PG EG S3 04 (DSE)

TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER - III

INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE
ENGLISH



Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This is a **Discipline Specific Elective (DSE 3)** Course of Semester 3. In this Course, learners will be introduced to Indian English Literature which has emerged both as a literary genre and as a small literary industry. Various terms have been used to address English Writings from Indian authors or from authors of Indian origin, in its 200 years of intellectual history. Some of them are – Indian English Writing, Anglo-Indian Writing, and Indian Writing in English and so on. At the same time, the answer to the question—if India exists only in the narratives 'imagined' abroad—is also to be explored by critically examining if imagining an Indian nation becomes a compulsion or a compensation for the 'loss', the diasporic Indian English writers often experience while writing about India.

The use of the term Indian English Literature is thought to be best suited to the purpose of addressing the different aspects of experimental writings that have emerged in the post-independence period. Such a form of writing looks markedly different from the realist and historical form of writing that emerged during the pre-independence period. Salman Rushdie's adoption of a kind of writing that challenged many of the taken-for-granted views in Anglo-Indian Writings, inaugurated a new 'construction' of the notion of Indianness and opened up new possibilities for discussing an Indian text. Subsequently, the use of English by such writers is to be seen as a deviation from a literary language invented mostly by Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan.

This Course shall start with a discussion of the history of Indian English Writing, Indian English poetry, drama and fiction then it will touch upon individual authors. Divided into three Blocks, this Course seeks to investigate the politics and problems of literary production and cultural practice within the both pre-colonial and post-colonial Indian context. To have a better idea of Indian English Literature you are advised to read a few books like M. K. Naik's *A History of Indian English Literature,* K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English,* Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest,* Meenakshi Mukherjee's *The Twice Born Fiction* and *The Perishable Empire*: *Essays on Indian Writing in English,* A. K. Mehrotra's *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English.*

BLOCK 1: INTRODUCTION

Block 1 is dedicated to the history of Indian English literature. It contains a total five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 1 Historical Background (1857-1920, 1920-1947) shall familiarise you with some of the important aspects of the social and intellectual contexts of English writing in India and its deep-rooted influence

on Indian minds. Though the British government introduced modern education in India with their particular motives, this move entirely changed the social and intellectual set up of India. Enlightened by modern education, a few literate Indians of the period reacted with the characteristic vivacity and adulation. The most important aspects of modern English education was observed in the novelistic genres. New to the Indian literary scene, novel, along with other literary genres, gained immediate popularity amongst the educated Indians of the period. This unit thus helps to form an idea of the history of Indian Writing in English before the Independence.

Unit 2 Historical Background (Independence and After) discusses the history of Indian English Literature in Post Independence India, which saw the emergence of many Indian writers in English. Moreover, the two decades after the Independence changed the Indian political and cultural ethos that facilitated the growth of Rushdie generation in 1980s and 1990s. This unit also deals with how following the inadvertent introduction of English literature in India through the Charter Act 1813, Indian Writing in English started to develop, and gradually it received worldwide recognition till the later part of the 20th century.

Unit 3 Modern Indian English Literature ["Introduction" to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* 1947-1997] shall deal exclusively with Indian English literature of the modern times, especially during the last three decades of the 20th century. In order to discuss the same, we shall try to read the "Introduction" of Salman Rushdie to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* 1947-1997 edited by Rushdie and Elizabeth West. This 'Introduction' should give you a panoramic picture of the development of Modern Indian English prose and fiction with reference to its various thematic aspects of Indian English Literature as seen by Salman Rushdie.

Unit 4 Gauri Viswanathan: "Literary Study and British Rule inIndia" from *Masks of Conquest* shall deal with Gauri Viswanathan's essay "The Beginnings of English Literary Study" from her seminal book *Masks of Conquest.* This book is about the institution, practice, and ideology of English studies introduced in India under the British colonial rule. The prescribed essay bears multifarious significance as it traces the development of English literature in India and its various upshots. It is assumed that the learners will gain important perspectives on the emergence of English literature in India from a reading of this unit.

Unit 5 A. K. Ramanujan: "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking?" provides a discussion on the life and works of the influential Indian poet-critic A. K. Ramanujan as well as his literary essay "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay" This essay will help you to discuss what makes Indian thoughts different from its Western counterpart, and how one is supposed to form an idea of Indian literature in general.

BLOCK 2: INTRODUCTION

The units of this Block will introduce you to some representative Post independence Indian English poets and dramatists as well as to their works. From your reading of the units on poetry in this Block, you will gain important insights into the growth of Indian English poetry against the various socio-cultural and intellectual background of Indian literary history. Besides, from these units, you are going to have an overall idea on the various dominant themes in Indian English poetry, which are also the major concerns of the Indian English poets prescribed in your syllabus. This Block also contains 2 units on Indian drama. Ancient Indian drama was a reflection of actual life, which was seen from the language it employed. However, post-independence Indian drama is also marked by an acute understanding of the social issues by the dramatists concerned.

After India gained political Independence in 1947, a number of playwrights felt the need to develop a theatre that did not follow British models, but was in some way Indian. KavalamNarayanaPanikkar, along with HabibTanvir, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad—the members of what is often referred to as the "Theatre of Roots" movement, began to study Kathakali, Yakshagana, Chhau and other traditional Indian performance forms to see what could be used in the creation of a modern Indian drama. As Karnad very clearly states, however the attempt "was not to find and reuse forms that had worked successfully in some other cultural contexts. The hope, rather, was to discover whether there was a structure of expectations-and conventions-about entertainment underlying these forms from which one could learn." This Block contains total five units that deal with Indian poetry and drama. The details of the unit are as follows:

Unit 6: Jayanata Mahapatra: "The Abandoned British Cemeteryat Balasore" deals with two poems written by Jayanta Mahapatra who is one of the most significant Indian poets. "Hunger" & "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore" are two important poems of Mahapatra and they express the major concerns of the poet. This unit is designed to help you to have some ideas of the poet's experiences that would add to your understanding of the richness of the poet's works.

Unit 7: Kamala Das: "A Hot Noon at Malabar" & "My Grandmother's House" deals with Kamala Das, another Indian poet of immense repute and her poems "A Hot Noon in Malabar" and "My Grandmother's House". She is known for her frank and fiery poems. Her uninhibited treatment of female sexuality gave her writing a powerful edge.

Unit 8: Keki N Daruwalla: "Wolf" & "Hawk" deals with two poem namely "Wolf" & "Hawk" written by Keki N Daruwalla who is a major poet and short story writer in the field of Indian Writing in English. Daruwalla's life and career, and the experiences as a police officer may well have sensitised him to certain aspects of society.

Unit 9: Girish Karnad: *Nagamandala* shall provide some ideas about Indian English drama through Girish Karnad's much acclaimed play *Naga-Mandala.* Karnad is an important name in the literary and cultural landscape of India along with other playwrights like Badal Sircar, and Vijay Tendulkar. From this unit, you will learn how Girish Karnad's experiments with traditional materials for dramatic performance help in the revival of Indian drama in Post independence period.

Unit 10: Bijay Tendulkar: *GhashiramKotowal* deals with Vijay Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. This is a controversial musical historical play and is concerned with the reign of the Peshwas in the 18th century Maharashtra. This play has been one of the worthwhile efforts in the use of traditional 'Indian' forms of drama.

BLOCK 3: INTRODUCTION

The form of the novel that appeared as a popular literary form in the 18th century England, is undoubtedly new to India. The Indian literary historian K. R. Srinivas Iyengar stated that for the novel in India, they had to wait till the latter half of the 19th century. Although the western influence on Indian English novel was quite obvious and although the early Indian English novel was called derivative and imitative of English models, the Indian novelists have successfully employed the Western techniques of novel writing for expressing their ethos and sensibility. Therefore, what essentially distinguishes Indian English novels is its social concern, realism and unfailing interest in men. It represents the cultural perspectives of the Indian people which in a way also helps to articulate the 'Indian' identity. Therefore, Indian English novels have to be studied as an expression of the writers' sense of 'Indianness' as well as their hopes and aspirations.

This Block contains total five units. The details of the unit are as follows:

Unit 11: R K Narayan: *The Vendor of Sweets* deals with an Indian English novel The Vendor of Sweets by R. K. Narayan. Narayan is one among the three leading figures of Indian Writing in English alongside Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. The novel deals with Jagan who is a prosperous sweet vendor at his 60s, and who is influenced by Gandhian principles. He is extremely fond of his son Mali who announces that he is abandoning school to go to America to become a writer. After a year or two, Mali returns with a half-Korean and half-American wife and with a grand scheme of marketing a machine that would help in novel writing. Jagan is utterly at a loss as he is forced to confront a new world in which his cherished notion of marriage and morals seem to have no importance.

Unit 12: Mulk Raj Anand: *Untouchable* shall introduce you to Mulk Raj Anand, another important Indian English novelist and his highly acclaimed novel Untouchable. The novel provides a glimpse of the miserable condition of the untouchables in a society, which had been stratified into various parts on the basis of caste and creed. Anand dealt with the subject of untouchability in a very poignant manner by delineating one day of an untouchable young man's life. He made a definitive protest

against the ancient caste system responsible for the menace of untouchability.

Unit 13: Anita Desai: *Clear Light of Day* deals with Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day*. In this novel, Desai wove the history of Delhi with a middle-class Hindu family. Bimala or Bim is a history professor, feels betrayed by her sister Tara and replays her memory in a decaying family mansion in Old Delhi. It is difficult for Tara to understand why Bim does not what to change herself from her sterile existence. Clear Light of Day is often considered one of the most successful works of the author, and is praised for "its highly evocative portrait of two sisters caught in the lassitude of Indian life."

Unit 14: Amitav Ghosh: *The Hungry Tide* (Part I) introduces us to Amitav Ghosh and his novel The Hungry Tide. Born in Kolkata and now a resident of New York, Amitav Ghosh has been one of the most renowned Indian English authors of recent times. A recipient of the coveted Padma Shri Award from the Government of India in 2007, Ghosh has by now established himself as one of the most versatile of the "post Rushdie" generation of expatriate Indian authors writing in English. This unit shall serve as an introduction to Amitav Ghosh—the author and his novel The Hungry Tide that tends to focus on a 'micro' culture within the region namely, the Sundarbans or the 'tide country".

Unit 15: Amitav Ghosh: *The Hungry Tide* (Part II) provides a discussion on Amitav Ghosh's novel The Hungry Tide. The incident of Morichjhapi massacre that took place in 1978-79, when the government of West Bengal forcibly evicted thousands of Bengali refugees who had settled on the island, forms one of the backgrounds for the novel. The novel is set in the Sundarbans the immense labyrinth of tiny islands in the Bay of Bengal. For the settlers here, life is extremely dangerous with possibilities of attacks by tigers, unrest and eviction by the Government. Many a times, without warning tidal floods rise and surge over the land, causing devastation everywhere. As you finish reading the unit, you will learn that the novel explores topics like humanism and environmentalism, especially when they come into a conflict of interest with each other.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (1857-1920, 1920-1947)

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Social Context

1.4 Intellectual Context (The Role of English)

1.5 Indian English Prose

1.6 Indian English Drama

1.7 Indian English Poetry

1.8 Indian English Novel

1.9 Let Us Sum Up

1.10 Further Reading

1.11 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.12 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- trace the social and intellectual contexts in which English language was introduced in India.
- discuss the early development of Indian English prose, poetry, novel and drama.
- gain some ideas on Indian nationalism against the British colonialism.
- discuss the impact of Gandhi and India's struggle for Independence on the early 20th century Indian English literature.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit, which is also the first unit of the course, will familiarise you with some of the important aspects of the social and intellectual contexts of English writing in India and its deep- rooted influence on Indian minds. Though the British government introduced modern education in India with

their particular motives, this move entirely changed the social set up of India. Enlightened by modern education, the Indians of the period reacted with the characteristic vivacity and adulation. Poets like Derozio and Toru Dutt imitated but at the same time showed glimpses of originality. In prose writing, social and political prose thronged the arena with reformative and nationalistic agendas. However, the most important aspects of modern English education was observed in the novelistic genres. New to Indian literary scene, novel gained immediate popularity amongst the educated Indians of the period. Various social, political and national themes got expressed through the novels of the period. In this regard, novelists like M. R. Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao took the most emphatic role. As a whole, the advent of English education in India brought about a new entrant in Indian literature- Indian English literature, which made its presence felt in the most formidable way possible. This unit should help you to form an idea of the history of the emergence of Indian Writing in English before the Independence.

1.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Modern education was made available to the people of India in the colonial regime under the British. Some Christian missionaries, British government and some western educated liberal Indians were responsible for the spreading of modern education in India. The principal aim of the institutions established by the Christian missionaries was religions, but they also played a vital role in spreading modern education in India.

However, the dissemination of modern education in India was made by British government for the fulfilment of its own political, economic and administrative needs. Lord Dalhousie took the initial move. At that time, British were able to conquer most parts of the Indian Territory and they established ever-growing numbers of industries in the conquered land. To rule such a vast area of land, they needed strong administrative machinery. It was almost impossible for the British government to supply such a mammoth requirement of educated people with the knowledge of English to work in the administrative offices, industrial establishments, courts and

other government institutions. Therefore, the British government, established schools and colleges in India to produce educated Indians catering to the needs of government and commercial establishments. However, it is important to note that the educated Indians were primarily given subordinate posts like clerks, managers and agents.

The British had other motives behind their policy of providing modern education to the Indian masses. Some British statesmen and prominent thinkers believed that British education would prove to be most enlightening in the world and when imported to the native Indians, this would attach them closely to the British rule. Mountstuart Elphinstone considered English education a political necessity. On the other hand, the British statesman like Macaulay, Cecil Rhodes regarded English culture as the most liberal and considered it the means of Anglicising the empire culturally. They envisaged a united Anglicised empire connecting its people with English education and culture under the British leadership.

Some liberal-minded Indians also advocated for modern education in India. For example, Chiplunkar Agarkar, Maganbhai Karamchand, Karve, Tilak, Gokhale, Malaviya were some of the prominent Indians who supported modern education throughout India. Raja Rammohun Roy pioneered the demand for modern education and he thought that English education would help in inculcating the scientific and democratic thinking in the minds of the Indian people. Roy was against the indigenous system of education in Tols and Madrassas because such education only worked for the perpetuation of prejudice, superstition and the hierarchy of the society. Every educated Indian of the period supported modern education because it was anti-authoritarian and liberal, it put stress on individual liberty, and it rejected blind faith and superstition and propagated rational thinking. English education and culture brought about a respite of incomprehensive magnitude to the Indians. It was the Charter of 1813, according to which, the East India Company took up the responsibility of education for the Indians. There was debate on the kind of education, which was to be provided for the Indian people. Raja Rammohan Roy supported this policy of modern education through the medium of English language itself.

In 1854, with Wood's Education Despatch, the modern education system had its formal beginning. Woods Despatch had three objectives for the Indian education system

- First, it wanted to spread western culture.
- Second, it wanted trained educated personnels for the public administration.
- Third, it wanted to prepare the Indians for various duties under the British government.

The Despatch also stated the responsibility of the government for imparting education to the Indian masses and to women. In 1904, the British government passed Indian Universities Act paving the way for affiliation rules for the colleges. They introduced modern English education in India to produce a mass of English speaking Indian people for their establishments.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who was responsible for the introduction of Modern English education in India?

Q 2: What was the need of modern education through English in India?

Q 3: Why did the educated Indians ask for modern education in India?

1.4 INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT (THE ROLE OF ENGLISH)

Modern education imparted through the medium of English by the British Government had a role to play in shaping the minds of the Indian people. The Government also intended to control the public education so that it could strengthen their political authority in India. In the colonial India, English language played a very significant role in creating uniformity of viewpoint and interest in the minds of the educated Indians. Due to the English language modern ideas of the western civilization became accessible to a large number of Indians. It was largely because of modern English

education that they could imbibe a democratic, rational, secular and nationalistic outlook. Contemporary European movements also created political awareness in their minds. The western political thinkers like Thomas Paine, Rousseau, Mill etc. became known to them through this English education, which, in the long run, enhanced their understanding of the political situation of India. They were the first to have felt and understood the evil effects of British rule and the consequent exploitation. An independent, modern and prosperous India was their dream. In addition, to achieve it, they wholeheartedly joined India's struggle for the Independence. Apart from these, English also acted as the medium of communication and exchange of ideas among the educated Indians of various language communities of India.

Creative literature, which was written by the Indians in English, necessarily belonged to the Indian literature. The Indian people have been writing and speaking English as medium of expression or they have used this language to achieve artistic expression in the literature they have produced. There was initial doubt whether the Indians could produce creative writing of high value in English. Sri Aurobindo amply nullified that doubt when he stated that many Indian writers such as Nehru, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu etc. already produced such literature, which had been termed excellent by good English critics. There was time when questions arose during India's freedom struggle regarding the acceptance of English as a language of the land. But, there were writers like Rammohun Roy, Ranade, Dadabhai Naoroji, Phirozeshah, Surendranath, Bepin Pal, Sankaran Nair, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Tilak. Gokhale, Malaviya, Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Aurobindo, Jawaharlal Nehru, M.K. Gandhi and many other who effectively used their language for the benefit of their motherland. Indian literature in English is the creative self-expression of those Indians who received English education.

K. R. Srinivisa Iyengar termed English language as the Suez Canal, which connected the intellectual contact between India and England. His line of argument is emphatic because prominent English educated Indians like Rammohun Roy, Keshab Chunder Sen, Vivekananda, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan etc. defied various limitations to achieve

success in this field and contributed profoundly to the world stream of Knowledge as well as to the construction of modern India. Most importantly, it is created in the Indian climate by the Indians. So, the literature that they produced must be regarded as national literature. This particular literary phenomenon called Indian English literature emerged when an Indian writer tried to express his emotions in English. In such writings, the most important aspects are the artistic sensibility and the mode of expression. M.K. Naik remarked that Henry Derozio, Aubrey Menen and Ruskin Bond etc. were distinctively Indian. While on the other hand, there were writers like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala who were not Indians by birth, but they carried the Indian sensibility and ethos into their writing with due sincerity.

There are many appellations given to this body of literature—Indo-Anglian literature, Indo-English literature, Indian writing in English and Indian English literature. Indo-Anglian and Indo-English—both the terms were considered inadequate with the passage of time. Indian Writing in English was used by K.R. Srinivas Iyengar for his book *Indian Writing in English* which is a comprehensive study on the subject under discussion. David McCutchion and M.K. Naik also used the same term in their edited books. However, it is also true that the term has a sense of circumlocution within it. Indian English literature is the most suitable term to define this body of literature. This appellation bears the sense that it is one of the languages in India, which is capable of expressing the Indian sensibilities and ethos like the other Indian languages. The Sahitya Akademi also accepted the term.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How did the educated Indians feel the influence of Western political thinkers?

Q 5: Can we regard Indian English literature as an important component of India's national literature?

Q 6: Do you think "Indian English literature" as the proper appellation to represent the literature written in English by Indians?

1.5 INDIAN ENGLISH PROSE

The first Indian English prose was written by C.V. Boriah in 1803. His "Account of the Jains" was a twenty eight-page essay about the views of a Jain priest. Though the essay was not so important content wise, it's significance rested on its historical value as the first ever essay attempted by an Indian to write in English. However, Raja Rammohun Roy's "A Defence of Hindu Theism" was basically regarded as the first original prose writing in English by an Indian.

Rammohun Roy edited an English periodical—*The Brahummunical Magazine* from 1821 to 1823. He wrote thirty-two original English essays on diverse subjects. His *An Abridgement of the Vedant* (1816) and *Kena and Isa Upanishads* (1816) were translated work on religion. *A Defence of Hindu Theism* was actually a response to the attack on the *An Abridgement of the Vedant*. He supported monotheism. He also wrote a second defence in support of monotheistic system of the Vedas. His vast learning on Christian theology took the form of a compilation *Precepts of Jesus* in 1820. He added three rejoinders to *The Precepts* in 1820, 1821 and in 1823. He was a social reformer of great stature. He worked strenuously for the rights of women and worked vehemently against suttee or widow burning. Some of his original writings in English about the issue were—"A Conference between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of burning Widows alive"(1818), "A Second Conference between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of burning Widows alive"(1820), "Abstract of the Arguments regarding the burning of Widows considered as a religious Rite"(1830), "Address to Lord William Bentick" (1830) and "Anti-Suttee Petition to the House of Commons"(1832). His attack on polygamy and dispossessing women from right to inheritance got expression in "Brief Remarks regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to the Hindu Law of Inheritance" (1822). However, his "Letter On English Education" (1823) could well be regarded as a masterpiece of its kind which actually set the tone for English education in India. This was also regarded as the manifesto of the Indian renaissance.

His "Petitions Against the Press Regulations" (1823) was against Government move to suppress the freedom of the press. This regulation was popularly known as Adam's gag. He protested against the exploitation of the peasantry and the siphoning of India's wealth through his "Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue System of India" (1832). Along with these writings, he also wrote a short autobiographical sketch of himself at the behest of one of his friends. This was important because such an attempt would be later enriched by the writings of Nehru and Nirad C. Choudhuri. Some other contemporary writers of Rammohun Roy in English prose were Krishna Mohan Banerji (1813-85), Ram Gopal Ghose (1815-68), Hurish Chunder Ghosh etc. Their social awareness prompted them to write their hearts out in support of India and her people. Their prose style was highly acclaimed by contemporary periodicals like *The Times* and *Indian Field.*

Bal Shastri Jambhekar (1812-46) was a Sanskrit Pundit and English writer of repute. He founded *The Darpan (1832)*- the first English and Marathi journal published in Maharashtra. The journal aimed to create interest in the Indians regarding English literature and to offer platform for public discussion on such issues. Dadoba Pandurang's *A Hindu Gentleman's Reflections respecting the works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (1878) was an illuminating study of religious thoughts. Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami (1765-1840), the elder brother of C.V. Boriah wrote *Biographical Sketches of the Dekkan Poets* (1829). This was the first book to be written on this subject in Indian English literature. The book comprehensively described the lives of many ancient and modern Sansrit, Tamil, Telegu and Marathi poets. Though the style of writing was lacking in standard and critical insight, it was regarded a mammoth task to be accomplished in the early 19th century. Lutufullah, a tutor to British officers in Persian, Arabic and Hindustani, tried his hands in writing his autobiography cum travel diary-*Autobiogrphy of Lutufullah: A Mohamedan Gentleman and His transactions with his fellow creatures: Interspersed with remarks on the habits, customs and character of the people with whom he had to deal* (1857). Lutufullah's *Autobiography* is the first full-length autobiography in Indian English literature.

Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917)—a prominent freedom fighter, member of London Indian Society, and member British House of Commons, wrote *Poverty of India* (1873) and *Poverty and UnBritish Rule in India*. Both the books were the seminal texts where he exposed the lacks of British administrative and economic policies. He was a moderate and liberal at the beginning of his political career but later on he vehemently criticised the British rule in India. At the twenty-second session of Indian National Congress held in 1906 in Calcutta, his address was clearly against the British rule in India.

Mahadev Gobind Ranade (1842-1901), hailed as Rishi Ranade and Father of Indian Economics was a scholar of encyclopaedic knowledge, religious and social reformer, ardent patriot and thinker. *Rise of Maratha Power* (1900) was his noted historical writing where he unfurled Maratha chronicle. His delineation of the 15th and 16th century Maharashtra was linked with the rise of the Marathas and the resultant social and religious resuscitation. Another book that was published during his lifetime was *Essays in Indian Economics* (1898). His speeches and writings were published posthumously in *Religious and Social Reform* (1902), *Miscellaneous Writings* (1915) and *The Wisdom of a Modern Rishi* (1942).

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, regarded as the father of the Indian unrest, was aggressive and rugged in his National Congress activities. His speeches delivered in English were collected in *Writings and Speeches* (1922) and in *Towards Independence: Samagra Lokamanya Tilak* (1975). He was an eminent Indologist, which was aptly revealed in such works as *The Orion: Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas* (1893) and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* (1903).

Next to Tilak was Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) who was a fiery leader of Indian National Congress. His sense of dedication and honesty is reflected in his published works- *Speeches* (1908) and in *Speeches and Writings* (3 Vols, 1962). Along with Tilak and Gokhle, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) was also famous as a novelist in Bengali and English. He defended Hinduism in his *Letters on Hinduism.* He also wrote many essays in English- “On the origin of Hindu Festivals” (1873), “Bengali

Literature" (1871), "The Study of Hindu Philosophy" (1873), and "Vedic Literature" (1894).

Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) was an experienced administrator who understood the social, economic and political problems of India. His *The Peasantry of Bengal* (1875), *A History of Civilization in Ancient India* (three Vols. 1889), *Famine and Land Assessment in India* (1900) and *The Economic History of India* (two vols. 1902 and 1904) were often regarded masterpieces of the class. They were also hailed as the inside narrative of the colonial regime from the perspective of a colonised native. It was later termed as the economics of colonisation. His *Three Years in Europe: 1869-187* was regarded as a pioneering literature of travel distinguished by detailed picturesque description. *The Literature of Bengal* (1879) was a literary survey but it also contained his assessment on the impact of western thought on India and her people.

Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925) was one of the founding fathers of Indian National Congress. Apart from that, he was one of the most formidable orators in English. His speeches were published as Anthologies— *Speeches 1880-1908* (6 vols. 1890-1908), *The Trumpet Voice of India: Speeches of Babu Surendranath Banerjea, delivered in England in 1909* (1919). He also wrote an autobiography— *A Nation in Making: Being the Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life* (1925). *A Nation in Making* is more of a public document than an autobiography. Here, he gave emphasis to the rise of nationalism from the nascent stage to its development.

Rabindranath Tagore's prose in English was basically his speeches delivered as lectures in different parts of the world. The lectures, which he delivered at Harvard University, were anthologised in *Sadhana* (1913). His speeches encompassed various issues related to life and soul, problem of evil, realization of love and beauty, and about non-dualistic faith. Two other collections of speeches came out after he toured U.S.A. in 1916- *Personality* (1917), and *Nationalism* (1917). In *Personality*, his speeches were related to various issues concerning man and his relationship with God, Art, Nature and woman. In these lectures, he also kept intact his non-dualistic position. *Nationalism* speeches were delivered on the topics such as imperialistic

nationalism of the west and the resultant threat it created for India and Japan. His observation was that western civilization stressed on material power rather than on the moral one. He also envisaged the imminent catastrophe looming large on Japan due to her dealings with the west. The lectures in *Creative Unity* (1922) concerned with the dichotomy between the East-West relationships. He opined that the West's too much insistence on the use of machine made schism more prominent. The Hibbert lectures that he delivered at Manchester College were collected in *The Religion of man* (1930). Successfully reflecting the title of the collection, these lectures mainly focussed on man's essential humanity and how such humanity could reach the stature of godliness. At the same time, these lectures highlighted the development of Tagore's religious views, which were regarded as "a poet's religion". Two lectures that Tagore presented at Andhra University were collectively published in *Man* (1937). In these lectures, he deliberated on man's dual nature, similarity of values in religions, on the doctrine of advaita, and his hope for a golden future for the mankind. On the basis of his speeches, it is fairly easy to term him a humanist unrestricted by caste, creed and national boundary. He preached for a symphony of man, nature and divine to arrive at universal harmony. Closely tied to Indian tradition, Tagore nurtured himself from his learning from the *Upanishads, The Gita,* Buddhism and Vaishnavism. His prose is characterised by ardent poetic statement.

Sri Aurobindo was one of the most prolific prose writers of the period. He wrote on vast range of subject matters such as literary, metaphysical, religious, cultural, political, social, occult etc. *Essays on the Gita* (1928), *The Life Divine* (1939-40), *Heraclitus* (1941), and *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1948) were his works related to religion and metaphysics. In *Essays on the Gita,* Aurobindo discussed the living messages of *the Gita,* which are considered essential to understand life better. *The Life Divine* was a work of encyclopaedic nature dealing with man's life, which could be made divine while living on this mortal world. Men possessed divine-self within and it becomes intrinsic to manifest the divinity to the outer-self. In *Heraclitus,*Aurobindo made a comparative study of the *Vedic-Upanishadic*

thought and Greek philosophy. *The Synthesis of Yoga* stressed on "Integral Yoga" which would help man to acquire the "Supermind" leading to the salvation of the human race. *The Renaissance in India* (1920), *The foundations of Indian Culture* (1953), *The Human Cycle* (1949), *The Ideal of Human unity* (1919) and *War and Self-Determination* (1920) were collections of essays on art, literature, poetry and literary criticism. The significant aspect of Aurobindo's literary criticism is his reliance on Indian literary and aesthetic tradition. As a whole, it can be said that his prose style is of varied nature and it has the capacity to assume different tones and effects.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) wrote his first major work *Hind Swaraj* in 1909, which initially appeared in the columns of *The Indian Opinion* (1903-14). Though it was published in Gujrati, later it was translated into English by Gandhi himself. The book was written in dialogue form regarding the problem of India's Independence. His autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* was later translated into English from original Gujrati by Mahadev Desai in two volumes. Gandhi's other works include *Satyagraha in South Africa* (1928), *Discourses on the Gita* (1930) and *From Yervada Mandir* (1932) which were translated by V.G. Desai. However, it is a matter to decide whether Gandhi's works can be included in Indian English prose because apart from *Hind Swaraj,* all other works are translated into English by other writers.

In comparison to M.K. Gandhi, his political heir Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was a prolific writer. *Soviet Russia* (1928) was Nehru's first work where he delineated his impression of Russia. *Letters from a father to his Daughter* (1930) was an anthology of thirtyone letters, which he wrote to his daughter about the early history of the world. *Glimpses of World History* was also written to his daughter in letterform during 1930-33. Here, he narrated the world history from the earliest period to the nineteen thirties. However, his most outstanding work was *An Autobiography* (1936) where he offered a vivid description of himself and his social milieu. Of course, Nehru's account of his life was selective and tinged with his characteristic detachment. *The Discovery of India* (1946) contained the history of India

from the Indus valley civilization to his contemporary period of nineteen forties. Like *Glimpses of World History,* this work was also written from the perspective of Nehru's lively historical sense interspersed with the currents of World history.

Another prolific writer of Indian English prose before the Independence was Sarvepally Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) who later became the second President of India. His prose was basically concerned with religion and philosophy. *The Ethics of the Vedanta* (1908), his M.A. dissertation, was written as a reply to the western attack on *Vedanta*. In *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (1918), Radhakrishnan probed into the poetry of Tagore to reach out the doctrine of Maya and Hindu ethics. *The Reign of religion in Contemporary Philosophy* (1920) was an examination of Western philosophical thought where he traced the influence of religion. Radhakrishnan's magnum opus was *Indian Philosophy* (Vols. I-II, 1923 and 1927) where he comprehensively dealt with Indian philosophical thought. *The Hindu View of Life* (1932), *East and West in Religion* (1933) were some distinguished works of Radhakrishnan.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Discuss Raja Rammohun Roy's contribution to Indian English prose.

Q 8: In what way, did Nehru express his knowledge of history through his prose writings?

1.6 INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Indian English drama had its genesis with Krishna Mohan Banerji's *The Persecuted or Dramatic scenes illustrative of the Present state of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* (1831). Banerji attempted to present the blackness and inconsistencies of the Hindu community through his dramatic art. Influenced by the liberal values of Western education, he could easily perceive the orthodox religious traditions present in the contemporary social set up. After him, Michael Madhusudan Dutt translated his three Bengali plays into

English—*Ratnavali* (1859), *Sermista* (1859) and *Is this Called Civilization*? (1871).

Sri Aurobindo began his dramatic writing with *The Witch of Ilni: A dream of the Woodlands*. His love for Elizabethan drama is quite evident in *The witch of Ilni*. *The Viziers of Bassora-A Dramatic Romance* was about two young lovers' trials and tribulations. The story was taken from *The Arabian Nights*. The drama highlighted the conflict between the good and evil. In conception and structure, *The Viziers of Bassora* clearly resembled Shakespearean comedy. *Perseus the Deliverer* was about the Greek legend of Perseus and Andromeda. The influence of Elizabethan drama was persistent throughout the drama. *Rodogune* was the only tragedy of Aurobindo. A striking feature of Aurobindo's play was his emphasis on love as a benevolent force to destroy evil.

Rabindranath Tagore was a prolific dramatist of Indian English drama. He translated most of his Bengali plays into English. His plays could be divided into two groups—thesis plays and psychological plays. *Sanyasi, The Cycle of Spring, Chitra, Malini, Sacrifice, Natir Puja* and *Red Oleanders* were considered thesis plays whereas *The King and the queen, Kacha and Devayani, Karna and Kunti* and *The Mother's Prayer* were included in psychological plays. The subject of matter of the two plays *Sanyasi* and *The cycle of Spring* was the glorification of life. In *Chitra*, the emphasis was on the essence of true love. *Malini, Sacrifice* and *Natir Puja* were the three plays written on the theme of religious fanaticism. Tagore's psychological plays revealed his capacity to understand feminine mind. In *The King and the Queen,* Queen Sumitra took the centre stage in the handling state of the affair in the kingdom. *Kacha and Devayani* was about Devayani's love for Kacha, which remains unreciprocated. *Karna and Kunti*, and *The Mother's Prayer* were based on the epic *Mahabharata*. Kunti and Gandhari exhibit their affection for their sons in contrasting ways. These dramas, though translated from original Bengali, had their flavour intact due to Tagore's mastery in rendering them a compact and neat structure. The themes and characters of his dramas authentically carry Indian ethos.

After Sri Aurobindo and Tagore, another major dramatist of the period

was Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. *Abu Hassan* (1918) was his first play written in prose and verse. He wrote seven verse dramas on the lives of seven Indian saints—Pundalik, Jayadeva, Ekanath, Tukaram, Raidas, Chokha Mela and Saku Bai. These verse dramas were significant for their poetic qualities. *The Five Plays* (1920) contain *The Widow, The Parrot, The Coffin, The Evening Lamp* and *The Sentry's Lantern*. These plays were marked by the simultaneous use of realism and symbolism.

A.S. Panchapakesa (1899-1963) wrote six plays which prominently carry his reformist message. In *Sita's Choice*, the young widow Sita was bold enough to go for a remarriage at a period, which was purely conservative. *The Slave of Idea* was a melodrama imbued with ethical and social purpose. In *The Clutch of the Devil*, he highlighted the witchcraft and ritualistic malpractices present in the rural south India. *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* contains allegorical significance.

Thyagaraja Paramsiva Kailasam (1885-1946) was a dramatist of considerable talent. Only four plays were ascribed to be written by him in his lifetime, but the actual output was bigger than that. *Little Lays and Plays* (1933) was a collection of three plays—*The Burden, Fulfilment* and *A Monologue: Don't Cry. The Burden* and *Fulfilment* were one-act plays having subjects from the epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. *A Monologue* was an allegory on the subject of the condition of woman in India. *Karna or The Brahmin's Curse* (1946) with the subtitle, "An impression of Sophocles in five acts" was on the tragedy of Karna who suffered from the fatal curse of Parashuram the warrior sage. Kailasam was attributed with some other dramas, which were said to be recited by him to his friends.

Bharati Sarabhai's *The well of the People* (1943) was a verse drama based on a true story. The play dramatises the benevolent act of an old widow who spent her money in digging a well for the untouchables of her village. The story was at first published in Mahatma Gandhi's *Harijan*. Her use of symbolic characters placed her alongside the dramatic masters of the period like Maeterlinck, Yeats, and Tagore. Another dramatist of considerable importance Joseph Mathias Lobo-Prabhu's two dramas were published before the Independence—*Mother of New India: A Play of the*

Indian Village in three Acts (1944) and *Death Abdicates* (1945). *Apes in the Parlour* reflected the sophisticated life of modern man. His language was fascinating but in character portrayal, he failed distinctly.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: How was Sri Aurobindo influenced by English drama?

Q 10: Discuss Rabindranath Tagore's contribution to Indian English drama.

1.7 INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31) is considered the first Indian English poet. *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828) are his published volumes of poetry. Derozio was influenced by the British romantic poets in theme, imagery, diction and sentiment in his shorter poems. At the same time, a little bit of influence of the neo-classical poets like Alexander Pope was also evident in his poems. On the other hand, influence of Byron was visible in his satirical verse and long narrative verse. *The Fakeer of Jungheera* is a long narrative poem written on the plight of a young Hindu widow Nuleeni. On the verge of her jump into the funeral pyre, she was rescued by a young leader of a robber group. Her rescuer who became her lover soon lost his life in the battle fought by her relatives to reclaim her. Nuleeni breathed her last in sorrow. The striking feature of the poem is its use of different metres for various occasions. Another noteworthy feature of Derozio as a poet is his burning nationalistic zeal. "To-India-My Native Land", "The Harp of India", "To the Pupils of Hindu College" etc. are some such poems where we can observe unmistakeable authenticity of patriotic utterances.

Indian English poetry came to the mature phase with Toru Dutt (1856-1877). Her *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) is a translation of 165 French lyrics into English. Even her sister Aru Dutt also translated a few lyrics. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) was published posthumously. The poems of this volume carry discernible influence of Keats.

Ballads of Sita and Savitri—two most prominent archetypal figure of Indian woman are included in the collection. Toru Dutt was the first Indian English poet who extensively used Indian myths and legends in her poetry. It was remarkable that her poetry was virtually free from imitation.

Rabindranath Tagore's fame as an Indian English poet certainly lies on *Gitanjali* (1912)—a collection of songs which were translated from Bengali into English and for which he got the Nobel Prize for literature. It is true that his fame and reputation declined after the initial applause, but he produced eight more collections of poems—*The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Fruit Gathering* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), *Lovers Gift and Crossing* (1918), *The Fugitive* (1921), *Fireflies* (1928) and *Poems* (1942). The last one was published posthumously. The central theme of the songs in *Gitanjali* is devotion. The songs were rooted in the Indian tradition carrying forward the poet's search for the divine grace. Different approaches and moods were adopted to deal with the songs. For Tagore, God was an "Unbroken perfection" who endowed him with "infinite gifts". However, at the same time, he also envisaged the angry aspect of God as the "King of the fearful night". Tagore's conviction is that God is omnipresent and to find God, one must seek him in the actions of the world.

In all the lyrics, there is evidence of verbal control, precision of imagery and guarded rhythm. In *The Gardener*, Tagore is at his best as a love poet. His close resemblance with Browning in these poems is also very significant. Tagore showed his mastery in the adoption of subjective and objective approaches, and also in presenting the male and female points of view regarding love. In fact, Tagore presented the multifaceted aspects of love in *The Gardener*. *The Crescent Moon* contains poems, which are basically about childhood. Tagore, in these poems presents both the adult view of the child and the child's own view of himself/herself. In evoking the child's consciousness, he was overwhelmingly successful. Other poetical collections such as *Fruit Gathering*, *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, and *The Fugitive* were his later works, which lacked diversity, concord of theme, verbal control and order in rhythm. "The Child" is the only lengthy poem of Tagore, which he wrote directly in English with effortless symbolism, vibrant

colours and verbosity. So, "The Child" was unable to surpass the pleasant loveliness of *Gitanjali.* It is evident that Tagore's English verse is essentially lyrical. With his simplicity, passion and sensuousness, he treated his varied subjects like God, love, nature, life and death and the child.

Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghosh, 1872-1950) began his poetic career with *Short Poems* (1890-1900). The themes of these poems were love, sorrow, death and liberty. He introduced Greek names in these poems, which rendered classical touch. In *The Short Poems 1895-1908,* a note of mystic awareness is discernible. *The Poems in New Metres* comprised some mystical lyrics distinguished by verbal cheerfulness, emotional ecstasy and technical innovation. "Urvasie", "Love and Death" and "Baji Probhou" are three long poems written in blank verse. In "Urvasie", he abundantly used epic similes, Miltonic diction and set descriptions. "Love and Death" contained Miltonic similes, Latinised diction and inversions. Though the poem was written on Indian theme, it lacked Indian idea, tradition and Hindu sensibility. "Baji Probhou" is a poem about military heroism. The description of Deccan landscape was done with rhetorical embellishment. Sri Aurobindo attempted to compose an epic *Ilion* in Homeric pattern but could not complete it. *Ahana* was a long poem about Divine Dawn who descended to the earth to bliss the mankind. His magnum opus is *Savitri* with the sub-title, "A legend and a symbol". There are twelve books, 49 nine cantos and 23,813 lines in the epic. The epic was based on the legend of Satyavan and Savitri of the *Mahabharata.* The story was about Savitri's endeavour to bring back the life of her husband Satyavan from the clutches of death. Sri Aurobindo divided the twelve books of his epic into three parts. The epic began in Medias res. Savitri was an unconventional and philosophical Hindu epic with bold experimentation. There was very little action in it and most of the action took place on the inner reality. The epic contained a few characters in comparison to other epics. Savitri could be regarded as an inner epic which emphasised on man's future evolution to a higher position.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) received much encouragement from Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse to write poems with Indian sensibility, when she was in England for study purposes. *The Golden Threshold* (1905)

was her first volume of poetry. *The Birch of Time* (1912), *The Broken Wing* (1917), *The Sceptred Flute* (1946), *Feather of the Dawn* (1961) were her poetical collections. Her lyric had manifold influencing factors—British romanticism of 'fin de siècle' variety and opulence of Persian and Urdu poetic modes. Her folk songs were rooted in the Indian setting where Indian folks engaged themselves in their conventional occupations in poems like "Indian Weavers", "Palanquin-Bearers", "Wandering Singers" etc. Love was one of her favourite subjects in her poetry, which she handled with variety of mood, approach and technique. Her penchant for nature was marked by her joy in beauty which she evoked by portraying the Indian landscape with its tropical magnificence. Her imagery was drawn from the Indian scene, which ushered in feeling of apparent freshness. Sarojini Naidu's significance as an Indian English poet rested on her portrayal of traditional Indian life with all the Indian ethos and the resplendent Indian scene.

Armando Menezes (1902-1983) and Manjeri S. Isvaran (1910-1968) were two other significant Indian poets before the Independence. *The Fund* (1923) and *The Emigrant* (1933) were his mock epics and satire respectively. *Chords and Discords* (1936), *Chaos and Dancing Star* (1946) and *The Ancestral Face* (1951) were his lyrical poetry collections. In his poetry, he maintained unerring rhythm. Manjeri Isvaran had ten collections of verse to his name. *Saffron and Gold and other Poems* (1932) and *The Neem is a Lady* (1957) are two of his verse collections. According to him, the inspiration to write poetry was in his blood. However, modern poetry was intricate for him and he was reluctant to come to terms with it, which ultimately brought about the closure to his poetic career.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: How was Derozio influenced by the British romantic poets?

Q 12: Discuss Tagore's achievements as an Indian English poet.

Q 13: How did Sri Aurobindo's success as a poet rest on *Savitri*?

1.8 INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

In the Indian literary scenario, novel was a new entrant during the middle part of the 19th century. This literary phenomenon was directly related to the beginning of English education in India. Before Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, various writings of pre-novel forms were extant in India. In this regard, Kylas Chunder Dutt's imaginary historical tract "A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours 1945" can be mentioned. The tract was published in 1835 in *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. Shoshee chunder Dutt's "The Republic of Orissa: A Page from the Annals of the 20th Century" was another imaginary historical tract published in the Saturday Evening Harakuru in the year 1845. Shoshee Chunder Dutt's two other novels *The Young Zamindar* (1883) and *Shunkur* (1885) were delineation of difficult relationship between the ruler and the ruled i.e., the British and the Indians.

K.K. Sinha in his *Sanjogita* or *The Princess of Aryavarta* (1930) delineated the tragic defeat of Prithvi Raj Chauhan at the hands of Mohammad Ghori. Sarath Kumar Ghosh wrote *Prince of destiny: The New Krishna* (1909) where English culture was shown victorious against the Indian culture. These early novelists of Indian writing in English had a predilection for showing their familiarity with best of the English writers like Shakespeare, Cooper, Coleridge, Byron, Scott etc. Whenever occasion arose, they referred to them or quoted passages from their texts. The possible reason was to parade their felicity with the best-known western classics in the eyes of British readers. Along with such direct influences, indirect influence of English literature was also noticeable in the early Indian novels written in English.

The earliest novel that was written in India was Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's *Rajmohan's Wife* which was published in 1864 in serialised mode in a weekly journal named *The Indian Field.* Then, he shifted his interest to Bengali and wrote many well known Bengali novels including *Anandamath* and *Devi Chaudhurani. Rajmohan's Wife* is about the middle class life of a Bengal village—a tragic story of an unhappy marriage between Matangini and Rajmohan. Bankimchandra evoked the trauma and passion of Matangini in lyrical prose, which was not readily comprehensible for the

English readers because domestic life of the Indian village was much a covert affair at that time. Along with Bankimchandra, other early novelists who tried their hands in novel writing in English were Raj Lakshmi Devi, Toru Dutt, Kali Krishna Lahiri, H. Dutt and Khetrapal Chakravarti.

Lal Behari Dey made an ethnographic attempt of documenting 19th century village life in Bengal in his *Govinda Samanta,* or *The History of a Bengal Raiyat* (1874). The novel encompassed the ups and downs of Govinda Samanta's life in between the years of 1820 to 1870. Krupabai Satthianadhan wrote two novels–*Kamala, A story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna, A Story of Native Christian life* published posthumously in 1895. Both these two novels represented the progressive women of the period through the eponymous protagonists Kamala and Saguna.

The period that followed this earliest attempt of novel writing was a turbulent one. That was the period of the growth of Indian nationalism, which encompassed the social fabric of India. Almost all the novelists who tried their hands in writing novels in English had contributed directly or indirectly to this aspect. While dealing with Indian nationalism, they also took up some of the other important issues prevalent in the period such as poverty, caste and class, industrialisation, problems of the peasants etc. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Ahmed Ali, K. A. Abbas, Bhabani Bhattacharya were some of the important novelists of this period. Some of these novelists also had the experience of living abroad which contributed to their broad cosmopolitan outlook.



LET US KNOW

The nationalistic fervour in Indian novels in English was mostly expressed through "Gandhi" theme. Gandhi's immense contribution to Indian National movement against the British made him a living legend. Began with the non-co-operation movement to the Civil disobedience movement leading to India's independence in 1947, Gandhi was the pivotal figure around whom all the activities of India's nationalistic movement and freedom movement were moving.

K. S. Venkataramani's *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927), and *Kandan the Patriot* (1932) were devoted to the themes of Gandhian economics and politics. *Kandan the Patriot,* which was published serially in a daily paper *Swarajya,* projected a comprehensive picture of a mass movement in national perspective. K. Nagarajan's *Athawar House* (1937) was the delineation of a family chronicle with Gandhian national movement as its background. Nagarajan's second novel *Chronicle of Kedaram* (1961) had Gandhi as a character whose arrival was necessary to defuse the feud between the two sects of Iyengars. Khwaja Ahmed Abbas' *Inquilab* was a comprehensive portrayal of Gandhian revolutionary age starting from Rowlatt Bill and the massacre of Jallianwalla Bagh. Along with Gandhi, many other notable leaders of the period were portrayed in the novel. Bhabani Bhattacharya, another important novelist of the period realistically portrayed the tragedy and trauma of 1942-43 famine in Bengal as well as the impact of Quit India movement in *So Many Hungers*. The novelist poignantly painted the sufferings of men, women and children due to famine in Bengal.

Raja Rao, one of the triumvirates of the novelists of the period along with R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, is best known for his novel *Kanthapura* (1938). The 'forward' to this book is generally acknowledged as the manifesto of Indian writing in English. Here, Raja Rao stressed the importance of the "systematic indigenisation of English". It was done by incorporating epic narrative technique of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In his novel, the activities of Indian national movement under the leadership of Gandhi became a fascinating subject which could also be termed as Gandhi Purana. Raja Rao's other novels *The Serpent and the Rope (1960), The cat and Shakespeare (1965), Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) were published much later after the Independence.

R. K. Narayan began his illustrious literary journey with *Swami and Friends*-a novel with a child protagonist in the famously fictitious town of Malgudi. Before Independence, he wrote three other novels *Bachelor of Arts (1963), The Dark Room (1938),* and *The English Teacher (1945)* where he presented the society of Malgudi from the perspective of a detached

observer. In *Waiting for Mahatma* published after independence in 1955, Narayan took Indian freedom movement as the background. Here in this novel, Narayan occasionally strayed away from the secure setting of Malgudi. Other novels of Narayan–*Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert, The Guide, The Man-eater of Malgudi* and *The Vendor of Sweets* were the portrayal of an exotic world located in Malgudi. Though contemporary to Raja Rao and Anand, Narayan took a different path and went on portraying the Indian society with all its idiosyncrasies in the exotic and fabulous Malgudi.

Nearly all the novels by Mulk Raj Anand are testament to his uncompromising love for the lowest dregs of the society. Anand began his novel writing with *Untouchable* (1935). Then, he wrote two novels one after another about the sufferings of the coolies in *Coolie* (1936) and in *Two Leaves And a Bud* (1937). In *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) are the poignant tales of the condition of the Indian peasants with Lal Singh as the protagonist of all the novels. Anand's last novel before the Independence was *The Big Heart* (1945). After Independence also, Anand continued writing fiction one after another. *Seven Summers* (1951), *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), *The Road* (1963), *The Death of a Hero* (1964), *Morning Face* (1970), and *Confession of a Lover* (1976) were the novels that he wrote after the Independence.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 14: How was "Gandhi" an important theme in Indian English novel before the Independence?

Q 15: Discuss the contribution of Raja Rao to the development of Indian English novel.



1.9 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that English language was introduced into the Indian education system by the British Government to create a

bunch of educated Indians who could help them in ruling this country effectively. You also learnt how the English language created a broad platform for the educated Indians to share their viewpoints through various modes communication. Along with this, there was tremendous upheaval in the Indian literary scene due to the emergence of new modes of prose, poetry, drama and novel in English. Many leaders of Indian National Congress published their speeches in English and brought about strong nationalistic fervour amongst the Indians. In poetry, Rabindranath Tagore glorified the literary scene of India in front of the world by achieving the Nobel Prize for literature with his immortal poetry in *Gitaljali.* Novel, a clear endowment of the modern education, also gained immense popularity with the writings of Anand, Raja Rao and Narayan during the 1930s, which was another important aspect of Indian English literature before the Independence. Thus, this unit must have acquainted you with the emergence of Indian English literature with all its major forms-prose, poetry, drama and novel and their practitioners preceding India's Independence.



1.10 FURTHER READING

1) Iyengar, K.R.S. (1962). *Indian Writing in English.* Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

2) Mehrotra,A.K. (2014). *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English.* Delhi: Permanent Black.

3) Singh, A. et al. (Eds.).(1980). *Indian Literature in English: An Information Guide.* Michigan: Gale Research Co.



1.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Modern education was available to the Indian people… by the Christian missionaries, British government… …Principal aim of spreading modern education in India.

Ans to Q 2: British government for the fulfilment… …the initial move was taken by Lord Dalhousie… …British was able to conquer most parts of Indian Territory.. …rule such a vast area of land.

Ans to Q 3: Some liberal Indians… …Chiplunkar Agarkar, Maganbhai Karamchand, Karve… …Raja Rammohun Roy pioneered the demand for modern education…it was anti-authoritarian and liberal… …propagated rational thinking.

Ans to Q 4: Western political thinkers… …became known to them through this English education… …enhanced their understanding of the political situation… …understood the evil effects of British rule… …joined India's struggle for the independence.

Ans to Q 5: Creative literature written by Indians in English… …Indian people have been writing and speaking English… …achieve artistic expression in the literature they have produced.

Ans to Q 6: Indian English literature is the most suitable term… …it is one of the languages in India… …Indian sensibilities and ethos… …Sahitya Akademi also accepted the term.

Ans to Q 7: Raja Rammohun Roy's "A Defence of Hindu Theism"… …first original prose writing in English… …wrote thirty two original English essays… … *A Defence of Hindu Theism*… …he supported monotheism… …learning on Christian theology… …worked strenuously for the rights of women… …attack on polygamy and dispossessing women… …wrote a short autobiographical sketch.

Ans to Q 8: Jawaharlal Nehru was a prolific writer… …*Letters from a father to his Daughter…* …early history of the world… …*Glimpses of World History… …*he narrated the world history… …*The Discovery of India* contained the history of India.

Ans to Q 9: Sri Aurobindo began his dramatic writing… …love for Elizabethan drama… …his emphasis on love as a benevolent force to destroy evil.

Ans to Q 10: Rabindranath Tagore was a prolific dramatist… …divided into two groups- thesis dramas and psychological dramas. *Sanyasi, The Cycle of Spring… …*were considered thesis dramas… …*The Mother's*

Prayer were included in psychological dramas… …though translated from original Bengali… …themes and characters of his dramas authentically carry Indian ethos.

Ans to Q 11: Henry Louis Vivian Derozio the first Indian English poet… …*Poems*, *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828) were his published volumes of poetry… …British romantic poets.

Ans to Q 12: Rabindranath Tagore's fame… …lies on *Gitanjali*… …he got Nobel Prize for literature… …*The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Fruit Gathering* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), *Lovers Gift and Crossing* (1918), *The Fugitive* (1921), *Fireflies* (1928) and *Poems*(1942)… …central theme of the songs in *Gitanjali* is devotion… …his simplicity, passion and sensuousness… …profoundly Indian in spirit.

Ans to Q 13: Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus is *Savitri* … …twelve books, forty nine cantos and 23,813 lines… …based on the legend of Satyavan and Savitri of the *Mahabharata*…began with in medias res…unconventional and philosophical Hindu epic… …man's future evolution to a higher position.

Ans to Q 14: The nationalistic fervour in Indian novel in English was mostly got expressed through "Gandhi" theme… …made him a living legend… …the pivotal figure around whom all the activities of India's nationalistic movement and freedom movement moved.

Ans to Q 15: Raja Rao is best known for his novel *Kanthapura*… …'forward' to this book … …acknowledged as the manifesto of Indian writing in English… …epic narrative technique of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*… …Gandhi became a fascinating subject… … Gandhi Purana.



1.12 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1. Discuss the social conditions, which laid the foundation for the advent of modern education in India.

Q 2. Why did the earliest of the educated Indians stress the imparting of modern education through the English language?

Q 3. Discuss the contribution of early Indian English prose to the emergence of nationalistic spirit amongst the Indians.

Q 4. Trace the development of early Indian English poetry with reference to Derozio and Toru Dutt.

Q 5. How did the growth of Indian nationalism get expressed in the early Indian English novels?

Q 6. Write a note on the history of the emergence of Indian English literature before India's Independence.

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UNIT 2: HISTORICALBACKGROUND (INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER)

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 The Social and Intellectual Contexts

2.4 Major Literary Forms and Their Exponents

- 2.4.1 Poetry
- 2.4.2 Drama
- 2.4.3 Prose
- 2.4.4 Fiction

2.5 Let Us Sum Up

2.6 Further Reading

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.8 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the social and intellectual contexts that shaped the Post-Independence Indian English literature.
- identify the major literary forms that maturated in the Post-Independence Indian English literature.
- name the important writers in the field of poetry, drama, prose and fiction
- locate the important works in the gamut of Post-Independence Indian English literature.
- explain how important politics is to the proliferation of Post-Independence Indian English literature.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have got a glimpse of Indian English literature before the Independence. This unit shall help you to discuss the

course of Indian English Literature after the Independence. Following the inadvertent introduction of English literature in India through the Charter Act 1813, Indian writing in English gradually started to develop and took time to receive worldwide recognition. The writers started writing in English in the mid 19th century had to face initial problems, as they had to run from pillar to post for getting their works published. However, resolute minds never break down to difficulties and ultimately it was the win of human endeavours. Gradually, they received publishers thanks to the initial interest and recognition that foreign writers shower on Indian writers. For example, the playwright Asif Currimbhoy became famous only when he was extolled by The Asian Theatre scholar Faubion Bowers who declared him in New York's "The Village Voice" that he was emerging "more and more clearly as a playwright of international stature." Despite getting plenty of such difficulties, the Indian writers continued to write in English with two basic reasons: firstly, writers writing in English received wider attention, they found readers in India and abroad; and secondly, the luxury of an elitist tendency that flaunted their western education. However, the second tendency that emboldened many writers had various convolutions and ramifications as the South Indian poet R. Parthasarathy was galvanised by the conflict of a foreign language and his native language as he learned English at a tender age and got the English-speaking environment. His knowledge of English language and literature mollified to believe that he belonged more to Britain than to India, and his belief forced him to take sojourn unsuccessfully in England and returned to India with an expressive realization that he belonged more to India as his Indianness cannot be deliberately uprooted, and his *Rough Passage* portrays the theme of identity exposed to Indian and Western cultures. As you finish reading this unit, you will be able to have some ideas on Post Independence India, which saw the emergence of many Indian writers in English as the social environment turned out to be more advantageous for writers as it provided a liberty of thought. Moreover, the two decades after the Independence reoriented the Indian political and cultural ethos that facilitated the growth of Rushdie generation in 1980s and 1990s.

2.3 THE SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL CONTEXTS

The Social Context :

In the social sphere, India had to encounter various problems after the Independence. The incoherent and hasty Independence brought a sea of problems and the first among them was the communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. The ethnic violence was the owner of mischief that caused countless deaths and left many casualties. It was a slur on the dreams of people like M. K. Gandhi among others, whose deliberate and desperate attempts fructified a free nation but the eruption of shocking and unacceptable ethnic violence caused him to think differently. M. K. Gandhi's deliberate but innocent 'ploy' succeeded that diminished the communal violence for a while and Jawaharlal Nehru declared India a secular nation. Besides the communal violence, many princely states denied to be a part of free India, and the political thinkers of India were sensing trouble as it created a ruckus and immediately worked for evading the problem, and stalwarts like Sardar Patel was successful to amalgamate those states to Indian democracy largely by coercion and if needed by intimidation. Moreover, India involved in three brief but fierce battles with neighbouring countries in 1962, 1965 and 1971 respectively with China and Pakistan that dismantled Indian economy and distraught the social setup of India.

In the economic sphere, various economic reforms fructified the growth of GDP in India and the introduction of the Five Years' Plan brought efficacious remedies to the flip side of Indian economy. The establishments and proliferations of large industrial projects in the public sector accelerated the growth of Indian economy along with the multi-purpose river schemes brought changes to India. However, it needs to be mentioned that the implementations of various schemes did not heal the rift between the rich and the poor. Moreover, widespread corruption caused riots in the Indian society and many litterateurs of the time addressed such negative developments as burning issues in their writings.

Changes in the political and economic spheres brought effective and notable developments in the social scene. The rise of literacy rate is

one of the indicators of the development in India as education moulds the conscience of a human being. 'The Untouchability Offence Act' was introduced in India with an eye to dilute dogmatic social inequalities, but in reality, the act remained in paper than in practice. Various schemes were introduced for the advancement of the Backward Castes and Scheduled tribes and the rise of literacy rate was one of the positive changes after Independence that earmarked the evident changes that such schemes brought for the people of India after the Independence. However, the most sensitive issue that disturbed the well-wishers of India was the gradual dilution of the ideologies of the freedom struggle. The dream of a free India having equity with amity and solidarity at its driver's seat was gradually fading away. In addition, corruption spread every nook and corner of the society, communal violence went shoulder to shoulder with bureaucratic inefficiency. In addition, in such a social context Indian English literature thrived earnestly that explored such social developments either positive or negative.

Intellectual Context (The Role of English) :

One of the major developments after the Independence that has multifarious significance was the decision of the Indian government to become a frugal partner and a member of the British Commonwealth. The decision was expressively triumphant for those who wanted to continue the cultural heritage of the English and desired to continue the cultural bondage with the British despite expressively snapping political bondage. In fact, the decision to be a part of the British commonwealth, fructified a more stronger cultural bonding with the British that might paved the way for creating another cultural domination is matter of debate, but it had efficacious meanings in the development and proliferation of English studies in India. The unprecedented interest in the English language and literature actually paved the way for the Indian writers in English, as they received not only Indian readers but also foreign readers and it really accelerated the growth of Indian English literature. Moreover, *Sahitya Akademi* started recognising the contributions of the Indian English writers to the rich heritage of Indian literature by conferring *Sahitya Akademi* awards to the Indian English writers.

The impact of English education and language on the Indian English writers can be best summed in the words of K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger, "Western education was as yet carrying all before it. It was the 'open sesame' to knowledge, freedom, power; it cut the old bonds of convention and tradition; it let in light into the old darks rooms of an obscurantist faith; and it made a new world and a new life possible for its beneficiaries." Several magazines like *The Illustrated Weekly of India* endeavoured to encourage the publication of Indian English verse and fiction and the attempt to give impetus to Indian English writers can be called a new possibility to the Indian English literature.



LET US KNOW

The Notion of 'Indianness' in Indian English Writing:

Indian literature in English moved along with addressing various fundamental questions like what evidently is Indianness. Whose Indianness wreathes India globally distinguishable? Such questions emerged in the Post Colonial India as it tried to create a new force in the global world. To answer to such questions are difficult for its multifarious ramifications. Raja Rao believed, "India is not a country(*desa*), it is a perspective (*darsana*): it is not a climate but a mood (*rasa*) in the play of the Absolute-it is not the Indian who makes India but "India" makes the Indian, and this India is in all."

Similar connotation can be found in the commentary of K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger, when he states, "What makes Indo-Anglian literature an Indian literature and not just a ramshackle outhouse of English literature is the quality of its 'Indianness' in the choice of its subjects, in the texture of thought and play of sentiment, in the organisation of material and in the creative use of language."

Various political developments like the dissection of India and creation of two nations lead to the horrible communal violence that distraught Indian sensibility, the declaration of secularism in India and its subsequent circumstances were matters of profound interest for

the post-Independence Indian English writers. Moreover, many writers rightly assumed that politics can easily penetrate into creative imagination and mould the narratives of a text. Such an assumption is enormously evident in the works of postcolonial Indian writers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Discuss the challenges and changes that India faced after the attainment of Independence?

Q 2: "Indianness is the cultural part of the mind that apprises and shapes the interests, activities and anxieties of the day-to-day life of a sizeable number of Indians." Explain.

2.4 MAJOR LITERARY FORMS AND THEIR EXPONENTS

The following is an attempt at exploring the major literary forms in Indian English literature following the Independence.

2.4.1 Poetry

Although the inheritance of the English language went through many stages of modifications in India, the most subtle impact of the British colony in India was the English language. Indian English poets in the late 1940s started to adopt a post-Romantic legacy that exchanged a received stylistic collection to local elements. And, it continued for several decades without any radical breaking of European tradition. The Indian English poets came from various backgrounds and they were united through the use of the English language. Many of them read English as an academic subject, some worked in journalism or media, but few of them had professional experience like Keki N. Daruwalla, a police officer by profession, Gieve Patel was a doctor, and Jayanta Mahapatra was a Physics teacher. The Indian poets of the period had two motives that wreathed them together as Indian poets that their self-imposed compulsion to write in English and the notion that nobody would write in any

language except their own language. The poets inspired by the second motive strived to make the English language as their own and gradually elements of Indianness started to make its presence felt in Indian poetry.

The shift from the romantic tradition to a verse more about the postcolonial present that expressively addressed the sentiments, ethos and anxieties of people of India, earmarked the post Independence Indian English poetry. English and American modernist poets like T. S. Eliot became standard inspirations for the Indian English poets. One of the exponents of 'new' poetry in the post- Independence was Nissim Ezekeil, a Bene-Israel original migrated to India, who was an admirer of T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden and who expressively writes about the search for identity and alienation, which are also the major shaping forces of his poetry. Moreover, the post Independence Indian English writers felt the need of sharing their thoughts to one another and that necessitated the creation of 'groups' that facilitates the poets to discuss new trend and developments in poetry in Europe. The notable contributor to the group formation was P. Lal whose coherent efforts fructified the formation of Writers' Workshop in Calcutta that really ushered the beginning of 'new poetry' in India. The practitioners of the new poetry unanimously believed that the English language was a boon for the nation as the nation is fortified intellectually by the English language that has given a new lease of life to the practitioners of creative literature. The group of modernist anthology actively worked by P. Lal voiced for the need of a private voice in postcolonial present as, "we live in an age that tends so easily to demonstrations of mass-approval and hysteria."

The chief motive that inspired the Indian English poets to embrace the foreign language was the scope and ranges that the language facilitated them. The new language enabled them to get wider audiences that in reality brought modernity to India. In due course of time, the Indian English poets intended to clothe new

intensions in poetry. Moreover, they also endeavoured to discover themselves in that process. One of the early Indian poets to receive universal recognition was Dom Moares. He was the winner of Hawthornden Prize in 1958 and was the first Indian poet to receive such a global recognition. He represented the 'new' Indian English poets who lived in England for many years and candidly proclaimed himself to be more a British poet than an Indian poet, but *The Penguin Companion to Literature* expressively named him to be an Indian poet because of his considerable and indicative contribution to Indian poetry. His sensuous imagery like "the curds/of sea" is a testimony of his poetic roots in India despite his repeated protestations. Some of his well-known works are "A Beginning" (1957), Poems (1960) and "John Nobody".

The Post Independence period saw the rise of many Indian poets in English with international repute and among them are Nissim Ezekeil, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das are prominent but they are different from each other from their outlook and experience. Nissim Ezekeil's deliberate and desperate attempts to become a part of Indian culture did not provide him efficacious remedies to his incongruous identity formations that tried to address through his poems but his success lies in his minor poems leaving behind traumas of alienation. His "Night of the Scorpion" is one of the finest poems in Indian writing in English that poignantly explored the cultural ethos of the Indian society behind the sting and tried to learn the Indian views of evil, superstition and suffering. His poetry is a testimony of his mastery skills and he is technically sound that he wrote his poetry in comprehensibly tight structure.

A. K. Ramanujan was one of the doyens of post Independence Indian poetry and a versatile scholar, decided against returning to India and continued teaching in the University of Chicago although he was born and brought up in India. His thirty years of stay in India and his assimilation with Indian culture moulded his

Indianness. His analytical study of the Indian cultural ethos forms the structure of the poetry, and his prolonged stay in England caused a note of assimilation of traditional Indian Culture with the modern social outlook of Europe. “An outsider’s” portrayal of Hindu culture interspersed with critical dissection of sensitive religious issues make him truly a contemporary postcolonial Indian poet. Such an approach is all-pervasive in some of his major poems like “The Hindoo: The Only Risk”, “The Hindoo: he doesn’t Hurt a Fly or spider either”, “Some Indian uses of History on a Rainy Day”. His Contribution to Indian English literature was recognised by Sahitya Akademi and was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award after his death in 1999 for his poetic collection *The Selected Poems.*

Jayanta Mahapatra was the recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award, he started his poetic career with the publication of “Close the Sky, Ten by Ten” and continued publishing various poetic volumes in English like “A Rain of rites”, “Waiting”, “Relationship” etc. His colloquial style with striking images won the hearts of many readers. He frequently portrayed the Jagannathan Temple with vivid imagery and extended his poetic forte to reflect psychological conflicts in love and sensuality.

The rise of Indian Women English poets becomes synonymous with the Indian Independence as the Post-Independence Indian English poetry saw the emergence of many female poets and Kamala Das became the doyen among them. Sexual frankness, expressive sensual longing are some of the important traits of her poetry that made her truly a post Independence Indian English poet. Her longing for physically intimate relationship is expressively evident in her poetic line like “the musk of sweat between my breasts.” A deeper study of her poems reveals that she did not attempt cheap popularity but it portrays that she is ‘beloved and betrayed’. Her traumatic frustration in love and marriage is evident in her autobiography “My Story”. She wrote three poetic volumes, “Summer in Calcutta”, “The Descendants” and “The Old

Playhouse and Other Poems".

R. Parthasarathy was also an important Post Independence poet who initially believed the superiority of western culture and believed that he belonged more to England than to India, but such a belief received a setback when he realised that his Indianness could not be willingly diluted. His *Rough Passage* portrays the theme of identity formation based to Indian and western cultures.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are the changes do you perceive in the Post Independence Indian Poetry?

Q 4: Discuss the shifts in Post Independence Indian poetry from the Romantic tradition to a verse more about the postcolonial present.

2.4.2 Drama

Indian drama has a rich tradition and its origin can be traced back to the Vedic Period. Indian plays were very simple in the Vedic Period and Sanskrit drama continued to flourish till the 15th century, but its progress was hammered by the various nasty invasions. However, a new lease of creative ingenuity was grown up after the British arrived in India as K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes that the English education was the 'open sesame' to knowledge that encouraged freedom and power. It effectively dilutes the old bonds of traditions and conventions. Thus, it shed a new light into the dark rooms of bizarre faith, and transformed it to a new world with new possibilities. However, Indian drama saw the comprehensive development after the Independence as the dramatists before Independence did not give enough density to reliability and 'stage-worthiness' of their plays. Indian drama received a fresh start when Kendriya Natak Sangeet Akademi got under way in January 1953. The setting up of Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1959 was another stimulus to the Indian drama. By 1960s, Indian English drama saw

the concoction of various fitting styles and techniques from Sanskrit and western theatre. By the 1970s, Indian English drama fully flourished in the hands of Badal Sincar, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. They were instrumental to the modernisation of Indian theatre. Bold metamorphosis and efficacious experiments in terms of thematic concerns and technical virtuosity accelerated the *modernization* of Indian theatre. Moreover, their use of legends, myths, folklores, history fructified imposing results. They do, however, exhibited Indian drama at national level as they dramatically intellectualised human life in India coupled with its particulars and ingredients.

Modern secular plays were introduced in India by the British in the 19th Century. Since then modern Indian theatre underwent several stages of changes with many convolutions. Basically, in the 19th Century, two streams of drama were presented–one was Shakespearean plays and classical Sanskrit plays. Shakespearean plays were translated into various regional languages to cater to the needs of the Indian audiences, as they preferred more to enjoy plays in their native language. The British's arrival in India and the consolidation of imperial power in India brought many contradictions and conflicts that the first Indian playwright in English. Krishna Mohan Banerjea addressed these convolutions in his plays. His "The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta" (1831) is a testimony of his eagerness to represent the contradictions and conflicts of Indians with the British cultural ethos. The most unique playwright of the mid 19th century was Tyagaraja Paramasive Kailasam (1885-1946) who wrote in English and Kanada and his English plays were different from Kanada plays. He believed that, "delineation of ideal characters requires a language which should not be very near to us." His English plays are based on myths of the *Mahabharata* with a Shakespearean historical method, but his plays were severely scrutinised by the drama pundits for his use of extravagant and bombastic Victorian

language.

Most of the playwrights of the mid 19th Century to mid 20th Century, followed classical Indian myths and Shakespearean dramaturgy and Sri Arobindo, H. Chatopadhyay and T.P. Kailasam were some of the major exponents in that period. In addition, the playwrights of post Independence followed the similar trend and wrote on ethical and moral issues. Dilip Kumar Roy wrote "Rama Rajya" (1952) in collaboration with Indira Devi and the play used the epic story of the *Mahabharata* with an attempt to put a modern touch in it. Swami Avyaktananda was another post Independence Indian playwright chiefly known for his play "All Prophets Day". The play addressed convolutions related to national integration and secularism. However, the plays written by Asif Currimbhoy (1928-94) made a new beginning in Post Independence Indian drama. His plays are rich in theatrical devices. He dexterously used dramatic devices like monologues, choruses, songs, sound effects that accelerated theatrical impacts. His notable plays are *Inquilab* (1970) and *Sonar Bangla* (1972) that have substantial impact on Indian politics in postcolonial India. *His Hungry Ones* (1965) is known for his comment on human predicament that all human beings are in chains and none is free that captivity comes from external forces or it could be family, religion, country and society.

With the treatment of epic stories to Shakespearean adoption, Indian English plays moved along with Asis Currimbhiy's theatrical experimentations. Indian English plays of 1970s started addressing contemporary political and social situations through unique dramatic presentation by Gurucharan Das. His "Larins Sahib" (1970) is a clear indication of his application of historical past the play is straightforward attempt to entertain audiences instead of a supposed assumption to relate past with the present.

The most enduring impact on post Independence Indian English drama was Ebrahim Alkazi. He was first director of National School of Drama, and he was trained in London at the Royal

Academy of Dramatic Art. He dexterously wreathed costume, music, light design with acting and speech accelerated the beginning of a language that was unique to the city audience. His fourteen years of stay in Bombay not only resulted in presentation of notable English playwrights but also influenced many Indians to follow his footsteps. Such an encouragement was capitalised by Nissim Ezekiel and Gieve Patel. Nissim Ezekiel's "Nalini" is considered to be the most successful play. His other notable works are "Sleepwalkers" and "Marriage-Poem". Gieve Patel was one of the followers of Ebrahim Alkazi who believed that language has a special role to play in theatre. In addition, his dexterous use of the English language is expressive in all his plays and each play is so minutely constructed that he achieved the desired specific end.

Therefore, Indian English drama developed gradually along with playful experimentation of the English language in the hands of Gieve Patel. He intentionally modified the English syntax and grammar that fructified a unique rhythm of speech. As he says, "I attempt to create a speech that perhaps does not exist in real life, but which never the less appears perfectly natural on the stage when spoken with understanding by actors."



LET US KNOW

Theatre Groups until 1968 endeavoured to introduce the Indians to the rich European and Western dramatic skills. However, in 1970s, a strong impetus of back-to-village movement was grown up that represented the Indian cultural scenarios as well as restructured Indian dreams. Moreover, the announcement of Sultan Padmasee Award for Indian plays in English provided the much-needed fire to Indian plays that had set the healthy atmosphere of competition among the Indian playwrights.

The plays of Asif Curimbhoy, Nissim Ezekeil and Gieve Patel among others emboldened the later Indian English playwrights to consolidate its position in the world. Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani,

Badal Sircar are some of the most famous Post Independence playwrights who became popular in the latter half of 20th century. Vijay Tendulkar is primarily a social analyst and his social commentary on the Indian social set up from a journalist point of view is all-pervasive in his works. He never claimed to be a champion liberator of women, but he raised voice against the negligible position accorded to women. His preoccupation that women are the victims of the institutional body of power constituted his major plays like— *Kamala* (1981) and *Fifth Woman*. He was awarded *Saraswati Samman* for his play *Kanyadan* (1983), and the play exhibits male chauvinism and hypocrisy.

Mahesh Dattani is one of the renowned Indian English playwrights whose penetrating insight into Indian urban society is widely extolled. His "Bravely Fought the Queen", "Dance Like a Man", "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai" are esoteric to some extent, but the vogue for socio-economic plays is well explored with subtle effects. These plays testify his predilection for exploring a perverse relationship between postmodern urban society and individuals. Pseudo work ethics, facades of honesty and an antipathy towards the society and the world at large have precipitated the ethical standards of the Indian urban society. Home has become an eyesore where people fight and clash to create their own space and time. A perverse refusal to follow family bonding coupled with lack of adaptability and preposterously narcissist attitude, have precluded from strengthening family relationship.

Badal Sircar's forte as a dramatist lies in delineating middle-class society, his projection of modern life from the existential standpoint designed him as a truly postmodern Indian dramatist. He is commonly known as the "barefoot playwright" who stands in the vanguard of new theatrical movement in India. His *Procession* (1972) is a quest for a real home in a so-called equal society. His other important plays like *Bhoma* (1974) and *State News* (1979) are situated on his concept of the Third Theatre.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Do you think that Indian drama was comprehensibly developed after Independence?

Q 6: Try to draw the contribution of Ebrahim Alkezi in the development of Post- Independence Indian drama.

Q 7: Would you agree that bold metamorphosis and efficacious experiments in terms of thematic concerns and technical virtuosity brought the modernisation of Indian theatre?

2.4.3 Prose

To wield the English language for the explication of Indian views fructified new gateways of the elucidation of Indian scenario. As you have read in the previous unit, Raja Rammohan Roy was an ardent advocate of English education in India and he happened to be the first Indian to write prose. In addition, Indian English prose never showed signs of enervation. From the simple, pointed style of M. K. Gandhi's prose to Jawaharlal Nehru's panoramic display of world history and then to the agile prose with political sensitive issues constitute the major prose works following the Independence. Apart from political prose, autobiography, travelogue, religious writing, historical writings as well as social criticism continue to thrive in the context of postcolonial Indian prose.

One of the exponents of non-fictional prose in the postcolonial India was Nirad C. Choudhuri who ventures to explore political and religious development in India. His first attempt at literary prose was a meticulous commentary on the quintessence of the colonial Indian army. He highlights the unjust recruitment policy of the colonial Indian army and its pernicious impact on society. Another remarkable contribution of N. Choudhuri to Indian prose is "A Passage to India"; it was a result of his short visit to England in 1955. He admired the British ethos and eulogised its rich cultural heritage, but critics often say that his adulation was a result of observing British culture with a

rose-tinted spectacle. He redeemed his reputation with his more balanced work "*The Intellectual in India"* (1967). He surveyed various intellectual traditions in India and underlines the reformist zeal of the modern Hindu intellectuals and dogmatism of the Muslim counterparts that diluted social reforms.

Apart from the non-fictional prose, Indian English literature saw the phenomenal development of literary criticism. Various factors are accountable for the remarkable development, the opening of many different universities with Post graduate courses have accelerated the proliferation of critical activities. Krishna Chaitanya is first among the notable postcolonial Indian prose writer whose "A New History of Sanskrit Literature" ventures to draw a balanced literary evaluation of the Sanskrit studies in India. Other notable contributor was S. C. Sen Gupta who wrote *Shakespearean Comedy* and *Shakespeare's Historical Plays.* K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar is also a notable contributor to post Independence literary criticism and his *Shakespeare: His World and His Art* exhibits his proficiency as a literary critic.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Try to find out the political convolutions of the Post Independence Indian Prose.

2.4.4 Fiction

In the previous unit, you have read about Indian English fiction preceding India's Independence. The two decades just before the Independence were momentous for the rise of nationalism and the Indian novels in English. The prominent fiction writers of 1930s and 1940s are Bhabani Bhattacharya, Raja Rao, Aubery Menen and G.V. Desani, and some others continued writing even after the Independence. Their nationalism was coloured and sometimes tempered by expressive cosmopolitanism of outlook as most of these writers spent a considerable period of their lives in Europe. Their

writings are often accentuated by a sense of cultural derangement that has also become the characteristic feature of the postcolonial Indian fiction. Two major developments are expressive in the fiction of this period. Firstly, the socio-political upheavals of the 'Gandhian whirlwind', and secondly, the era of late modernism in European countries had considerable impact on the development of fiction of this period. The Gandhian philosophy and ideologies were so popular and dominant that the fiction writers of this period capitalised his philosophy and ideologies to produce popular fiction with a message in it. Moreover, the fiction writers considered it a moral obligation to spread nationalism in India and they successfully attained their end through their fiction.

Indian fiction in English did not produce substantially important novels immediately after the Independence because "many writers felt there was something unpatriotic about writing in the language of recently departed". Many Pre-Independence Indian writers continued writing fiction but the recognition of R. K. Narayan's creative prowess by Sahitya Akademi provided the much-needed fillip to Indian fiction. He was awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960 for his "The Guide". The Post Independent Indian fiction saw the rise of character development and psychological depth, depth wise developments of narrative than lengthwise development became the hallmark of Post Independence Indian fiction. The writers were also haunted by a sense of alienation and were largely discontented from modern lives. Moreover, the advantageous social condition was capitalised by the women writers and the theme of alienation came to "a special edge in the numerous novels published by women in the period." The most prominent post-Independence women writers are—Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala.

Perhaps the most prominent novelist to immerse in the upshots of Indian Independence was Khuswant Singh. Various political developments after the ethnic violence caused by the

partition found its apt expression in his *Train to Pakistan* that was published in United States under the title *Mano Majra.* The novel is an expressive representation of the ramifications of partition. Simple villagers were living peacefully before the Partition irrespective caste, creed and religion, but the situation was altered after Independence when a mob became ferment to kill Muslims travelling through the village on a train to Pakistan. Many innocent lives were saved at the cost of a generous and 'impulsive Sikh peasant' who died when attempting to stop the attack. The novel become a critique of corrupt officials, policy makers and politicians who fermented the whole situation in the name of liberty. His other notable works are—*I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) and *Delhi: A Novel* (1989).

