. S. K. Pottekkat was the most prolific travel writer who wrote some 2700 pages. Two other figures who can compare with him are Rahul Sankritayan and Ramnath Biswas.

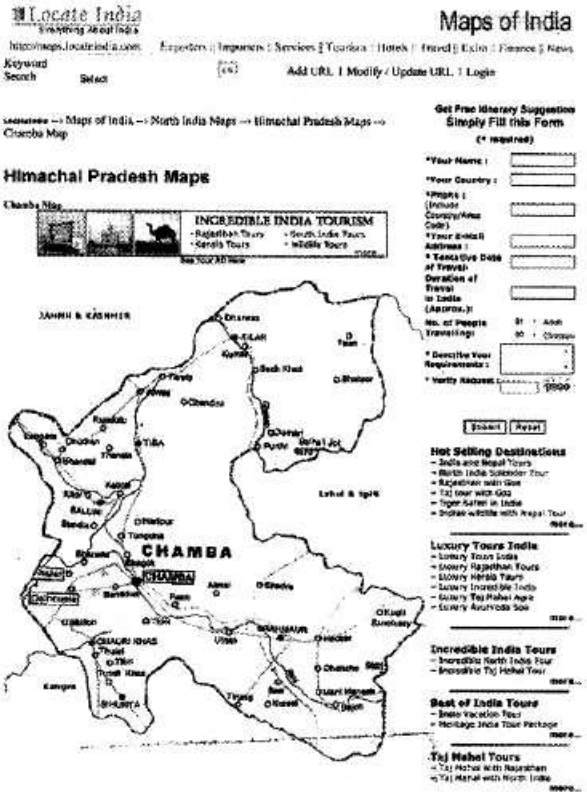
Most of the travel writing mentioned above is about Indians visiting England, European countries, China, Russia or Japan. But the evolution of travel

writing in various Indian languages that deal with Indian cities and villages, pilgrim centres, places of historical interest and natural habitats were part of a nationalist agenda. To begin with, travel accounts mostly covered the Himalayas and Kashmir, and pilgrimages. Gradually, travel writing developed into something that bordered on fiction or was a part of fiction.

4.3.1 Bengali Travel Writing

The Bengali is popularly believed to be the incorrigible traveller. The foremost name in Bengali travel literature is no other than Rabindranath Tagore. He published his travel accounts of Europe in the nineteenth century. This was followed by his experiences in Japan, *Japan Yatri* (1919), Persia, *Parasye* (1936), Russia, *Rasyar Cithi* (1930). They document an "Indian understanding of different civilizations and socio-political systems," as S.K. Das says in *A History of Indian literature* 1911- 1956. Annada Shankar Ray's account of European experience in *Pathe Prabase* (1931) is one the most representative works of literature on Indo-European relations. Prabodh Kumar Sanyal's *Mahaprasthaner Pathe* (1933), a narrative on the Himalayas, marks the beginning of a travelogue that is also a fictional narrative. The later part of the century saw the genre of travel writing flourish in Bengal.

4.4 INTRODUCING MANIMAHESH



The excerpt in your course is about travelling through the Chamba region of Himachal Pradesh. It is a creative piece on travel from a book-length travelogue which was not originally written in English but Bengali, and is

therefore significant as a translated text also. The translation is by Sanjukta Das Gupta. **The full travelogue is in three parts, and deals with the author's trek over the Himalayas. The first part has 14 sub-sections, of which sections 8, 9, 10 and 11 are in your course. The first part describes the journey from Pathankot to the foot of Manimahesh** by the side of a picturesque lake. The second part describes the journey from Khara Pathar towards Chakrata, a high cantonment area over the Jumna valley. The third part has him starting from Masobra on the outskirts of Simla and after passing through some legendary mountain villages, he reaches the foot of the 22,000 high Kinnor Kailas, resembling the phallic image of Lord Shiva.

To specifically acquaint you with the portion in your course, the eighth section of the first part has the writer and Himadri walking from Kharamukh, and reaching the village of Lahul. They encounter a schoolmaster, and a shopkeeper who initially refuses to part with the *bhutta* growing outside his shop in fear of a local superstition. They reach Varmore, the gateway to *Manimahesh*, where the reader's curiosity is tantalized by the description of a sadhu who is supervising the repair of a farmland, and yet is not conscious of the power he wields. Section 9 describes their meeting with the Range officer Sood, who invites them to sleep for the night in his bungalow instead of carrying on to the Forest bungalow. He introduces them to the local doctor Chatterjee, who lives a reclusive and enigmatic existence. They interact with the doctor about common landmarks in Calcutta as well as shared historical signposts. Section 10 narrates well-known stories about the Sadhu, Naga Baba, which have become part of the local lore. The doctor tells them some uncanny happenings centred around Manimahesh and its history that defy rational explanation. Section 11 further explores the history, myth and legend surrounding the hallowed site of *Manimahesh*. The Map will help you to imagine and identify the route to *Manimahesh*.

4.4.1 Questions to ask

Keep certain questions in mind while following the text. What is Mukhopadhyay's motive behind the travel? It is neither religious pilgrimage (as he specifies), study, trade, diplomacy, flight, migration nor empire building and consolidation. What, as a very ordinary but itinerant spirit, entices him to undertake the hazardous journey?

Also, keep your eyes open, during the course of reading the narrative, what it is about the place that continues to interest him, and what issues he wants to discuss. Is it the history, the topography, the myths and legends surrounding it, or more everyday observations like their food, dress, religion, local beliefs and ethno-cultural traits?

What are the nuances and very small details that make the narrative interesting? Does the narrative have an autobiographical voice that is clearly audible? Can you, for instance, guess the age of the writer, or is there any hint about it in the narrative? Is there anything else about his personal self that we learn from the excerpt?

From his short-term travel, is the author able to arrive at any in-depth understanding of the land and its people, both in their present cultural milieu and whatever he can recuperate about them from oral narratives that have been passed on from generation to generation? Is he appreciative or critical of

them? Is there any irony in the way he talks about them, their history, their religion, their superstitions etc.

4.5 THE TEXT: AN ANALYSIS

4.5.1 Geographical Location

Trying to locate the site of *Manimahesh*, there is something that you need to alert yourselves to as we journey along with the author through Himachal Pradesh. At the beginning of the first part itself (which is not in your course), the author makes it clear that the five rivers of Punjab have classical, Sanskritic names like Chandrabhaga, Bitasta, Irawati, Bipasha and Shatadru, apart from the more colloquial names that we are used to hearing, like Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej. The name 'Irawati' might sound confusing to the reader/ student, because it is well-known that Irawati is one of the six rivers of central India that run across the Vindhya plateau. But it is clear from the description of the place that Irawati is also the authentic name of the river Ravi, running through Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. The place Manimahesh, therefore, is situated in a precise geographical location in the Chamba valley, and should not be confused with any other part of India.

4.5.2 Situating *Manimahesh*

In the very first paragraph of the excerpt that is your text, the landscape surrounding Manimahesh has been addressed by many other names. The area of Goderan and Varmore has been called 'the strange land of the Gaddis', a nomadic tribe that migrated from Central Asia some two thousand years ago. It is also called 'Shivbhumi', a land associated with Shiva, the god of creation and destruction, so it is obviously a place of religious sanctity. We are then told that the precise sacrosanct space is none other than Manimahesh, 'the snow mountain' that is also 'Chamba's small Kailash', which helps us to assess its position in the natural landscape of India. Within a few phrases, therefore, this introductory paragraph tells us about the geographical location of Manimahesh, its resemblance and justifiable comparison to the majestic Kailash range of the Himalayas, and one of its striking physical attributes — that it is a snow-covered mountain. It also evokes religious associations that immediately help us to identify its people as Hindus who are devotees of Shiv. With an economy of expression, the travel writer draws us immediately into the world and environment of Manimahesh and its surrounding areas. The reader, therefore, is easily carried along with him in his descriptions of his journey, the topography, and his interactions with the local people. A travel writer really accomplishes the task of recording his/ her journey in a reader-friendly manner when s/he can make his readers believe themselves to be vicariously involved in the entire experience.

4.5.3 Autobiographical Elements

A travelogue is a non-fictional account, and by and large true. In *Manimahesh*, the travel writer articulates himself in a manner that divulges his sincere love of adventure and devotion to the mountains. In the December 1990 issue of *Desh*, the leading Bengali weekly, he had said in an interview with Salil Dutta that he was satisfied with minimal comforts while travelling. Forever eager to be away from the madding crowd, he had always been passionate about the

silent sun-kissed Himalayan peaks, and completely absorbed in them as if in deep meditation. The writing in a travelogue is always autobiographical to some extent, which means it reports the writer's experiences in the first person, and is coloured by the writer's prioritization of certain episodes and encounters over others, although they may be insignificant in the eyes of most people. I quote below from the nineteenth century travel writer Alexander William Kinglake's classic travel text *Eothen* (1844) to explain the travel writer's preoccupation with the self:

> His [the travel writer's] very selfishness — his habit of referring the whole external world to his own sensations, compels him, as it were, in his writings, to observe the laws of perspective; he tells you of objects, not as he knows them to be, but as they seemed to him. The people, and the things that most concern him personally, however mean and insignificant, take large proportions in his picture because they stand so near to him. He shows you his Dragoman, and the gaunt features of his Arabs, his tent, his kneeling camels, his baggage strewn upon the sand; but the proper wonders of the land — the cities, the mighty ruins and mountains of bygone ages, he throws back faintly into the distance. You may listen to him forever without learning much in the way of Statistics...