The emergence of psychological novelist provided a different colour to postcolonial India fiction. Anita Desai was one of the post Independence novelist who has a pertaining insight into the characters' psyche that is praiseworthy. She fabulously made her characters face success and agony through aesthetic experiences in their lives, and she added a feather more to her cap by dexterously blending nature, experience, myth, and cultural formation of an artist. Her notable fictional works are *Cry, the Peackock; Fasting, Feasting; The Artist of Disappearance;* and *In Custody*. Another women novelist of considerable repute is Nayantara Sahgal, the niece of Jawaharlal Nehru. Her novels are critique of hypocrisy and shallow values of the upper class people of the society. Her important works are—*A time to Be Happy* (1958), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969).



LET US KNOW

The first two decades immediately after the Independence witnessed that many writers refrained from writing in English, as they believed it unpatriotic to write in a language of a race that subjugated Indian for many years. Nevertheless, the doyens of the Post Independence Indian

fiction like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan continued writing in English. Moreover, leaders of Indian national congress were also puzzled at the status of English in the Post-Independent India although C. Rajagopalachari proclaimed that English is the gift of Saraswati to India. The issue was resolved when Gandhi responded to queries of Mulk Raj Anand. He said, "The purpose of writing is to communicate, isn't it? If so, say your say in any language that comes to hand."

M. Anantanarayana was the only fiction writer in the Post Independent India who wrote in English but did not follow the western narrative forms in his novels. His *The Silver Pilgrimage* is a testimony of his renunciation of western narrative and adaptation of Indian narratives. The novel portraits the adventure of Jayasurya, a prince of 16th century Sri Lanka and his subsequent hardships. M. Anantanarayana's whole purpose of his rejection of western narrative in evident in the epigraph as he warned Indians to refrain from selling own cleverness, as it will fetch on convolutions, "Sell your cleverness and buy Bewilderment."

Most of the Post Independent Indian fiction writers were dissatisfied with the metropolis and modernity. Arun Joshi and M. Anantanarayana were expressive in their dissatisfaction with the metropolitan Indian culture. In his "The Apprentice" (1974), Arun Joshi portrays the adaptation of a corrupt means by the government official to survive in the post-Independent corrupt society and provided low quality materials in the Sino-Indian war 1962, and the victim was one of his childhood friends. His other major works are *The Strange case of Billy Biswas, The Foreigner, The Last Labyrinth and The City and the River.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Discuss the impact of Gandhian philosophy on the Post Independence Indian fiction.



2.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit made an attempt to give you an overview of social and intellectual developments and its diverse upshots in the post Independence India. It has also familiarised you with the intellectual advancements like the assertion of western scientific education as an 'open sesame' to knowledge and liberty. In addition, an unprecedented interest in the English language and literature by the Indian writers in English ushered a new beginning as they received not only Indian readers but also foreign readers that accelerated the growth of Indian literature in English. Moreover, the unit attempted to show the growth and proliferations of major literary forms in Indian Writing in English and its major exponents. The primary concern in this unit has been to acquaint you with the miscellaneous developments and shaping forces on the Post-Independence Indian English literature. You must have by now been well acquainted about the formative influences on the Post-Independence Indian English literature. By now, you should be able to understand the 'Indianness' of Indian English literature and the role of the English language with the help of which a great number of Indian writers, moved by the earnest desire to exhibit before the western readers, strived for authentic depiction of India through their writings.



2.6 FURTHER READING

1) Karkala, J. B. (1971). *Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. Mysore: Literary Half-Yearly, University of Mysore.

2) Melwani, M. D. (1971). *Critical Essays on Indo-Anglican Themes*. Calcutta: A Writers Workshop publication.

3) Memmi, A. (2016). *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. London: Souvenir Press.

4) Mill, J., & Wilson, H. H. (1968). *The History of British India*. New York: Chelsea House.

5) Mukherjee, M. (2010). *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

6) Nandy, A. (2015). *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

7) Parry, B. (2004). *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London: Routledge.

8) Riemenschneider, D. (2016). *Essays on Indian Writing in English: Twice-born or Cosmopolitan Literature?* Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

9) Viswanathan, G. (2015). *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. West Sussex, England: Columbia University Press.



2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The immediate change in India brought by the ill-prepared Independence was the ethnic violence between Hindus and Muslims… …Partition rocked the nation and political thinkers took the challenge to find out efficacious remedies to the intricate problem… …Subsequent declaration of India as a secular country had far-reaching repercussions… …abolition of societal ills, effective economic schemes and amalgamation of princely states to Grater India.

Ans to Q 2: Indianness is reflected in the choice of its subjects… …also presents the texture of thought and play of sentiment inherited in India… …sometimes, the cultures of particular caste, class and family can expressively alter the civilization heritage but the intrinsic awareness of an Indian identity keeps going on.

Ans to Q 3: The western scientific education brought significant changes in the Indian society… …it attempted to abolish social ills… …it was a storehouse of knowledge that emanated freedom and power.

Ans to Q 4: The Post Independence Indian Poetry turned away from the romantic tradition… …engrossed in addressing the sentiments, ethos and anxieties of contemporary India.

Ans to Q 5: The Post Independence drama gave enough density to reliability and 'stage-worthiness' of their plays… …post-Independence drama profited by the enduring demand abroad in Indian English drama.

Ans to Q 6: He was first director of National School of Drama, and he was trained in London at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He dexterously wreathed costume, music, light design with acting and speech accelerated the beginning of a language that was unique to the city audience.

Ans to Q 7: The establishment of National School of Drama in the first Five Year Plan was an encouraging development in Indian drama… …that facilitated many experiments… …Girish Karnad's *Hayavandana* is a testimony of the daring experiment in the wield of folk motifs… …The use of ghost by Mahesh Dattani in *Where there's a Will* is an indication of effectual experiment that correlates thematic concerns and technical virtuosity that implicates the modernization of Indian theatre.

Ans to Q 8: In his "A History of Indian English Literature", M. K. Naik indicated that 'fresh political thinking' remained dominant in post Independence prose… …Nirad C. Chaudhuri addressed different political and religious intricacies of the post-Independence India… …M. N. Roy, Jayaprakash Narayan and R. M. Lohia were notable contributors to subtle political debates in the post-Independence India.

Ans to Q No 9: Gandhian philosophy and ideologies were so popular and dominant that the fiction writers of this period capitalised his philosophy and ideologies to produce popular fiction with a message in it. Moreover, fiction writers considered it a moral obligation to spread nationalism in India and they successfully attained their end through their fiction.



2.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did the continuity and growth of Indian literature in English remain assured after Independence? Give an illustrative answer.

Q 2: How did the recognition of national identity help the Indian English writers?

Q 3: In the fifties arose a school of poets who tried to turn their backs on the romantic tradition and write a verse more in tune with the age, its general temper and its literary ethos. Discuss.

Q 4: Do you think Post-Independence Drama was profited by the growing interest abroad in Indian English literature? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 5: Elucidate the factors responsible for the growth of literary criticism in the Post Independence India.

Q 6: Trace the shift from Pre-Independent 'Gandhian whirlwind' to psychological depth in the Post Independence Indian English fiction.

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UNIT 3: MODERN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE ["INTRODUCTION" TO *THE VINTAGE BOOK OF INDIAN WRITING* 1947-1997]

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Excerpts from "Introduction" to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* 1947-1997

3.4 Important Issues raised in the Essay

3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.6 Further Reading

3.7 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- identify the major aspects modern English Indian literature
- discuss the contributions of the major Indian English writers who shaped Indian Writing in English (IWE)
- trace the major social and intellectual concerns in IWE especially in the field of fiction and non-fictional prose
- explain the major developments in modern Indian English fiction.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is an integral part of your reading of the history of Indian English literature. As the title suggests, this unit shall deal exclusively with Indian English literature of the modern times, especially during the last three decades of the 20th century. In order to discuss the same, we shall try to read the "Introduction" of Salman Rushdie to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* 1947-1997 edited by Rushdie and Elizabeth West. This 'Introduction' shall give you a panoramic picture of the development of Modern Indian English fiction with reference to its various thematic aspects as seen by

Salman Rushdie who through his fictional and nonfictional works informed the entire world about the beauty of Indian English Writings. Therefore, you are supposed to carefully go through the text of the essay, as we believe that this will help you to discuss many important aspects of modern Indian English Literature one of which is the representation of India in an alien language.

3.3 EXCERPTS FROM "INTRODUCTION" TO *THE VINTAGE BOOK OF INDIAN WRITING* 1947-1997

I once gave a reading to a gathering of university students in Delhi and when I'd finished a young woman put up her hand. 'Mr. Rushdie, I read through your novel, *Midnight's Children*,' she said. 'It is a very long book, but never mind, I read it through. And the question I want to ask you is this: fundamentally what's your point?'

Before I could attempt your answer, she spoke again. 'Oh, I know what you're going to say. You're going to say that the whole effort—from cover to cover—that is the point of the exercise. Isn't that what you were going to say?'

'Something like that, perhaps…'I got out.

She snorted. 'I won't do.'

'Please,' I begged, 'do I have to have just one point?'

'Fundamentally,' she said, with impressive firmness 'yes.'

So, here, once again, is a very long book; and though it is not a novel, but an anthology selected from the best Indian writing of the half century since the country's independence, still one could easily say of the work contained in these pages that the whole collective effort, from cover to cover, is the point of the exercise. Fifty years of work, by four generations of writers, is impossible to summarise, especially when it hails from that huge crowd of a country (close to a bill on people at the last count), that vast, metamorphic, continent culture that feels, to Indians and visitors alike, like a nonstop assault on the scenes, the emotions, the imagination and the spirit. Put India and Atlantic Ocean and it would reach from Europe to America; put India and China together and you have got almost half the

population of the world. It's high time Indian literature got itself noticed, and it's started happening. New writers seem to emerge every few weeks. Their work is as multiform as the place, and the readers who care about the vitality of literature will find at least some of these voices saying something they want to hear. However, my Delhi interrogator may be pleased to hear that this large and various survey turns out to be making fundamentally, just one—perhaps rather surprising – point.

This is it: the prose writing—both fiction and nonfiction—created in this period by Indian writers *working in English*, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India, the so-called vernacular languages' during the same time; and indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution Indian has yet made to the world of books.

It is a large claim, and while it may be easy for Western readers to accept it (after all, few non-English language Indian writers, other than the Novel laureate Tagore, have ever made such an impact on world literature); it runs counter to much of the received critical wisdom within India itself. …

Two qualifications should be made (in the selection of the pieces in this anthology) at once. First: there has long been a genuine problem of translation in India—not only into English but between the vernacular languages—and it is possible that good writers have been excluded by reason of their translator's inadequacies rather than their own. Nowadays, however, such bodies as the Indian Sahitya Akademi and UNESCO- as well as Indian publishers themselves –have been putting their resources into the creation of better translations, and the problem, while not eradicated, is certainly much diminished. And second: while it was impossible, for reasons of space, to include a representative selection of modern Indian poetry, it was evident to us that the rich poetic traditions of India continued to flourish in many of the sub continent's languages, whereas the English language poets, with a few distinguished exceptions (Arun Kolatkar, A. K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, to name just three), did not match the counterparts in prose…

The lack of first-rate writing in translation can only be a matter of regret. However, to speak more positively, it is a delight to be able to showcase the quality of a growing collective oeuvre whose status has long been argued over, but which has, in the last twenty years or so, begun to merit a place alongside the most flourishing literature of the world.

For some, English language Indian writing will never be more than a postcolonial anomaly, the bustard child of Empire, sired on India by the departing British; its continued use of the old colonial tongue is seen as a fatal flaw that renders it forever in-authentic. 'Indo-Anglian' literature evokes, in these critics, the kind of prejudiced reaction shown by some Indians towards the country's community of 'Anglo Indians'—that is, Eurasians.

In the half century since Jawaharlal Nehru spoke, in English, the great 'freedom at midnight' speech that marked the moment of Independence, the role of English itself has often been disputed in India. Attempts in India's continental shelf of languages to coin medical, scientific, technological and everyday neologisms to replace the commonly used English words sometimes succeeded, but more often comically failed….

Like the Greek god Dionysos, who was dismembered and afterwards reassembled—and who, according to the myths, was one of India's earliest conquerors—Indian Writing in English has been called 'twice born' (by the critic Meenakshi Mukherjee) to suggest its double parentage. While, I am, I must admit, attracted to the Dionysiac resonances of this supposedly double birth, it seems to me to rest on the false premise that English, having arrived from outside India, is and must necessarily remain an alien there. But my own mother tongue, Urdu, the camp argot of the country's earlier Muslim conquerors, became a natutralised sub-continental language long ago; and by now that has happened to English, too. English has become an Indian language. Its colonial origin means that, like Urdu and unlike all other Indian languages, it has no regional base; but in all other ways, it has emphatically come to stay…

Indian English, sometimes unattractively called 'Hinglish', is not 'English' English, to be sure, any more than Irish or American or Caribbean English is. And it is a part of the achievement of the writers in this volume to

have found literary voices as distinctively Indian, and also as suitable for any and all purposes of art, as those other Englishes forged in Ireland, Africa, the West Indies and the Unites States.

However, the Indian critical assaults on this new literature continue. Its practitioners are denigrated for being too upper middle class; for lacking diversity in their choice of themes and techniques; for being less popular in India than outside India; for possessing inflated reputations on account of the international power of English language, and of the ability of Western critics and publishers to impose their cultural standards on the East; for living, in many cases, outside India; for being deracinated to the point that their work lacks the spiritual dimension essential for a 'true' understanding of the soul of India; for being insufficiently grounded in the ancient literary tradition of India; for being the literary equivalent of MTV culture, of globalising Coca-colonisation; even, I'm sorry to report, for suffering from a condition that one sprightly recent commentator, Pankaj Mishra, calls 'Rushdie-it is…(a) condition that has claimed Rushdie himself in his later works'.

It is interesting that so few of these criticisms are literary in the pure sense of the word. For the most part, they do not deal with language, voice, psychological or social in sight, imagination or talent. Rather, they are about class, power and belief. There is a whiff of political correctness about them: the ironical proposition that India's best writing since Independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists is simply too much for some folks to bear. It ought not to be true, so must not be permitted to be true. (That many of the attacks on English language Indian writing are made in English by writers who are themselves members of the college-educated, English speaking elite is a further irony)

Let us quickly concede what must be conceded. It is true that most of these writers come from the educated classes of India; but in a country still bedevilled by high illiteracy levels, how could it be otherwise? It does not follow, however—unless one holds to a rigid, class war view of the world—that writers with the privilege of a good education will automatically write novels that seek only to portray the lives of the bourgeoisie. It is true

that there tends to be a bias towards metropolitan and cosmopolitan fiction, but, as this volume will demonstrate, there has been, during this half century, a genuine attempt to encompass as many Indian realties as possible, rural as well as urban, sacred as well as profane. This is also, let us remember, a young literature. It is still pushing out the frontiers of the possible.

The point about the power of the English language, and of the Western publishing and critical fraternities, also contains some truth. Perhaps it does seem, to some 'home' commentators, that a canon is being foisted on them from outside. The perspective from the West is rather different. Here, what seems to be the case is that Western publishers and critics have been growing gradually more and more excited by the voices emerging from India; in England at least, British writers are often chastised by reviewers by their lack of Indian-style ambition and verve. It feels as if the East is imposing itself on the West, rather than the other way around. And, yes, English is the most powerful medium of communication in the world; should we not then rejoice at these artists' mastery of it, and at their growing influence? To criticise writers for their success at 'breaking out' is no more than parochialism (and parochialism is perhaps the main vice of the vernacular literatures). One important dimension of literature is that it is a means of holding a conversation with the world. These writers are ensuring that India, or rather, Indian voices (for they are too good to fall into writing nationalistically), will henceforth be confident, indispensible participants in that literary conversation. …

The question of religious faith, both as a subject and an approach to a subject, is clearly important when we speak of a country as bursting with devotion as India; but it is surely excessive to use it, as does one leading academic, the redoubtable professor C. D. Narasimhaiah, as a touchstone, so that Mulk Raj Anand is praised for his 'daring' merely because, as a leftist writer, he allows a character to be moved by deep faith, while Arun Kolatkar's poetry is denigrated for 'throwing away tradition and creating a vacuum' and so 'losing relevance', because in *Jejuri*, a cycle of poem about the visit to a temple town, he sceptically likens the stone gods in the temples to the stones on the hillsides nearby ('and ever other stone/is god

or his cousin'). I hope readers of this anthology will agree that many of the writers gathered here have profound knowledge of the 'soul of India'; many have deeply spiritual concerns , while others are radically secular, but the need to engage with, to make a reckoning with, India's religious self is everywhere to be found….

In my own case, and I suspect in the case of every writer in this volume as well, knowing and loving the Indian languages in which I was raised has remained of vital importance. As an individual, Hindi-Urdu, the 'Hindustani' of North India, remains an essential aspect of my sense of the self; as a writer, I have been partly formed by the presence, in my head, of that other music, the rhythms, patterns and habits of thought and metaphor of my Indian tongues. What I am saying is that there is not, need not be, should not be, an adversarial relationship between English language literature and the other literatures of India. We drink from the same well. India, that inexhaustible horn of plenty, nourishes us all….

The first Indian novel in English was a dud. *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) is a poor melodramatic thing. The writer, Bankim, reverted to Bengali and immediately achieved great renown. For seventy years or so, there was no English language fiction of any quality. It was a generation of independence, 'midnight's parents ', one might call them, who were the true architects of this new tradition (Jawaharlal himself was a fine writer). Of these, Mulk Raj Anand was influenced by both Joyce and Marx but most of all, perhaps by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Raja Rao, a scholarly Sanskritist, wrote determinedly of the need to make an Indian English for himself, but even his much praised portrait of village life, *Kanthapura,* seems dated, its approach at once grandiloquent and archaic. The autobiographer Nirad C. Choudhuri has been, throughout his long life, an erudite, contrary and mischievous presence. His view, if I may paraphrase and summarise it, is that India has so culture of its own, and that whatever we now call Indian culture was brought in from outside by the successive waves of conquerors. This view, polemically and brilliantly expressed, has not endeared him to many of his fellow Indians. That he was always swum so strongly against the current has not, however, prevented *The Autobiography of An Unknown*

Indian from being recognised as the masterpiece it is.

The most significant writers of the first generation, R. K. Narayan and G.V. Desani, have had opposite careers. Narayan's books fill a good sized shelf; Desani is the author of a single work of fiction, *All About H. Hatterr*, and that singleton volume is already 50 years old. Desani is almost unknown, while R. K. Narayan is of course, a figure of world stature, for his creation of the imaginary town of Malgudi, so lovingly made that it has become more vividly real to us than most real places….Narayan shows us, over and over again, the quarrel between traditional, static India on the one hand, modernity and progress on the other; represented, in many of his stories and novels, by a confrontation between a 'wimp' and a 'bully'—The Painter of Signs and his aggressive beloved with her birth control campaign; *The Vendor of Sweets* and the emancipated American daughter in law with the absurd novel writing machine'; the mild mannered printer and the extrovert taxidermist in *The Man Eater of Malgudi. …*

The beauty of Nayantara Sahgal's memoir *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (extracted here) is paralleled by the liveliness and grace of her fiction; while Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is a just renowned study of village life.

Ved Mehta is represented here by a part of Vedi, his memoir of a blind boyhood that describes cruelties and kindness with equal dispassion and great affect…

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has written so many fine short stories that it has been hard to choose just one. As a writer, she is sometimes underrated in India because, I think, the voice of the rootless intellectual (so quintessentially her voice) is such an unfamiliar one in that country where people's self-definitions are so rooted in their regional identities.…Satyajit Ray, was also an accomplished author of short stories….

Anita Desai is one of India's major living authors. Her novel *In Custody*, perhaps her best to date, finely uses English to depict the decay of another language, Urdu, and the high literary culture that lived in it…The dying past, the old world, Desai tells us, can be as much of a burden as the awkward, sometimes wrong-headed present….

One of the most important voices in the story of modern literature, V S Naipaul, is regrettably absent from this book, not by our choice, but by his own. His three non-fiction books on India, *An Area of Darkness, A Wounded Civilisation* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* are key texts, and not only because of the hackles they have raised. Many Indian critics have taken issue with harshness of his responses. Some have fair-mindedly conceded that he does attack things worth attacking. 'I'm anti Naipaul when I visit the West,' one leading South Indian novelist told me, 'but I'm often pro-Naipaul back home.'...India, his migrant ancestors' lost paradise, cannot stop disappointing him. By the third volume of the series, however, he seems more cheerful about the country's condition. He speaks approvingly of the emergence of 'a central will, a central intellect, a national idea', and disarmingly, even movingly, confesses to the atavistic edginess of mood in which he had made his first strip almost 30 years earlier: 'The India of my fantasy and heart was something lost and irrecoverable…On that first journey, I was a fearful traveller.'

In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul's comments on Indian writers elicit in this reader a characteristic mixture of agreement and dissent. When he writes: …the feeling is widespread that, whatever English might have done to Tolstoy, it can never do justice to the Indian language writers. This is possible; when I read of them in translation did not encourage me to read more. Premchand…turned out to be a minor fabulist…other writers quickly fatigued me with their assertion that poverty was sad…many of the 'modern' short stories were only refurbished folk tales…

In the 1980s and 1990s, the flow of that good writing has become a flood. Bapsi Sidhwa is technically Pakistani, but this anthology has no need of Partitions, particularly as Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man* (retiled Cracking India in the US), extracted here, is one of the finest responses to the horror of the division of the subcontinent. Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* is an important attempt by a thoroughly modern Indian to make her reckoning with the Hindu culture from which she emerged. Padma Perera, Anjana Appachana, Githa Hariharan, less known than Sidhwa and Mehta, confirm the quality of contemporary writing by Indian women.

A number of different styles of work are evolving: the Stendhalian realism of a writer like Rohinton Mistry, the equally naturalistic but lighter, more readily charming prose of Vikram Seth (….), and the elegant social observation of Upamanyu Chatterjee can be set against the more flamboyant manner of Vikram Chandra, the linguistic play of I. Allan Sealy and Shashi Tharoor and the touches of fabulism of Mukul Kesavan. Amitav Ghosh's most impressive achievement to date is non-fiction study of India and Egypt, *In An Antique Land*. It may be (or it may not) that his greatest strength will turn out to be so as an essayist of this sort. Sara Suleri, whose memoir *Meatless Days* is, like Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, a visitor from across the Pakistani frontier, is a nonfiction writer of immense originality and grace. And Amit Chaudhuri's languorous, elliptic, beautiful prose is impressively impossible to place in any category at all.

Most encouragingly, yet another talented generation has begun to emerge. The Keralan writer Arundhati Roy has arrived to the accompaniment of a loud fanfare. Her novel, *The God of Small Things,* is full of ambition and sparkle, and written in a highly wrought and utterly personal style. Equally impressive, are the debuts of two other first novelists. Ardashir Vakil's *Beach Boy* and Kiran Deasai's Strange Happenings in the Guava Orchard are, in their very unalike ways, highly original books…Kiran Desai is the daughter of Anita: her arrival establishes the first dynasty of modern Indian fiction. But she is very much her own writer, the newest of all these voices, and welcome proof that India's encounter with the English language, far from proving abortive, continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts.

The map of the world, in the standard Mercator Projection, is not kind to India, making it look substantially smaller than, say, Greenland. On the map of world literature, too, India has been undersized for too long. This anthology celebrates the writers who are ensuring that, fifty years after India's independence, that age of obscurity is coming to an end.

Salman Rushdie

March 1997



LET US KNOW

This essay is divided into two parts. In the first part Rushdie deliberates on the issues and problems often faced by the Indo-Anglian writers (Rushdie himself being one of them), while also reiterating the fact that this literature has successfully made its presence felt in the field of World literature in the last 50 years or so.

In the second part, Rushdie refers to some of the Indian English authors who in a sense shaped what we often recognise as Indian Writing in English and who have been in this Anthology. You may read the whole book to have a firsthand experience of the authors mentioned and then identify the major concerns of IWE in the last 50 years of the 20th century.

3.4 IMPORTANT ISSUES RAISED IN THE ESSAY

From your reading of the excerpts from Salman Rushdie's essay in the previous section, you must have gained important insights on the main issues and debates concerning Indian English Literature (IEL) in the 20th century. IEL usually refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Rushdie here traces the history of IEL actually began with the works of R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao as they rendered remarkable contribution to Indian English fiction in the 1930s. However, IEL in the post independence period also came to be associated with the works of members of writers belonging to the Indian diaspora, such as V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Rushdie himself and many others who are of Indian descent. Such type of literature is frequently referred to as Indo-Anglian literature; Indo-Anglian being a specific term in the sole context of writing that should not be confused with Anglo-Indian. However, as a category, it comes the broad area of postcolonial literature from previously colonised countries such as India.

Salman Rushdie in this essay not only provides a history of modern IEL, but also very poignantly refers to the important debates regarding its status as a genre of modern literature. One of the key issues has always been the superiority/inferiority of IWE (Indian Writing in English) as opposed to the literary production in the various languages (bhashas) of India. Key binaries used in this context are superficial/authentic, imitative/creative, shallow/deep, critical/uncritical, elitist/parochial and so on. The views of Salman Rushdie and Amit Chaudhuri expressed in their introductory essays in their books—*The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* and *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* respectively essentialise this battle. However, Salman Rushdie's statement in his book, "the ironic proposition that India's best writing since independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists is simply too much for some folks to bear"–created a lot of resentment among many writers, including writers in English. Similarly, in his book Amit Chaudhuri questions, "Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party?" The answers to such questions have always provided an enriching experience to the students and the scholars alike.

Amit Chaudhuri feels that after Rushdie, IWE started employing magical realism, bagginess, non-linear narrative and hybrid language to sustain themes seen as microcosms of India and supposedly reflecting Indian circumstances and conditions. He contrasts this with the works of earlier writers such as R. K. Narayan where the use of English is pure, but the deciphering of meaning needs cultural familiarity. He also feels that 'Indianness' is a theme constructed only in IWE and does not articulate itself in the vernacular literatures. He further adds, "The post-colonial novel becomes a trope for an ideal hybridity by which the West celebrates not so much Indianness, whatever that infinitely complex thing is, but its own historical quest, its reinterpretation of itself."

These arguments form an integral part of what is known as postcolonial theory. The very categorisation of IWE, as IWE or post-colonial literature, is seen by some as too limiting. Even an erudite writer like Amitav

Ghosh made his views on this very clear by refusing to accept the Eurasian Commonwealth Writers Prize for his book *The Glass Palace* in 2001. The renowned writer V. S. Naipaul, a third generation Indian from Trinidad and a Nobel Laureate, is a person who belongs to the world and usually not classified under IWE. Naipaul evokes ideas of homeland, rootlessness and his own personal feelings towards India in many of his books based on India. Therefore, there are certain serious issues that one is supposed to remain aware of while studying the history of modern Indian English literature.



3.5 LET US SUM UP

As you have finished reading this unit, you must have gained some ideas on the Modern Indian English Literature through a reading of the essay "Introduction" to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* 1947-1997 by Salman Rushdie. As discussed already, Rushdie here makes a subtle reference to the important debates and issues relating to the significance of IWE in the context of world literature. Rushdie almost assertively states that 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution Indian has yet made to the world of books. Regarding the use of the English language to tell 'Indian' experiences, Rushdie states that it is a part of the achievement of the writers who have found literary voices as distinctively Indian, and also as suitable for any and all purposes of art, as those other Englishes forged in Ireland, Africa, the West Indies and the Unites States. One important dimension of literature, Rushdie opines, is that it is a means of holding a conversation with the world. Thus, the writers he mentions and whose works he includes in his Anthology, are ensuring that India, or rather, Indian voices (for they are too good to fall into writing nationalistically), will henceforth be confident, indispensible participants in that literary conversation. It is against this background and also against the need for post colonial representation of India, that one is supposed to reflect on the Modern history of Indian English Literature. You will certainly do well if you can manage to read the books mentioned below.



3.6 FURTHER READING

1) Rushdie, Salman, and Elizabeth West. (Eds.). (1997). *Mirrorwork: 50 years of Indian Writing 1947-1997.* New York: Henry Holt and Company.

2) Chaudhuri, Amit. (2001). (Ed.). *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature.* London: Picador.

3) Mehrotra, A.K. (2003). *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English.* Delhi: Permanent Black.

Website and Electronic Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_English_literature



3.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Read the essay carefully, and jot down the important points Salman Rushdie makes about the nature of Indo-Anglian literature.

Q 2: According to Rushdie, most of the Indian English writers have profound knowledge of the 'soul of India'. Discuss.

Q 3: Do you think that language shall always remain a problem in Indo-Anglian literature? Give you response in terms of Salman Rushdie's observations.

Q 4: Would you agree that while discussing the status of Indian English writers whom Rushdie refers to in this essay, Rushdie also defines his own 'Indian' self? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 5: Name the writers who find themselves mentioned in Rushdie's 'Introduction'? What does Rushdie state about their respective qualities as Indian English writers?

Q 6: Indian Writing in English has been called 'twice born' by the critic Meenakshi Mukherjee to suggest its double parentage. Discuss.

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UNIT 4: GAURI VISWANATHAN: "THE BEGINNINGS OF ENGLISH LITERARY STUDY" FROM *MASKS OF CONQUEST*

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Gauri Viswanathan : The Critic

4.4 Explanation of the Essay

4.5 Issues raised in the Essay

4.6 Issues raised in *Masks of Conquest*

4.7 Let Us Sum Up

4.8 Further Reading

4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.10 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- acquaint yourself with the different grounds for the introduction of Charter Act1813.
- trace the upshots of the introduction of English literature in India
- identify vicious British policies to cripple the natives
- locate the introduction of English literature as an efficacious remedy for the British from their conflict with 'religious neutrality' and desperate attempts to consolidate their territorial authority in India.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall deal with Gauri Viswanathan's essay "The Beginnings of English Literary Study" from her seminal book *Masks of Conquest* which is about the institution, practice, and ideology of English studies introduced in India under British colonial rule. The prescribed essay bears multifarious significance as it traces the development of English literature in India and

its various upshots. Moreover, the essay also presented objections of a section of the Englishmen in Britain for introducing reforms in Indian society without reforming their people in India. In such a crucial conflict between religious neutrality and the attempt to find mechanisms to consolidate power in India that English literature became the efficacious remedy for the British. Viswanathan rightly mentions in the beginning of the first chapter of the book that "ENGLISH LITERATURE made its appearance in India, albeit indirectly, with a crucial act in Indian educational history: the passing of the Charter Act in 1813." As you finish reading the unit, I hope that you will gain important perspectives on the emergence of English literature in India.

4.3 GAURI VISWANATHAN: THE CRITIC

Gauri Viswanathan is Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University. She has published widely on education, religion, and culture; 19th century British and colonial cultural studies; and the history of modern disciplines. The author of *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (Columbia, 1989; Oxford, 1998) and *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, 1998), Viswanathan won the Harry Levin Prize awarded by the American Comparative Literature Association, the James Russell Lowell Prize awarded by the Modern Language Association of America, and the Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Prize awarded by the Association for Asian Studies. As a critic, Viswanathan dissects various convolutions and ramifications of the key matters of society and her special interest on education, culture and religion led her to investigate pernicious policies of the British rule in India. Her encounter with Edward Said has an enduring impact upon her who also taught at Columbia University.

She also edited *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (Vintage, 2001). Prof. Viswanathan is coeditor of the book series *South Asia Across the Disciplines*, published jointly by the university presses of Columbia, Chicago, and California under a Mellon grant. She has held numerous visiting chairs, among them the Beckman Professorship at Berkeley, and Affiliated Fellowship at the American Academy in Rome

and a Visiting Mellon Scholarship at the University of Cape Town. She has also been a fellow at various international research institutes. Prof. Viswanathan's current work is on genealogies of secularism and the writing of alternative religious histories. She has published extensively on the cultural influence of Theosophy, with two recent articles appearing in *PMLA.* She has been a network partner in the international research project "Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, Modernism, and the Arts," funded by the Leverhulme Trust in the U.K.

Her award-winning book *Outside the Fold: Conversion*, *Modernity, and Belief* (1998) presents 'famous conversions' as political arbitrations and cultural criticism. However, she became famous with her first book *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989) which scrutinises the institution, practice, and ideology of English studies initiated in India by the British. She argues in the book that the introduction of English studies in India relinquished the Indian values and cultures as the colonizers did not insert any 'Indian literary text' for study in Indian schools and colleges. They considered the Indian literary texts as dumps of greatest immodesty, impurity and immorality. She further criticises the pernicious experimentations of the British, as they introduced such educations that had been relinquished in England or fallen a victim of various dichotomies in England. Moreover, the British experimented with such fallen education in India so that the Indians would remain at the level of innocent children and unmindful of the meaning and intent of their instructions. She therefore criticises the British attempt to establish "one power, one mind" in India initially propagated by Charles Grant.



LET US KNOW

Charles Grant was one of the first Englishmen to motivate the introduction and proliferation of English literature and Christianity in India. In his *'Observation on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain'*, Grant presents a heroic self assumption of the colonial power in comparison

with the colonised society and propagated one single moral code "One Power, One Mind" to achieve desired positive social change in India in place of polytheism and sacrificial rites in India.

The well-known Macaulay's Minute is a continuation of the propagations of Charles Grant as Macaulay minute presented a supercilious nature of the British, stressed the importance of only English literature, and diluted values of native literature. Here, Viswanathan argues that the British considered themselves to be governed by "superior lights and juster principles and possessed of higher lights." Viswanathan indicated that Grant's idea of "One Power, One Mind" summarised equitable British ideas of cultural hegemony, monotheism, centralised authority. Thus, Viswanathan immersed into the backdrop of the introduction of English literature in India.

4.4 EXPLANATION OF THE ESSAY

At the outset of the essay, the author has pointed out that English literature made its beginning in India inadvertently with the introduction of the all-important Charter Act 1813. He Act was very significant in the history of Indian education because it was the first such educational bill that reminded the British to work for the "interests and happiness" of the natives of India. Moreover, the Act suggested to adopt advantageous measures for the accomplishing "useful knowledge and of religious and moral improvement". The Act was important for two crucial reasons as it diplomatically depicted the obligations of the British towards the natives as they were feathering their nests from the natives. In addition, such an assumed responsibility towards the people of India was never officially declared and the British self-righteously declared themselves the most potent race to uplift the natives both morally and intellectually. Secondly, the Act relaxed its authority on the missionary activities in India, but the British Parliament curtailed the monopoly of the East India Company in India.

Gauri Viswanathan, in this essay, not only explained the importance of the Act in this essay but also divulged the various ramifications of it and its reaction in England. The self–righteousness of the British as the most

potent race to civilize the natives was exposed by the British Parliamentary member Henry Montgomery, and he termed the official declaration to uplift the moral and religious conditions of natives as unacceptable, "If we wished to convert the natives of India we ought to reform our own people there, who at present only gave them an example of lying, swearing, drunkenness, and other vices." However, Viswanathan mentions that the so assumed commitment was a result of British's 'own depredations in India'. Their intent was to plunder the natives and the writer quotes a few lines of the influential British politician Charles Grant who championed the causes of social reform in India:

"The primary object of Great Britain, let it be acknowledged, was rather to discover what could be obtained from her Asiatic subjects, than how they could be benefited. In process of time it was found expedient to examine how they might be benefited in order that we might continue to hold the advantages, which we at first derived from them… [Their] happiness is committed to our care."

Moreover, Viswanathan discloses that the ways to uplift the natives was means to fortify their territorial power in India. Moreover, the monopoly of the 'pampered' trading company was broken by the Act, and the British Parliament found the Act to be an efficacious remedy to tacitly subdue the natives as well as to generate authority upon the trading company. The writer has dissected the whole issue in the following words:

"…the question of how England can serve the people of India blends indistinguishably with the question of how power can best be consolidated. The shift has far-reaching consequences. Duty toward the people is seen less as a motive for involving the government than as the endpoint of a process of consolidation of territorial control. To the question, "What are the best means of perpetuating our empire there?" only acquired illicit fortunes but showed a shameful dereliction of responsibility by delegating authority loosely to sycophantic local leaders."

The Charter Act of 1813 allowed the British to intervene with the Indian education system and it emboldened the missionaries to proliferate their activities in India. However, the British Parliament warned the

missionaries not to involve more candidly in their purpose because of an apprehension that, "the inhabitants would feel threatened and eventually cause trouble for England's commercial ventures." However, they could not resist the missionaries because they feared that "many immoral and disgusting habits" might degenerate the Englishmen. Then, she dissects various designs of the accidental act and mentioned that the British were trapped between their goal to fortify territorial power in India and to fabricate a design to enter into the natives, and made them believe that they were working for "their interests and happiness". But, it became impossible for them to enter into the masses through secular and western scientific education in India. Furthermore, they considered that too much involvement with the natives might relinquish their identity and their original goal.

The British administrators were virtually paralysed from moving in either direction. Since, it was believed that knowledge could not be separated from religion in the Indian tradition, there was widespread fear among the Council of Education members that western scientific propositions opposed to the tenets of Hinduism would not merely be denounced as false, but would also be interpreted by overly suspicious Indians as deliberately hostile to the foundations of that religion. And, such a conflict was resolved by the introduction of the English literature in India as Viswanathan mentioned, "The tension between increasing involvement and enforced noninterference in religion was productively resolved through the introduction of English literature."

Although the 43rd section of the Act categorically emboldened the governor-general-in-council to utilize "a sum of not less than one lakh rupees shall be annually applied to the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India", it was not expressive whether 'improvement of literature' meant native literature or English literature. However, the issue was settled and English literature officially made its inception in India. Thus, the essay is very significant as it traced the various causes of the official beginning of English literary studies in India.

In addition to that, the essay has also traced the role of Bengali

Hindus in promoting and acknowledging the importance of English language, literature and western scientific education in India. As she mentions that Sir Edward Hyde, the then chief justice of the Supreme Court, was 'not unappreciative' of the request of a group of Calcutta citizens to offer 'European education' and impart 'an English system of morals' in India. In the one hand, the Calcutta Hindus wanted western education for self-advancement and elevation, on the other; the British were governed by shrewd and perspicacious intent to plunder the Indians. Thus, Viswanathan, in the essay prescribed, has comprehensively studied various factors responsible for the inception of English literary studies in India.



LET US KNOW

Indian cultural pride in the early 19th century dithered the British from introducing modern and scientific knowledge to the Indians. Initially, the British attempted to maintain religious neutrality so that they could refrain from getting entangle with undesired problems in India. They feared that the introduction of modern and enlightened education could encourage discontentment among the natives and they had no intention to enamour such a situation and the Indians missed the enlightened and modern knowledge in the early 19th Century. British indifference to real Indian issues and Indian cultural pride were partly responsible for the non-introduction of secular education in India.

The British wanted to consolidate their imperial power in India and they thought it right to create an English speaking group to facilitate their clandestine perverse purpose. However, the natives had no respect for the English scholar and they found it difficult to proliferate English literary studies in India as many *maulavis* and Sanskrit *pundits* assessed the new language and literature as a threat to them. The British were trapped between their notion of religious neutrality and the aim of disseminating English education in India. And, they found it convenient to introduce English literature

as an efficacious remedy to such a problem. Moreover, the Bengali Hindus also helped them to achieve their goals as they advocated ardently to introduce western enlightened education in India. And, they did not consider the foreign language and literature as threat to their cultural pride.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why do you think the British introduced English literature in India?

Q 2: Trace the upshots of the Charter Act1813.

4.5 ISSUES RAISED IN THE ESSAY

The crucial Charter Act 1813 'indirectly' started English literary studies in India but several implications of the act were not clear that invited many conflicts of interest. The act did not explain the term 'literature' but the 43rd section of the Act categorically sanctioned "a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees shall be annually applied to the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India". The problem of not defining the term 'literature' invited various conflicts of interest and it was later resolved in 1835 with a definition that the term meaning not Sanskrit and Arabic literature but English literature. Thus, the repercussions of the act were far reaching as English was not just a language spoken by a handful of Englishman but it transmuted to the courts and offices of India.