In *Manimahesh*, however, the objective facts like the 'mighty ruins and mountains of bygone ages' are not thrown into the distance. All that the travel writer narrates, therefore, is not subjective, but is greatly intermingled with his personal observations. In this travelogue, the narrator's meetings with Masterji, the ranger Mr. Sood, Doctor Sahib and others have the flavour of a singular interaction that only he is equipped to reconstruct.

4.5.4 Dialogue

That brings us to a second very important aspect of modern day travel writing, and that is dialogue. There are instances of many such dialogues in the text under consideration, which help us to chart the writer's views on life, religion, regional superstitions etc. For instance, in para 10, they first come across a shop in the village of Lahul. Even without resorting to direct speech, the author is able to convey a sense of the rapport struck between them and the shopkeeper on the basis of the shopkeeper's claiming to have visited some well-known spots in Calcutta.

At the ranger's house, they meet a kindred and cheerful spirit in Mr. Sood, who will not let them stay in the bungalow, but would rather have them stay with him because he is so deprived of human company. Thus having made the initial gesture of friendship, he generously introduces them to Chatterjee Saheb, the doctor, so that they can carry out some conversation in Bengali. Both are very happy at the fortuitous meeting in the remote Himalayas, and they exchange notes about their background. They find that they lived very near each other in Bhowanipore in Calcutta.

Writing about late twentieth century travel writing, Susan Bassnett says:

> Though the I — narrator still occupies a dominant position, the increasing use of dialogue in travel writing has ... [made]

the travel text resemble the novel much more closely. The protagonist engages in conversations that introduce a range of other characters into the narrative, and the reader is expected to believe that such conversations which apparently transcend any language barrier are recorded rather than invented.

Could you pick out examples of dialogues that seem significant in the context of the portion that is in your syllabus?

4.5.5 Social Commentary

Travel writing in the twentieth century tends to focus on the relationship between the individual and the societies through which the writer passes. Depending on the interest of the writer, s/he writes about the ethno-cultural traits, the socio-economic conditions, the educational opportunities, the proportion of locals versus migrants or anything else. For instance, using dialogue cleverly, the writer describes how his companion Himadri demolishes in one fell swoop the local superstition of the people about not allowing corn cobs to be plucked from their farm before undertaking a festive ritual heralding the new crop. By pointing out that bears have eaten some of the corn cobs already, Himadri convinces the shopkeeper to imagine that the bears have likewise eaten the same corn cobs that he would give to them.

To keep alive our ethnographic interest, it is essential that the author present the local and tribal people as they are. The description of the tribal people, the Gaddis, does not abound in this part of the narrative, although we are told on page 4 of the travels that "They had *the same* [Italics mine] cords around their waists" and that "They were smoking hookahs". This is so inadequate that it does not help in speculating the form, physique and embellishments of a Gaddi, in the way that an urban mind would like to visualize a person from a remote area, belonging to a rare tribal community. The Gaddis have actually already been described in Part 7 of the travels, which is not in your course (see glossary).

4.5.6 Humour

Certain incidents, like the one about the corncobs, contribute to humour in more ways than one. The author and Himadri are tempted by the *bhuttas* in the farm — when they are denied those, their insistence virtually shows them to be greedy and so desperately desirous of the succulent, mouthwatering *bhuttas* that they will not let go of an opportunity to eat them. However, in the process, a serious subject like the local superstition about when to eat a *bhutta* is taken up, and the superstition debunked by Himadri's irrefutable logic that if the bears could have taken away some *bhuttas* before the ceremony, surely it could be assumed that the bears have also taken the ones that they are going to be offered. The humour is also created out of the juxtaposition of the rationality of Himadri's mind as contrasted to that of the shopkeeper, which is imbued/entrenched in local old wives' tales.

In part 11, after narrating the story of the Brahmini Devi who had to be appeased before doing almost anything that is within her ambit or sphere of influence, the author tells us that he has heard that the plentiful water in Varmore will now be used to generate electricity. Hearing of this, Himadri

asks Sood in a tongue-in-cheek manner, "Has the Devi's permission been taken?" This remark undercuts the traditional belief in the power of the Brahmini Devi. Can you point out what is so incongruous and out-of-context about this question and how it adds a dash of spice to the story?