The most important issue raised in the essay was the growing rift between the natives and the British, and the rift was never healed. Charles Cornwallis, the Governor-General and commander in chief 1786-1792, was fundamentally responsible for the created gulf. He considered that the natives were responsible for moral degeneration and 'contact' with natives was the root cause of declining European morals. He determined to 'run a government that would remain free of corrupting influences from the native society' and he excluded Indians from appointment to important and influencing posts. He believed that the exclusion of the Indians from sensible posts would revive the Englishmen. His exclusion of Indians from responsible

posts had multifarious repercussions as it created the most 'durable legends' among the British that Indians were incapable of responsible and sensible works, "Denied all opportunities for expression as a result of the harsh measure, public ability declined steadily. But curiously, when this occurred it was taken to mean that civic responsibility had never existed in India, thus giving rise to one of the most durable legends of British rule: that the Indian mind was best suited to minor pursuits of trade, but not to government or administration."

Thus, the Indians were crippled by the British and the influential British politician Charles Grant, who was motivated by evangelic Christianity, candidly mentioned that renovation and elevation of the Indian society were expressively needed because of the wrong doings of early British Conquest in India. J. S. Mill, the undoubted spokesperson for British imperialism was skeptical of the British's assumed role of giving western education to the Indians for speedy and effective reforms in India. Mill voiced his concern about the future of Indian education and Viswanathan skillfully entangled Mill's cynicism to show the 'masks' behind British's assumptions to work for the 'interests and happiness' of Indians.

Gauri Viswanathan did not only depict the upshots of the Charter Act 1813 in this essay but also described the reactions between both the colonial and the colonised people. She mentioned that a mere English scholar was not respected by the Indians, and the British believed that Sanskrit *pundits* and Arabic *maulavi*s were fundamentally responsible for that. The British were convinced that the introduction of secular and scientific education could only dissatisfy the natives. Therefore, they refrained from assimilating native religion with modern western education and the Indians missed the modern western education due to so-called cultural pride in the early 19th century.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What led the British to introduce the Charter Act 1813?

Q 4: What do you implicate by "interests and happiness of the natives"?

Q 5: Why did Bengali Hindus meet Sir Edward Hyde?

Q 6: What are the ramifications of British policy of plundering the India natives from government and administrative jobs?

4.6 ISSUES RAISED IN *MASKS OF CONQUEST*

In this section, we shall try to have a look at the other important issues in Gauri Viswanathan's book *Masks of Conquest.* The author mentioned in the 'Introduction' that the book is simple in concentration and design. The book opens with "The Beginnings of English Literary Study", the chapter comprehensively delineates the 'indirect' beginning of English literary studies in India under the British rule with the introduction of Charter Act 1813 that diluted the monopoly of the 'pampered' trading company in India, and allowed the missionaries to spread prosestylising activities in India. Moreover, the act emboldened the British Parliament to directly intervene in Indian education system.

The second Chapter "Praeparatio Evangelica" discusses Alexander Duff's role in transmuting English curriculum for religious ends. The Chapter 3 "One Power, One Mind" evaluates the British acceptance to allow the missionaries for religious use of literature. The 4th Chapter "Rewriting English" portrays the stirring rejection of the nexus between English literature and Christianity, moving away from religion English literature fortified its cultural base in India to give a fresh political authority in India. The 5th chapter of the book "Lessons of History" evaluates the subtle emphasis given on English literary studies as a part of historical analysis that attempted to fortify British cultural hegemony in India. Chapter 6 "The Failure of English" surveyed the gradual degeneration of English literary education in India and the disenchantment of the natives with the British rule. The Indians exposed

the façade of British honesty termed the so-called 'moral and intellectual' improvement of the natives as fictitious interspersed with an intent to fortify British imperial power in India.

In her review of ***Masks of Conquest***, Sandhya Shetty of University of New Hampshire says that Gauri Viswanathan "takes her theoretical model from Antonio Gramsci. Her scholarly examination of the archives of colonial governance illuminates the Gramscian notion of hegemony and the crucial role of cultural and moral leadership in the legitimisation and consolidation of power. In the records of British India's educational history, she finds a perfect exemplification of Gramsci's idea that cultural hegemony can be established and sustained most effectively through the consent of the dominated. In colonial India, the consent of the dominated was created primarily by a system of education that turned deliberately on English literary instruction. ***Masks of Conquest*** puts this collusion between power and knowledge, between political domination and the development of English literature on display, highlighting the "progressive refinement of the rapacious, exploitative, and ruthless actor of history into the reflective subject of literature." In meticulously documenting the precise mode and process by which English literature ensured cultural and political hegemony, the book undergirds current pedagogical approaches and auricular practices based on the insight that the distance between educational discourse and politics is ideologically constituted.

Masks of Conquest beautifully substantiates this logic that the strategic rupture between cultural and material practices serves the interests of dominant groups by making "culture" desirable while keeping power invisible. The six central chapters track the operations of English literary culture as hegemonic activity, providing a highly specific chart of the subtleties, self-contradictions, and vicissitudes of the discipline as a method of political management and social control in colonial India. Through intense scrutiny of particular decisions, moves, and endorsements and close readings of administrative debates and disagreements, the middle chapters also reveal how English, because of its ambiguous stance toward a number of thorny issues ("knowledge and belief, empiricism and intuition, reason

and faith") served as a consummate resolution to most of the political dilemmas and ideological impasses that colonial administrators and educationists faced in the task of consolidating and maintaining authority."



LET US KNOW

It is not necessary that every new beginning is to have a positive intent, the formal commencement of the English literary studies started in India, indeed, inadvertently as the genuine purpose of the introduction of English literary studies in India was under wraps. And Gauri Viswanathan has traced various causes of the introduction of English Literature in India in her book called *Masks of Conquest*. The British found the introduction of the English literature as an efficacious remedy to various conflicts in India. Moreover, they deemed it right to take the 'white men's burden' of civilising the natives. While explaining the 'white men's burden, Gauri Viswanathan has taken resort to various modern theories like Antonio Gramsci's 'cultural hegemony' and Edward Said's postcolonial theories.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How did Gauri Viswanathan construct the whole book *Masks of Conquest* highlighting the intricacies of the introduction of English literature as a British policy in India?



4.7 LET US SUM UP

The attempt in this unit has been to discuss the various grounds of the introduction of English literary studies in India by the British and its multifarious ramifications. This unit must have familiarised you with the diverse methods adopted by the British to fortify their imperial power in India especially through English literature as a modus operandi to consolidate

their territorial authority in India. After reading the unit, you are supposed to know the various pretences of the British to consolidate their territorial control in India and the introduction of the English literature in India by the British was one of the schemes of the British to exhibit their facade of care and concern to Indian natives. You must have also come to know about the various convolutions of the introduction of English literature in India and its various upshots. An understanding of the issues raised in this essay shall help you to critically explore the rise of Indian English literature.



4.8 FURTHER READING

1) Bureau of Education. (1920). Selections from Educational Records. Part I: 1781–1839. Henry Sharp, ed. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing,

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Website and Electronic Resources:

https://english.columbia.edu/people/profile/412



4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The British introduced English literature in India to reinforce their territorial power in India… ...at the same time, English literature was used as an advantageous solution to various convolutions in early 19th century India.

Ans to Q 2: The Charter Act brought a vicissitude of change in British colonial India… …minimised restrictions hitherto imposed on Christian missionaries and it ascertained direct British involvement in Indian education… …it curtained the monopoly of the trading company in India… …term like 'literature' in the Act created hue and cry in India as it did not define the term… …British Parliament asserted that they would spend one lakh rupees for English literature but not on Indian literature like Sanskrit and Arabic literature.

Ans to Q 3: The British Parliament was alarmed by the proliferation of the trading company in India… …The British were convulsed by its attempt to fortify its authority in India and to appease the natives and the introduction of the Charter Act 1813 worked as a double-edged sword for them.

Ans to Q 4: The British asserted to work for "interests and happiness of the natives" and the British Parliament entrusted the duty on the British living in India… …but it can only implicate as the facade of honesty to appease the natives.

Ans to Q 5: The visit to the Chief Justice of Supreme Court (British colonial India) by the Bengali Hindus bears extensive meanings… …Bengali Hindus requested him to introduce English language and literature in India… …they belied that introduction of the European education could subtly develop India… …moreover, they asserted him that the English language was not emasculating the Indian society… …the visit suggests that some Indians in early 19th Century were disenchanted

by the superstitious Indian society enfeebled by religious dogmatism.

Ans to Q 6: Charles Cornwallis, the Governor-General and commander in chief 1786-1792, believed that the contact of the natives was the chief cause of British degeneration and he decided to restrict appointment of the natives in administrative and government jobs. The biased policy of plundering the natives… …created the advantageous myth for the British that Indians were emasculated to carry on responsible duties… …the policy did not only enfeebled the natives but also created a huge rift between the ruler and the ruled that never healed.

Ans to Q 7: Gauri Viswanathan highlighted various pretences of the British to reinforce authority in India and the Introduction of English literature in India was one of the masks of the British… …she discussed convolutions of introduction of the English literature in India to the religious use of literature… …evaluates the subtle emphasis given by the British on English literary studies as a part of historical analysis that attempted to fortify British cultural hegemony in India… … surveyed the gradual degeneration of English literary education in India and the disenchantment of the natives with the British rule.



4.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: "English Literature made its appearance in India, albeit indirectly, with a crucial act in Indian educational history: the passing of the Charter Act in 1813." Explain.

Q 2: Who is Henry Montgomery? Why did he say, "If we wished to convert the natives of India, we ought first to reform our own people…"?

Q 3: Explain the important issues raised by Gauri Viswanathan in the essay "The Beginnings of English Literary Study".

Q 4: How did English literature work as an efficacious remedy for the British? Explain the convolutions that led the British to introduce English literature in India?

Q 5: Discuss the repercussions of restricting the Indians from government

and administrative jobs in colonial British India.

Q 6: How did the Indians especially the Sanskrit *pundits* and Arabic *maulavis* respond to the introduction of English language and literature in India?

Q 7: Discuss critics' views on Gauri Viswanathan's book *Masks of Conquest.*

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UNIT 5: A. K. RAMANUJAN: "IS THERE AN INDIAN WAY OF THINKING? AN INFORMAL ESSAY"

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 A. K. Ramanujan: The Critic

5.4 Excerpts from the Essay

5.5 Reading the Essay

5.6 Let Us Sum Up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of A. K. Ramanujan, the famous Indian English poet and an erudite scholar of Indian Literature
- explain how the essay "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay" helps to understand the very ethos of Indian literature
- discuss the important issues raised by Ramanujan in the Essay
- gain insights into the very ethos of Indian literature from your reading of the essay.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the Block 1 of the course on Indian English literature. In this unit, we shall try to briefly discuss the life and works of the influential Indian poet-critic A. K. Ramanujan as well as his literary essay "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay." Ramanujan was a bi-lingual writer. Besides being a poet, he was a translator and essayist. In this essay, "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" (1990), Ramanujan explains cultural ideologies and behavioural manifestations thereof in terms

of an Indian psychology he calls "context-sensitive" thinking. This essay should help you to discuss what makes Indian thoughts different from its Western counterpart, and how one is supposed to form an idea of Indian literature in general. In total six Parts, Ramanujan very lucidly develops his idea of India and Indianness in the essay, which shall further help you to gain important insights into the uniqueness of the Indian thought and intellectual contexts. As you finish reading this unit, you will feel enlightened to approach any of the Indian literary texts-be it in English or in native languages besides being able to address what makes an 'Indian' literary text exclusively 'Indian'.

5.3 A. K. RAMANUJAN: THE CRITIC

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929–1993), popularly known as A. K. Ramanujan was an Indian poet-critic who wrote in both English and Kannada. However, his academic research ranged across five languages: English, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit. Though, he wrote widely and in a number of genres, Ramanujan's poems are remembered as enigmatic works of startling originality, sophistication and moving artistry.

Ramanujan was born in Mysore on 16th March 1929. His father, Attipat Asuri Krishnaswami, an astronomer and professor of mathematics at Mysore University, was known for his interest in English, Kannada and Sanskrit languages. Ramanujan's brother, A. K. Srinivasan was also a writer and mathematician. He started his education at Marimallappa's High School and then at the Maharaja College of Mysore. Though he was interested in science his father thought that he did not have a 'mathematical mind', and instead persuaded him to change his major from science to English. Later, Ramanujan became a Fellow of Deccan College, Pune in 1958–59 and a Fulbright Scholar at Indiana University in 1959–62. Later, he got his education in English at the University of Mysore and received his PhD in Linguistics from Indiana University.

Ramanujan taught at various colleges in South India but mainly in Belgaum in 1950s. He taught English at The Maharaja Sayajirao

University in Baroda for about eight years. In 1962, he joined the University of Chicago as an assistant professor. He was affiliated with the university throughout his career, teaching in several departments. He also taught in prestigious universities like Harvard University, University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, University of California at Berkeley, and Carleton College. At the University of Chicago, Ramanujan was instrumental in shaping the South Asian Studies programme. He worked in the departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, Linguistics, and with the Committee on Social Thought.

In 1976, the Government of India awarded him the Padma Shri, and in 1983, he was given the MacArthur Prize Fellowship (Shulman, 1994). In 1983, he was appointed the William E. Colvin Professor in the Departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, of Linguistics, and in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and the same year, he received a MacArthur Fellowship. As an Indo-American writer, Ramanujan had the experience of the native as well as of the foreign milieu. His poems such as the "Conventions of Despair" reflected his views on the cultures and conventions of the East and the West.

A. K. Ramanujan died in Chicago, on 13th July 1993, at the age of sixty-four under anaesthesia during a surgery. His theoretical and aesthetic contributions span several disciplinary areas. In his work in folklore studies, Ramanujan highlights the inter-textuality of the Indian oral and written literary tradition. His essay "Where Mirrors Are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections" (1989), and his commentaries in *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967) and *Folktales from India*, *Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* (1991) are good examples of his work in Indian folklore studies.

Ramanujan has been awarded with the prestigious Padma Shri in 1976 and MacArthur Prize Fellowship in 1983. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award posthumously in 1999 for his collection of poems, *The Selected Poems*.

5.4 EXCERPTS FROM THE ESSAY

I

Stanislavsky had an exercise for his actors. He would give them an everyday sentence like, 'Bring me a cup of tea', and ask them to say it forty different ways, using it to beg, question, mock, wheedle, be imperious, etc. My question, 'Is there an Indian way of thinking?', is a good one for such an exercise. Depending on where the stress falls placed, it contains many questions—all of which are real questions—asked again and again when people talk about India. Here are a few possible versions:

Is there an Indian way of thinking ?

Is there ***an*** Indian way of thinking ?

Is there an ***Indian*** way of thinking ?

Is there an Indian way of ***thinking*** ?

The answers are just as various. Here are a few: There was an Indian way of thinking; there isn't any more. If you want to learn about the Indian way of thinking, do not ask your modern-day citified Indians; go to the pundits, the vaidyas, the old texts. On the contrary: India never changes; under the veneer of the modern, Indians still think like the vedas.

The second question might elicit answers like these: There is no single Indian way of thinking; there are Great and Little Traditions, ancient and modern, rural and urban, classical and folk. Each language, caste and region has its special world view. So, under the apparent diversity, there is really a unity of viewpoint, a single super system. Vedists see a vedic model in all Indian thought. Nehru made the phrase 'unity in diversity' an Indian slogan. The Sahitya Akademi's line has been, 'Indian literature is One, though written in many languages'

The third question might be answered: What we see in India is nothing special to India; it is nothing but pre-industrial, pre-printing press, face-to-face, agricultural, feudal, Marxists, Freudians, McLuhanites, all have their labels for the stage India is in, according to their schemes of social evolution; India is only an example. Others, of course, would argue the uniqueness of the Indian Way and how it turns all things, especially rivals

and enemies, into itself; look at what has happened to Indo-Europeans in India, they would say: their language gets shot with retroflexes, their syntax with nominal compounds, they lose their nerve the British are only the most recent example (according to Nirad Chaudhuri). Look what happens to Buddhism, Islam, the Parsis. There is an Indian way, and it imprints and patterns all things that enter the continent; it is inescapable, and it is Bigger Than All of Us.

The forth question may question whether Indians think at all: It is the West that is materialistic, rational; Indians have no philosophy, only religion, no positive sciences, not even a psychology; in India, matter is subordinated to spirit, rational thought to feeling, intuition. And even when people agree that this is the case, we can have arguments for and against it. Some lament, others celebrate India's un-thinking ways. One can go on forever.

We-I, certainly-have stood in one, or another of these stances at different times. We have not heard the end of these questions—or these answers.

II

The problem was posed for me personally at the age of 20 in the-image of my father. I had never taken a good look at him till then. Didn't Mark Twain say, 'At 17, I thought my father was ignorant; at 20, I wondered how he learned so much in three years'? Indeed, this essay was inspired by contemplation of him over the years, and is dedicated to him.

…He (Ramanujan's father) was a mathematician, an astronomer. But he was also a Sanskrit scholar, an expert astrologer. He had two kinds of exotic visitors: American and English mathematicians who called on him when they were on a visit to India, and local astrologers, orthodox pundits who wore splendid gold-embroidered shawls dowered by the Maharajah. I had just been converted by Russell to the 'scientific attitude'. I (and my generation) was troubled by his holding together in one brain both astronomy and astrology; I looked for consistency in him, a consistency he didn't seem to care about, or even think about. When I asked him what the discovery of Pluto and Neptune did to his archaic nine-planet astrology, he said, 'You

make the necessary corrections, that's all.' Or, in answer to how he could read the Gita religiously having bathed and painted on his forehead the red and white feet of Visnu, and later talk appreciatively about Bertrand Russell and even Ingersoll, he said, 'The Gita is part of one's hygiene. Besides, don't you know, the brain has two lobes?' ….

III

Both Englishmen and 'modern' Indians have been dismayed and angered by this kind of inconsistency. About twenty years ago, The Illustrated Weekly of India asked a number of modern Indian intellectuals to describe the Indian character-they did not seem to be daunted by the assignment and wrote terse, some quite sharp, columns. They all seemed to agree on one thing: the Indian trait of hypocrisy. Indians do not mean what they say, and say different things at different times. By 'Indians' they did not mean only servants. In Max Muller's lectures (1883) on India, the second chapter was called 'Truthful character of the Hindus', in answer to many complaints.

Recently I attended a conference on karma, a notion that is almost synonymous in some circles with whatever is Indian or Hindu. Brahminical texts had it, the Buddhists had it, the Jainas had it. But when I looked at hundreds of Kannada tales, I couldn't find a single tale that used karma as a motif or motive. Yet when their children made a mess, their repertoire of abuse included, 'You are my karma!' When Harper (1959) and others after him reported that many Indian villagers didn't know much about reincarnation, such a discrepancy was attributed to caste, education, etc. But the 2,000 Kannada tales, collected by me and others over the past twenty years, were told by Brahmins, Jainas (both of whom use karma in their explanations elsewhere quite readily), and by other communities as well. What is worse, Sheryl Daniel (1983) independently found that her Tamil village alternately used karma and talaividi ('headwriting') as explanations for the events around them. The two notions are inconsistent with each other. Karma implies the self's past determining the present, an iron chain of cause and consequence, an ethic of responsibility. Talaividi is one's fate inscribed arbitrarily at one's birth on one's forehead; the inscription has no relation to one's prior actions; usually in such explanations (and

folktales about them) past lives are not even part of the scheme (see also Wadley, in this volume).

Another related characteristic seems to preoccupy observers. We have already said that 'inconsistency' (like my father's, or the Brahminllaina use of karma) is not a matter of inadequate education or lack of logical rigor. They may be using a different 'logic' altogether. Some thinkers believe that such logic is an earlier-stage of 'cultural evolution' and that Indians have not developed a notion of 'data', of 'objective facts'. Edward Said's Orientalism cites many such European stereotypes about the 'Third World'. Here is Henry Kissinger's explanation:

Cultures which escaped the early impact of Newtonian thinking have retained the essentially pre-Newtonian view that the world is almost completely internal to the observer ... [Consequently] empirical reality has a much different significance for many of the new [old?] countries.

Such a view cannot be dismissed as peculiar to Kissinger's version of Newtonian optics. One meets with it again and again in travelogues, psychological writings, novels. Naipaul quotes Sudhir Kakar, a sophisticated psychoanalyst, deeply knowledgeable in matters Indian as well as Western, an insider/outsider:

Generally among Indians there seems to be a different relationship to outside reality, compared to the one met with in the West. In India it is closer to a certain stage in childhood when outer objects did not have a separate, independent existence but were intimately related to the self and its a:ffective states...The Indian 'ego' is underdeveloped; 'the world of magic and animistic thinking lie close to the surface; so the grasp of reality is 'relatively tenuous' (1977: 107).

In a memorable and oft-quoted section of Foster's A passage to India, Mrs. Moore muses vividly on the relations between inside and outside in India; the confounding of the two is not special to humans in India:

Going to hang up her cloak, she found the tip of the peg was occupied by a small wasp. She had known this wasp or his relatives by song; they were not as English wasps, but had long yellow legs which hung down behind when they flew. Perhaps he mistook the peg for a branch-no Indian

animal has any sense of an interior. Bats; rats, birds, insects will as soon nest inside the house as out, it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately produces houses, trees, houses, trees. There he clung, asleep, while jackals bayed their desires and mingled with the percussion of drums (1952: 35).

And sympaticos, like Zimmer, praise the Indians for not being hung up on an objectivity that distinguishes self from non-self, interior from exterior; what for Naipaul is a 'defect of vision', is for Zimmer vision itself:

India thinks of time and herself in biological terms, terms of the species, not of the ephemeral ego...We of the west regard world history as a biography of mankind, and in particular of Occidental Man...Our will is not to culminate in our human institutions the universal play of nature, but to evaluate, to set ourselves against the play, with ill egocentric tenacity (1946: 21).

…Is there any system to this particularism? Indian philosophers do not seem to make synoptic 'systems' like Hegel's or Kant's. Sheryl Daniel (1983) speaks of a 'tool-box' of ideas that Indians carry about, and from which they use one or another without much show of logic; anything goes into their 'bricolage' (Levi-Strauss 1962: 16-36). Max Weber, in various writings, distinguished 'traditional' and 'rational' religions…

IV

It is time to step back and try a formulation. The grammarian sees grammar in all things; I shall be true to my bias and borrow a notion from linguistics and try it for size…..

Or take Indian literary texts. No Indian text comes without a context, a frame, till the 19th century. Works are framed by phalasruti verses—these verses tell the reader, reciter or listener all the good that will result from his act of reading, reciting or listening. They relate the text, of whatever antiquity, to the present reader-that is, they contextualise it. An extreme case is that of the Nadisastra, which offers you your personal history. A friend of mine consulted the Experts about himself and his past and future. After enough rupees had been exchanged, the Experts brought out an old palm-leaf manuscript which, in archaic verses, mentioned his full name,

age, birthplace, etc., and said suddenly, 'At this point, the listener is crossing his legs-he should uncross them.'

Texts may be historically dateless, anonymous; but their contexts, uses, efficacies, are explicit. The Ramayana and Mahabharata open with episodes that tell you why and under what circumstances they were composed. Every such story is encased in a metastory. And within the text, one tale is the context for another within it; not only does the outer frame-story motivate the inner sub-story; the inner story illuminates the outer as well. It often acts as a microcosmic replica for the whole text. In the forest when the Pandava brothers are in exile, the eldest, Yudhisthira, is in the very slough of despondency: he has gambled away a kingdom, and is in exile. In the depth of his despair, a sage visits him and tells him the story of Nala. As the story unfolds, we see Nala too gamble away a kingdom, lose his wife, wander in the forest, and finally, win his wager, defeat his brother, reunite with his wife and return to his kingdom. Yudhisthira, following the full curve of Nala's adventures, sees that he is only halfway through his own, and sees his present in perspective, himself as a story yet to be finished. Very often the Nala story is excerpted and read by itself, but its poignancy is partly in its frame, its meaning for the hearer within the fiction and for the listener of the whole epic. The tale within is contextsensitive-getting its meaning from the tale without, and giving it further meanings.

Scholars have often discussed Indian texts (like the Mahabharata) as if they were loose-leaf files, rag-bag encyclopaedias. Taking the Indian word for text, grantha (derived from the knot that holds the palm leaves together), literally, scholars often posit only an accidental and physical unity. We need to attend to the context-sensitive designs that embed a seeming variety of modes (tale, discourse, poem, etc.) and materials. This manner of constructing the text is in consonance with other designs in the culture. Not unity (in the Aristotelian sense) but coherence, seems to be the end.

...Like the Nala story in the Mahabharata, what is contained mirrors the container; the microcosm is both within and like the macrocosm, and paradoxically also contains it. Indian conceptions tend to be such concentric nests…

…Where Kissinger and others are wrong is in not seeing that this view has nothing to do with Newtonian revolution, education, or (in)capacity for abstract thought. Cognitive anthropologists like Richard Shweder (1972) have studied descriptive phrases used by highly intelligent Oriya and American adults and shown that they describe persons very differently: Americans characterised them with genetic words like 'good', 'nice', Oriyas with concrete contextual descriptions like 'he brings sweets'. The psychoanalyst Alan Roland (1979) suggests that Indians carry their family context wherever they go, feel continuous with their family. He posits a familial self, a 'self-we regard', sees no phase 'of separation/individuation from the parental family as in modern America; hence there seems to be no clear-cut adolescent phase through which one rebels, and thereby separates and individuates oneself in opposition to one's family (the exceptions are in 'modern' urban-centred families). Roland remarks that Indians develop a 'radar' conscience that orients them to others, makes them say things that are appropriate to person and context. (No wonder Max Muller had to insist that Indians were truthful!) Roland also found that when directions to places are given, Indians always make reference to other places, landmarks.

Such a pervasive emphasis on context is, I think, related to the Hindu concern with jati-the logic of classes, of genera and species, of which human jatis are only an instance. Various taxonomies of season, landscape, times, *gunas* or qualities (and their material bases), tastes, characters, emotions, essences (rasa), etc., are basic to the thought-work of Hindu medicine and poetry, cooking and religion, erotics and magic. Each jati or class defines a context, a structure of relevance, a rule of permissible combinations, a frame of reference, a meta-communication of what is and can be done.

It is not surprising that systems of Indian philosophy, Hindu, Buddhist, or Jaina, confine themselves to the consideration of class-essences (jati) called genera and species in Western philosophy. They never raise the question of whether there are universals of other types, namely identical qualities and relations. The assumption seems to be that qualities and relations are particulars, though they may be instances of universals (Dravid

1972: 347).

The most important and accessible model of a context-sensitive system with intersecting taxonomies is, of course, the grammar of a language. And grammar is the central model for thinking in many Hindu texts. As Frits Staal has said, what Euclid is to European thought, the grammarian Panini is to the Indian. Even the Kamasutra is literally a grammar of love-which declines and conjugates men and women as one would nouns and verbs in different genders, voices, moods and aspects. Genders are genres. Different body-types and character-types obey different rules, respond to different scents and beckonings.

V

All societies have context-sensitive behaviour and rules-but the dominant ideal may not be the 'context-sensitive' but the 'context-free'. Egalitarian democratic ideals, Protestant Christianity, espouse both the universal and the unique, insist that any member is equal to and like any other in the group. Whatever his context-birth, class, gender, age, place, rank, etc.-a man is a man for all that. Technology with its modules and interchangeable parts, and the post-Renaissance sciences with their quest for universal laws (and 'facts') across contexts intensify the bias towards the context-free. Yet societies have underbellies. In predominantly 'contextfree' societies, the counter-movements tend to be towards the context sensitive: situation ethics, Wittgensteinian notions of meaning and colour (against class-logic), the various relativisms including our own search for 'native categories' in anthropology, holistic movements in medicine (naturopaths who prescribe individually tailored regimens) are good examples. In 'traditional' cultures like India, where context-sensitivity rules and binds, the dream is to be free of context. So rasa in aesthetics, moksa in the 'aims of life', sannyasa in the life stages, sphota in semantics, and bhakti in religion define themselves against a background of inexorable contextuality.

Where kama, artha and dharma are all relational in their values, tied to place, time, personal character and social role, moksa is the release from all relations. If brahmacarya (celibate studentship) is preparation for a

fully relational life, grhasthacrama (householder stage) is a full realisation of it. Manu prefers the latter over all other states. Vanaprastha (the retiring forest-dweller stage) loosens the bonds, and sannyasa (renunciation) cremates all one's past and present relations. In the realm of feeling, bhavas are private, contingent, context-roused sentiments, vibhiivas are determinant causes, anubhavas the consequent expressions. But rasa is generalised, it is an essence. In the field of meaning, the temporal sequence of letters and phonemes, the syntactic chain of words, yields finally a sphota, an explosion, a meaning which is beyond sequence and time.

In each of these the pattern is the same: a necessary sequence in time with strict rules of phase and context ending in a free state.

The last of the great Hindu anti-contextual notions, bhakti, is different from the above; it denies the very need for context. Bhakti defies all contextual structures: every pigeonhole of caste, ritual, gender, appropriate clothing and custom, stage of life, the whole system of homo hierarchicus ('everything in its place') is the target of its irony….

VI

In conclusion, I would like to make a couple of observations about 'modernisation'. One might see 'modernisation' in India as a movement from the context-sensitive to the context-free in all realms: an erosion of contexts, at least in principle. Gandhi's watch (with its uniform autonomous time, governing his punctuality) replaced the almanac. Yet Gandhi quoted Emerson, that consistency was the hobgoblin of foolish minds. Print replaced palm-leaf manuscripts, making possible an open and egalitarian access to knowledge irrespective of caste. The Indian Constitution made the contexts of birth, region, sex and creed irrelevant, overthrowing Manu, though the battle is joined again and again. The new preferred names give no clue to birth-place, father's name, caste, sub-caste and sect, as all the traditional names did…

In music, the ragas can now be heard at all hours and seasons. Once the Venkatesasuprabhatam, the wake-up chant for the Lord of Tirupati, could be heard only in Tirupati at a certain hour in the morning. Since M. S. Subbulakshmi in her devotion cut a record of the chants, it wakes up not

only the Lord, but anyone who tunes in to All India Radio in faraway places.

Cultural borrowings from India to the West, or vice versa, also show interesting accommodations to the prevailing system. The highly contextualised Hindu systems are generalised into 'a Hindu view of life' by apologues like Radhakrishnan for the benefit of both the Western and modern Indian readers. The individual esoteric skills of meditation are freed from their contexts into a streamlined widely accessible technique. And when T.S. Eliot borrows the DA DA DA passage (quoted earlier) to end 'The wasteland' (1930), it becomes highly individual, introspective, as well as universal: Then spoke the thunder DA datta: what have we given?...

In reverse, Indian borrowings of Western cultural items have been converted and realigned to fit pre-existing context-sensitive needs. English is borrowed into (or imposed on) Indian contexts, it fits into the Sanskrit slot; it acquires many of the characteristics of Sanskrit, the older native Father-tongue, its pan-Indian elite character-as a medium of laws, science and administration, and its formulaic patterns; it becomes part of Indian multiple diglossia (a characteristic of context-sensitive societies). When Indians learn, quite expertly, modern science, business, or technology, they 'compartmentalize' these interests (Singer 1972: 320ff.); the new ways of thought and behaviour do not replace, but live along with older 'religious' ways. Computers and typewriters receive ayudhapuja (worship of weapons) as weapons of war did once. The 'modern', the context-free, becomes one more context, though it is not easy to contain…..

My purpose here is not to evaluate but to grope toward a description of the two kinds of emphases. Yet in each of these kinds of cultures, despite all the complexity and oscillation, there is a definite bias. The Buddha (who said 'When we see a man shot with a poisoned arrow, we cannot afford to ask what caste he or his enemy is') also told the following parable of the Raft: Once a man was drowning in a sudden flood. Just as he was about to drown, he found a raft. He clung to it, and it carried him safely to dry land. And, he was so grateful to the raft that he carried it on his back for the rest of his life. Such was the Buddha's ironic comment on context-free systems.

5.5 READING THE ESSAY

Ramanujan in **Part I** of the essay asks four very pertinent questions and then tries to answer them by emphasising specific aspects of the question.

First he asks ***Is*** there an Indian way of thinking? The answer is: there *was* an Indian way of thinking, which can be traced in the upper-caste; Brahmanical section of the society through a perusal of the Vedas and other religious texts; but it does not exist now. However, since our thinking is still shaped by the religious texts like the Vedas, it is still pertinent to state that there is an Indian way of thinking that exists. The second question Ramanujan asks is: Is there ***an*** Indian way of thinking? In reply to this, he mentions that there has always been the existence of Great and Little Traditions. Therefore, as we do celebrate the multiplicities and diversities in India, no single Indian way of thinking exists or can exist. The third question is: Is there an ***Indian*** way of thinking? Ramanujan's reply is that India is nothing but a product of the influences of alien cultures, languages, religions and social evolutions. Therefore, some might tend to state that there is nothing unique about India. However, India has also shown her capability to adapt to the changes and accommodate these external influences into its culture. The last question Ramanujan asks is: Is there an Indian way of ***thinking***? He states that it is the West that is capable of thought. The West is projected as materialistic and rational. In India, logic is rationalised with religion and superstitions. In India, actions are projected, not the thoughts behind those actions. Thus, in the last part of Part I of the essay, Ramanujan states how India is perceived differently at different stages by different people and from different perspectives.

In **Part II** of the essay, Ramanujan refers to the inconsistency between tradition and modernity. In order to discuss that he refers to his experience of his own father to show how India can be ancient yet modern at the same time. Ramanujan's father was a South Indian Brahman, but at the same time, he showed his scientific mindset as can be seen in terms of the following: While wearing dhotis in traditional Brahmanic style, he also

wore English jackets over his dhotis; he wore tartan-patterned socks and leather shoes when he went to the university but removed them before entering the inner quarters of the house; he was together a mathematician, an astronomer, a Sanskrit scholar and an expert astrologer; American and English mathematicians as well as the local pundits and astrologers used to visit him; while he read the *Bhagvad Gita* religiously every morning after taking a bath, he would talk about Russell and Ingersoll also with the same amount of passion. Ramanujan could not actually figure out such an 'inconsistency' in his father, because for him, 'consistency' refers to strict adhearence to any one– either religion or science.

In **Part III**, Ramanujan explores the concept of 'inconsistency' in a wider perspective. He discusses the concept of 'karma'—implying the self's past as determining the present and future, and Talaividi or 'head writing'– focusing on destiny. The Western world often seek to construct the Orient (India) based on the notion of 'objective facts.' Ramanujan refers to Sudhir Kakar, who stated that in the oriental world, there is no clear difference between self and non-self that further problematises the causes of inconsistency. In India, there is no concept of the universal. The Indian way of thinking lacks universality; because it is a traditional society constituting of inconsistency and hypocrisy and because in India there are subjective positions. Therefore, in India, the understanding of reality is always 'context-sensitive' and not 'context-free'.

In **Part IV**, Ramanujan examines how context-sensitivity is an important part of Indian thought and culture. In India, all additions are often the subtraction from a universal law. Stories get their context with reference to the frame in which they have been placed. Indian texts are historically dateless, but their contexts, uses and efficacies are explicit. Even when we look at the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, we find that there are several episodes—each story is within another story, these producing a meta-story. In addition, within the text, one story is the context for another within it. Thus, the outer-frame story as well as the inner sub-story provides relevant contexts for the other's existence. Aristotle's theory of unity of time, place and action therefore cannot be applied to the Indian narratives.

Besides the way we divide time in India is also very different from the way it is done in the West. The Indians have times that are auspicious, inauspicious (rahu kala), and the past and present seem to merge together. Even our houses have moods (vaastu shastra). The Indians are prone to blame their wrong doings on fate, vaastu and it is not possible for them to remove this context-sensitivity. With modernity, they are widening their context in the way they want to rather than doing away with all the traditional practises. It is because of this that the original context seems to be lost. Ramanujan says that all societies have 'context-sensitive' behaviour and rules but the dominant idea is always 'context-free'.

In **Part V**, Ramanujan observes that societies that are 'context-free' have movements, which are context-specific in nature whereas in societies like India, which are context-sensitive, there is a dream to be free of context. This gives rise to the concept of 'rasa' in aesthetics, 'moksha' in the aims of life and 'sanyasa' in the end of life-stages.

In the last part of the essay—**Part VI**, Ramanujan states how the Indians have gradually moved towards context-free situations in India. He says that with modernity and modernisation, there has been a movement from context-sensitive to context-free at least in principle. Today, the Indian people can listen to any raga at any time rather than strictly sticking to the time prescribed. But the new thoughts and behaviours borrowed from the West has not necessarily replaced the old religious ideas. They get incorporated with the existing tradition. For example, In 'Ayudhapuja', even computers and typewriters are worshiped instead of weapons. Therefore, no matter how hard the Indians try to move to a context-free society, the result is that the context-free nature ends up becoming yet another context i.e. the 'modern' context.



5.6 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of this unit, you have learnt how A. K. Ramanujan in his essay very beautifully answers to the question "Is There an Indian

Way of Thinking? with the help of four additional questions, which he answers one by one with various examples drawn even from his own life. With examples drawn from different contexts Ramanujan asserts that there ***Is*** an Indian way of thinking which can be traced in the perusal of the Vedas and other religious texts; there is ***an*** Indian way of thinking as Indians do celebrate the differences and diversities in India, for which no single Indian way of thinking exists or can exist, there an ***Indian*** way of thinking because India has also shown her capability to adapt to the changes brought by external influences into its culture; and lastly, there is an Indian way of ***thinking*** because unlike in the West, in India, logic is rationalised with religion and superstitions. Thus, the main thrust of the essay has been to explore what the notion of 'Indianness' in Indian literature indicates and how 'context-sensitivity' still remains an important issue in Indian Literature even in the 'modern times. You will need to know that such a background has also affected the birth and development of Indian English literature since the beginning



5.7 FURTHER READING

1) A. K. Ramanujan. "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay." Available at: http://cis.sagepub.com

Website and Electronic Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._K._Ramanujan

http://www.indiaonline.in/about/personalities/writersandpoets/a-k-ramanujan



5.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the important issues raised by Ramanujan in the essay "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?"

Q 2: In what way, do you think, does Ramanujan explain the cultural

ideologies and behavioural manifestations of the Indians in terms of an 'Indian' psychology he calls "context-sensitive" thinking.

Q 3: What are the four questions that Ramanujan poses to answer if there is an Indian way of thinking?

Q 4: "The Ramayana and Mahabharata open with episodes that tell you why and under what circumstances they were composed. Every such story is encased in a metastory." How does this statement help to understand the storytelling processes in Indian Writing in general.

Q 5: In what way, do you think, Ramanujan's essay " Is There an Indian Way of Thinking' informs our reading of Indian Literature. Illustrate with a few examples.

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UNIT 6: JAYANATA MAHAPATRA: "THE ABANDONED BRITISH CEMETERY AT BALASORE"

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Jayanta Mahapatra: The Poet

6.4 The Poems: "Hunger" & "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore"

6.4.1 The Texts of the Poems

6.4.2 Reading the Poems

6.4.3 Major Themes

6.4.4 Mahapatra's Poetic Style

6.5 Critical Reception of Mahapatra

6.6 Let Us Sum Up

6.7 Further Reading

6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.9 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Mahapatra—a leading contemporary Indian poet
- connect the experiences of the poet to the two poems prescribed
- explain the themes of the poems and his use of language, images etc.
- examine for yourself what makes his poetry unique and memorable
- assess Mahapatra as one of the pillars of Indian Writing in English

6.2 INTRODUCTION

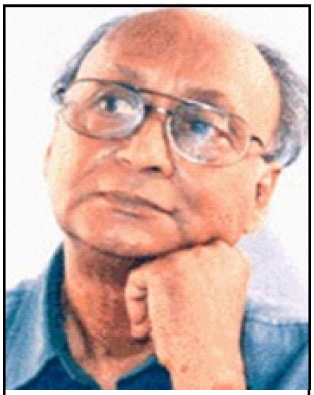
This is the first unit of Block 2 of the course on Indian English Literature. This unit deals with two poems written by Jayanta Mahapatra,

one of the most significant Indian poets who writes in both Oriya and English. Although he started writing poetry quite late (by some standards) at the age of thirty-eight, his writing was accorded recognition immediately upon publication and he has gone on to become one of the icons in this field. Mahapatra weaves in myth, history, the landscape and the people around him into his work, creating a different world from what surrounds us in contemporary India. The two poems "Hunger" & "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore" are two important poems of Mahapatra as they express the major concerns of the poet. This unit is designed to help you to have some ideas of the poet's experiences that would add to your understanding of the richness of the poet's works.

6.3 JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: THE POET

As you know, the experiences of an individual greatly influence how they think and what they write as well as how they express what is in their minds. It would therefore be fruitful to take a brief look at Mahapatra's life to see how his experiences have shaped his creative imagination.

His Life:


Source: https://www.google.co.in

Mahapatra was born in Cuttack and has lived in Orissa all his life, teaching physics in various government colleges all over the state. Orissa is part of Mahapatra's being so much so that it would be difficult to say where he begins and Orissa ends. To Orissa, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which lies my beginning and my end..." declared the poet in his Award-receiving speech at the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. Mahapatra did not have a very happy childhood as he came from a family that was not well to do. He mentions in his *Autobiography*, "There is invariably a lot of pain in childhood. I remember mine and all of it seems so long ago; and yet the pain, or whatever I choose to call it today, paces quietly behind the breastbone." He also speaks about his feelings of

inferiority at school as he watched rich students coming in carriages to school and enjoying other luxuries, which he was deprived of.

He did well in studies and was accorded public praise by the Headmaster, which naturally, filled him with great happiness. This evoked feelings of envy among the other, elite students who gave vent to their frustration and jealousy by subjecting him to brutal bullying and this experience brought home sharply to him, the transience of joy. He had an uneasy relationship with his mother who failed to understand his sensitive spirit. Although his father remained out of the home and city for long periods on tours of duty, Mahapatra shared a close bond with him and talks movingly of the later years when he helplessly watched his father die slowly. He was a lonely child and had no one to talk to or share his thoughts and feelings. To escape the life-sapping gloom in the house, he turned to books for solace and these probably helped shape his creative and literary imagination that was to flower in his poetry and other writing in later years.

In an otherwise unexciting childhood, he hungered to both love and be loved. Growing up, he was acutely aware of the poverty, disease and misery that he could see all around him. The fact that he belonged to two worlds–Christian at home and the Hindu world outside–also created certain conflicts that he had to resolve according to the situation. As he says in his Autobiography: "…as children, we grew up between two worlds. The first was the home where we were subjected to a rigid Christian upbringing, with rules my mother sternly imposed; the other was the vast and dominant Hindu amphitheatre outside, with the preponderance of rites and festivals, which represented the way of life of our own people. Two worlds then; and I, thinking I was at the centre of it all; trying to communicate with both, and probably becoming myself incommunicable as a result through the years."

Mahapatra also speaks of experiencing a bias against him when he was passed over and another student from a higher caste awarded the first position in the postgraduate examinations. Having tried his hand at writing fiction first and being rejected, Mahapatra turned to poetry and achieved remarkable success. Not only is he a distinctive poet in his own right but he is also credited with being one of the trio of poets who laid the foundations

of Indian English Poetry.

Jayanta Mahapatra has won a host of awards, chief among them being the Padma Shri, Sahitya Academy Award, Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award, Gangadhar National Award for Poetry, Ramakrishna Jaidayal Harmony Award, Allen Tate Award and the SAARC literary Award. He has been an invited poet at prestigious events in India and abroad.

His Works:

Mahapatra carved a special niche for himself in Indian English Writing and was not a part of what is known as the Bombay school of poets. His quiet, tranquil poetic voice is certainly different from those of his contemporaries and it has earned him a special place in the field of English poetry. There is a richness and sophistication in his use of the language that beautifully complements the delicacy of vocabulary, resulting in poetic music that seems to flow without hindrance through his verse forms. He reminds us of T. S. Eliot's famous phrase "objective correlative" in the manner in which he offers concrete images to afford his readers a feel of his own experiences. As such, he focuses more on the palpable than on the abstract.

Mahapatra has published *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*, *Svayamvara and Other Poems*, *A Father's Hours*, *A Rain of Rites*, *Waiting*, *The False Start*, *Relationship*, *Life Signs*, *Dispossessed Nests*, *Burden of Waves and Fruit*, *Temple*, *A Whiteness of Bone*, *Shadow Space*, *Bare Face*, *Random Descent*, *The Lie of Dawns: Poems 1974-2008The Green Gardener* (short stories), *Door of Paper: Essay and Memoirs* and has been featured in numerous other collections and anthologies.

Mahapatra seems to opine that poetry has always been responsible to life. By this, one means that a poet is first of all responsible to his or her own conscience otherwise; he or she cannot be called a poet. This is how Mahapatra interprets his work. Mahapatra, in almost all his poetic works, is mostly concerned with issues that he feels closest to his heart. Being a part of the deprived sections of Orissa, Mahapatra has deeply felt about poverty, hunger, starvation and sexual exploitation of women. These aspects of his life are best expressed in poems like 'Hunger' and "The Whorehouse in Calcutta" and so on.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did Mahapatra's childhood contribute to the shaping of his poetry?

Q 2: How did the experiences of life influence Mahapatra's poetic writings?

6.4 THE POEMS: "HUNGER" & "THE ABANDONED BRITISH CEMETERY AT BALASORE"

The following sections will help you to read about the different aspects of the poems Hunger" & "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore"

6.4.1 The Texts of the Poems

"Hunger"

It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back.
The fisherman said: Will you have her, carelessly,
trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words
sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself.
I saw his white bone thrash his eyes.
I followed him across the sprawling sands,
my mind thumping in the flesh's sling.
Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in.
Silence gripped my sleeves; his body clawed at the froth
his old nets had only dragged up from the seas.
In the flickering dark his lean-to opened like a wound.
The wind was I, and the days and nights before.
Palm fronds scratched my skin. Inside the shack
an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to those walls.
Over and over the sticky soot crossed the space of my mind.
I heard him say: My daughter, she's just turned fifteen...
Feel her. I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.
The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wile.

Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.
She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.

“The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore”

This is history.
I would not disturb it: the ruins of stone and marble,
the crumbling wall of brick, the coma of alienated decay.
How exactly should the archaic dead make me behave?
A hundred and fifty years ago
I might have lived. Now nothing offends my ways.
A quietness of bramble and grass holds me to a weed.
Will it matter if I know who the victims were, who survived?
And yet, awed by the forgotten dead,
I walk around them: Thirty-nine graves, their legends
floating in a twilight of baleful littoral,
the flaking history my intrusion does not animate.
Awkward in the silence, a scrawny lizard
watches the drama with its shrewd, hooded gaze.
And a scorpion, its sting drooping,
two eerie arms spread upon the marble, over an alien name.
In the circle the epitaphs run: Florence R——, darling wife
of Captain R—— R——, aged nineteen, of cholera…
Helen, beloved daughter of Mr. & Mrs.——, of cholera.
aged seventeen, in the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred…
Of what concern to me is a vanished Empire?
Or the conquest of my ancestors’ timeless ennui?
It is the dying young who have the power to show
what the heart will hide, the grass shows no more.
Who watches now in the dark near the dead wall?
It is the cholera still, death’s sickly trickle,
that plagues the sleepy shacks beyond this hump of earth,
Moving easily, swiftly, with quick power

through both past and present, the increasing young,
into the final bone, wearying all truth with ruin.
This is the iron
rusting in the vanquished country, the blood's unease,
the useless rain upon my unfamiliar window;
the tired triumphant smile left behind by the dead
on a discarded anchor half-sunk in mud beside the graves:
out there on the earth's unwavering gravity
where it waits like a deity perhaps
for the elaborate ceremonial of a coming generation
to keep history awake, stifle the survivor's issuing cry.

6.4.2 Reading the Poems

"Hunger"

"Hunger" is one of the most remarkable poems of Mahapatra. The protagonist of the poem is struggling against the desires of the flesh, just as the fisherman father sells the flesh of his daughter to fulfil the cravings of his own flesh and thereby leaving the young daughter exposed and helpless before the lusty males.

As the title suggests, it is quite obvious that the poem is talking about two kinds of hunger. The first one has to do with the physical need for food, which in turn sometimes leads people into satisfying the sexual hunger of others. In other words, poverty and hunger often force people to cater to the sexual appetites of others for money. In this poem, on the one hand is the poor fisherman who offers his daughter casually. On the other is the narrator, driven by a different hunger who follows the fisherman to his squalid shack. This is essentially the core of the poem. Everything else adds to the mood, the setting and the emotional tone.

There are two kinds of images that portray the two different kinds of hunger but they are all interwoven together so that there is a composite picture of deprivation, desperation and exploitation. It may be questioned whether it really construes exploitation since

the fisherman offers his daughter to the narrator of his own accord. However, it is the circumstances of his extreme need that prompt him to do this and the narrator is intensely aware of this.

You must have made a long list as this poem makes abundant use of this device. So, let us see if they can be categorised or grouped together in a certain way. The images that suggest wounds, suffering, need and deprivation are: 'flesh heavy'; 'white bone thrash his eyes'; 'thumping in the flesh's sling'; 'burning'; 'body clawed at the froth'; lean-to opened like a wound'; 'wormy legs'.

There is also the image of an oil lamp which casts shadows of the agonising hours spent within the walls of that pitiable abode: 'an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to those walls'. The line 'Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber' also speaks of age and time and suggests what effect years of poverty and deprivation have had on the body of a young girl who should have been blooming with life and vitality.

Another very powerful image is that of the soot that 'crossed the space' of the narrator's mind. Black is very commonly used to suggest evil and sin and in this poem, it is not only a condemnation of a desperate father who offers his daughter to a tourist for money, it is even more, a black mark against the kind of society that allows such a tragic thing to happen and people who are only too ready to take advantage of the situation. Hence, although the soot from the oil lamp is physically present on the walls of the fisherman's shack, by saying that it 'crossed the space of my mind' the poet makes it metaphorically clear that the blackness is actually covering the mind of the narrator. When we connect it with the earlier line 'as though his words/ sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself', there is the irony that in such a desperate situation, there is no room for sanctity and human values. There is also a questioning of the state of such a society in which basic values of decency and humanity – 'sanctity' – seem to be missing.

When the tourist sees the fisherman 'trailing his nets', there

is the deeper irony that strikes us as we realise that he was trailing his nets not only for fish but for customers to take home to his shack for their sexual gratification.

Because of the first person narration, as the reader progresses on the path set out by the poem, there is a sense of involvement. Hence, both the desperation and the shame are felt equally by the reader who is not allowed to remain an outsider to the experience by the poet. In a sense, both the narrator – a tourist – and the reader are outsiders but become insiders through their participation as voyeurs.

You must have noticed that the fisherman talks about his daughter 'carelessly' as though she is a commodity, and not a living being, and certainly not one who is so closely related to him. The role of father-protector has been distorted beyond recognition. Here the father is offering up his daughter to a stranger for material gain. You can also see how the girl does not have a voice or agency. She has no say in what is happening and no control even over her own body. What she wants is not considered and there is no question of asking for her consent. His 'carelessness' of speech as he invites the tourist to his shack is probably to cover up the enormity of his betrayal of the father's role, as though by assuming such a tone, he can free himself from the guilt.

The girl is described as 'long and lean', having 'wormy legs' which serve to accentuate the degree of deprivation that she has undergone. Although 'she's just turned fifteen' when a young girl is beautiful and poised on the verge of womanhood, the narrator feels her years to be 'cold as rubber' due to the hardships she has had to undergo and the numerous customers she has probably already entertained to escape the pangs of poverty.

The last two lines collapse both the hungers together in a fusing of the literal with the metaphysical. Can you see how the two types of hunger are merged so effortlessly but to such effect by the poet? As the young girl prepares to receive the narrator, he

understands for the first time perhaps, what real hunger and poverty means and to what desperate measures it can drive people.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: In what way does the poet make the reader a part of the experience described in the poem?

"The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore"

Let us now go on to the next poem. The poem often described as the author's reflection on entering a cemetery in which a number of British people lay buried about hundred and fifty years back. A number of British died due to a sudden outbreak of cholera in Balasore. However, the cemetery is now deserted and abandoned. Read through the poem once or twice before we start discussing the various elements that go into the poem:

The poet speaks of the effect on him of a visit he makes to an old British cemetery. As he looks at the crumbling gravestones with their faded inscriptions of the young English men and women who came here all the way only to die prematurely in a foreign land and now lie buried in forgotten, untended graveyards, he questions the very meaning of history and is moved to sorrow over the tragedy of young people cut down by disease.

The most obvious thing that strikes us on a reading of the poem is that the narrator, on looking at the tombstones in the dilapidated cemetery, has moved beyond the bitter thoughts of the conflict between the Indians and the British during the colonial years. In a very humanistic gesture, the narrator focuses on the heart-breaking sadness of the death of the young in their prime of youth. The speaker muses on the futility of lingering on the bitterness of colonial conquest: 'Of what concern to me is a vanished Empire?' He does not feel sad about the death of those who lie here for all this happened 'a hundred and fifty years ago' and those who lie here are the 'archaic dead'. The use of the word 'archaic' in

conjunction with 'dead' could suggest that it was all so distant in time as to be almost irrelevant: 'Will it matter if I know who the victims were, who survived'? However, he goes on to add that he is 'awed by the forgotten dead' and feels that 'It is the dying young who have the power to show/What the heart will hide, the grass shows no more.'

The emptiness, abandonment and silence is indirectly emphasised by the poet's mention of a lizard, which 'watches the drama'. It is so used to the haunting, brooding inactivity of that place that just the arrival of a single visitor quietly moving around the cemetery reading the inscriptions on the tombstones is like a 'drama'.

Disease is like an advancing army that is unvanquished which snatches away the young and makes them part of the ever-expanding boundaries of history. It is not just the sight of these tombstones that make the poet melancholy. It is the thought that the inexorable march of disease has still not halted and that countless lives still continue to be lost, which adds to the poet's anguish:'It is the cholera still, death's sickly trickle/that plagues the sleepy shacks beyond this hump of earth'

The phrase 'coma of alienated decay' is a graphic image of death and ruin while 'flaking history' beautifully evokes a picture of the weather-beaten, crumbling tombstones on the verge of collapse.

The deadly disease, cholera which brought the lives of these men and women to a tragic and untimely close, is compared to a silent watcher on the fringes of life, ominously lying in wait for more lives, which could have been lived out fruitfully. Although the British have left Indian shores, the country is still 'vanquished' by the army of disease as the dead smile triumphantly in the knowledge that future generations are not going to be spared the onslaught of the disease that cut their own lives short so abruptly and mercilessly. The 'earth's unwavering gravity' suggests not just the physical force that attracts everything towards itself but also the metaphysical one of the grave which draws human beings to itself relentlessly.

The references to the lizard with its hooded gaze and the scorpion only serve to accentuate the sinister, uncongenial atmosphere of the place and its morbid association with disease, death and decay. Other images that add to the mood are: quietness; weed; twilight; awkward; silence; eerie; dark; dead wall; sickly; plagues; sleepy; bone; wearying; ruin; rusting; blood's unease; tired; discarded; half-sunk; stifle.

The poem has been written in short, four-line, unrhymed stanzas and is a good example of Mahapatra's poetic craft through which he uses images from reality to express his tragic vision.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How do the images in the poem build up its mood?

6.4.3 Major Themes

The poetry of Mahapatra describes and evokes what is closest to him–the magnificent temples, the sea-washed beaches and the crowded streets of his native state of Orissa. The street cobbler, hungry street children, a woman in pain people his poems—all that make up the warp and weft of the everyday life of real people caught up in the vortex of human emotions. For him, the air is rent with the pealing of temple bells and the tumult of the sea waves is in counterpoint to the crackling of the pyres at the funeral ground. It is through the local that he reaches the universal.

Like the English Romantics, Mahapatra anchors his poetry in the sights, sounds and experiences of ordinary life and the ordinary man. We may miss observing these in the daily metronome of our existence but they come to us with a resonant force when we encounter them in Mahapatra's poetry. Nor are the people and their universally valid emotions only what his poetry is all about. It is an undeniable fact that the centuries-old tradition that brought the

splendid temples into being and which is such an integral part of the life of the people of Orissa still, is a tangible presence in itself in his poems. There can be seen even on a cursory reading of his poetry, Mahapatra's complete immersion in and oneness with the culture and tradition of Orissa. A characteristic trait of his poetry is the depiction of India and Hindu religion, with its various rituals and myths.

Mahapatra is the poet of the small town and village, making his choices clear–the solace of the forest and the tang of the seashore preferred to the mechanic and automated noises of the big cities. The small town–the reviled and despised entity of city dwellers with their own notions of the good life, status and power–is Mahapatra's choice of landscape. It is away from the noise and with the continuity of an ancestral tradition that washes over his blood and beats against his bones that he would like to sequester himself. He says in *Living in Orissa*:

"To live here
Antlered in sickness and disease,
In the past of uncomprehended totems,
And the spilt blood of ancestors
One would wear like an amulet."

For him, the ancient gods are still a living presence whose spirits can be encountered drifting through the bustling, twisting, narrow bazaars. The past too is a persisting continuity as manifested in the droughts and violence that stalks the landscape now as it has done for ages.

In his early poems can be seen the strands of love and the preoccupation with the self that love engenders. While they do not preclude the concept of physical passion–an essential component of all that goes into this most essential of human emotions–the poems that deal with love are imbued with the whole range of feelings that the word 'love' evokes. There is melancholy and anxiety; there are

the moments of absence, the anguish and the darkness of presentiment. In his later poems however, one sees the poet making forays into a more social and sociable kind of consciousness in which are evoked the nuances of life in a worldly, public sphere. Life is not made up of only love and its delights and travails even though it may appear so to the lover in the first flush of passion. There are other elements that make up the strands of human existence (one remembers the Urdu poet Ghalib in this context) and these can be seen in Mahapatra's later poetry. In these poems, it is as though he has chosen to emerge from the cocoon or prison of passion and involve himself in the society of other human beings.

However, pain remains an integral theme in his poems. There is frequently the feeling when one reads his poetry, that it has a strong autobiographical element in it and that the pain he expresses is, in certain ways, an attempt to banish the agonizing ghosts of painful childhood memories. The past–that is such a tangible presence in his poetry–is the source of much of his pain whether it is entirely personal or impersonal in which gods, priests, and history play a major role.

Uncertainty is another powerful note that sounds through his poetry. His approach to poetry is not that of an emotional aesthete such as Keats or Shelley, but that of a scientist, with the scientist's analytical, objective eye, marking him out as–if one may dare to label someone who cannot really shackled by labels–as a poet modernist. In his poetry can be found the conflicts that besiege humanity and which lead to a state of incertitude. There is an expression of the struggles of human beings torn between painful memories and wistful desire.

However, it cannot be said that Mahapatra is a pessimist. In *The False Start*, for instance, he speaks of life vis-à-vis the crumbling walls of ancient relics and the positive, life-affirming essence of poetry when confronted with the negative forces of devastation, disintegration and dissolution.

In the seamless unification of the past and present towards which he so intensely strives, is the belief that only this merging will give meaning to the present and that it will sow the seeds of new myths, embodied in the boy-hero of the Konarak temples. In addition, in a thought that is strongly reminiscent of Coleridge and Shelley, Mahapatra visualises these new myths as springing out of the imagination and creativity of the poet-figure.

The poet is envisaged as a heroic figure who, larger than life, strides across the landscape of the mind, coming to grips with pain and betrayal. Forces of moral order and creativity are drawn together and then unleashed like the embers of words of prophecy, which Shelley implores the West Wind to scatter among mankind (*Ode to the West Wind*). In addition, like Shelley, he believes that the poet has the power to stimulate and thus liberate the nation from the shackles of inertia and indifference. He does not assert like Milton that a poet explains the ways of God to man or even that he should justify one's humanity to a sceptical world. Nor does he take it upon himself to reveal or remind the nation of a distant glorious past that would bathe the pathetic present in its glow. What he would like the poet to do is to relate the present to the past. The present is described as drab, degenerate and decayed:

"The present opens its toothless mouth wide,
The earth seems loose…" (*Tonight I hear the Water Flowing*)

People of the nation, in the abstract, like the poet's own friends and the women, have betrayed the vision and the nation:

"Those who've been my friends throughout the years
Have known only how to keep walking toward themselves…" (*Relationship* poem no. 9)

And, in exploring the themes of religion, culture and time, he embarks on a tireless quest:

Under the rain, beyond the walls,
"I search for the lost inhabitants of my country.

Gleaming skulls of people I do not know,
Those who had died a violent death
at the hands of a God with noiseless thunderstorms.
It has become a ritual, this search
for history…" (*The Quest*)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Do we encounter pain in Mahapatra's poetry or is it full of hope and joy?

Q 6: What role does Mahapatra envisage for the poet?

6.4.4 Mahapatra's Poetic Style

In section 1.4.2, I have tried to give you some ideas regarding Mahapatra's poetic style through his use of metaphors and symbols. Like Ezra Pound who said that he had no speech but metaphor, Mahapatra too uses them but not for colour or as a gesture to jolt the reader into paying attention. They are, rather, his ways of interpreting his world. It is in these metaphors that he finds the objective correlative to what he wishes to convey, his attempt to find, in Wallace Stevens' phrase, 'what will suffice'. The geographical and cultural markers of his land are transformed into metaphors, in the process making him the 'middleman' who, for the price of a poem, mediates between his exotic world and the 'other'. A. K. Mehrotra observes, "In the secretive language he mines, certain words recur whose meaning lies in the body of his work. Thus 'iron' signifies calamity, sometimes person; 'rain' a past experience that, though painful, is often remembered; 'hands' a woman once loved and unattainable from the start; 'vague' a sudden intake of breath on coming to a vista in his interior landscape; 'door' the unfaceable and inexpressible; 'glass' the innocence of childhood; and 'window' the quotidian, divided world."

6.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF MAHAPATRA

Mahapatra is recognised as one of a trio of poets who laid the foundations of Indian English poetry. He is different essentially in not being a product of the Bombay school of poets. His quirt, tranquil voice is entirely his own and distinctly different from that of his contemporaries. Regarded as a post-modern experimental poet, his poetry, in line with the modernist poetry pioneered by Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla, reveals a continuous interface of the personal and immediate with the world of external experience and reality.

There have been complaints that his work lacks humour. His sensibility is perceived as being both Indian and modern while some critics feel that he articulates and creates a new modernist mythology from existing forms. He is also seen as a significant poet of Oriya sensibility although that seems only partially true on a sensitive reading of his work. In some quarters, he is perceived as a difficult poet to read.

Mahapatra is one Indian writer who has received more acclaim and recognition abroad than in his own country. As one critic opines, "He is the case of a writer who first recognised abroad before getting deserved attention at home. Even now one could say that critical output on Mahapatra is not appropriate to his own work". C L L Jayaprada (in R. K. Dhawan ed. *Indian Literature Today.* Vol. 2).

According to M. K. Naik, 'Mahapatra's poetry is redolent of the Orissa scene, and the Jagannath temple at Puri figures quite often in it. His most characteristic note is one of quite but ironic reflection mostly concerning love, sex and sensuality in the earlier poetry and the social and political scene in some of the later poems. His "Relationship", which won him the Sahitya Akademi award, explores his complex relationship with the larger arena around him which redirects us to his meditations on the important myths and legends of Orissa, the Jagannath cult, the stone sculpture of the temples of Orissa, the river Daya, and Orissa's history.

According to K. Ayappa Paniker Mahapatra is concerned with contemporary reality in the following way: "…the recent poems of Jayanta

Mahapatra… …reveal an increasing concern on the part of the poet with contemporary reality with all its political connotations. From the preoccupation with timeless myths he has extended his range of interest to include reality, still glimmering in the light of reason, not yet metamorphosed into myth."

Similarly, Bruce King, on the other hand, makes a succinct study of Mahapatra's verse constructions like this: "Jayanta Mahapatra seems closer to the modernist movement of the first half of this century with its open-ended literary forms and reliance on recurring symbols to provide coherence to non-linear, fragmented structures. Mahapatra's persona is an estranged, distanced, sensitive artist rather than an invisible or playfully prominent post-modernist author. As in modernist writers there is less importance on the material world and more emphasis on subjective memory and the inner self, the psychological, in contrast to the post-modernist's emphasis on almost totally self-enclosed art, forms. Mahapatra's is an elite art, aimed at a small, discriminating readership… ...Mahapatra's vision and obsessive writing of poetry as a hopeless search for meaning in the human condition is, however, a characteristic of post-modernism as found in Beckett's later works."

Such observations help in considering Mahapatra as an important poet in Indian Writing in English.



6.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have understood that Jayanta Mahapatra is a poet who expresses a truly Indian sensibility. However, a sense of irony makes his poetry distinctive. Although his work has been published in several important anthologies, his work still appears to be relatively unappreciated in India and not got the attention it deserves in his homeland. His difficult childhood has left a mark on his psyche, which is often articulated in his work, but it is not a sense of bitterness that the reader comes away with after a reading of his work. There is yet a sense of optimism that underlines his work. He is deeply concerned about the state of humankind and society

and many poems serve as a vehicle to express these concerns through images and metaphors.



6.7 FURTHER READING

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2) Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. (2007). *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
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10) Paranjape, Makarand. (Ed.). (1993). *Indian Poetry in English*. Madras: MacMillan India Limited.
11) Parthasarathy, R. (Ed.). (2004). *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. New Delhi: OUP.



6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The difficult circumstances of childhood find expression in Mahapatra's poetry in numerous forms… …they have also made him more sensitive and aware of individual suffering… …this in turn leads to a questioning and commentary on society as a whole.

Ans to Q 2: Mahapatra's upbringing as a poet… …the hurdles he faced initially… …his vision as a human being… …his concerns over his own craftsmanship etc.

Ans to Q 3: The use of the first person narration draws the reader into the poem and makes him/her feel as though s/he is a character in that situation… …in fact, the reader feels that s/he is actually in the narrator's shoes.

Ans to Q 4: The kind of imagery employed in the poem is such that it emphasises the dark, repulsive, sinister aspects of existence… …they are appropriate for the setting of a graveyard and make the mood sombre and brooding.

Ans to Q 5: Although Mahapatra's poetry is not lacking in hope, there is a very strong undercurrent of pain that runs through his poems… …having their origin in his own early experiences, the poems talk not just about his own personal suffering but that of the poor and deprived sections of society as well.

Ans to Q 6: The poet is envisioned as a vibrant, dynamic figure who, through his creativity, can render order from chaos… …The poet is seen to be powerful, with a great responsibility to society and this is a concept that is reminiscent of the English Romantics.



6.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Jot down the ideas that come to you when you see the title of the poems "Hunger" and "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore." Try to analyse the ideas and see if they are echoed by Mahapatra.

Q 2: In what ways, can Mahapatra be considered a poet of the small town or a poet of the soil?

Q 3: How does Mahapatra both distance and yet close the gap between himself and the dead in the cemetery?

Q 4: Discuss the role of metaphors and symbols in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. Analyse 'Hunger' from the viewpoint of the dominant images.

Q 5: Discuss Mahapatra's use of the Indian landscape in his poems with reference to "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore."

Q 6: What is the position of Mahapatra in the field of Indian Writing in English? In what ways, does Jayanta Mahapatra introduce 'modern' themes and concerns into his poems?

Q 7: Discuss the use of memory and myth in Mahapatra's "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore" as a technique with the help of which the poet explores his 'self'.

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UNIT 7: KAMALA DAS: "A HOT NOON AT MALABAR" & "MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Kamala Das: The Poet

7.4 The Poems: "A Hot Noon in Malabar" & "My Grandmother's House"

- 7.4.1 The Text of the Poems
- 7.4.2 Reading the Poems
- 7.4.3 Major Themes
- 7.4.4 Das' Poetic Style

7.5 Critical Reception of Das

7.6 Let Us Sum Up

7.7 Further Reading

7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.9 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Kamala Das—one of the most important poets of India
- explain how Kamala Das develops her subject and possibly relate it to her own experiences of life and people
- examine and analyse elements of her style and the ways in which she uses language to convey emotions and ideas
- make yourself familiar with the themes that Kamala Das takes up and what it is that makes her poetry distinctive
- appreciate the prescribed poems in totality.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have read about Jayanta Mahapatra, who is an important poet of Indian Writing in English. In this unit, however, you will read about Kamala Das, another poet of immense repute. Kamala Das (1934-2009) is recognised as one of India's foremost poets. A prominent name in Indian English Writing, she also wrote stories in Malayalam under the name of Madhavikutty and was a columnist as well. She is known for her frank and fiery poems and her autobiography, *My Story*, stirred up controversy regarding her personal life with its boldness. While her uninhibited treatment of female sexuality gave her writing a powerful edge, it also gave her the image of an iconoclast and rebel. Thus, in this unit, you will read about Kamala Das, one of the most celebrated poets in the field of Indian Writing in English, and her poems "A Hot Noon in Malabar" and "My Grandmother's House". A brief glimpse into her life will give you some ideas of what shaped her personality and sensibility and we will then go on to take a critical look at her writing with a detailed discussion of two of her poems. You will also have some ideas of the kind of critical appraisal her works have received.

7.3 KAMALA DAS: THE POET

The experiences of individuals–more so creative individuals–and the influences that have shaped their imagination and perspective do play a prominent role in their creative output. Therefore, it is always a good idea to have a glimpse into the life of a writer in order to place their writing in perspective.

Her Life:

Born on March 31, 1934 in Malabar, Kerala, Kamala Das' love of poetry was ignited by watching her great uncle Nalapat Narayana Menon, a prominent writer of his time. She would watch him work all day and felt that his life was one of bliss as he was able to live out his life by



Source: https://www.google.co.in

writing all the time. The poetry of her mother, Nalapat Balamani Amma, as well as the sacred writing of the Nairs, a matriarchal community of Kerala, also influenced her. Das spent her childhood between Calcutta where her father was employed and the ancestral Nalapat home in Kerala. Given private tutoring till the age of fifteen and then married at a young age, she found great support for her literary inclinations in her husband. K. Madhava Das, who always felt proud of her achievements in spite of all the controversy that surrounded some of her writing. Having spoken about her sexual experiences and dissatisfaction with a husband who was years older than her, she would still always claim that he was her greatest support in all her literary endeavours.

Although she was encouraged by her husband to write and to augment the family income, being a woman with three sons and a household to run, she could not emulate her great uncle and write blissfully from morning to night. She could only sit down at the kitchen table to her work at night after her family had fallen asleep. However, although this was quite exhausting and resulted in poor health, she viewed it optimistically as her illness forced her to stay home and she could therefore write more. Wanting to fill her life with varied experiences that went beyond writing poetry, Kamala Das tried her hand at painting, fiction and politics. Having declared that poetry was not a very profitable proposition in India; Das started writing a syndicated column in which she talked about all topics under the sun.

Born into a conservative Hindu family with royal links, in 1999, she announced her decision to convert to Islam and took on the name of Kamala Surayya–another topic of controversy. Her act was dubbed as another of her histrionics meant to grab attention but she defended her decision saying that it gave her a secure feeling to don the Muslim veil. However, later, she also opined that it was not worthwhile to change one's religion. Although with no family background of politics, she contested for a Parliament seat in 1984 after launching the Lok Seva party, but was unsuccessful.

On 31 May 2009, at the age of 75, Kamala Das breathed her last in a Pune hospital. Her body was taken to Kerala and buried with full state honours.

Her Works:

Just around the beginning of the post-Independence era, the second wave of Indian poetry in English emerged, after the romantic tradition in writing showed signs of having receded. The publication of R. Parthasarathy's *Ten Twentieth-century Indian Poets* gave voice to these poets. The poems that drew a lot of attention in this volume was the bold writing of Kamala Das who, with her protest against patriarchy, her fervent endorsement of the matriarchal system and the articulation of female desire and sexuality, established herself as an icon of Indian feminism. In the words of a well-known critic, K. R. Sreenivasa Iyengar, Das was perceived as being "aggressively individualistic". Her writing has been termed as confessional in which private grief and humiliation has been expressed without reservation, with perceptive self-analysis and sincerity of tone and purpose.

When one reads the poetry of women writing before her–Sarojini Naidu or Toru Dutt for example, one is struck by the huge difference in tone, subject matter and use of linguistic and poetic devices. While Naidu is noted for her romantic imagery, mastery over English metrical forms and native view of Indian exotica and Dutt is recognised for her lyrical romantic poetry that upheld moral vision through the use of myths, Kamala Das ventured into the depths of the feminine sensibility and, by using everyday expressions and symbols, conveyed the thoughts of an Indian woman living in a patriarchal society.

Kamala Das' first volume of poetry in English was *The Sirens*, published in 1964. This was followed by *Summer in Calcutta* in 1965. Being bilingual, Das could express herself with ease in both Malayalam and English. She wrote poetry in English and fiction in Malayalam. Her daring autobiography was also first published in her mother tongue. As she ventured into 'forbidden' territory by speaking about topics that were considered out of bounds for women, she broke new ground and established herself as a powerful voice in both languages.

In her later years, she wrote a syndicated column and characteristically, expressed herself with candour on a number of topics.

She was spontaneous–even whimsical-and reserved the right to change her mind. Although this may have irked her critics, it allowed her to explore life and ideas with all their contradictions and paradoxes honestly and with emotional integrity. She is noted for writing in a distinctively Indian voice without blindly imitating the West in her expression. Her poems are provocative and unflinching in their explorations of the self and female sexuality. She is also concerned with urban life, women's roles in traditional Indian society, issues of postcolonial identity, and the political and personal struggles of marginalised people.

Kamala Das' major works include *The Sirens*, *Summer In Calcutta*, *The Descendants*, *The Old Playhouse And Other Poems*, *My Story*, *Alphabet of Lust*, *The Anamalai Poems*, *Padmavati The Harlot and Other Stories*, *Only The Soul Knows How To Sing*, *Yaa Allah*, *Pakshiyude Manam*, *Dayarikkurippukal*, *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam*, *Madhavikkuttiyude Unmakkadhakal*. Kamala Das won recognition around 1965. However, it was with her third volume of poems *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), that she gained international reputation as a strong feminist in Indian poetry in English. Critics like K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar compare her 'confessional' poetry with that of Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Judith Wright.

Das was nominated and shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in 1984. She was a recipient of the Asian Poetry Prize, the Kent Award for English Writing from Asian Countries, the Asian World Prize, the Ezhuthachan Award, the Sahitya Academy Award, the Vayalar Award and the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, among others.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What made the poetry of Kamala controversial?

7.4 THE POEMS: "A HOT NOON IN MALABAR" & "MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE"

The following sections will help you to read the poems in terms of the various important aspects.

7.4.1 The Texts of the Poems

"A Hot Noon in Malabar"

This is a noon for beggars with whining
Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
With parrots in a cage and fortune cards
All stained with time, for brown kurava girls
With old eyes, who read palms in light singsong
Voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
Bangles, all covered with the dust of roads,
For all of them, whose feet, devouring rough
Miles, grow cracks on the heels, so that when they
Clambered up our porch, the noise was grating,
Strange .... This is a noon for strangers who part
The window-drapes and peer in, their hot eyes
Brimming with the sun, not seeing a thing in
Shadowy rooms and turn away and look
So yearningly at the brick-ledged well. This
Is a noon for strangers with mistrust in
Their eyes, dark, silent ones who rarely speak
At all, so that when they speak, their voices
Run wild, like jungle-voices. Yes, this is
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love. To
Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet
Stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my
Home in Malabar, and I so far away.

"My Grandmother's House"

There is a house now far away where once
I received love……. That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved
Among books, I was then too young
To read, and my blood turned cold like the moon

How often I think of going
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or
Just listen to the frozen air,
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom door like a brooding
Dog…you cannot believe, darling,
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved…. I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?

7.4.2 Reading the Poems

"A Hot Noon in Malabar"

Let us now look at the first poem in your course. Before beginning to read the poem, I would like you to do a simple activity. Read the poem "A Hot Noon in Malabar" again. Do not go further than that now. What are the images that spring to your mind? Note them down and, as you proceed with the poem, see how many of them match with what the poet has to say.

The poem is full of nostalgia for hot summer afternoons in Malabar where the poet spent many of her days in her ancestral house. It evokes the sights, smells and sounds of a quiet afternoon in summer in a town where life moves at an easy pace and the noons are reserved for activities like resting, entertaining wandering hawkers etc. The poem is remarkable for stirring up so many sensory experiences in our imagination.

Let us look first at all the adjectives that the poet uses to conjure up various sounds: whining voices; light, singsong voices; grating noise; wild voices; jungle-voices. You will notice that most of the sounds described are those of the way people speak. Light, singsong voices evoke freshness and youth while words like 'whining' and 'grating' are harsh and negative. The 'wild' and 'jungle-voices'

go together and form a thematic thread that recurs throughout the poem.

Now for the adjectives that bring out the colours: stained fortune cards; brown girls; black floor; red, green and blue bangles; shadowy rooms. They are all very vivid and evocative of a hot, summer afternoon in India. In addition, there is the use of old eyes, cool floor, hot noon, brick-ledged well, dark, silent ones, wild men, wild thoughts, wild love, wild feet.

There is the interesting contrast between the 'old' eyes of the young kurava girls that suggests that though they may be young in years, they are old in experience and wisdom. There is also the juxtaposition of opposites in 'hot' noon and 'cool' floor, 'hot eyes brimming with the sun' and 'shadowy rooms' that expresses so well the difference between the bright, hot exterior of the landscape and the dark, coolness of the interior. The contrast does not end with this. There is also the interesting collocation of the serenity of the town and its inhabitants as against the wildness of the itinerant visitors. The people of the town are safe and protected from the summer heat in their secure homes while the strangers are wanderers who bring the dust from near and far on the wares they sell. The quiet of the summer afternoon is laden with the promise of 'wild men, wild thoughts, wild love'. The 'stirring up' of the dust could be seen as a metaphor for the stirring of subterranean emotions and instincts that long to break free from the chains of convention and indulge in a wild pandering to the senses. The verbs in the poem are dynamic, showing action. When we read 'come', 'read', 'spread', 'covered', 'devouring', 'grow', 'clambered', 'pout', 'peer', 'brimming', 'turn', 'speak', 'run', 'stirring', there is again the contrast between the somnolent summer afternoon and the ripples created by the strangers who invade and fill the space with their wildness even if only for a short while.

One of the interesting images is 'hot eyes brimming with sun'. It is an example of a transferred epithet—it is not the eyes that

are hot but the afternoon - and the natural fact of vision being blinded with the brightness of the sun so that it is not possible to see what lies in the dark interior, is vividly and poetically expressed. Also, the fact that they 'look so yearningly at the brick-ledged well', says without actually putting it in so many words, the need to quench thirst awakened by the heat of the afternoon. It also perhaps hints at the social barriers that prevent these 'wild' strangers from freely drawing water from the well.

The image conjures up a picture of tall and thin men walking with long strides over mile after mile. It emphasise their strength and stamina–their 'wildness' in a way. The metaphor, as of a wild animal gobbling up its prey, is vivid in its comparison of the feet as animals and miles as prey. There is also a transferred epithet in the use of 'rough miles'. It is the feet, which are rough with traversing such long distances. Rough miles can also be taken to mean difficult journeys.

For the poet, the memory of those afternoons and the fact that she is so far away from her home in Malabar on such an afternoon 'is torture'. The poem is not only an exercise in nostalgia but also a longing for a return to a way of life that is apparently markedly different from what the poet experiences now. It does not talk about a time that has vanished although the poet is obviously drawing upon memory for the descriptions. There is the awareness that such noons still exist in Malabar and that the poet is re-living them in a far-off location in an attempt to recreate those scenes and escape from the present.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: The poet talks about 'hot eyes brimming with sun'. What purpose does the image serve and what do you think is striking about the image?

Q 3: What are the activities described in the poem?

Let us now look at the second poem in your course. It is a short poem which many of us can identify with in terms of thought and feeling. However, of course, the poet has expressed those feelings in her own unique way!

"A Hot Noon at Malabar"

This poem too goes back in time to reflect on the present and is replete with images, similes and metaphors. There is the memory of unstinted love that had been given at some point in the distant past during the poet's childhood and which is completely at variance with what she experiences now. It is a poignant poem in which every line is underlined with sadness and the wish to go back to the place where she had received immeasurable love and attention.