Unconventional characters also account for much of the humour in a travel narrative, which brings you to another major preoccupation of a modern day travel text.

4.5.7 Characters

A work of fiction necessarily entails some interaction among various characters in the narrative. But a non-fictional work like a travel tale may or may not have unique 'characters' to liven up its atmosphere or to weave together a story line. This travel account, you will notice, has some very interesting characters who colour the narrative, and they are both locals as well as those who have migrated to Varmore. To begin with, there is the genial Masterji who coaxes the shopkeeper to give the travellers some *bhutta* from the farm, although according to the custom of the place, it can only be plucked after appropriately auspicious rituals and ceremonies. The Doctor Saheb is somebody with whom the author and Himadri gain a longer and deeper acquaintance. He turns out to be a mysterious character from Bengal who seems to be alone in the world and yet claims that he has a family whom he never visits and who never visit him. At one point, he even starts explaining why it is difficult for him and his family to meet, but he quickly changes the subject, showing that there is something about it which he does not want to divulge. This puzzle is not solved till the end of Part 11, and thus remains a matter of unrelieved suspense. He does not socialise with the people in his neighbourhood, although he is perfectly amiable when he meets them. Part 10 ends with Doctor Saheb's visit to the ranger Sood's house, but refusing dinner, which he had promised to have with them. Such eccentricities in a character make the human interactions in the narrative worth reading about, although they are not explained or worked out to a logical culmination as they usually are in a work of fiction.

At the end of part 8, the writer and Himadri see a Sadhu in saffron clothes, overseeing and sometimes participating in repairing the damaged portion of a farmland that had crumbled due to the impact of a strong waterfall. He is referred to as an "embodied inspiration", a kind of "inspiration personified", and in part 10, they are actually taken for a 'darshan' of the Naga Baba, who seems to be older than the stones and the trees. Not even a blade of grass, it seems, grows there without his instructions. He is responsible for restoration of old temples, construction of roads, opening of schools, building of hospitals and maintenance of dharmasalas. The narrative continues with many stories about the Naga Baba, particularly the one about how he prevented an English commissioner from opening a liquor store in the vicinity of the market and temples. He has no political clout or economic power that makes him so revered among the people, yet the doctor says that he is like a Raja, because the value system of the place is different from that of towns and cities. Throughout his life, although Umaprasad Mukhopadhyay met and interacted with such a wide variety of people belonging to a colourful range of places, he philosophically said to Salil Dutta that one cannot get a greater companion than oneself in this life.

Can you point out some of the oddities, foibnles, mysteries and admirable traits of the characters in this excerpt? Yet how are these characters different from the characters in work of fiction? Do they evolve in the course of the narrative?

4.5.8 Nature

In traversing a mountainous region, descriptions of nature are an integral part of the text. The excerpt in your course only has parts 8-11, and it therefore does not cover the really thrilling glimpse of Manimahesh, earned after a laboured climb through breathtakingly beautiful, majestic and inaccessible terrain. However, even as they are going towards Goderan and Varmore through the Bhudol valley, the mountain and the river, which is a tributary of the river Irawati, are described in vivid detail. They seem to come alive with the physical attributes of a human being or an animate creature. In para 7, the author tries to draw a contrast between the two banks of the river:

> The road was on the left of the river cut alongside the steep mountain. Black rocks. These were black rocks which looked as if hooded snakes were hanging over our heads. It seemed as we were walking through a tunnel. There was a moist darkness all around. On the other downward side too, the steep walls of the mountain could be seen. The gorge of the river lay in the middle. But the upper areas of the mountain opposite did not seem all that steep, those seemed to have risen more gently. On that side there were a few clusters of trees, green grass and the surroundings were without the overhanging shadows. It looked bright in the morning sun. The two banks of the same river were so dissimilar.

It is through word-pictures like the one above that the reader can familiarize himself/ herself with the mountainous panorama.

In Part 11, the village of Varmore, nestling amidst the forest, is described in the following words:

> Along the slope of the mountain houses stood in terraced formations. Built of wood and stones. The terrace was covered with slate rocks. Down there, everything was entirely different. A wide table land in the lap of the mountain, 7007 ft. above sea level. A calm and quiet environment. The gigantic deodars had created a dense shadowy canopy. In that half-light, one could see temples scattered here and there. They bore the evidences of the architectural artistry of olden times.

In the Bengali version, the compound word for 'half-light' is 'alo-chhaya', which means a more complex and subtle intermingling of 'light' and 'shade' than 'half-light', and conjures up a visual feast that can be imagined photographically.

Although it is a description that combines heterogeneous facets of a rural habitat like living abodes, temples, and the canopy of deodar trees, the reader

can holistically visualize the picture perfect plateau that accommodates all these.