At this point, it would be a good idea to quickly jot down all the similes and metaphors the poet has used in the poem. Do you find any recurrent patterns in the imagery? So what are the similes and metaphors that you found in the poem? Are they the same as the ones I mention below?

Similes:

1. Blood turned cold like the moon.
2. Like a brooding dog.

Metaphors:

1. Blind eyes of windows.
2. Armful of darkness.
3. Love…in small change.

There is the interesting use of animal imagery in 'snakes moved among books' and 'darkness…like a brooding dog'. Neither of the images has a very positive or warm connotation. The snakes moving among the books suggests abandonment and emptiness, as though the house had been left to collapse, neglected, into the wilderness and was no longer a haven of love and sanctuary for the poet but a treacherous place where danger lurked unseen. And, although the dog is regarded as a friendly and loyal creature, its

association with darkness and the use of 'brooding' makes it sound a little ominous.

The windows of the empty house are likened to 'blind 'eyes' as there is nobody inside to look out of them. Since the house is deserted and there is no one to tend to the garden, the only thing that the poet can pick is an 'armful of darkness' instead of flowers which she says she will bring back with her like one brings souvenirs of the places one visits or places that are associated with warmth and love. The windows also serve as the symbol that link the past and present together, inasmuch as they afford a glimpse into the interior of the house and therefore, a peep into the distant recesses of the poet's memory.

There is the recurrent use of coldness to signify the darkness and chill of death: 'blood turned cold like the moon' and 'frozen air'. The moon is associated both with coldness and with the darkness of night. As a reflection of the sun that can be seen at night, it does not have any life-giving properties and is hence 'cold'.

The overpowering silence that surrounds the house is emphasised by the phrase 'listen to the frozen air'. The need to hold on to something from that time, the time when she was loved, is so overwhelming that she is in a state of 'wild despair'. The knowledge that there is nothing concrete that she has now and there are only memories left, brings her to a state of hopelessness and she wishes that she could bring back something at least–even if it is only darkness—from that place of cherished memories.

There is the contrast between what was hers once and her state of loveless existence now. The poet compares herself to a beggar pleading for alms—only in this case, she wants not material handouts but the intangible and far more precious gift of love. In a telling metaphor, love is referred to as money, which she would be happy to accept even if in 'small change'. She feels she is unrecognisable now as the proud and loved person she used to be as she has been reduced to the status of someone who has lost her

way and now begs for love from door to door.

The recognition of the unconditional love that she once received and her disillusionment with the present where, even though she sometimes receives insufficient scraps of love, it is perhaps never unconditional, emphasises the yearning for the lost days, which she now preserves in her memory.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is it that tells you that the poet is speaking to someone?

7.4.3 Major Themes

The important themes of the two poems can be discussed under the following headings**.**

Womanhood:

This is one of the major themes in Kamala Das' poetry, frequently linked with love. She considers herself to be a representative of '...every woman who seeks love' ("An Introduction"). Although the experiences of individuals may be different, there are certain thoughts and feelings that Das believes belong collectively to all women regardless of place or time and this is what she evokes in her poetry with often disconcerting honesty. Although social norms have dictated that women not articulate these feelings, Das refuses to accept these restraints and insists on giving voice to what she feels have gone on in the minds of women from ages immemorial, right from the time of Radha and Krishna. Refusing to take silence as the accepted norm for women, Das brings into the public sphere what was always regarded as a very private and individual matter for a woman.

Love:

Much of Das' poetry is the musings of a lonely heart that seeks love with never-ending passion. There are different shades of love in her poetry–from contentment to despair to betrayal and

consequent anguish as well as a rejection of the physical as the only bond between a man and woman to the contradictory hunger of the body. There is also the mythical framework identified with Radha and Krishna in the quest for true love. Love, sex, marriage and companionship are significant themes in her work. There is also the curiosity and joy of discovery of life around her, the observing of the smallest details that go into making up the interesting, complicated tapestry of life. Love is not confined to the man-woman relationship alone. There is the recognition of that emotion as an elemental force at the base of all human relationships as evidenced by the poem *My Grandmother's House*.

Eroticism:

Das speaks of the body and its needs with candour and boldness. There is no shirking, no hiding behind coy euphemisms. For Das, love and the erotic expression of it is defined by an unconditional honesty. While there is the longing to lose oneself in passionate love, she makes a distinction between the satisfaction of physical needs between a man and a woman and the need to communicate at a different, deeper level. While acknowledging that a physical relationship, a complete surrender to the demands of the body is an important component of the whole experience of love, she also strives to go beyond the physicality to focus on the satisfaction of the soul. She does not shy away from anatomical details and describes the sensuality of the human form and its life processes in a joyous celebration of life while pointing out the dangers of losing oneself purely in the physical. Das' women are not merely in search of sexual freedom but, intertwined inextricably in this is the quest for poetry, intimacy and divinity. Her work consistently speaks of the greatness of love which, even while being expressed through the body, transcends it

Feminism:

Even if Das may have declared that a longing for love can lead to a looking for it outside the conjugal bond, there is no marked

advocacy of adultery in her poetry. She does not wave any overt banners of feminism or identify with a particular movement or group of feminist activists. Neither are there any statements that can be construed as anti-men or confrontationist in nature. In this sense, she differs from the popular notion of feminism. Das feels that a woman is incomplete without a man and she is most beautiful when she surrenders to one. What make her poetry feminist are the concerns that she takes up and the articulation of what has for long been suppressed and rendered invisible by a patriarchal society. In doing so, she breaks new ground and sets the post-colonial woman free to express herself both in social as well as linguistic terms.



LET US KNOW

Das' poems are concerned with love, marriage, the man-woman relationship, women's autonomy, the traditional roles of women in patriarchal societies, and a questioning of such assigned roles. Her concept of love goes beyond the physical and her poetry appears to be an ongoing quest for perfect, complete, unconditional love. This quest is frequently marked by forays into memory, which serve as the counterpoint for her current state of longing and loneliness. By questioning and transgressing traditional boundaries, she comes across as a feminist who however, never openly waves feminist banners or gets into a confrontational mode where men are concerned. Her unconventionality, defiance and radicalism are not self-conscious. For Das, the world would be incomplete without men and the most beautiful moments of a woman's life are when she surrenders unconditionally to the man she loves.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is remarkable about Kamala Das' treatment of love?

7.4.4 Das' Poetic Style

The poetic style of Kamala Das reflects a feminine sensibility and sexual brazenness as well as her inner torment and ferment. Repetition and ellipsis (dots to suggest incompleteness or inability to proceed) are two devices that she uses with telling effect across the range of her writing. In "My Grandmother's House", for instance, when she talks about how she was proud because of the love she had received in the past, the use of ellipsis points to her emotional state, which makes it unable for her to continue speaking smoothly and without choking up. The ellipsis serves as a sort of barometer of her emotions, so to speak. In this poem, she uses this device thrice, each time making the readers feel as though she is speaking to them and has to pause, overcome with emotion. Go back to the poem at this point and read it again to get a better idea of what is being said here.

Das' language is conversational, colloquial and fluent, exhibiting a mastery of phrase and control over rhythm. In "My Grandmother's House", she lightly and easily uses the line '…you cannot believe, darling, /Can you, that I lived in such a house and/ Was proud, and loved' as though she is talking to someone beside her. She often splits phrases and even meanings over two lines as can be seen from the lines quoted above and this can be seen as symbolic of the fractured sensibility that she wanted to express. The conflicts, the dualities of existence are best conveyed through this breaking up of meaning and phrase. The same thing is also conveyed through her unstable, erratic punctuation and varying length of lines. There is no staccato uniformity of length or rhythm and this lends to her poetry sometimes, the quality of jerkiness that echoes her thought process.

Das' words are marked by simplicity, ease and grace. Her choice of words and phrases are particularly apt. For example, when she speaks about 'eyes brimming with the sun' "A Hot Noon in

Malabar", it conveys immediately the harsh glare of the afternoon sun that blinds us for a while when we go or look into a darker space. Although she does not clutter up her poetry with images, they are scattered throughout, not for mere ornament's sake or to make her poetry obscure but in order to convey her ideas with greater force.

One quality that stands out when we read Kamala Das' work is that at no point does she resort to esoteric images and references. The reader does not have to search for meaning in encyclopaedias but only has to look around to find the reference points from familiar, everyday life but used in such a novel and fresh manner that they delight and surprise. This reveals a daring imagination and stylistic innovativeness. For instance, when she describes the voices of the itinerant traders in "A Hot Noon in Malabar", she says they are 'jungle voices'. The idea that it conveys is at once within the reach of the reader for 'jungle' is an everyday word that is used to suggest the opposite of domesticity and civilised city life. The novelty lies in the context in which is used. The same thing can be seen in the phrase 'pick an armful of/ Darkness' which combines the familiarity of a bunch of flowers and the astonishing collocation with darkness.

There is clarity of expression and command over the language, which allows her to play with words and images to suit her purpose. The idiom is natural and occasionally rhetorical, with an economical use of language that is full of energy and music. She is also spontaneous and straightforward which is where the appeal of her writing largely lies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: In what way does Das' arrangement of lines in her poems reflect her mind or emotional state?

7.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF DAS

As a woman writing openly about female sexuality and feminine sensibility vis-à-vis patriarchal society, critical opinion about her work has, inevitably perhaps, been closely intertwined with critical views regarding her personality, personal life and politics. Whatever the response–positive or negative—it has probably never been just neutral. Her poetry has drawn praise for its uncompromising boldness, startling images, fierce honesty, and unquestionable originality. There has also been admiration for her attempts to foray into territory that had hitherto been considered taboo for women–the exploration of female sexuality and an open admission and acceptance of the needs of women. While her intensely personal voice has evoked appreciation from critics, there have been voices expressing their disappointment with her handling of structure and her indifference to craftsmanship.

Some critics have opined that her insistence on autobiographical details, her 'confessions' are inconsistent and self-indulgent, even self-contradictory at times yet full of powerful images and stated in a strong poetic voice. For them, Das is a poet who talent has been vastly overrated and who has received such wide attention only because of the provocative nature of her writing. Others see in Das, powerful feminist images and feel that her writing critiques the traditional notions of marriage, motherhood and the role of women in Indian society. They also find her writing to be explorations into the nature of female sexuality, the relationship that women have with their own bodies and the power over their sexuality, which has been and still continues to be denied to them in large measure.

Das has been hailed as an innovative poet writing in the tradition of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and Denise Levertov. Her stress on the self has been linked by certain critics to larger historical and cultural contexts and complicated, shifting postcolonial identities. While many have disagreed with her choice–that of writing about an Indian women's experiences, thoughts and emotions in the language of English–there is the opposing view that, by her refusal to bind herself to traditional aesthetic forms, Das

has forged a new linguistic paradigm for the expression of the contradictions inherent in a post-colonial society. Critics have noted that her work is replete with elements of self-loathing, frustration, metaphysical angst and moments of anguish and distress. However, they also echo with ecstasy even while in the midst of the awareness that it is transient.

In spite of the mutually exclusive opinions of critics regarding the aesthetic qualities and consistency of Kamala Das' poetry, there is no denying the fact that her voice has been a bold and invigorating one, which has infused Indian Writing in English with force and vitality.



7.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have realised that the poetry of Kamala Das has been termed 'confessional' in the tradition of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and Denise Levertov. Her autobiography *My Story* raised controversies regarding her personal life and her later conversion to Islam also provided fodder for much talk and criticism. Das has provoked reactions as much for the way she has lived her life as for her writing and politics. Her poetry dared to explore territory that was considered closed to women and was instrumental in opening up new perspectives on issues like female sexuality and the power that women have over their own bodies and the ways in which they can express their sexuality. It might however be a mistake to take all that she writes in the personal 'I' mode, in a completely literal autobiographical sense. Like all creative people, Kamala Das takes in life around her and melds the experiences into her own imagination to remould them and articulate them as powerful images in her poetry. Noted for her felicity of expression and the ability to coin the precise phrase as well as for her earthy, everyday symbolism, Kamala Das has been criticised for not paying enough attention to the structure of her poems or to the fine craftsmanship that should go into the writing of each poem. However, this disregard for sophisticated polishing of her work is perhaps what makes her poetry appealing in its spontaneity and outspokenness that seem to

come straight from the heart without recourse to any artifice. Kamala Das has evoked mixed reactions on both ends of the positive-negative spectrum but no one has been able to maintain an indifference to her work and everyone agrees that her voice is a significant one in the body of Indian Writing in English with its uncompromising female sensibility, postcolonial contradictions and daring imagination.



7.7 FURTHER READING

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10) Sarkar, Jaydip. (Ed.). (2009). *Kamala Das and her Poetry*. Booksway.
11) Uma, Alladi. (1996). "What's in a Genre?: Kamala Das's My Story." *Literary Criterion* 32, no. 3: 69-75.



7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Kamala Das' frankness and boldness of articulation… …she was spontaneous and whimsical… …her poems are provocative and unflinching in their explorations of the self and female sexuality… …her concerns over female identity.

Ans to Q 2: One of the interesting images is 'hot eyes brimming with sun'. It is an example of a transferred epithet – it is not the eyes that are hot but the afternoon - and the natural fact of vision being blinded with the brightness of the sun so that it is not possible to see what lies in the dark interior, is vividly and poetically expressed.

Ans to Q 3: The poem weaves in activities with people that are both routine as well as those that are not part of mundane everyday life.

Ans to Q 4: Try to find a particular line in the poem that indicates she is addressing someone.

Ans to Q 5: Kamala Das talks about various shades of love – both physical and spiritual… …much of Das' poetry is the musings of a lonely heart… …love is not confined to the man-woman relationship alone.

Ans to Q 6: The sentence structure, punctuation, splitting of meaning etc reflect the working of the mind.



7.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Comment on Kamala Das' use of symbols, their innovativeness, appropriateness and effectiveness with suitable illustrations.

Q 2: How does the poetry of Kamala Das establish her as a distinctive voice of her generation? Discuss the sense of alienation that Das constructs in her poems.

Q 3: Discuss Kamala Das' ideas with regard to love and lust; the physical and the spiritual elements.

Q 4: What is the role of memory and forgetting in the poetry of Kamala Das?

Q 5: Examine the significance of the 'feminine sensibility' displayed by Kamala Das in her poetry. Discuss the strategies adopted by the poet to express that sensibility.

Q 6: Discuss the thematic significance of 'My Grandmother's House' and A Hot Noon at Malabar" in terms of both 'Indianness' and the 'Feminine'.

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UNIT 8: KEKI N. DARUWALLA: "WOLF" & "HAWK"

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Keki N. Daruwalla : The Poet

8.4 The Poems: "Wolf" & "Hawk"

8.4.1 The Text of the Poems

8.4.2 Reading the Poems

8.4.3 Major Themes

8.4.4 Daruwalla's Poetic Style

8.5 Critical Reception of Daruwalla

8.6 Let Us Sum Up

8.7 Further Reading

8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.9 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the poet Keki N. Daruwalla
- have a look at his professional background which will give you a perspective on his themes and style
- read the two prescribed poems by Daruwalla in terms of its various aspects
- familiarise yourself with Daruwalla's poetic technique, world view, and choice of subjects
- explain how Daruwalla is perceived as a poet.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

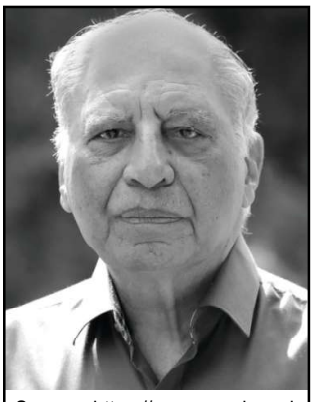
This is the third unit on Indian English poetry. This unit deals with two poem namely "Wolf" & "Hawk" written by Keki N. Daruwalla (1937-)

who is a major poet and short story writer in the field of Indian Writing in English. He published his first novel *For Pepper and Christ* in 2009. A former IPS officer, he retired as Additional Director in the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Daruwalla's story 'Love across the Salt Desert' is believed to have inspired the Hindi film *Refugee,* directed by J. P. Dutta. He is presently based in Delhi and is the President of The Poetry Society of India. When you read about the poet's life in this unit, you may be surprised to see how someone from the police force could be so sensitive and intense–this is generally not the image we have of a policeman, do we? Daruwalla's life and career experiences may well have sensitised him to certain aspects of society but that would only have been an extension of his innate compassion and concern regarding the human condition. This unit will help you to have a brief discussion of his life and then will go on to discuss the two prescribed poems in detail. There will be an exploration of themes, imagery and style appropriately illustrated with examples from his poetry. There will also be a close look at the kind of language used by the poet, which serves to convey his meaning in a powerful way.

8.3 KEKI N DARUWALLA: THE POET

Before talking about the work of a writer, it is always helpful to read something about their lives as it gives us a perspective on what experiences have shaped their creative imagination.

His Life:



Source: https://www.google.co.in

Keki Daruwalla was born in Loni, Burhanpur in what is now Pakistan and after partition, his family moved to Junagarh in Gujarat and then to Rampur. He studied in several different schools and mediums and started writing short stories when he was still a school student. He later went on to get a master's degree in literature from the University of Punjab. He was also a Fellow at Oxford University for a year. Subsequently, he joined the IPS (Indian Police Service) and in time, became

a Special Assistant to the Prime Minister. He was later posted in the Cabinet Secretariat until he retired from service. While pursuing an illustrious career, Daruwalla kept his passion for the craft of writing alive and published widely. It may seem a little odd or incongruous that someone who worked in the police department (associated with roughness and violence) can also be a member of the poets' fraternity (recognised for sensitivity and intellect). However, Daruwalla could be said to have taken up his experiences from the world of criminals and shady deals and transformed them into poetry. It may be argued that his experiences in the police department have shaped his world view and influenced both his choice of subject and imagery.

His Works:

Keki N. Daruwalla has been a prominent name in the field of Indian Writing in English for quite a while now. When his first book, *Under Orion* was published in 1970, he was immediately recognised as a significant poetic voice and his work was hailed by a senior poet and critic, Nissim Ezekiel, as 'evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness". His second collection, *Apparition*, was published in April 1971 for which he was given the Uttar Pradesh State Award in 1972. Being a daring innovator, he follows his conviction that modern poetry must, of necessity, reflect in its language, the complexities of the modern world. This would, quite obviously mean that such poetry might tend to be 'difficult' but in spite of this difficulty, Daruwalla has contributed in various, significant ways to the body of Indian Writing in English.

In bringing the world of violence to the reader, in his satirical treatment of social evils, in his use of imagery and mode of narration, Daruwalla occupies a special niche in the world of Indian poetry. His publications of poetry include *Under Orion*,(1970), *Apparition in April*, (1971), *Winter Poems*, (1980), *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982), *Crossing of Rivers* (1985), *Landscapes* (1987), *A Summer of* Tigers (1995), *Night River* (2000), *The Map-maker* (2002). Arvind Krishna Mehrotra has stated that much of Daruwalla's early poetry is concerned with things like floods, famines, riots, anniversaries, or things that tele printers are busy with.

More than forty years have passed since the publication of his first volume of poetry and these years have seen a long journey for the poet in both thematic and formal terms. One of the dominant characteristics that has stayed constant is his ironic perspective. There is also, in his work, the awareness and expression of the rich diversity of the multi-textured culture of India, which can sometimes be maddeningly yet evocatively contradictory! He is conscious of the multiplicity of the cultural, mythic and historic Indian landscape, which he evokes in a succinct yet forceful way. His poetry is replete with imagery, often animal, and he is at ease with both metrical patterns and free verse. There is a sense, when one reads his work, of an artistic sensibility that allows him to work on a grand scale with the precision of a miniature painter. In his descriptions of animals for instance, there is a keen observance of their characteristics that are rendered in the poems either directly or metaphorically with precise expression.

Daruwalla received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1984 for his collection of poetry *The Keeper of the Dead* and the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for Asia in 1987. His latest volume of verse, *Map-maker* (2002), features a fascinating series of dramatic monologues by diverse figures.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the characteristics that one can find in Daruwalla's poetry?

8.4 THE POEMS: "WOLF" & "HAWK"

8.4.1 Texts of the Poems

"Wolf"

Fire-lit
half silhouette and half myth
the wolf circles my past
treading the leaves into a bed
till he sleeps, black snout
on extended paws.

Black snout on sulphur body
he nudged his way
into my consciousness.
Prowler, wind-sniffer, throat-catcher,
his cries drew a ring
around my night;
a child's night is a village
on the forest edge.
My mother said
his ears stand up
at the fall of dew
he can sense a shadow
move across a hedge
on a dark night;
he can sniff out
your approaching dreams;
there is nothing
that won't be lit up
by the dark torch of his eyes.
The wolves have been slaughtered now.
A hedge of smoking gun-barrels
rings my daughter's dreams.

"Hawk"

I saw the wild hawk-king this morning
riding an ascending wind
as he drilled sky.
The land beneath him was filmed with salt:
grass-seed, insect, bird
nothing could thrive here. But he was lost
in the momentum of his own gyre,
a frustrated parricide on the kill.
The fuse of his hate was burning still.
But in the evening he hovered above

the groves, a speck of barbed passion.
Crow, mynah and pigeon roosted here
while parakeets flew raucously by.
And then he ran amuck,
a rapist in the harem of the sky.
As he went up with a pigeon
skewered to his heel-talon
he scanned the other birds, marking out their fate,
the ones he would scoop up next,
those black dregs in the cup of his hate!
The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man.
When snared in the woods
his eyelids are sewn with silk
as he is broken to the hood.
He is momentarily blinded, starved.
Then the scar over his vision is perforated.
Morsels of vision are fed to his eyes
as he is unblinded stitch by relenting stitch.
Slowly the world re-forms:
mud walls, trees burgeon.
His eye travels like the eye of the storm.

8.4.2 Reading the Poems

“Wolf”

Let us now look at the first poem in your course. However, before we do that, please do the following activity. It will prepare you to enter the world that the poet creates with his poem. Write down what occurs to you on hearing the word ‘wolf’. Are they positive or negative images or both? What do you expect from the poem?

The underlying theme in the poem “Wolf” is one of violence. In the beginning is the implied violence of the beast and at the end is the overt violence **towards** the beast. Let us first look at all the

words that the poet uses to describe the wolf:

Fire-lit; half silhouette; half myth; black snout; sulphur body; prowler; wind-sniffer; throat-catcher. Of these, some describe his physical attributes, the way he appears, his habits while one is an abstract description ('half myth'). The portrayal conjures up a mysterious, stealthy being lurking in the shadows, a dimly lit figure that evokes fear and awe. The reference to the yellow colour of the wolf as 'sulphur' body, suggests a menacing, predatory presence, which can prove fatal. In combination with the 'black snout', the body of the wolf is evoked in contrasts that are striking to the eye. The danger it represents is emphasised by 'throat-catcher'.

The stealthy nature of the animal is further emphasised by how it is described as having quietly 'nudged' its presence into the narrator's consciousness. The poet uses a metaphor 'a child's night is a village/ on the forest edge' to suggest the fears that haunt a child's imagination in the dark. The darkness holds many terrors for a child, akin to real and imagined terrors lurking in a village that abuts a forest.

The other metaphor alludes to the ability of the wolf to see in the dark – 'the dark torch of his eyes'. The blackness of the wolf's eyes nevertheless holds light within itself, making them a torch as it were, enabling the animal to see even in darkness. This, along with the other attributes the narrator's mother lists, add to the sense of awe a child would feel for this beast. The final lines also contain a metaphor in the description of 'a hedge of smoking gun-barrels' which have replaced the silhouettes of the wolves in the dark night. Hedges are planted around farms and houses to keep wild animals away. Here, the hedge is made up of guns- "smoking gun-barrels' which suggests both recent as well as frequent use, leading to an alarming decrease in the number of wolves prowling around the villages.

There is hyperbole in the way the animal is described by the mother, an exaggeration of the wolf's quickness, alertness and

sensitivity: 'his ears stand up/at the fall of dew'; 'he can sense a shadow/move across a hedge/on a dark night'; he can sniff out/ your approaching dreams'…

Thus, it is that the child's nights are ringed by the cries of the wolf as though it has encircled his world and set the limits to where the child could wander.

Cut to the present and there is a sense of the narrator's feelings of emptiness and loss as he ruminates on the fact of the wolves having been slaughtered. Now it is not the cries of the wolf that reverberates in the night as in the past–and as it should be–but the bursts of poachers' gunfire that echo in the dreams of the narrator's daughter. The hunter has become the hunted, predator turned prey and the world is emptier and poorer for it. The normal balance of the environment has been disturbed and what was natural has now been replaced by the artificial, manmade instruments of destruction.

The wolf does not evoke awe or admiration. There is no majesty, no unrelenting strength or beauty that it is known for. In the beginning, the description of the wolf suggests its predatory nature. While there is fear, there is also acceptance of the natural order. However, by the end of the poem, there is a sense of this natural order having been overturned and regret for the disappearance of the animal from the modern landscape.

The poem is written in short, unrhymed lines, divided into four stanzas of irregular length. While the first three stanzas deal with the wolf's real and imaginary attributes, the last–and shortest–one informs us of the slaughter of these beasts and their disappearance from both the physical and the imagined landscape. The natural forces that once held out fear to a child's mind have been replaced by man-made instruments of destruction.

Going back to what was said at the beginning of the discussion, do you now see how the target of the violence has changed from the start to the finish of the poem? Whereas the poem

starts off with the child's fears about the imagined violence of the beast towards other creatures, it ends with actual violence done to the wolves by Man.

The poet makes no overt statements regarding nature, the environment or Man's predatory attitude in this poem. All of it is suggested and the reader comes away with the feeling of melancholy that accompanies the thought of a gradual extinction of creatures in the wild due to human interference.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: How do the poems portray the 'human sense of loss'?

Q 3: How does the poet fuse the past and present in this poem?

"Hawk"

Let us now go on to read the second poem. Like the first, this one too alludes to the animal world and juxtaposes it with human activity that directly affects the creatures of the wild. However, before reading the poem, there's something that you could do: What qualities do you associate with the 'hawk'? Is it possible to view it sympathetically as a victim too? Write down your thoughts about this and then read the poem.

The poem "Hawk" starts off with a vivid description of the hawk as a cruel, ruthless predator. He is a 'king' who rules the skies and scans the earth for vulnerable prey. The poet imagines him to be full of hate as he soars, glides and swoops down on unsuspecting, smaller birds. The image of the bird is imbued with an explosive dynamism and barely curbed violence, which is unleashed in the latter part of the stanza.

The poet uses a number of adjectives and phrases to describe the hawk: 'wild'; 'king'; 'frustrated parricide on the kill'; speck of barbed passion'; 'rapist'. He is full of violence; burning with 'the fuse of his hate', who, having 'skewered' a victim to his talon, still

looks for prey which are 'black dregs in the cup of his hate'.

The description of the hawk patrolling the sky in search of prey conjures up the image of a sharp and quick creature with no compassion or tenderness. The poet imagines this creature to be hate-filled for that is the emotion, which would be intense enough to fuel the bird's killing spree. The second stanza paints a different picture of the hawk. Here, his passion has been tamed; his eyes have been stitched cruelly shut and he is forced to accept the hood that will keep him covered till his master wishes to release him for his own pleasure. The poet feels that the tamed hawk is 'worse' for he has been tainted by the touch of Man and hence, his forays into the sky will be even more driven by hate than they otherwise were.

The manner in which the hawk is subdued by human beings evokes compassion. He is first trapped, then blinded - albeit temporarily - and kept hungry. Once his trainer thinks that the time is right, the stitches over the hawk's eyes are slowly removed and he is allowed to see once more. Now he will travel across space at the whim of his master and hunt for him. The hawk still is a formidable predator but his power, hunter's instinct and keenness of vision are now instruments to be used by his master and no longer at his own disposal. He is no more the 'king' but a slave; no more the master of the sky and the lesser creatures that are his prey for the predator has now himself fallen prey to Man's greed.

The poet makes innovative use of language when he describes the hawk's spiral, upward movement in the ascending wind as drilling the sky. Hate is evoked in terms of an explosive with a burning fuse that rages in the bird's breast when he cannot find prey in the barren landscape. In addition, the same emotion is also a cup in which float, like sediment at the bottom, the hawk's future prey for it is certain that he will be on the hunt once more. The sharpness and power of the hawk's beak is captured by the word 'barbed' while his rampage among the variety of birds that haunt the evening is described in an image that is as graphic as it is

shocking and unusual—'rapist in the harem of the sky'.

The subjugation of this majestic creature is a slow process during which his sight is taken away from him and he is starved so that he loses his will to struggle against his tormentors. Once he is judged to be tamed, his vision is restored to him in 'morsels' as each stitch is removed one by one. But the concluding line of the poem still gives us an idea of the hawk's fierce, indomitable spirit even after undergoing this ordeal: his eye, now reopened to the vista of the world once more, 'travels like the eye of the storm'.

Throughout the poem, the hawk is evoked in vigorous, masculine term that has no room for softness or gentleness of any sort. Even in the end, in spite of the sympathy we may feel for the treatment meted out to it, there is admiration for its never-say-die spirit that refuses to be cowed down completely. It retains its aura of cruel invincibility even in the hands of Man. The poem "Hawk" refers to the art of hawking which was practised by some rich people, particularly in the Middle Eastern countries. Here, Daruwalla's concerns relate to how human beings are the enemies not only to their own species but also of the animal world.

The poem is alive with figures of speech and stylistic devices that capture the readers' attention with their innovativeness and unusual collocation. There is an abundance of metaphors, which effectively serve to describe both the hawk and his experiences. The lines are short and, except for a couple of lines here and there, do not rhyme. The terseness of the lines heightens the feeling of bursts of intensity that the hawk indulges in. The two stanzas are unequal in length and while the first draws a portrait of the hawk as a cruel bird of prey, the second brings out its unexpected vulnerability.

Both the poems that we have read in this unit deal with wild creatures, their natural strength and their power to evoke fear while at the same time underlining their compelled submission to Man's superior, artificial force fuelled by greed and unmindful pursuit of 'pleasure'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Why can the "hawk" be considered a 'king'?

8.4.3 Major Themes

Dynamism and Action:

As can be seen even from just a brief reading of two of his poems, Daruwalla comes across as a poet of action with many poems featuring predatory birds and beasts. There are also poems about soldiers and warriors, which might indicate the poet's preoccupation with the theme of power or dominance. There is not much sympathy for the victims–it is after all a world where only the fittest survive and history tells us that this has always been the way of the world. It is not easy to say whether there is the concept of a god who rules over the universe conjured up by the poet. There does not appear to be a sense of moral order brimming with compassion or a sense of justice in which the weak are rewarded and the cruel mighty are brought down to the dust. What there does seem to be is the operation of the law of the jungle. Although some might term him as a cynic, the poet would like to see himself more as a realist who looks at the world and human history with an unprejudiced eye. For him, power, lust and violence are natural instincts that drive human beings and write our history

Animal Imagery:

In his frequent use of animal imagery, one can see a marked resemblance to the British poet Ted Hughes. However, whereas Hughes uses myth and dramatic monologue to great effect in his poetry, often imbuing his animal images with supernatural powers, Daruwalla, although similar in his use of animal imagery, is different from Hughes in that he does not refer to other worldly forces. His poems are firmly rooted in the human universe with all its violence and brutality and the beastly instincts that are present here

Violence:

Many of Daruwalla's poems deal with violence, which, often working at a deeper level, comes across as one of the most dominant motifs in his poetry. In his poems, we encounter the world of police sirens and curfews, riots and warrants, arrested men and lathi blows, soda bottles and acid bulbs. Violence, disease and fire are images that occur repeatedly in his poetry. But, he is not just preoccupied with violence in society. As some of his poems reveal, he is also concerned with social evils and talks of them with ironic satire. For instance, he evokes the river Ganga in a deeply disturbing image that conveys his sense of anguish at the environmental degradation in Benares where "corpse-fires and cooking-fires/ burn side by side", and the sacred river Ganga is "dark as gangrene". Violence is indeed a major theme in Daruwalla's poetry

Darkness:

The themes of his poetry include deprivation, misery, disease and death and some critics opine that he almost seems to have a dark, pessimistic view of life that is reminiscent of Hardy. However, it would not be wrong to suggest that Daruwalla is a starkly realistic poet who is fascinated by both the inner and outer worlds and meditates on philosophical ideas of time and space.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: In what ways is Daruwalla a realist?

8.4.4 Daruwalla's Poetic Style

Daruwalla's poetry concerns itself with events and incidents, which are conveyed through description and narration. There is an abundance of figures of speech–more particularly of similes and metaphors which are not borrowed or clichéd but extraordinarily original. The description of hunters' rifles as 'A hedge of smoking gun-barrels' that has replaced the green bushes of the past is a

vivid and striking metaphor.

His excellent command of the language allows him to play with words and images, to construct an amazing variety of word combinations and clauses involving a creative use of English as when he refers to the wolf's ability to see in the darkness as 'dark torch of his eyes'. When he says 'a rapist in the harem of the sky' to describe the hawk for instance, the unusual collocation of words and the stark imagery compels the reader's attention. And again, the phrase 'speck of barbed passion' encapsulates both the distance of the bird (high up in the sky where it can only be seen as a speck) and its predatory power.

His language is not that of the common man and it bears all the hallmarks of an erudite scholar in its choice of vocabulary and turn of phrase–in his use of 'gyre' to illustrate the spiral movement of the hawk for instance. It is not a commonly used word and recalls to mind W B Yeats' memorable lines 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer' (again in the context of a bird of prey). His ease with the language enables him to just reach across and pick a word that precisely conveys his idea and he is adept at making words function effectively and startlingly even in contexts where they are normally not used as in 'his cries drew a ring/around my night' or in 'Morsels of vision are fed to his eyes'. It is in this yoking together of unlikely ideas, concepts or objects that capture the readers' interest.

We can also see a great variety in the rhythms that he chooses for his poems and it would be difficult to find poems with a similar structure in terms of the length of lines, stanza arrangement or rhythm. His poetry is not mere word ornament, however. Even a very shallow reading of his poems would reveal that there is a depth of feeling, which he manages to convey through an economic use of language coupled with original insights.

Daruwalla offers a wide range of settings to the reader–from the Kalinga of Asoka's time or the madness of modern day life in a

bustling metropolis deeply pocked with contradictions, to the Indian hinterland.

Another significant attribute of his poetry is the manner in which he is able to concretise abstract concepts and ideas and his prowess in striking a balance and creative tension between image and statement. His description of post-Independence India is for example, "a landscape of meaninglessness". In *Migrations*, he links the metaphysical integrally with the concrete and singular so that while exploring the idea of migration across space and time, the poet spans the violent biography of nations to arrive at a moment of intense personal realisation: "Now my dreams ask me/ if I remember my mother/ and I'm not sure how I'll handle that. / Migrating across years is also difficult."

Other remarkable features of Daruwalla's poetry are his unfailing preoccupation with the ideas of love, death and domination, vigour, sharpness and immediacy of tone and expression and scepticism and anger over the condition of human society that is expressed through irony, word play and satire. As Bruce King says, Daruwalla's poetry is imbued with "moral ambiguities and unresolvable conflicts of the human condition."

For instance, having described the predatory nature and the cruelty of the hawk at length, the poet abruptly switches over to the same qualities in Man. However, whereas the hawk requires those abilities in order to stay alive, in Man it is a totally unnecessary use of power over lesser and more helpless creatures as the hawk's eyes are cruelly stitched shut and later opened gradually. The poem seems to comment on the greed of Man, which takes a toll on the magnificent creatures of the wild – a theme that the other poem on wolves also touches.

8.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF DARUWALLA

Daruwalla has been recognised as a major Indian writer who has a large thematic canvas that draws upon his personal life as well as the

paradoxical realities of Indian life that he sees all around him. There is variety in both his form and content, which makes him an interestingly unpredictable writer. He is known as a writer whose Indianness and modernity, global perspective, experiences and interests have ensured that his place in Indian writing is a central one.

Daruwalla has been criticised for being too much of a landscape poet who brings in scenes and sounds from all around the world—Volgograd, Stockholm, Yugoslavia, England, Helsinki, Moscow –all of which he has visited for poetry readings, a charge that he admits to readily. His propensity to portray a broad range of landscapes rather than social or political concerns has been attributed to his long stint in the service of the Government of India. In his Introduction to *Two Decades of Indian Poetry 1960-1980*, Keki N. Daruwalla writes, "My poems are rooted in landscape which anchors the poem. The landscape is not merely there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination. It should be the eye of the spiral. I try that poetry relates to the landscape, both on the physical and on the plane of the spirit." (21)

Despite all criticism, he has also been lauded for the vigour of his style, which seems to be driven by his satiric, iconoclastic approach to life and issues. He displays a lack of faith in the system and a modernist, realistic, non-moral attitude that embraces existential concerns. Critics opine that of all the Indian poets, Daruwalla is perhaps the one who delves deepest into the mysteries of the human psyche. While his treatment of nature might remind us of Tennyson, there are echoes of Eliot in his broken images or Emily Dickinson in his fascination with death.

Many of Daruwalla's poems are concerned with the ordinary men and women one sees around us, with the anxieties, difficulties and fears that most of us can identify with. Although he may at first glance appear to be a pessimist with the view that the world is full of violence and self-seeking individuals, there is at the same time, a philosophical acceptance of reality and a sadness that seeks to reform and improve the human condition. His publications over the years reveal how relentless the poet has been in his quest for perfection of his poetic technique, which he has steadily honed, to a knife-edge of irony. His career in the police force has, far from de-

sensitising him to the violence and brutality of life, made him more aware of it in all its aspects and has frequently provided creative fodder to his poetic spirit. That is why perhaps, he has won recognition as a major Indian poet of repute both in India and overseas, and his descriptions of landscape have traversed Indian borders and brought the world to the eyes of his readers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How does Daruwalla use landscapes to illustrate his point?



8.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have understood that Daruwalla is a richly complex poet with a penchant for telling the truth however bitter or cruel it may be. His poetry displays distinctive technical skills, an original and extraordinary use of imagery coupled with an excellent command over the language and a consummate ease at playing with words and phrases to remarkable effect. His strength as a craftsman has now been recognised as one of the hallmarks of his talent. His abundant use of animal imagery has led to his comparisons with the noted English poet, Ted Hughes. What is remarkable is that Daruwalla brings in animal figures into his poetry as a commentary on human beings and the state of our society. Linked with the animal imagery are the ideas of violence and action, a 'survival of the fittest' attitude that characterises the animal world and which, as the poet knows only too well after having seen the dark underbelly of crime from close quarters as a police officer, is a not insignificant part of human society as well.



8.7 FURTHER READING

1) Daruwalla, Keki. (Ed.). (1980). *Two Decades of Indian Poetry; 1960-1980.* New Delhi: Vikas.
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6) Singh, Ram Ayodhya. (1992). *Keki N. Daruwalla: Assessment as a Poet*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot.
7) Sinha, Ravi Nandan. (2002). *The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: B.R. Pub. Corp.
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8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: A sense of irony… …awareness of the diversity of Indian life… …animal imagery and precise detailing are some of the characteristics to be found in his poetry.

Ans to Q 2: Narrator's feelings of emptiness and loss over the wolves having been slaughtered… …bursts of poachers' gunfire that echo in the dreams of the narrator's daughter… … the hunter has become the hunted, predator turned prey and the world is emptier and poorer for it.

Ans to Q 3: The poet evokes the past to paint a vivid picture of the wolf and then connects it to the present by mentioning his daughter and the wolves' disappearance from the forests.

Ans to Q 4: The hawk can be considered a 'king' in more ways than one as he possesses extraordinary abilities and power.

Ans to Q 5: The poet's realism lies in the clarity and balanced perspective with which he sees the world.

Ans to Q 6: Daruwalla uses landscape as an extension of the human mind.



8.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Daruwalla's world view in the light of his intensity and sensitivity to individual suffering.

Q 2: Would it be right to say that the universe Daruwalla portrays in his poems is a godless one? Elaborate.

Q 3: Illustrate Daruwalla's use of landscape and nature with suitable examples to show how he uses them to express his ideas about people.

Q 4: Elaborate on the motifs of hate and violence in Daruwalla's poetry and show how these themes are articulated by the poet.