4.5.9 History and Myth

Any place one visits, quite apart from having a climate and natural environ that is in some way different from where one actually lives, is also steeped in history, even if it is not an earth-shattering one that changed the map of the world. In section 8 itself, in para 5, when they reach Kharamukh, Himadri says "So this must be the same Kharamukh, where according to the myth, Rajkumar Jayastambha had been met by the Saint Agrachari". The author does not respond to this statement, but hurries him on, and the historical background of the place is only taken up in the last section (part 11) of the excerpt in your course. Although that also does not take up the story of the meeting between Rajkumar Jayastambha and the saint Agrachari, this sentence of Himadri's arouses the reader's curiosity and creates an aura of suspense about the history of the place — both mythical and authentic. If the site has also salvaged interesting archaeological relics, architectural marvels, art and sculpture conserved over centuries, there is so much to write about. However, even if it is not very renowned for its history, there are still legends and folklore that contribute to its character. And that is what has been discussed in Part 11 of the travel tale.

Part 11 of the narrative blends history and legend, reality and myth in an intertwining narrative, in which the interface between the two are often blurred and it is difficult to distinguish between the two. It would be useful for our purpose to try and retrieve the truth from the hearsay and fictional accounts in this seamless account of fact and folklore.

The stone carvings on the Chamba temples chronicle the rule of a dynasty that goes back 1500 years in time. They weave together various historical as well as fictionalized accounts of the reign of kings like Aditya Burman, Meru Burman, Ajiya Burman, Lakshmi Burman and Mushan Burman. Of these, the details of how a ban on the killing of rats was imposed contribute to an interesting narrative in the text. Let us try to reconstruct its events in sequence:

i) Lakshmi Burman was killed and his kingdom was taken over by the Kiras (foreign aggressors).

ii) His wife was being carried in a palanquin to a safer place by the Wazir and the Raj Purohit.

iii) Tormented by labour pain, the Rani gave birth to a child in a cave, and in fear, abandoned the child and joined her escorts.

iv) When they went back to the cave, they found that the infant was being guarded by rats. That is how he attained the name Mushan Burman, for 'mushik' means 'rat' in Sanskrit.

v) The queen and the infant took shelter in a Brahmin's house, and later when their royal identity was discovered, they were sent to the palace of the King of Suket.

vi) Mushan Burman was married to the princess of Suket.

vii) He organized a regiment of soldiers and won back the kingdom of Brahmapur.

He imposed a ban on the killing of rats in his kingdom. The author then cites another example of a place which has a ban on the killing of rats, and wonders if there is any connection between the two.

What is the moral of the Mushan Burman story?

Similarly, the story of a unique relationship between Sahil Burman and a yogi called Charpatnath is told towards the end. What illustrations do you find in it of the king's reverence and commemoration of the yogi?

The tale of how a kund was fashioned by Ganesh and named Ardha Gaya in order to appease Parvati when Shiva refused to take her to Gaya for a holy dip is also an intrinsic part of Hindu folklore that sanctifies the kund for visitors. Why does this story get retold here and does it have any connection with the history of the place?

The story behind the Brahmini Devi's temple is obviously one that has filtered down through generations, but the actual temple and the 84 surrounding ones, which are supposed have come into existence when the 84 followers of Shiva who had encroached on the Brahmini Devi's area, were petrified into lingas. That is why the place is called Chowrashi. This, along with, Shiva's decree that pilgrims to Manimahesh must bathe in the Brahmini fall and pray in the Brahmini temple before proceeding to Manimahesh, is something that a sceptic might find hard to believe. The name Brahmapur, which was later changed to Varmore, was also supposed to have been derived from the Brahmini Devi.

Which of the above stories do you think are historically authentic, and which are part of their local legends? Can you think of other places in India which are named after legendary characters?

4.5.10 Religion

Most of the legends about the place are Hindu in origin, for the folklore and myths of a particular locale are usually a part of the religious beliefs of the people of the place. Although the writer and his friend are going on a pilgrimage to what is considered by the Hindus a holy place, and when he sees the Sadhu in saffron, he thinks of it as an auspicious omen, they are not besotted by superstition. This is amply demonstrated in the episode of the corncobs, in which they override the local superstition about not eating *bhutta* before a proper ceremony. Also, they choose to go to Manimahesh somewhat later than the propitious time for pilgrimages, because they do not like crowds and want to imbibe the natural ambience of the place in relative seclusion.

4.5.11 Food

The multi-faceted episode of the *bhutta* is also a guide to the eating habits of the place. We are told that "All over Chamba corn was the staple food". The ripe corn, spread out to dry over rooftops "as if the roofs were covered with golden sheets" is another use of simile, but it is not a natural object or

phenomenon that is compared to the human body. Most travelogues are replete with descriptions of local food, which, unlike travel brochures, deploy descriptions and illustrations of food to advertise eating places, lets people who have never ventured into that territory savour its cuisine imaginatively. **In Vikram Seth's 'From Heaven Lake', another travel fragment that is in your course (MEG-7, Indian English Liteature), for instance, the narrative is punctuated by the writer's stopping at the most unexpected of places for a refill — either a snack or a meal, and each of them is a unique gastronomical experience in itself.**

4.6 LANGUAGE

4.6.1 Figures of Speech and Style

We are told that a snowy lake nestles *in the lap of* Manimahesh. This is a metaphorical way of describing the way the mountain and the lake, which are configured in a geographical interlocking with each other, the lake positioned within the mountain. It also personifies them, for the mountain and the lake are visualized as archetypal images of mother and child, and humanizes them to that extent. It would help you to look out for other such figures of speech all along the travels — particularly metaphors. In the second paragraph itself, the author describes a wide valley of the river with the mountains far apart, 'as if Irawati had '*stretched her limbs and was relaxing.*' The figurative description of a woman's body continues here, this time not as a maternal icon, but as a woman in indolent repose.

A little later (para 7), the road which is 'cut alongside the steep mountains' is actually described in the original Bangla version as 'having been carved out of the mass or the *body* of the mountains'. Metaphors and similes of the human body lend themselves very graciously to the outlining of a mountainous region with a river between its two ranges. In para 8, we are told that the mountains 'seemed to be smeared with snow as they raised their *heads* towards the sky'. On page 4, where the travellers see the ravages of a huge landslide in Cheld Ghar, "it seemed as if someone had clawed off a huge portion of the mountain *face*". Now, the phrase 'mountain face' can be used independently of any resonances of the human face, but when it suggests that part of it has got 'clawed off', the resemblance with a human face becomes very obvious in the description of violence that human bodies are sometimes subjected to. The sense of the mountain having undergone some devastation continues in the sentence "*Amidst the green trees all around, the mountain stood, with severe wounds on its body*".

To come back to para 7, there is a description of black rocks in the Varmore or Bhudol valley, which look "*as if hooded snakes were hanging over our heads*". Here, unlike some of the earlier descriptions, the two objects of comparison are linked by 'like', 'as if' or 'as though', and these are, therefore, similes. The difference between a simile and a metaphor, of course, is that while in a simile, the two objects are merely compared on the basis of a likeness, in a metaphor, one object is equated to the other. A metaphor is, therefore, much more of a superimposition, more complex and needs to be understood with greater care. The point of alerting you to these metaphors, similes and personifications is to sensitize you to such figures of speech all along the way. Keep your eyes open for locating any more such uses of

language. For instance, Par II opens with a comparison of the village centre of Varmore to a very precious stone hidden within the depths of the forest by a Brahmini. In the next paragraph, the temples, with their head erect, perennially silent, look "*like monks in meditation in the sacred woods*".

In the same part, describing the experience of looking around the temples which had stone carvings that told their story, the author says that the experience was like looking at an ancient manuscript in the archives of Indian culture that had been preserved with great care. What is being compared to what? Can you find any more examples of such similes and metaphors?

The memoir, as we can judge from the excerpt in the course, is written in a diary form. It was perhaps originally written to just keep brief notes of the author's trip, and some of it has been retained as such. Apart from elaborations like the ones pointed out above, there are many instances where staccato phrases or terse sentences are all that the reader has to guide him through the terrain of Varmore, Bhudol Valley, Lahul and Manimahesh. The second and the third paras, which describe the valley with some embellishments, also sometimes just record some functional information. "Wide valley". Or "Wooden bridge". Or even "We advanced happily". But depending on whether the situation demands it, the author gets into detailed conversation or lavish natural descriptions. Are there any other stylistic devices you can think of that make this work distinctive?

4.7 LET US SUM UP

This Unit has, I am sure, given you a fascinating glimpse of the writer's travel to Manimahesh in all its aspects, and the people he has met and also the brush with history and myth he has had on his travel.

4.8 THE TEXT AS A TRANSLATION

While we are on the subject of language and style, it is imperative to remember that this narration it is only a translation from Bengali and not an original piece. We are therefore talking about language at one remove from the original language in which the narrative was written. A translation can never be an exact replica of the text in the source language, particularly if it is a translation from an Indian language to English. Therefore, those of us who can read the original, should not expect that it will communicate without any distortion all the colloquial expressions, ethnic words, uses of proverbs and descriptions of customs and traditions that are there in the source language. However, what is written in the target language should read smoothly and convey the sense of what has been written in the source language. This is something that Sanjukta Dasgupta's translation (Sahitya Akademi, 2006) has perhaps been able to do.