Q 5: Make a comparison between the animal and the human at the heart of Daruwalla's poem "Hawk". Also discuss the importance of 'cruelty' in this comparison.

Q 6: Discuss Daruwalla's use of animal imagery in terms of the human condition.

Q 7: Analyse Daruwalla's use of symbolism in the poems "Hawk" and "Wolf" that help in heightening their respective themes.

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UNIT 9: GIRISH KARNAD: *NAGAMANDALA*

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Girish Karnad: The Playwright

- 9.3.1 His Life
- 9.3.2 His Dramatic Career

9.4 Sources of the Play *Nagamandala*

9.5 Reading the Play *Nagamandala*

- 9.5.1 Summary of the Play
- 9.5.2 Critical Commentary on the Play
- 9.5.3 Major Themes
- 9.5.4 Major Characters

9.6 Critical Reception of Karnad

9.7 Let Us Sum Up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.10 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- gain some ideas about the life and works of the playwright Girish Karnad
- discuss Karnad as a great Indian playwright and critic
- explain in detail the story of the play and discuss its significance in the context of the “search for Indian roots”
- read the text in its other possible contexts and identify the different philosophical and aesthetic ideas implicit in the play
- appreciate the text in its nuanced totality.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the forth unit of the course. In this unit, you will get some ideas about Indian English drama through a reading of Girish Karnad's play *Nagamandala.* Karnad is an important name in the literary and cultural landscape of India along with other playwrights like Badal Sircar, and Vijay Tendulkar. He is also equally famous abroad with his works receiving serious critical attention. Newly married Rani is neglected and locked in the house by her husband Appanna. A king cobra from the nearby anthill falls in love with her and starts visiting her at night disguised as her husband. When the real husband comes to know this, Rani is asked to prove her innocence by undergoing the "Cobra Ordeal" which means putting her hand into the anthill. Naturally, she emerges unscathed, and is immediately hailed as goddess by the village folk. Finally, the cobra finds shelter in the long tresses of Rani. By, the time you finish reading this unit, you will learn how Girish Karnad's experiments with traditional materials for dramatic performance helps in the revival of Indian drama in Post independence period.

9.3 GIRISH KARNAD: THE PLAYWRIGHT

The following subsections will help you to examine the life and works of Girish Karnad.

4.3.1 His Life



Source: https://www.google.co.in

Girish Karnad was born in Matheran, near Bombay in 1938. After obtaining a first-class B.A. in mathematics and statistics from Karnatak University in Dharwar (1958), he went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. There he received an MA in philosophy, politics, and economics. After starting his writing career in England, he came back to India to work for the Oxford University Press in Madras from 1963-70.

Since 1970, he has established himself as one of the most dominant playwrights of Post independence India and has received numerous honours in recognition of his dramatic writing which include the Homi Bhabha Fellowship for creative work in folk theater (1970-72), the Padma Shri Award (1974), the Karnataka Nataka Akademi Award (1984), and the Padma Bhushan Award (1992).

Karnad belongs to the Saraswat Brahmin community. As a Saraswat, Konkani was Karnad's first language. But English became the medium of his education. Most interestingly however, when he began writing, he chose Kannada, the language of Karnataka. You should note here that most of the famous Indian writers are typically multilingual. Anantha Murthy stated in 1994 that throughout Indian history, two or three languages have always been in the Indian home structure—the language of home, the language of the street and perhaps the language of culture. He further stated that Indian literature had a coalescence of different languages, cultures and traditions, making it great. Nonetheless, the choice of Kannada seems to have come as a surprise to Karnad. He had hoped to write in English. However, when he actually started writing his first play *Yayati*, he wrote the play in Kannada. Some of Karnad's plays have been translated into other languages, both Indian and European. Subsequently, Karnad has been recognised as a leading dramatist both in Kannada and in Indian Writing in English. Anantha Murthy also argues that Karnad's English version of his play, *Tughlaq* "should be as rewarding an experience to teach and to study, as it has been to see on the stage all over India."

You must have realised by now that Karnad is an exponent of the Postcolonial "search for Indian roots". In his essay, "Theatre in India" Karnad reiterates on the issue of 'rootedness' in the following ways:

"Every theatre is rooted in the culture of its own language, so there are as many theatre situations as there are languages. India has oral traditions, riddles, proverbs, songs, ballads, tales,

and epics in more than 3,000 mother tongues. These forms are potentially or partially theatrical. As one moves from the kitchen in the village (for that is where tales are told) to the electronically equipped movie hall in the big city, one encounters theatre in different guises. To make any sense of the subject at all, I shall stick to a narrow definition of theatre and its purpose, which I hope will become clearer as I go along. In my childhood, in a small town in Karnataka, I was exposed to two theatre forms that seemed to represent irreconcilably different worlds. Father took the entire family to see plays staged by troupes of professional actors called natak companies, which toured the countryside throughout the year. The plays were staged in semi permanent structures on proscenium stages, with wings and drop curtains, and were illuminated by petromax lamps. Once the harvest was over, I went with the servants to sit up nights watching the more traditional Yakshagana performances. The stage, a platform with a canopy and a back curtain, was erected in the open air and lit by torches."



LET US KNOW

In the "Theatre in India" Karnad also explains the cause of professional theatre in India, and his own dramatic practice, in the following way:

"It is extraordinary how little professional theatre is to be seen in most Indian cities, and even in places that show some evidence of theatrical activity, how little is moderately good. In Bombay, one can see scores of Marathi and Gujarati plays advertised in daily papers. Calcutta has a few plays staged in Bengali. No other cities in India have regular professional theatre. To understand why urban Indian theatre is in this state today, one has to go back to the nineteenth century, when what is called modern Indian theatre first made its appearance, independently in Bombay and Calcutta. It is no coincidence that these cities were both creations of the British

maritime trade with no pre-British Indian history. The populations of these cities had benefited from British education and had prospered financially under British rule. It was inevitable, then, that the entertainment they sought for themselves should also be modelled on English theatre. Two features of the new theatre borrowed from the West were to set it totally apart from anything that preceded it and to qualify it for the adjective modern."

It thus needs to be mentioned that that Karnad, has written 12 very successful Kannada plays, of which *Yayati*, *Hayavadana* and particularly, *Tughlaq* have been widely translated and enacted all over India. He has also directed many feature films, documentaries and television serials. His first film, Vamsha Vriksha (with B. V. Karanth) won him a President's Award. Since then, he has made three others—Kaadu, Tabbaliya Neenade Magane, and Ondanandu Kaladalli, which have all won critical acclaim. Karnad was the Director of the Film and Television Institute, Pune, from 1974 to 1975, and his involvement with the cinema includes a number of scripts (for Shyam Benegal) and also a few appearances as an actor in commercial films.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Karnad is an exponent of the Postcolonial "search for Indian roots". Discuss.

Q 2: What is Karnad's view on professional theatre in India?

9.3.2 His Dramatic Career

Karnad became a playwright all of a sudden. Once he was preparing to go to England. One day he found himself reading the Mahabharata just for fun and got excited by the story of king *Yayati*. Unintentionally he started writing a play in Kannada, the language of his childhood. In his essay, "Theatre in India" Karnad writes about the birth of the play like the following:

"In the midst of these tensions, a few weeks before leaving for England, I suddenly found myself writing a play (*Yayati*). The play surprised me in several ways. First, because it was a play and I had always imagined I was a poet. Second, because it appeared in Kannada, the language of my childhood, rather than in English, in which I had trained myself to write. Lastly, it was a story from the Mahabharata, from which I considered myself alienated. In fact, I hadn't been aware I remembered the myth until I started writing the play. It was the myth of King Yayati. While still in the prime of his life, King Yayati was cursed to old age for a moral lapse on his part. Distraught at the thought of impending decrepitude, Yayati searched for a young man who would be willing to give him his youth in exchange for the curse and found him in his own son. Thus, the son became old; the father became young, younger than his son. The myth ends on a note of self-realization and tranquillity. However, befitting a young Indian who had just discovered Strindberg and Anouilh, my play had a tragic end…At the time of writing, I had seen the play only as an escape from my tensions. However, looking back, I am surprised how accurately the myth reflected my anxieties, my resentment at the elders who seemed to be demanding that I sacrifice my future for their peace of mind. By the time I had finished writing the play, it was not my parents but this myth that had appeared out of nowhere to come to my aid that seemed to pose the real challenge. It had nailed me to my past."

The play *Yayati* was published in 1961. Karnad got the Mysore State Award for the play *Yayati* in 1962. However, it was the publication of his next play *Tughlaq* (1964) that Karnad became famous as a playwright. In the essay, "Theatre in India" Karnad further writes about the *Tughlaq* like the following:

"For my second play, Tughlaq, I took my subject matter from medieval history and tried to fit it into the ready-made structure perfected by the original Parsi theatre and perpetuated without the slightest modification by the natak companies. A company play

consisted of a mechanical alternation of "shallow" and "deep" scenes. The shallow scenes were played in the foreground of the proscenium stage, against a drop curtain, which usually showed a street scene. These scenes were devoted to low comedy, whose ancestry could be traced back both to Shakespeare and to the folk theatre, and kept the audience occupied while the set was being changed in the deep scene behind the curtain. In the deep scene the entire stage space was used to present elaborate palaces and gardens in which heroic characters emoted in lofty rhetoric…"

Hayavadana (1971) was his next play. His childhood exposure to street plays in Karnataka villages and his familiarity with Western dramas staged in Bombay engaged him in retelling the secular legends of India to suit the modern context. *Hayavadana*, drawn from the Katha-Sarit Sagara, attempts to prove that the Head always wins over the Body. Karnad has intelligently used masks to achieve the harmonised complexity of this tale of transposed heads wherein the wife Padmini must choose her husband after a mix-up. Since the Head is most important, the poetic Devadatta gets her back, but living with his brawny body (till now that of his labourer friend) gives her a rare satisfaction that had eluded her till now. Burdened by tradition, she cannot choose to live with both. Devadatta and Kapila kill each other and Padmini burns herself on their pyre.

Subsequently, Karnad published five more plays, *Angumalige* (1977), *Hittina Hunja* (1980), *Nagamandala* (1988), *Tele Danda* (1990) and *Agni Mattu Male* (1995). All these plays were written in Kannada and have been translated into many Indian languages. Tughlaq, Hayabadana, Nagamandala, Tele-Danda, and *Fire and the Rain* have been translated into English by the author himself. The first three have been published by Oxford University Press in India, and the other two by Ravi Dayal Publishers, New Delhi. Karnad also translated Badal Sircar's *Evan Indrajit* another very important Indian play.



LET US KNOW

1. Karnad talks about the critical choice a writer has to make when he opts to write in one language rather than in another. The choice also determines the primary audience for the work. The play *Hayavadana* is a case in place. On the question of translating his own plays from Kannada to English Karnad has brought in the idea of 'rewriting'.
2. Karnad opines that theatre needs to be nurtured and encouraged. A play lives on the stage and its dynamism derives from its interaction with the audience. It belongs to the moment when it is being watched. The playwright, the actors, the technicians, the director, the spectators create that experience together; they can determine or even modify that experience. I am not convinced that good recordings can be made of theatre performances. (Mukherjee, 47).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How did Girish Karnad conceive his important plays?

9.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *NAGAMANDALA*

The sources of the play can be traced in two oral tales Karnad heard from A. K. Ramanujan. But, Karnad states in his "Note to Nagamandala" in *Three Plays*: "But that is only the least of the reasons for dedicating this play to him." However, the source of the play, Karnad states the following in "Author's Introduction" to *Three Plays*:

"These tales are often narrated by women—normally the older women in the family—while children are being fed in the evenings in the kitchen or being put to bed. The other adults present on these occasions are also women. Therefore these tales, though directed at the children, often serve as a parallel system of communication among the women in the family…They also express a distinctly woman's understanding of the

family around her, a lived counterpoint to the patriarchal structures of classical texts and institutions. The position of Rani in the story of *Nagamandala*, for instance, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected role—as a stranger during the day and as lover at night. Inevitably, the pattern of relationships she is forced to weave from these disjointed encounters must be something of a fiction. The empty house Rani is locked in could be the family she is married into…Many of these tales also talk about the nature of tales. The story of the flames comments on the paradoxical nature of oral tales in general: they have an existence of their own, independent of the teller and yet live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener. Seen thus, the status of a tale becomes akin to that of a daughter, for traditionally a daughter too is not meant to be kept at home too long but has to be passed on. This identity adds poignant and ironic undertones to the relationship of the teller to the tale."

In his conversation with Tutun Mukherjee, Karnad states about the conception of the play *Nagamandala* like this:

"I did not intend any mystical connotations. I thought of it first as 'Naga Bandha' but that sounded rather clumsy and my friends said that there already too many 'bandhs'! 'Nagamandala' had the right sound, you know, strongly evocative of the coils of the snake." (Mukherjee. p 42)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What are the two oral tales from which Karnad draws the inspiration of writing the play *Nagamandala*?

9.5 READING THE PLAY *NAGAMANDALA*

The following sections will help you to read the play *Nagamandala* in terms of its different important aspects. Karnad wrote the play *Näga-Mandala* (1988) while he was Visiting Professor and Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at the University of Chicago in 1987-88. The English version

was first performed by the students of the University of Chicago at the University Theater in May 1988. In 1992, the play was directed in German by Vijaya Mehta at the Leipziger Schauspielhaus in Leipzig, and in Berlin for the Festival of India in Germany. In 1993, the Guthrie Theater of Minneapolis, one of the most prestigious regional theaters in the USA, presented the American première directed by J. Garland Wright as part of its 13th anniversary celebrations. For this play, Karnad received both the Nandikar Calcutta Award for Playwriting (1989) and the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award for the most creative work of 1989 (1992).

9.5.1 Summary of the Play

The play starts with a Prologue. In the Prologue, a failed dramatist is cursed with death, because he has caused many to sleep in the theatre. He is helped to stay awake by a "story" personified, who recounts to him the exciting narrative of a cobra and a married woman. The play combines two folk tales. The framing story describes the gathering of the flames is a dilapidated temple after the lamps in the village homes have been put off. The gossip of the flames is overheard by a playwright who is condemned to die unless he can keep awake the whole night. The story the playwright hears is about a woman, her husband and her snake lover. The following is an attempt at describing the story.

This play is based on the story in which Rani, a young married woman, is neglected by her indifferent and unfaithful husband, Appanna who spends most of his time with his concubine and comes home only for lunch. Rani, being a typical wife, wants to win her husband's affection by all means, following which she mixes a love root to his milk. However, interestingly, that milk is spilled on the nearby anthill and a Cobra called Naga drinks it. Naga, who could take the form of a human, gets enchanted with her and begins to visit her every night in the guise of her husband. This changes Rani's life completely as she starts to experience the good things in life though she never knows that the person with her is not her husband

but the Naga. Soon she becomes pregnant and breaks the news to Appanna. He immediately accuses her of adultery and says that he is not the father of the would-be child. The issue is referred to the village Panchayat. Rani is then asked to prove her fidelity by putting her hand in the snake burrow and taking a vow that she has not committed adultery. Rani places her hand in the snake burrow and vows that she has never touched any male other than her husband and the Naga in the burrow. She is declared chaste by the village Panchayat. However, her husband is not ready to accept that she is pregnant with his child and decides to find out the truth by spying on the house at night. Appanna is shocked to see the Naga visiting Rani in his form, spending time with her and then leaving the house. Appanna gets furious with the Naga and indulges in a fight with him. Both of them fight vigorously. Eventually, the Naga dies in the fight. After this incident, Appanna realises his mistake and accepts Rani along with the child she is carrying.

The play however has two endings. In one, the snake dies. In the second ending, the writer is asked to do something to change the tragic end of the snake lover. So, the woman lets down her hair and asks the snake to hide in her lock. A. K. Ramanujan has remarked that the tale reflects the experience of the Indian women in a joint family system. She has to remain confined in her home. The husband is like a stranger during the day and at night he becomes the lover. So, there is no complete relationship. Thus, the framework of oral storytelling in the play provides the mode of expressing the yearning for love of the women often deserted and or negated or neglected in the patriarchal social system.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Retell the story in your own words

Q 6: What significance does the reference to the failed dramatist hold in the prologue to the play?

9.5.2 Critical Commentary on the Play

As you have understood by now, in the last twenty years or so, a new interest in regional cultural expressions and folklore has developed in India. This has led to the rediscovery and re-evaluation of indigenous forms of literature and the performing arts. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the hands of the Indian playwright. The traditional theatres such as Yakshagana, Tamasha, Ras Lila, Nautanki, Bhavai, Jatra, and Khyal have gone through a remarkable revival since Independence. Considered decadent and largely forgotten during colonial days, such regional theatrical forms have received unprecedented attention and a certain amount of governmental support from the national and state Sangeet Natak Akademis. Their status has been further enhanced by intellectual reviews, which analyse them as the surviving fragments of the ancient Sanskrit dramatic tradition, based on common features such as preliminary rituals, stylised acting and gestures, stock characters like the stage director (suttradhara) and clown (vidushaka), and abundant song and dance. Through annual festivals held in the heart of the cities, folk theatre groups from all over India have performed for urban audiences. Besides, Western scholars too have taken keen interest in studying these traditions. As a result, greater familiarity with folk theatre forms has developed in the cities, and the urban attitude has shifted from scorn to curiosity and respect. Thanks to a playwright like Girish Karnad that such an attitude has been possible.

Prema Nanda Kumar writes that the prestigious Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, USA staged Karnad's *Nagamandala* with African, European, Japanese, and Indian faces which revealed the deep significances of the play. This play was directed by Garland Wright. As Karnad remarks in his "Author's Introduction" to *Three Plays*, his retelling of folktales was inspired by Western playwrights like Bertolt Brecht and Jean Anouilh. However, he confesses that the cobra hero Naga's long speech in the second act "owes much

to Jean Anouilh, although I have been unable to identify the play." Karnad's creative genius lies in taking up fragments of historical-legendary experience and fusing them into a forceful statement.

The contemporary focus of the play is provided by the network of community relations and the shared ideology of folk belief. The drama's frame story derives from another important element in the oral tradition: the notion that stories exist independently of their tellers. Writing about the power of storytelling, A. K. Ramanujan explains how this works. In one Tamil tale, for example, a poor widow is abused by her family of two sons and two daughters-in-law. With no one to talk to, she keeps "her tales of woe" to herself, growing fatter and fatter. One day, unable to bear her misery any longer, she finds a deserted house and begins to talk to the walls. As she tells her "tales of grievance" against her first son, the first wall collapses, and her body grows lighter. With each set of tales, another wall comes down, until she is "standing in the ruins, with bricks and rubble all around her, lighter in mood and lighter in body." Ramanujan concludes that tales do, indeed, have "an existence of their own." They pre-exist the teller, demanding to be told and retold so that they may survive. As Ramanujan puts it, these tales are "constitutive of consciousness," central to the lives of both individuals and communities, crucial for the transfer of ideas from generation to generation. However, as both Ramanujan and Karnad make clear, there is a corresponding threat: if you know a tale and fail to pass it on, take care (Ramanujan 1989: 248-53).



LET US KNOW

One of the important threads in the play of Karnad is the exploration of urgent contemporary issues. As he seems to believe that drama must engage honestly with the contradictions that lie at the heart of the society it talks to and about. In addition, Karnad uses traditional stories to achieve this goal. The stories come from a variety of sources like India's historical past,

mythological episodes from the epic tradition, and regional and pan-Indian folktales. Thus, while the finished dramas have an entirely modern perspective and are clearly intended to speak to a sophisticated and contemporary urban Indian society, the original material almost always belongs to mythology and folklore. Both, both in spirit and in language, Karnad's dramas re-clothe that past to address the emotional realities of India today.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Do you think that the status of the traditional theatrical forms of India has been revived in the present times?

Q 8: Where do Karnad's stories come from?

9.5.3 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes of the play.

Role of Patriarchy:

Rani is a victim of the patriarchal social order. Under the clutches of the traditional marriage system in rural India, Rani fails to enjoy a healthy marital and social interaction as her husband Appanna keeps her "locked up like a caged bird". She is sexually abused, physically bullied and beaten, and emotionally crushed. Consequently, she has no voice as a dignified member of human society. "Marriage is not only an honourable career and one less tiring than many others: it alone permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same time to find sexual fulfilment as lived one and mother". The woman is portrayed as dependant in all three phases of her life. As a daughter, Rani is dependent on her parents, as a wife, on Appanna. Besides, she is imprisoned in her own house. Appanna poses her as an adulterous woman whereas he himself has an illicit relationship with a concubine. He and his hypocritical society questions Rani's chastity and side steps the validity of Appanna's principles.

Intricacies Human Relationship:

The play brings forth the intricacies of human relationship. Besides, the intimate relationships between a man and a woman, and an Indian woman's desperation to win the affections of her husband in spite of the husband's open infidelity exposes many of the established customs in a traditional Indian society. In such a society, the need to prove fidelity is always thrust upon married women while their husbands are not even questioned by the village judicial system about their extramarital affairs. Although Rani and Appanna are presented as characters 'who lived happily ever after', a sense of restlessness in Appanna's inability to comprehend Rani's motherhood and her status as a goddess and her anguish to know whether it was her husband who came to her as the lover because 'No two men make love alike' makes their relationship even more intricate.

Post-colonial search for Indian roots:

In several ways, Karnad clearly articulates the historical and cultural contexts, which his plays try to deal with. His being a socially and politically conscious playwright, his plays are directed to the "post-colonial search for Indian roots." Most of the dominant themes in the play *Nagamandala* are either mythological or historical, because he believes that ancient Indian myths can be used to address the modern sense of the loss of individual identity. The return to India's oral and folk tradition helps in understanding the complexity of human life, and the relations between the individual and society.

Rootedness in Indian Culture:

The play brings together two Kannada folk-tales and some of the techniques of folk theater. The central narrative is that of the snake lover. Rani is married to a man who locks her inside the house all day, returning only to eat. However, every night, in the absence of the husband, a cobra that takes his shape visits Rani. When Rani finally becomes pregnant, her husband complains to the village

elders, which forces Rani to undertake the public ordeal of plunging her hand into the termite mound, which is also the home of the cobra. Her innocence vindicated, she becomes revered as a goddess. Karnad valorises the pleasure he takes in the supra mundane by recollecting the stories he heard inside his lamp-lit house in the Western Ghat villages, which lacked electricity. He dedicates the story of *Nagamandala* to a village culture in which the human world was not separated from the 'snakes' people believed, could take human form, or the goddesses who could change form, and so on.

9.5.4 Major Characters

The following are some of the important characters of the play *Nagamandala*.

Rani (which means Queen):

Rani was the only daughter of her parents. She was better known as the Queen of the family. Her beloved father found her a suitable husband who was rich but without his parents who were long dead. However, Rani continued to live with her parents until she reached womanhood. Soon her husband came and took her with him to his village. To spend her lonely times in the absence of her uncaring husband, she endeavours to discover her individuality by seeking refuge in dreams, fairy tales and fantasies to escape the sordid reality of her existence.

Through the character of Rani in the play, Karnad discusses a woman's predicament in a traditional Indian joint family set-up. *Nagamandala* also provides an underlying metaphor of love that rises from the realms of an abyss to reach the heights of a sanctified relationship of acceptance and reverence. (Mukherjee, 196)

Appanna (which means Any Man):

Appanna literally means "any man" and points to the metaphor of man in general, his chauvinistic stance and towering dominance. Most of his time is spent in suppressing a woman's

individuality. Through the character of Appanna, Karnad exposes the character of any man in a patriarchal set up.

Naga (which means The Cobra):

The king cobra, which is called Naga in the play, gets seduced by the love medicine provided by Kurudavva to Rani to lure, pathetically, her own husband who ignores her and often visits concubines. The snake assumes the form of a loving Appanna in contrast to the horrible husband of daytime and starts visiting her. The climax is reached when Rani becomes pregnant and Appanna questions her chastity. Her innocence is proved by virtue of the snake ordeal that the village elders put before her, and she is eventually proclaimed a Goddess incarnate. Naga makes up all that Rani had missed out in her married life.

Naga finally attains a status higher than men. It protecting its beloved Rani and by providing a sense of security, the snake lover fulfils the role of a husband. Rani is assured an acceptance and even reverence from society. It finally sacrifices its life for the sake of his love.



LET US KNOW

As you read the text of the play, you will have learnt that Rani is not just a name but an epithet from folk vocabulary that is used to describe any beautiful woman as 'queen-like.' Appanna is any man or Everyman. Kappanna is the dark one and his mother Kurudavva is a blind old woman. She is old because she is worldly-wise and blind because she represents Rani's Unconscious. She makes Rani realise her sexuality by giving her magic roots to attract her husband and to wean her husband away from his concubine. Kappanna is haunted by the spectre of a Yakshi— a snake woman, floating out of the well or walking out of a cemetery, both standing in the dark, nether regions. His sudden disappearance is equally intriguing and mysterious. (Mukherjee, 202)

9.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF KARNAD

Almost all the plays by Girish Karnad have received high critical acclaim with the winning of several prestigious awards. For example, *Hayabadana* won the Kamaladevi Award of Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the best Indian play of the year in 1972, and *Tele Danda* won the Karnataka Nataka Akademi Award for the best play of 1990-91 in 1993, and Sahitya akademi Award for 1994.

Prema Nanda Kumar states, "Karnad's plays depend a good deal on the physicality of stage spectacle and the power of spoken Kannada. That much of the original linguistic power is conveyed in the English versions is a tribute to Karnad's unambiguous story lines. A legend, a myth, a page of medieval history, but the ambience is strictly contemporaneous. A. K. Ramanujan has also commented that even in the most urbane and Westernised Indian household there exists, behind the prim exterior, another India. It lives in tales of passion and trouble. The primary sources of these tales are loving grandmothers and servants weaving hypnotic spells in the kitchen as night falls. He contrasts these vernacular tellings both with Sanskrit texts containing the pan-Indian past and with creations in the English language representing the repositories of Europe and the West. Karnad's dramatic writing draws on all three as he undertakes what Ramanujan calls the "lifelong enterprise" of the modern Indian thinker shaped by that "triple stream". Karnad, however, gives as much weight to myth and history as he does to folk tales, for they too demand to be retold. And, this is the contexts in which he has been mostly acclaimed.

He is acutely aware of the state of Indian theatre in post-colonial India and the vacuum that an artist was required to fill. His own predicaments and political developments in the country were interwoven to remake new Indian drama, where the new technology and the new psychology had to play significant roles. As the reviewer B. M. Bhalla observes, plays like *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala* received competent expositions at the hands of prominent scholars who look at these mythical, existential tales from contemporary critical angles to bring out relevant meanings. The

dialectical oppositions and contradictions in the basic situations in both the plays mirror our own situation today. Karnad goes back to his roots to revitalise his art, drawing from both the classical and the folk traditions.

Tutun Mukherjee in his Introductory chapter "Of Text and Performance: Girish Karnad's Plays" in his edited book *Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives* states the following about Girish Karnad:

"Girish Karnad is a playwright whose plays offer together a re-engagement between the apparently separated worlds and makes the autonomy and accessibility to drama and theatre complementary rather than contrasting domains. His plays figure in University syllabi around the world to be taught in classrooms as texts; they are equally popular as performance texts re-produced time and again by different directors. It is remarkable that whatever be the physical or behavioural embodiment given to the mythical, historical, social, or psychological horizons of his plays, the issues that build the plots are drawn from and remain firmly grounded in the experiential world of the readers/spectators but bearing larger implications capable of transcending cultural specificities to reach out towards a universality of human knowledge. That Conrad's plays are successfully performed by theatre groups of different countries and are extremely well received by the audiences of different cultures proves this point." (Mukherjee, 17)



9.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you have learnt that Girish Karnad is one of the most prominent dramatists of the last two decades of the 20th century. His plays *Tughlaq* (1972) and *Hayavadana* (1975) had demonstrated how Indian English drama could revitalise itself by taking 'experiment' as the mode of expression. For example, *Hayavadana* represented a purposeful return to its roots in the rich tradition of ancient Indian drama written both in Sanskrit and Prakrit. In later times, he added three more plays *Nagamandala: Play*

with a Cobra (1990), *Tele Danda* (1993) and *The Fire and the Rain* (1998). It is to be mentioned that all these three plays have been written originally in Kannada but subsequently translated into English by the author himself. In the Preface to *Nagamandala*, Karnad states that the play "is based on two oral tales from Karnataka, which I first heard from Professor A. K. Ramanujan." Although he does not exactly specify which stories these are, equivalent stories are found in every Indian languages. The first is obviously the oral story of a cobra turning into a man at night and visiting a married woman; and the second is based on the faith belief that a nightlong vigil in a temple can ward off death. You have noted that Karnad is somewhat different and interesting simply because he writes in Kannada but himself has translated many of his plays into English. Karnad has so far translated *Tughlaq* (1972), *Hayavadana* (1975), and *Nagamandala* (1991) into English. Published by OUP, these plays have enjoyed enormous success and have become a part of the curricula of several university courses in IEL. You will agree that Karnad's expertise as a playwright lies in is his return to myth and folklore. He uses these to challenge and comment on the present situation.



9.8 FURTHER READING

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: In his essay "Theatre in India" Karnad states that every theatre is rooted in the culture of its own language… …India has oral traditions, riddles, proverbs, songs, ballads, tales, and epics in more than 3,000 mother-tongues… …these forms are potentially or partially theatrical… …reference to Karnad's own childhood and the stories he heard… …his father took him to see plays staged by natak companies.

Ans to Q 2: Karnad is worried about the current status of professional theatre in India… … In Bombay, one can see scores of Marathi and Gujarati plays advertised in daily papers… …Calcutta has a few plays staged in Bengali… …no other cities in India have regular professional theatre.

Ans to Q 3: The myth Yayati in the play *Yayati* very accurately reflected Karnad's anxieties and his attempt to regain his lost connection with the past… …for *Tughlaq*, he took the subject matter from medieval history… …*Hayavadana*, was drawn from the Katha-Sarit Sagara story that the Head always wins over the Body… …the idea for the play *Nagamandala* was conceived form two oral tales that Karnad heard from A K Ramanujan.

Ans to Q 4: Karnad does not exactly specify which stories these are… …the first is the oral story of a cobra turning into a man at night and visiting a married woman… …the second is based on the faith belief that a night long vigil in a temple can ward off death…. …, equivalent stories are found in every Indian language.

Ans to Q 5: Newly married Rani is neglected and locked in the house by her husband Appanna… …a king cobra from the nearby ant hill falls in love with her and starts visiting her at night disguised as her husband… …when the real husband comes to know this, Rani is asked to prove her innocence by undergoing the "Cobra Ordeal" which means putting her hand into the ant hill… …naturally she emerges unscathed, and is immediately hailed as goddess by the village folk. Finally, the cobra finds shelter in the long tresses of Rani.

Ans to Q 6: The tale of the failed playwright suggests that art demands fulfilment on the part of the artist or he will die… …thus the play also suits the rustic folktale it presents at the surface structure… …this of course causes no harm to the deep underlying symbolist structure.

Ans to Q 7: Yes… …their status has been further enhanced by an intellectual reviews which analyse them as the surviving fragments of the ancient Sanskrit dramatic tradition… …besides, there can be seen a return to rituals, stylised acting and gestures, stock characters like the stage

director (Suttradhara) and clown (Vidushaka), and abundant song and dance.

Ans to Q 8: The stories come from a variety of sources… …India's historical past… …mythological episodes from the epic tradition… …regional and pan-Indian folktales.



9.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: In what ways, is Girish Karnad associated with the Post-colonial search for roots. Discuss with reference to his play *Nagamandala*.

Q 2: What are the important themes in the play *Nagamandala*? Discuss the significance of men women relationship as reflected in the play.

Q 3: Karnad dedicates the play *Nagamandala* to a village culture in which the human world was not separated from the 'snakes', people believed, could take human form, or the goddesses who could change form. Discuss.

Q 4: Evaluate the significance of a play like *Nagamandala* in the context of the revival of the regional theatres in India considered decadent and largely forgotten during colonial days.

Q 5: How does the story of Rani dismantle the patriarchal set up? Elaborate.

Q 6: Nagamandala has two endings. Try to discuss, why Karnad does so.

Q 7: Comment on the title of the play *Nagamandala*. Discuss how Karnad's use of folk elements help in the revival of the traditional theatrical practices of India.

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UNIT 10: VIJAY TENDULKAR: *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Vijay Tendulkar: The Playwright

10.3.1 His Life

10.3.2 His Dramatic Career

10.4 Sources of the Play *Ghashiram Kotwal*

10.5 Reading the Play *Ghashiram Kotwal*

10.5.1 Summary of the Play

10.5.2 Critical Commentary on the Play

10.5.3 Major Themes

10.5.4 Major Characters

10.6 Critical Reception of Tendulkar

10.7 Let Us Sum Up

10.8 Further Reading

10.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.10 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

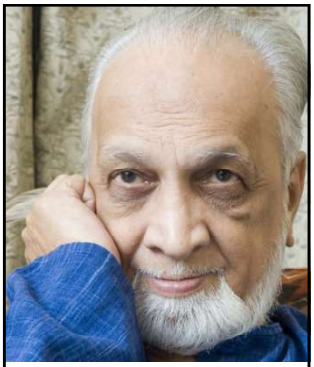
- gain some ideas about the life and works of the Indian playwright Vijay Tendulkar
- explain in detail the story of the play and discuss its significance in the context of the 18th century Pune in Maharashtra
- read the text in its other possible contexts and identify the different philosophical and thematic aspects implicit in the play
- discuss Tendulkar as an important Indian playwright and critic and appreciate the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* in its nuanced totality.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with Vijay Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. This is a controversial musical and historical play of Tendulkar. It concerns with the reign of Peshwas in the 18th century Maharashtra. This play has been one of the two worthwhile efforts in the use of traditional forms. *Ghashiram Kotwal* in the original Marathi production has travelled to several countries and remains, to this date, a highly exportable production. This play has been extensively translated and performed abroad. Set in 18th century Pune in Maharashtra, this play deals with a lecherous Maratha Chieftain, Nana Phadnavis, and the social decadence of his times. Tendulkar evolves a new dramatic form by using prose dialogue, verse, songs, and dances inspired by several popular folk forms of Maharashtra. His production beautifully fuses these traditions with modern techniques and gives a most delightful theatre. It was first performed on 16th December 1972 at the Bharat Natya Mandir, Pune under the auspices of Progressive Dramatic Association and was published in 1973.

10.3 VIJAY TENDULKAR: THE PLAYWRIGHT

10.3.1 His Life



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org

Vijay Dhondo Tendulkar is one of the best-known and most widely performed playwrights of post-Independent India along with Girish Karnad and Badal Sircar. He was born into a Brahmin family in 1928. Even while in school he wrote his first play and later worked as an apprentice in a bookshop. Later, he took up journalism and became the assistant editor of the Marathi dailies Navbharat, Maratha and Loksatta. Tendulkar has been translated and performed in all the major Indian languages. Jabbar Patel's production of his *Ghashiram*

Kotwal is undoubtedly a landmark in modern Indian theatre. His other plays like *Shantata, court chalu ahe (Silence! The Court is in Session,* 1968*)*, *Sakharam Binder* (1972) and *Kamala* are also well-known. What distinguishes the works of Tendulkar from those of his contemporaries is the prevailing mood of disillusionment with nationalist ideals of the Freedom Movement and the exploration of the world of the fallen. His works investigate the gruesome dimension of post-Independent Indian democracy in the context of Mumbai, the biggest inferno of the country.

He is a prolific writer with 32 plays, 30 one-acts, 20 film scripts, 2 novels and a huge body of essays, short-fictions and newspaper columns. He has written plays, short stories, features and television serials in Hindi. He wrote around hundred short stories. He was also a prolific journalist and screenplay writer, as Shyam Benegal, called him the best screenplay writer of the past 50 years. During 1970s and 1980s, he wrote the scripts and dialogue for eleven Hindi films like Nishant, Manthan, Akrosh, Ardhaya Satya and Aghat, which represent an important phase in Hindi cinema. The world of Tendulkar's short-fiction dramatizes disturbing aspects of the relationship between man and woman. Besides, he is also the one who changed the form and pattern of Indian drama by dismantling the three-act play and creating new models. He also tried his hand at writing novels. He published two novels entitled (in the characteristic Tendulkar way), *Novel One* and *Novel Two*. They were however, never translated into any other language.

He has been the recipient of many prestigious awards, which include Maharastra State Government Award (1956, 1969, 1973), Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1971) Padma Bhushan (1984), Maharastra Gaurav Puraskar (1990), Kalidas Samman (1992) and so on. He was the co-founder and president of the theatre group called Aviskar based in Bombay. He also served in the Board of Directors of the National School of Drama (New Delhi) and was the vice president of NSD from 1979-1984.

Tendulkar died in 2008. G. P. Deshpande in "Remembering Tendulkar" writes, "Tendulkar was a phenomenon. It is not easy to explain the appeal of the man. He was very well known and yet he was very lonely. His best moments were the time that he spent with young playwrights and theatre people. During his last days in a Pune hospital, you could not miss the young theatre activists taking turns sit- ting in his hospital room. Here was a lonely man. Here was some- one who did not think too highly of modern human beings. Yet, he was not lonely. His plays denied the possibility of human communication; in actual life he enjoyed nothing better."

10.3.2 His Dramatic Career

You are informed that Vijay Tendulkar has 32 full-length plays and 30 one–act plays to his credit. In this section, we will discuss some of the major plays of Tendulkar. This has to be mentioned that his association with the experimental theatre movement was part of the advent of modernism in Marathi Theatre marked by a break from traditional musical drama and a growing concern with socio-political themes.

Tendulkar's first major play *Manus Navache Bet* (*An Island Called Man*, 1955) is the tale of the tormenting solitude and alienation of modern human beings in an urban society. This was followed by plays like *Madhlya Bhinti* (*The Walls Between*, 1958), *Mee Jinklo Mee Harlo* (*I Won, I Lost,* 1963), *Sari Ga Sari* (*Rain, O Rain*). In these plays, which he wrote between 1955-64, Tendulkar is concerned with how the middle class people are set against a hostile society. His play *Shantata, court chalu ahe (Silence! The Court is in Session,* 1968*)* brought him national recognition. Since them however, there is a change in his theme and treatment. A play like *Dambadwipche Mukabala* (*Encounter in Umbugland*) is different from his previous plays as this is one of his first political plays. You will note that *Ghashiram Kotwal* also looks like a political play. This play musically combines Marathi folk performance style with

contemporary theatrical techniques. This play mainly focuses on the power games men play in society and which are connected to corruption, violence and sensuality. His play *Gidhade* (*The Vultures*) displays how violence becomes an end in itself. While his *Sakharam Binder* explores the complication of human nature and the manifestation of physical lust and violence in human beings. *Kanyadaan* (1983) is another play, which portrays a Dalit writer as a drunkard, wife beater, manipulator and blackmailer

Thus, all of Tendulkar's plays, somehow or the other, deal with different aspects of human characters and complexities of societies and human relationships. With the emergence of Tendulkar on the scene in the mid 1960s, the musical drama, that had dominated the Marathi stage, was losing ground. Though Tendulkar stated writing plays under the influence of his predecessors, his greatness lies in that he outgrew that influence and did not remain stuck there. Often he expressed his uneasiness about the stereotypical dramatic writing of his time as well as the stagnation of the Marathi stage. Therefore, he wanted to rebel and break new ground.



LET US KNOW

It was the late sixties, Indian Drama was represented by four playwrights—Mohan Rakesh, who died young, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad. They are all excellent craftsmen. It had taken contemporary Indian playwriting less than a century to achieve this.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the distinguishing features of Tendulkar's plays?

Q 2: Name some of the awards received by Vijay Tendulkar.