Having read the text both in Bengali and English, however, I cannot help pointing out a few somewhat inappropriately transcribed words and phrases. In the second para, 'the road followed the curves of the river', it says, and yet

the Bengali word used for 'curves' is 'dhara', which means 'torrent' or 'current' or 'flow'. In para 8, 'the *slim* course of the river' is not a very happy expression to describe a river when it is at its narrowest. In the next para, the last sentence is "The village was named Lahul". Reading it, one senses almost as if the writer is talking about a time when the name Lahul was actually given to the village; whereas all that he needs to say is "The village was called Lahul" or "The name of the village was Lahul". On the next page, when the shopkeeper says very 'seriously' that it is not permitted to pluck corn from the farmland yet, what the Bengali version conveys is 'grimly' or 'solemnly'.

There are some informal, conversational bits that have been transcribed to very formal English. When the Bengali text says something like "Travelling on that route has stopped for this year", the English rendition says "there was *no permission* for anyone to travel on that route". Again, when the shopkeeper says something like "It will not do to pluck corn from the farmland yet", the English translation reads "it is not *permitted* to pluck corn from the farmland yet". In both instances, the word 'permission' or 'permitted' is an interpolation that could easily have been done without. Similarly, something that is said in the passive voice, possibly with an intention of distancing, has been changed to active — e.g. "you cannot get them now" to "I cannot give them to you now". Likewise, in part 9, "all arrangements for our journey would be made" has been changed to "he would make all arrangements for our journey".

There are other expressions that I found were not close to the original. When the writer and Himadri ask if they can go to the forest bungalow and 'rest', the actual Bengali version asks something like "Can't we go there and settle down?" A little earlier, a sentence that reads "This secluded, inaccessible area of the Himalayas seemed ideal for establishing a capital town" is, in the Bengali version, something akin to "The ambience of this secluded, inaccessible area of the Himalayas was so beautiful that one could establish a capital town there". Again, the word 'ideal' has been interpolated. A sentence in the English version reads "Now then we sat down *without further anxiety weighing on our minds* and formal introductions began". It could have been shortened a great deal to "Relieved, we sat down, and formal introductions began", because the Bengali version also only uses the word 'nishchinta' for 'relieved'.

At times, however, an easy shortcut by substituting a word for a phrase has not done justice to the phrase. In part 11, after the description of Varmore village, in the next para, it says "Brahmini Devi was enraged to find *strangers* in her territory". However, the Bangla text says that she was enraged to see this *unauthorised encroachment* into her territory. Look at the sentence "This was like catching a glimpse of an ancient invaluable, many splendoured manuscript that had been treasured with great care". The Bangla text reads something like this: "This was like catching a glimpse of an invaluable illustrated document that had been brought down from the shelves (kulangi) of a library of ancient Indian culture". The sense of the original is certainly there in the translation, but there are a few flaws. The adjective 'ancient' has been used for Indian culture, but the translation seems to ascribe the adjective 'ancient' to the so-called 'book'. Also, the word 'library', which makes the description so graphic, is missing. "Inscriptions on slabs of stone, and a wooden temple hand-carved by a skilled artiste" has been translated to the passive voice as "Words had been chiselled into the hand carved stone walls".

In a later passage, it is said about Sahil Burman that he was the most famous king in the history of Chamba. The English translation has bypassed this sentence altogether. This could have been an unintentional slip, but should not have missed the editor's eye.

Going over some of these minute details of translation is not to find evidence to the effect that the translation is inadequate. Sanjukta Dasgupta's translation is competent. Pointing out some finer items that needed a more careful handling is only to initiate you into always taking translation with a pinch of salt, particularly if it is from a regional language that you are literate in and which you have some access to. It, however, entails a serious and close reading of both the texts.

4.9 GLOSSARY

2 a)

Proliferated: flowered
Discourse: a formal discussion of a topic in speech or writing
Canon: Body of texts that has been privileged over the popular and the commonplace, a set of literary or artistic works considered to be permanently established as being of the highest quality.
Corpus: body

b)

Vicarious: at one remove, second hand
Homogenized: made uniform or identical
Posits: proposes, states
Regimen: routine
Congenial: amicable

c)

Underscores: highlights
Ethno-cultural: belonging to a subgroup within a larger national group, that is culturally similar to the larger group, and yet has its distinctive traits
Collates: puts together
Socio-anthropological: related to a comparative study of human societies and cultures

3.

Sporadic: random, uneven, irregular
Trajectory: direction

5.

Ambience: atmosphere
Historicity: historical authenticity

7.

Tantalize: tease, titillate
Enigmatic: puzzling, mysterious
Reclusive: leading a solitary life
Hallowed: consecrated, revered, believed as holy

8.

Nuances: subtle differences in shades of meaning
Milieu: social environment
Recuperate: recover

9. (b)

Varmore: sub-tehsil of Chamba district, seat of the Gaddis, originating from the name Brahmapore. Another name of the place is Gaderam or Goderan.
Sanctity: piety, holiness
Sacrosanct: too important to be interfered with
Topography: geographical terrain

9.(c)

Sensitize: make one sensitive to
Prioritization: giving precedence over others

9. (d)

Fortuitous opportune, fortunate

9.(e)

Demolishes: destroys
Ethnographic: related to the study of people and their cultures
Cords: a forty to sixty yards belt made of wool around the waist, weighing 2-3 kgs, which is a trademark of the Gaddis. In the Bengali narrative, it is called a 'dora', and in the 7th part, a detailed description is given. Even women wear it, and use it to tie sheep and goats, pitch tents, and to pull up animals who have fallen off the mountains. The ropes are so strong that they can be tied to rocks and trees and one can climb up with their support. These 'dora's are also called 'Shivji ki jata' because these people are all devotees of Shiv. Varmore is also called Shivbhumi.
Gaddi: An ancient tribe of Varmore, which is also called Shivbhumi. This area is also called Shiv's 'gaddi' or seat, and that is how the tribe has acquired its name. They do not look Pahari. Their ancestors were Shakas, akin to Aryas. They used to roam about with horses and sheep, but when the Huns attacked them, they fled in all directions with their animals. Some of them travelled

southwards, towards India. Some of their branches went to the plains and even established little kingdoms there. But those who still tame animals are still in the Himalayas. Their blood is nomadic. Some roam in the Bushahar and Tehri regions of the Himalayas with buffaloes. They are called 'Gujjars', and have embraced Islam. Others wander around Chamba, Mandi, Lahul etc. They are called 'Gaddi'. They tame sheep and goats. In emulation of Vasudev, the grandson of the Shaka king Kanishka, they adopted the Hindu religion. They are also agricultural people, build huts, and have their separate land and social life.

Embellishments: adornments, ornaments

9(f)

Succulent: juicy
Debunked: exposed, ridiculed
Imbued: entrenched, steeped
Tongue-in-cheek: in an ironical manner, jokingly although apparently seriously
Juxtaposed: placed side by side
Undercut: undermine, damage, subvert
Ambit: range
Incongruous: incompatible, inappropriate

9(g)

Eccentricities: peculiarities

9(h)

Familiarize: acquaint
Panorama: vista, scene, spectacle
Heterogeneous: complex, of a wide variety
Holistically: using an approach where the parts are interconnected to the whole

9 (I)

Salvaged: excavated, dug up
Intertwining: overlapping, woven together
Interface: meeting point
Seamless: a whole without stitches or joints
Petrified: turned into stone
Sceptic: non-believer, cynic

9 (j)

Besotted: overwhelmed
Override: overrule
Propitious: auspicious, favourable

9 (k)

Deployed: marshalled, assembled
Savour: relish, taste
Cuisine: food with its local flavour and specialities
Gastronomical: related to food

9(l)

Configured: shaped, put together or arranged in a particular form
Archetypal: like a recurrent symbol or motif in literature
Icon: image, symbol
Resonances: echoes, reminders

9. (l b)

Staccato: short, detached style, usually used for music, but can be applied to speech or writing as well
Distinctive: special

9. (l c)

Transcribed: translated
Rendition: version, rendering
Interpolation: insertion

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. Elaborate the myth surrounding the origin of the name of Brahmapur or Varmore.
2. What does the writer say about the Naga Baba? What is his attitude towards him?
3. Discuss the stylistic aspects of this essay.
4. What do you learn about the history of the territory surrounding Brahmapur from the excerpt in your course?
5. In what way is *Manimahesh* a personal memoir rather than an objective travellers' guide to the land and its people?
6. *Manimahesh* tells us about the religion, customs, staple food and culture of its people. Discuss.
7. *Manimahesh* is about a site of immense natural beauty, and yet that beauty is punctuated by other vibrant happenings in a way that it does not pall. Do you agree? Discuss.
8. Discuss how the writer creates humour in the text, both by descriptions of the society of the place and the individuals who live in it.
9. Enumerate some of the historical legends and myths about the valley surrounding Manimahesh.
10. Evaluate the place of this text within the genre of travel writing in India, emphasizing its salient features.

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