10.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

Ghashiram Kotwal, (Translation into English by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot), was first staged in Marathi on December 16, 1972 by the Progressive Dramatic Association at the Bharatiya Natya Mandir, Pune. Directed by Jabhar Patel, this play remains a milestone in the history of modern Indian theatre. The setting of the play is late 18th century Poona in the last years of the Peshwa Baji Rao II and his chieftain Nana Phadnavis. Their relationship was however not so comfortable as the Peswa even had him arrested at one point. Nana plays off Ghashiram, who is a Brahman from Kanauj, against the Brahmins of Poona following which he had been made the Kotwal by Nana. Actually, Ghashiram will be used as a scapegoat for his own misdeeds. On being asked whether *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a historical play, Tendulkar states: "This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces, which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis, or Ghashiram." It is important to note that the play was written and performed at time during which India was undergoing internal turmoil of various kinds that finally led to the infamous Emergency. Hence, the play's portrayal of the utmost authority unleashed on the common people is to be seen against the play's historical background. However, you should note that Tendulkar himself states, "It is not a historical play. The historical incident was used, to say something which may be' universal. See, I had been playing with different forms, it is fun. It provides a lot of space, to think of a new idea." (Conversation with Vijay Tendulkar).

In his Interview with Gowri Ramnarayan, Tendulkar deliberated on the inspiration of the play like the following:

"The inspiration of the play was a topical situation. I was working for *Loksatta* when the first major riots were launched in Bombay by Shiv Sena. Bal Thackeray seemed an ordinary man, not at all the sort of person who would indulge in dare-devilry. The middle class boys who followed him were

not demons. In that particular situation they acquired power, abused it and spread terror. I sensed that terror in my newspaper office. We were not free to write anything about Shiv Sena. If the title 'Senapati' was not prefixed to Thackeray's name in a report, a morcha would be taken out with burning and looting. Actually, the Shiv Sena was deliberately fuelled by the ruling party to establish a force against the masses. Then came Krishna Menon and his election campaign when the Shiv Sena was pitted against the communists. You can see the similarity between the Ghashiram incident and this event to which we all were witness." (Madge, 170-71)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* all about?

Q 4: Do you think that *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a historical play?

10.5 READING THE PLAY *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

The following subsections will help you to read the text of the play in terms of its various aspects.

10.5.1 Summary of the Play

Ghashiram Kotwal is divided into two Acts. Each Act is divided in small scenes though these scenes are not separated from each other. As you are already informed, that *Ghashiram Kotwal* presents the story of an elderly Brahman, Ghashiram Savaldas, who had come to Poona to earn his livelihood. Now let me try to summarise the play.

The play begins with an invocation of Ganapati for its success. However, the play also invokes Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and music, and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. After the invocation, the Sutradhar and the chorus quickly change their role into Poona Brahmans. The line "we the Poona Brahmans bow and prance" capture the mood of Act I. The Sutradhar, along with the Chorus, asks certain important questions, which sets

the plot of the play in progress. Act I points to the class structure in the city of Poona and the dominations of the Brahmans. We see a group of three Brahmans who are heading towards Bavannakhani and the Sutradhar is seen playing a dholki and singing, "The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani". Suddenly, the setting changes to the house of Gulabi who is a prostitute. The Brahmins are enjoying her erotic dance. Ghashiram appears and joins the dance. However, the climax of the scene comes with Nana's arrival at Gulabi's house. Nana is carrying a 'silver-handled walking stick' with a 'garland of flowers on wrist'. Nana is dancing with the rhythm of Tabla, and his walking stick denoting his authority. The flowers at Nana's wrist are appropriate for the one who regularly visits prostitutes, flirts with women even at Kirtan, pursues young girls of the age of his own daughter, and marrying for seven times. Nana's latest bride is just 14 years of age.

Then we meet many dancers on stage. Brahmans, Nana, Gulabi and Ghashiram all are dancing, and along with them dance the Brahman wives and their lovers. Thus, there are two sets of dancers onstage. Interesting to note that their erotic dancing is accompanied by the religious chant. Ghashiram bends and offers his back for Nana to rest his foot and Nana is pleased enough to offer him a pearl necklace as gift. However, Gulabi demands the necklace and Ghashiram refuses. Gulabi who is impelled by greed gets him beaten up. Ghashiram is marginalised, as he looks different from the Poona Brahmans. Ghashiram is later accused of stealing, and his claims of being a Brahman is not accepted by the soldiers. Finally, he is banished from Poona. Subsequently, he transforms himself into a tyrant. After becoming the Kotwal, Ghashiram becomes arrogant, proud and larger than life after having a taste of power. But soon Ghashiram discovers that his daughter Gauri is dead because of Nana who is going to marry for the seventh time. This is a moment of deep anguish for a bereaved father. Then follows senseless violence. Ghashiram is stoned and hit by the mob. Finally,

Ghashiram is cornered and killed.

This play first appeared on the Marathi stage on 16th December 1972, and in many senses, it became an important event in the history of the Indian stage. However, like his other play *Sakharam Binder* this play was also caught up in controversy. Against the fierce opposition from the local Marathi audience, there came unprecedented international recognition. The opposition occurred mostly due to the characterisation of the major character Nana Phadnavis who is placed at the centre along with Ghashiram Kotwal. The play not only deals with incidents in their personal lives but also presents a commentary on the inhuman Brahmanical social system in Pune during the age of Peshwai. Tendulkar intended to specifically show the different shades of debauchery and its impact on inter-personal relationships, on society and political power game. As the Marathi audience was not used to such a play, initially they were confused. Although the devices of Maharastrian folk music such as Naman, Lavani, Powada and Kirtan were familiar to the audience, their integration into dramatic presentation was almost revolutionary. Subsequently, the play was translated and staged in many languages in different regions.

10.5.2 Critical Commentary on the Play

Commenting on the form and the theme of the play, Girish Karnad explains clearly the contemporary relevance of the play in the Introduction to his *Three Plays* like this: “In his Ghashiram Kotwal, Tendulkar uses, Dashavatara, a traditional semi-classical form, to investigate a contemporary political problem, the emergence of “demon” in public. These demons are initially created by political leaders for the purpose of their own power games but ultimately go out of control and threaten to destroy their own creators. It is a theme recurrent in Indian mythology: the demon made indestructible by the boon of gods and then turning on gods themselves.” However, the play emerges as an ironical commentary on our socio-political

set up. As Samik Bandopadhyay points out, Tendulkar could find a parallel in the history of Peshwa Empire and thereby suggest that such circumstances are not confined to a particular era but are seen in all times and discovered its contemporary relevance. When we see the end of one Ghashiram, we presume that it is the end of all Ghashirams but the fact is that the emergence of Ghashirams is a universal phenomenon. Ghashirams grow and prosper as and when they get identical socio-political situations in our society.

Tendulkar's plea printed on the blurb of the book *Ghashiram Kotwal: A Reader's Companion* goes thus: "This is a non-historical opera like legend based on history. Ghashiram is an offspring of a specific social situation. This social situation of Ghashiram goes beyond time and place. Although the author undertakes all the responsibility of the historical base of the episode, he does not intend to express his opinion on the Peshwa regime, Nana Padhnavis and Ghashiram Kotwal in their so-called authentic life stories in the relevant history." (20)

Thus, through thus play, Vijay Tendulkar explores the corrupt and sick modern society with its typical callous men who have no moral scruples. However, Tendulkar also stated the following regarding the play:

"This is not a historical play. It is a story in prose, verse, music, and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces, which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram. The moral of this story, if there is any, may be looked for elsewhere… …It is rather difficult to go back to the point when I thought of writing this play and recollect everything that happened to me on the conscious and subconscious levels. Broadly speaking, I had in mind the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghashirams. Also those who create, and help Ghashirams to grow and the irony of stoning to death a person pretending that it is

the end of Ghashirams. The rest just happened. Or, if that sounds pretentious happened at a subconscious level. The decadence of the class in power (the Brahmins incidentally during the period which I had to depict) also was incident though not accidental."

However, after nineteen performances the president of the Progressive Dramatic Association banned the play. The executive committee of the Association passed a resolution supporting the president's decision. They objected to the play on the grounds that

1) It was anti-brahmin
2) The character of Nana Phadnavis as conceived by the playwright was not historically correct.
3) There was a fear of revolt in the audience and a strong possibility that the play would be publicly abused by the audience if the performances continued.

It is important to note that Ghashiram Kotwal is called a folk musical. It uses the Tamasha form, which is a folk theatrical form, which had developed in Maharashtra in the 16th century. This form offered bawdy entertainment to the village folk. According to *Cambridge Guide to Theatre* "Tamasha satirises and pokes fun at contemporary society often at the expense of politicians and businessmen, priests and prophets, under the guise of historical or mythological stories." You will like to know that the Tamsha plays usually start with a song in praise of the gods following which historical figures and incidents are satirised. The ambiance of the play is usually created through Lavani or love songs accompanied by erotic dance. Besides the Tamasha form, Ghashiram Kotwal also uses the Khela form of Uttar Pradsesh and Rajasthan. The Khela usually begins with prayers to Ganapati and includes invocations to other gods and goddesses. It is interesting to note how the play Ghashiram Kotwal brings together all such dramatic forms through the opening invocation to Ganapati and to Saraswati, the figure of the Sutradhar and the Chorus, the use of Music to explore sexual licence and revelry, use of historical figures and incidents, and a vehement satire against authority and individual who misuse power.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What are some of the traditional dramatic forms used by Tendulkar in this play?

Q 6: Why was the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* banned?

10.5.3 Major Themes

Dominant Class:

The dominant class in the context of the play is the Brahmins who enjoyed many privileges. However, they also took various advantages of their position and their intimacy with their ruler. Many times, they even broke class codes and indulged in illicit activities. In case of Nana, he has the protection of the ruler and hence, feels secure despite his violation of all Brahman codes.

Authority and Power:

This theme can be best understood in terms of the role played by both Nana and Ghashiram. Nana was already powerful following his connection with the Peshwa, but Ghashiram, newly made powerful by Nana, get carried away by it and engages in brutal demonstration of power. Thus, they are not different from each other in terms of exerting power. However, the ides of power in this play can also be seen in terms of the state and its various institutions and organs. However, Tendulkar, instead of simply investigating power, also tries to explore how individuals use each other within different institutionalised power structure. Both Nana and Ghashiram display an equal degree of selfishness and a tendency to use people for their own betterment. The dynamics of power manipulation in *Ghashiram Kotwal,* can be seen in terms of the way Ghashiram uses his innocent daughter Gauri to secure the post of Kotwal. The predator ultimately becomes the prey and Ghashiram is stoned to death. He is outsmarted by the wily Najia Phadnavis who uses Machiavellian tactics to get rid of the Kotwal.

Theme of Violence:

It is important to see how Tendulkar deals with the theme of violence in the play. The Barhmins almost considered the city of Poona as personal property. They closed all doors to the outsiders as they could not earn a living and had to face humiliations from the city people. This is what makes Ghashiram Kotwal a brutal character. Tendulkar stated, "I feel fascinated by the violent exploiter-exploited relationship and progressively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it." This play beautifully showcases how violent treatment is meted out to the outsider, the Brahmin Ghashiram from Kanauj, and the threat of violence behind the permit system in Ghashiram's rule. Finally, one can also see an example of mob violence.

Being asked by Shukla Chatterjee—Why do you prefer violence in your plays? Vijay Tendulkar states that he doesn't frequently use violence in his plays. He further states,

"Since you are referring to the plays translated so far, from a set of about thirty plays, you find a prominence on violence…Violence has been a part of my writing. It has come in quite a few plays in different contexts. Violence has never been my theme. My themes have always been different. An element of violence is there in the human mind. And their different expressions come through my plays. It happens so, because it is happening in life itself. It has been happening even before I was born. And it is happening now. Something that I could not put aside and decide that I would not write on this. All aspects of human nature are different. A human being is again a complex entity by itself. It cannot take away anything by ones being good or bad, cruel or kind or whatever. Can be both at the same time. The complexity is something that appeals to me. I am interested in the human mind, the human beings and obviously their relationships and the problems of existence etc. Violence, or I will prefer to change the word to 'aggression', has been a part of this human existence. That instinct of aggression which again is

intrinsically linked up with the human ego cannot be taken aside and treated independently, either in literature or in other writings. So it has happened without my deciding to use violence frequently I can't give any reason."

10.5.4 Major Characters

Tendulkar had, at a very early stage of his life, developed a curiosity for people. Without consciously trying, he had an ear for the speech habits of people and also an eye for their mannerisms and personal peculiarities. "I do not have to exert myself to do it", he once said, "It happens automatically. Everything gets recorded and stored in the computer of the brain. I do not have to call for it as I write. It comes by itself. "I have been asked several times: From where did this or that character in your play come? My characters have also been related to certain living persons quite a few times because of an obvious similarity of a few details. I never had one single living person in my mind as my character. Even if I did at the beginning the character took its own shape as it moved through the play and changed considerably in the course." According to Tendulkar, a character offers a great scope to represent the socio-political issues of his time. Tendulkar also states that each of his characters has his or her own separate existence and expression. However, that remains within the framework set up for each play. This gives specificity to the different characters through their distinctive expression, appearance, and style. Tendulkar also opined that none of his characters is modelled on one single individual but emerges because of his experiences and encounters with many similar kind of people. Thus, Ghashiram represents the other characters like him caught in the traps of the powerful in society.

The following are the most important characters of the play.

Sutradhar:

The Sutradhar is an important character of the play. He is one who holds the 'Sutra' or the thread of the story to be told. The

Sutradhar actually belongs to a traditional element in Indian theatrical performances. His major role is to observe, inform, comment, and indicate changes into the story of the play. Besides, he adopts several roles in order to set the play in progress. When you go through the play, you will find that the Sutradhar becomes a cynical prisoner telling Ghashiram about Police power in Poona, a Kirtankar or Haridasa, or a man with the pregnant wife.

Neela Bhalla in her article "Ghashiram Kotwal: Text and Sub-text" writes that the role of the Sutradhar is fluid. In both classical and Marathi folk traditions, the Sutradhar introduces the play and greets the audience, and then he leaves the stage. In GK however, we see a merging of the classical and folk traditions and innovation and adaptation as well. The role of the Sutradhar is as flexible as that of the chorus. He can merge with the chorus or take on an important or minor acting role. He can comment or even speak directly to the audience, stand by silently as a spectator. He is present on the stage from the beginning of the play to the end. (Magde, 135).

Ghashiram Kotwal:

Ghashiram, the protagonist of the play, is a poor Brahmin from Kannauj who comes to Pune in search of a livelihood. During that time, local Brahmins who distinguished themselves as scholars, doctors, logicians, astrologers, linguists and barons dominated Pune. Because Ghashiram is an ordinary man, he has no high hopes for life. What worries him is how to earn a living for his family in the caste-based society of Pune. We meet him at Bavannakhani, a red light area in Pune, where Gulabi entertains Nana and his followers with dance and song. Here he gets the chance to meet Nana who appears to him as his saviour without knowing that he will uproot him one day. Pune becomes rotten as the ruler Nana, with lack of morality, married seven times, and is still running after young women. At Bavannkhani, in the name of God, a dance of adultery is going on and the Brahmins and Nana are enjoying Gulabi's dance. During

the dance, Nana hurts his ankle and Ghashiram saves him by offering his back to rest his injured leg. Ghashiram who has struggled a lot to establish himself in the society takes up a chance to please Nana who offers necklace to Ghashiram for saving him. However, this reward from Nana to Ghashiram instils wrath and jealousy in Brahmins. You find that Ghashiram in the play is a combination of various details, historical and contemporary. His visual image and his speech come from images from a few folk forms he had casually seen in his part of the country whereas his character is a combination of real life Ghashirams of his time.

Nana Phadnavis:

Nana is typical of the wily, unscrupulous politicians who are true to our times. His lavish life style, compulsive lechery, and enjoyment with music and dance are simply the extensions of power and wealth. He is also very clever and always relishes the prospect of manipulating others as and when necessary. He is good at using the weaknesses of the poor people to gain control over them and deploy them to meet his own ends and desires. His first appearance on stage with his walking stick and flowers at his wrist and joining in the erotic dance is a way to dramatically represent his character. The gifting of the necklace to Ghashiram becomes a kind of investment by Nana for the future. His lecherous nature comes forth when he catches sight of Ghashiram's daughter Gauri during a Kirtan and develops a passion for her. Towards the end of the play, while facing the rage of Ghashiram, he takes the role of Krishna and speaks on the transitoriness of life in a parody of the famous scene in the Mahabharata. Besides, he is also performing religious rituals that sheds more light on the evil aspects of his character. From this, it is possible for you to assume that Nana is devoid of any moral obligations.

The Women Characters:

In the context of the play, the women are presented as minor figures. In the play, you will find different types of women: Gauri is a

prostitute; the first Brahman wife and her lover; the second Brahman woman who is accused of adultery and is forced out of her house; Gauri and the seventh bride who are young and innocent and represent all young beautiful women preyed upon by people like Nana. However, the status of these women characters in the play is that of a sex object to be exchanged by men. In GK, one can see the strong forces of social tradition, which make a young girl like Gauri an easy prey to patriarchy in the form of her father's ambition and a powerful man's lust. An activist for women's rights, Tendulkar, though made Gauri voiceless, implicitly showed great awareness on the issue, at a historically important phase of 1960s and 70s, when the new identity of women was emerging in Indian drama.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What does Tendulkar has to say about his characters?

Q 8: What role is played by the Sutradhar in the play?

10.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *VIJAY TENDULKAR*

Vijay Tendulkar, in this play, portrays in unpretentious manner, violence as a part of human life. Through various themes taken from real-life experiences, Tendulkar fights for social justice it is this touch with reality that makes his plays lively. One of the corner stones of contemporary experimental Indian Theatre, Tendulkar highlights the development of regional theatre, as well as contemporary Indian Theatre as a whole.

After so many performances since its first performance under the directorship of Jabbar Patel, the Progressive Dramatic Association banned the play because it was anti Brahmin and provided an inaccurate picture of Nana Padnavis who is a historical figure. Subsequently, most of the actors resigned from PDA and formed Theatre Academy on March 27, 1973. Since that time, the play has been produced in many Indian languages, in different parts of India as well as abroad. Samik Bandyopadhyay, who introduces Tendulkar's plays in the *Collected Plays in Translation* (OUP, 2003) suggests,

"the sheer thrill of the musical codes to a certain extent weaken the thrust of the satire, and the sting is blunted." However, the disguised play of power and the masking of the evil neatly represent the ways in which real face of power is disguised.

Thus, Tendulkar made many enemies. He was a victim of physical violence more than once because his writings offended the historical and social beliefs of the people. When Ghashiram was staged, a group of Brahmans, who felt offended at the description of brahmans in that play, marched to Tendulkar's office and bit him up. This happened in the Express group of newspapers. Tendulkar was then working for the Marathi daily of the group. They were also angry that Nana Phadnavis, the late 17th century Maratha Brahman, was shown in a derogatory way. Tendulkar's experience was no different, except that it was more violent. A dalit threw a chappal (footwear) at him presumably because he thought that Tendulkar's treatment of the dalit protagonist was casteist. Nevertheless, despite all such allegations, this play remains an important landmark as it exposes many of the social ills that India is still struggling to overcome in different parts of India.

As you have already read, following the staging of the play, Tendulkar and his family had to suffer social humiliation and torment, which they faced most bravely. The main objection to the play was its character assassination of Nana Phadnavis. Many even asked why Vijay Tendulkar in portraying the character of Nana underplayed his historically proven qualities as a politician and concentrated only on the negative features like his lechery. Besides, they were also troubled by the satirical portraiture of the Brahmins of Pune and their so-called Brahminism in the days of Peshwa. In the preface to the play, Tendulkar stated that though the play is historical it is also in a sense a-historical. However, despite all oppositions, the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* has acquired almost a global reputation.



10.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have gained sufficient ideas about the life and works of the playwright Vijay Tendulkar, about his experiments in bringing in the traditional elements of drama back to contemporary plays. By now, you must have learnt why Tendulkar is seen as an important Indian playwright and critic. You have read that the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is set in the context of the 18th century Pune in Maharashtra. You are now able to read the text in its other possible contexts, and identify the different philosophical and thematic aspects implicit in the play. This play also met with many objections regarding the portrayal of the Brahmans in terms of many negativities. You are advised to read the translated version of the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* published by Oxford University Press. You should have learnt that once Ghashiram is shown as a pawn in the game of power politics, the play becomes a metaphor or even an allegory of the power-hungry people in all walks of life—social and political. There are many Ghashirams and many Nanas everywhere, and this realisation will always help to celebrate the play *Ghashiram Kotwal*.



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10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The prevailing mood of disillusionment with nationalist ideals of the Freedom Movement and the exploration of the world of the fallen… …investigation of the gruesome dimension of post-Independent Indian democracy in the context of Mumbai.

Ans to Q 2: He has been the recipient of many prestigious awards, which include Maharastra State Government Award (1956, 1969, 1973), Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1971) Padma Bhushan (1984), Maharastra Gaurav Puraskar (1990), Kalidas Samman (1992) and so on.

Ans to Q 3: *Ghashiram Kotwal* also looks like a political play… this play musically combines Marathi folk performance style with contemporary theatrical techniques… …this play mainly focuses on the power games men play in society which are connected to corruption, violence and sensuality.

Ans to Q 4: No… …as Tendulkar himself has state that it is not a historical play… …it is just a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era… …Ghashirams are the creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place.

Ans to Q 5: Dashavatara, a traditional semi-classical form, to investigate a contemporary political problem, the emergence of "demon" in public… …non-historical opera like legend based on history… …use of folk musical… …use of the Tamasha form, which is a folk theatrical form which had developed in Maharashtra in the 16th century etc.

Ans to Q 6: Because it was anti-brahmin… …the character of Nana Phadnavis as conceived by the playwright was not historically correct… …there was a fear of revolt in the audience and a strong possibility that the play would be publicly abused by the audience if the performances continued.

Ans to Q 7: Tendulkar developed a curiosity for people since childhood… …his characters have been related to certain living persons… …a character offers a great scope to represent the socio-political issues of his time… …Tendulkar also states that each of his characters has his or her own separate existence and expression.

Ans to Q 8: The Sutradhar is an important character of the play… …he actually belongs to a traditional element in Indian theatrical performances… …his major role is to observe, inform, comment, and indicate changes into the story of the play… …he adopts several roles in order to set the play in progress.



10.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Vijay Tendulkar's association with the experimental theatre movement was part of the advent of modernism in Marathi Theatre. Discuss with reference to *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

Q 2: Which are the traditional dramatic forms brought back into mainstream drama by Vijay Tendulkar? Discuss with reference to his play *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

Q 3: How is the character of Ghashiram portrayed by Vijay Tendulkar? Comment on Ghashiram's marginalisation in the second act of the play.

Q 4: Discuss the theme of violence as reflected in a play like *Ghashiram Kotwal.* How does Vijay Tendulkar justify the use of violence in this play?

Q 5: In what ways does the play expose the corruption in the 18th century Pune in the last years of the Peshwa Baji Rao II.

Q 6: Tendulkar opines that a character offers a great scope to represent the socio-political issues of his time. Elaborate.

Q 7: Write in detail about Vijay Tendulkar's contribution to Indian drama as a whole drawing on the success of the play *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

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UNIT 11: R. K. NARAYAN: *THE VENDOR OF SWEETS*

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 R. K. Narayan: The Novelist

11.4 Reading the Novel: *The Vendor of Sweets*

- 11.4.1 The Storyline
- 11.4.2 Major Themes
- 11.4.3 Major Characters
- 11.4.4 Narayan's Narrative Style

11.5 Critical Reception of Narayan

11.6 Let Us Sum Up

11.7 Further Reading

11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.9 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of R. K. Narayan, one of the important novelists of the early phase of Indian English novels
- form an idea of Narayan as a major novelist of his generation
- discuss the novel *The Vendor of Sweets* in terms of its different aspects
- make an assessment of the reception of R. K. Narayan as well as of the novel.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 3 of the course on Indian English literature. In this unit, you will gain some ideas about Indian English fiction through R. K. Narayan's novel *The Vendor of Sweets.* Narayan is one among

the three leading figures of early Indian Writing in English alongside Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. The novel deals with Jagan who is a prosperous sweet vendor at his 60s, and who is influenced by Gandhian principles. He is extremely fond of his son Mali who announces that he is abandoning school to go to America to become a writer. Jagan is confused. After a year or two Mali returns with a half-Korean and half-American wife and with a grand scheme of marketing a machine that would help in novel writing. Jagan is utterly at a loss as he is forced to confront a new world in which his cherished notion of marriage and morals seem to have no importance. Gradually, the clash of civilisation deepens as each chapter progresses. Thus, this novel is an excellent rendering of the experiences of Narayan's own generation of people. By the time you finish reading this unit, you should be able to appreciate the novel as one of the landmarks of Indian fiction writing in English.

11.3 R. K. NARAYAN: THE NOVELIST

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (1906–2001), known to the world as R. K. Narayan is an Indian writer who is best known for his "Malgudi" novels set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. R. K. Narayan was born in Madras. His father was a school headmaster. Narayan did some of his studies under his father in his school. It is heard that Narayan's family mostly conversed in English. In later life, Narayan studied at different schools in Madras. Since his childhood days, he was an avid reader of Dickens, Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy. Narayan moved to Mysore to live with his family when his father was transferred to the Maharajah's College High School. The well-stocked library at the school, as well as his father's own, fed his reading habit, and he started writing. After completing high school, Narayan failed the university entrance examination and spent a year at home reading and writing. He subsequently passed the examination in 1926 and joined Maharaja College of Mysore. It took Narayan four years to obtain his Bachelor's degree. Narayan realised later that the only career he was ready to embark on was writing, and he decided to stay at home and write novels.

Narayan wrote his first novel, *Swami and Friends* in 1930. The book was semi-autobiographical and built upon many incidents from his own childhood. With this book, Narayan created Malgudi, a town that creatively reproduced the social sphere of India. However, it was rejected by a publisher. He sent the manuscript of *Swami and Friends* to a friend at Oxford, who instead showed the manuscript to Graham Greene. Greene recommended the book to his publisher, and it was finally published in 1935. Greene also counselled Narayan on shortening his name to become more familiar to the English-speaking audience. Narayan's next novel *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), was inspired in part by his experiences at college, and dealt with the theme of a rebellious adolescent transitioning to a rather well adjusted adult. His third novel, *The Dark Room* (1938) was about domestic disharmony, showcasing the man as the oppressor and the woman as the victim within a marriage.

After the death of his wife Rajam in 1939, Narayan remained depressed for a long time. The bereavement brought about a significant change in his life and became the inspiration behind his next novel, *The English Teacher*. This novel, like his first two books, is autobiographical to a significant extent, and completes a supposed trilogy following *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*. In 1940, Narayan tried his hand at a journal, *Indian Thought*. With the help of his uncle, a car salesman, Narayan managed to get more than a thousand subscribers in Madras city alone.

In November 1942, was published his first collection of short stories *Malgudi Days,* followed by *The English Teacher* in 1945. In between, Narayan also started his own publishing company, naming it Indian Thought Publications. After *The English Teacher*, Narayan's writing took a more imaginative and creative turn. His next effort *Mr. Sampath*, was the first book exhibiting this modified approach. Soon after, he published yet another novel *The Financial Expert*, a very significant and original works of fiction in 1951. The novel was based on a true story about a genius called *Margayya*, related to him by his brother. His next novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* is loosely based on a fictional visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Malgudi and includes significant references to the Indian Independence Movement.

In 1953, his works were published in the United States for the first time, by Michigan State University Press. *The Guide* was written while he was visiting the United States in 1956 on the Rockefeller Fellowship. While in the States, Narayan maintained a daily journal that laid the foundation for his book *My Dateless Diary*. Around this time, on a sudden visit to England, Narayan met Graham Greene for the first time. On his return to India, *The Guide* was published. It won him the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958.

In 1961 was published his *The Man-Eater of Malgudi.* The book was written in the classical art form of comedy. Then Narayan spent three weeks in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne on his visit to Australia to have lectures on Indian literature. The trip was funded by a fellowship from the Australian Writers' Group. By this time, Narayan had also achieved significant success and fame. In 1964, Narayan published his first mythological work *Gods, Demons and Others*, a collection of rewritten and translated short stories from Hindu epics. Like many of his other works, this book was illustrated by his younger brother R. K. Laxman. You must have heard about Laxman who had been a great cartoonist of India.

Narayan's next major publication was *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967). It was inspired in part by his visits to America and his contemplations on cultural differences. Then he published a collection of short stories entitled *A Horse and Two Goats* in 1970. Narayan was commissioned by the Karnataka government to write a book to promote tourism in the state. This bore fruits as *The Emerald Route* (Indian Thought Publications, 1980). The book contains his personal perspective on Karnataka's local history and heritage. The same year, he was elected as an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and won the AC Benson Medal from the Royal Society of Literature. In 1983, Narayan published his next novel, *A Tiger for Malgudi*, about the relationship between a tiger and humans. His next novel *Talkative Man* was published in 1986. It is the tale of an aspiring journalist from Malgudi.

In 1980, Narayan was nominated to the Rajya Sabha, for his contributions to Indian literature. In 1990, he published his next novel *The*

World of Nagaraj another novel set in Malgudi. Around 1994, Narayan published his final book *Grandmother's Tale*. The book is an autobiographical novella, about his great-grandmother who travelled far and wide to find her husband, but who ran away shortly after their marriage.

Narayan died on 13 May 2001, in Chennai at the age of 94. In his sixty years of writing career, Narayan received many awards and honours. These include the A C Benson Medal from the Royal Society of Literature and the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Discuss the life and works of R. K. Narayan in brief.

Q 2: Which three novels of Narayan are autobiographical?

11.4 READING THE NOVEL: *THE VENDOR OF SWEETS*

The following sections will guide you to read the novel in terms of its various aspects.

11.4.1 The Storyline

The main plot of the novel revolves around the issues arising from the generation gap between father Jagan and his son Mali. Narayan in his superb style narrates Jagan's role in India's freedom struggle during his youth. He tries to act on the principles described in the great epic Ramayana. Naturopathy forms the pivotal of his life and he even desires to publish his natural way of living in the form of a book, but obviously, it is a futile dream as the draft has been gathering dust in the publisher's office for the last five years. He wears hand-spun cloth that signifies purity to him. In his early days, Jagan loses his wife Ambika because of his belief in nature cures. He had never spent much time with his wife, something that causes discontent in his son Mali. Mali has got his passport and tickets ready without even informing Jagan about his plans. Mali,

without his father's permission discontinues his education, and goes to America to get training to write a book. However, the old man accepts even this diversion with good heart, treasures every letter received from Mali, and proudly exhibits it to anyone who cares to listen. A few years later, he comes back very westernised and brings along a half-American, half-Korean girl, Grace. Jagan assumes that they are married, though Mali never told him this in a straightforward way, which causes great disappointment to Jagan. Jagan however develops affection for Grace and feels Mali is not giving her the attention she deserves. Soon Mali expresses a desire to start a machine factory with some partners from America. He asks his father to invest in this factory. Jagan is unwilling, which causes friction between Jagan and Mali. Troubled by the turmoil, Jagan decides to retire from active working. As this is happening, Mali is caught by the police for drunkenness and deserts his wife. Jagan then asks his cousin to make sure that Mali stays in prison for some time, so that he can learn his mistakes. Jagan also gives some amount of money to the cousin so that he can buy a plane ticket to Grace so that she can go back to her hometown.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Narrate the story of the novel *The Vendor of Sweets* in your own words.

11.4.2 Major Themes

The following are the major themes of the novel *The Vendor of Sweets*.

East versus West/Tradition versus Modernity:

The relationship between Jagan and his son Mali is central to the clash between Eastern and Western cultural values. The two present two diametrically opposite ways of thought as well as two different lifestyles. This can be found for example, in their food habits: while Jagan maintains a strict, religiously founded diet, Mali starts

eating beef and drinking alcohol after his stint in America. Again, while Jagan prefers his vocation of a sweet vendor, and prefers to walk everywhere, Mali aspires for a higher social status that manifests itself in his desire to buy a car. Again, by choosing to enter the field of technology and industry, Mali shows a more westernised outlook while Jagan looks at such a desire as too shallow. For Narayan, progress cannot be reduced to technological advancements but in an individual's successful confrontation and consequent reconciliation with oneself. It thus implies a victory over oneself and over one's material desires. Narayan thus moves away from the seemingly more materialistic Western concept of progress, to the Indian ideal of self- realization that is perceived to be a marker of an authentic life. Each of Narayan's novels take up this theme in various manifestations and all his protagonists undergo significant moments of self-doubt that allow them to question their beliefs and opinions that they have held only superficially after which they arrive at a moment of revelation that takes them to a deeper spiritual or mystical level. Again, in the novel, "the elements of tradition are based on the Hindu view of life and Gandhian ethics, the two most powerful influences discernable in the character of Jagan" (Jha 91). Frequent mentions of the Gita, the Puranas and such texts help create a framework of tradition on which the framework of modernity (the fantastic plan of Mali to manufacture and sell story-telling machines being at the centre of it all) is superimposed. Tradition, as it were, seeps into even the everyday habits of Jagan: "eating natural salts, wearing khadi, spinning the charkha, reading the Gita and writing a book on nature therapy" (Jha 92). Mali, the rebellious college-dropout son of Jagan, on the other hand, becomes remote from such a life. This remoteness and rejection is symbolised by the terse letters and telegrams sent by him to his father, announcing certain significant activities like that of eating beef and drinking alcohol.

Father and Son:

The above theme naturally leads us to another theme: that

of the generational gap between the father and the son, representing two different versions of India. Jagan, still living in the past and basking in his glory as a Gandhian who was jailed for his participating in the freedom struggle, does not realise that his son does not share these same ideals. For one who opposed British rule in his youth, Mali's embracing of Western ideals becomes distressing for Jagan, but at the same time, he himself does not realise that part of the reason for this are his own actions, particularly his reluctance to avail of the advantages of modern medicine that cost the life of his wife and Mali's mother. From taking a stereotypical paternal pride in his son and his journey to America for his higher studies, Jagan comes down to despair at the foolhardiness and arrogance of his son, and finally is of the opinion that a bit of jail time will actually make him learn the hard lessons of life more efficiently and teach him some responsibility.

Human versus Machine:

The theme of modernity is manifested in the crucial image of the story-writing machine, which evokes "two major modernist values – mechanization of an area of activity which requires to remain human and a frenzied effort for material prosperity" (Jha 92). The refusal of Jagan to sponsor the project thus affirms the human in preference to the mechanical, and paves the way for the spiritual regeneration of the protagonist, Jagan.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What are the major themes of the novel *The Vendor of Sweets*?

11.4.3 Major Characters

The following are the major characters of the novel.

Jagan:

Jagan is the protagonist of the novel. A follower of Gandhi in his youth, Jagan is now a vendor of sweets. It is Jagan who embodies

the ideals of the East. Jagan "discovers the reality of the West through his own son, Mali" (Pousse 44). Jagan is a widower and has a tremendous love for his son, Mali. In an apparent paradox, given his extremely successful career as a sweetmeat seller, Jagan is very conscious and disciplined about his dietary habits. As mentioned earlier, during his youth, Jagan was active in Gandhi's Satyagraha movement, and had even gone to jail. He was consequently criticised and rejected by his family for what they saw as the slackening of his Hindu orthodox beliefs and the fact that he mingled with people from lower classes too. After Independence, he settled in Malgudi where he opened a small business that grew into a large establishment employing twelve people. Jagan leads a Gandhian lifestyle all his life, though, as is pointed out in the novel, it is merely in name, not in spirit. "He makes a point of spinning a few yards of cotton daily and makes sure that his shoes have been cut out of the hide of an animal who died of old age and was not slaughtered. ...he keeps his savings in his house, up in the attic, and lives a very modest life. It is clear that Jagan represents modern India, mistaking religion for routine and finding it normal to cheat the State in order to save money. He gives to beggars on Fridays only and keeps double accounts, one private and one 'which could be inspected by anyone'" (Pousse 44).

While Jagan is dismayed and disappointed by his son's marrying a foreigner and trying to introduce technology into the daily life of tradition in Malgudi, Grace, on the other hand, elicits his sympathy and affection. Because of Jagan's objection to Mali's project of introducing a machine that will write stories, father and son become alienated to each other. Their conflict is further aggravated when Mali expects his father to help him financially in the project, which Jagan is aware that it is a failure from the start. He cannot accept the fact that his son refuses to follow Gandhian ideals in his life. However, after Mali fails in the project and is jailed for drunkenness, he realises that it is not only his son who has

abandoned these ideals but he too is guilty of doing the same. Subsequent to his realization, he renounces his old material life and retires into an old house previously inhabited by a stone carver. As Pousse argues, "[w]ith the independence of India, Jagan has unconsciously forgotten his own identity. While he wanted Mali to inherit his business, it is because of Mali's misbehavior that he finds inner peace and contentment" (Pousse 45). Jagan reconciliation with himself and his circumstances is however in contrast to the original idea Narayan had for him: "In the original idea, Jagan was to make penance for the sins of his ancestors and of his debauched son by building a temple. In this godly service, he was to meet with corrupt contractors. As Narayan explained to Mehta: 'Such are the ways of the world'" (Pousse 57).

Mali:

Jagan's son. Mali blames his father for his mother's death since Jagan had refused to take the help of modern medicine for his ill wife. After living in America he dislikes his hometown and wants to modernise it. Mali wins a scholarship to go and study for a year in the United States of America from where he returns with a Korean-American girl friend. During his stay in America, Mali has transformed into a total Westerner. He eats beef, drinks alcohol and has in mind "a fantastic plan to make money and educate people"...[and]With the help of an American friend and with his father's money, he hopes to manufacture and sell in India a machine which can write novels and short stories" (Pousse 44).

Grace:

A Korean-American girl who is brought home by Mali to India and announced as his wife. Unlike Mali who is arrogant, she is gentle and accommodating, and tries to integrate into the different culture that she encounters in India. She thus works like a catalyst between the two cultures, as well as a bridge between Jagan and Mali. Jagan becomes very fond of her, and after Mali is jailed due to his misadventures, Jagan arranges for her to go back to America.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What ideas can you have of Jagan from the reading of this section?

11.4.4 Narayan's Narrative Style

In his fiction, Narayan attempts to grapple with the changing nature of India as it emerges into a modern nation after Independence. In this, he privileges the picture of India seen through the eyes of middle-class people from the South. Most of his work including *The Vendor of Sweets* is thus set in the fictional town of Malgudi. In telling the stories of ordinary people trying to live their lives in a changing world, Narayan uses a realistic style that is marked by simplicity and subtle humour. At the same time, his is a critical realism that enables the inclusion of ethical or moral preoccupations into the accounts of everyday lives of his characters. His use of English, again, is devoted towards recreating a picture of everyday Indian life through the introduction of Indian words and phrases as well as texts like the Gita that also evoke the spiritual aspects of this life. Narayan also tends to focus on characters rather than storyline. Pousse argues that this is related to the Indian tradition of passing on stories orally and the need for a slow building up of the complications and a large amount of humour to keep the audience's attention. Narayan also displays a reluctance to be overtly political in his fiction. Frequently in his work, Narayan uses contrasts in order to pursue his themes more powerfully. In this novel, for example, the two main characters are used as foils against each other so as to bring out the conflict within India between the past and the present and between tradition and modernity more powerful. Narayan then goes on to show ironically how the two terms can themselves become interchangeable in that the supposedly traditional (in a positive sense) Jagan has himself succumbed to a materialistic, modern (in a negative sense) India, and how by going back to a more spiritually

rewarding life has actually made Jagan more tolerant of others (a more progressive outlook that can be seen for example in his treatment of Grace).

Moreover, as Fawzia Afzal Khan argues, "there is a balancing of various genres in Narayan's novels, a harmonious coexistence symbolising a unity, a wholeness, toward which Narayan's protagonists are constantly progressing and which they must achieve if they are to mature fully" (Khan 27-28). This "wholeness" is "possible in the Malgudi of Narayan's novels because it is a world rooted in Indian myth and tradition, a town that is still pastoral in its innocence of the political reality of modern, twentieth-century India...what matters most is not how the natives deal with the aftermath of political fragmentation, but whether they will achieve an authentic and sincere identity as Indians in an 'authentic' Indian setting (Khan 28). Khan connects this aspect of wholeness to both Western realism as well as an Indian framework of myth. Western realism, she argues, aims at the individual achieving "a state of balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility (neither extreme being viewed as good) and this is usually achieved through becoming honest, or sincere, about oneself and one's motives, which, in turn, leads to sincerity and responsibility toward others" (Khan 28). However, Narayan adds to this, the element of myth, since "it is through the use of Indian myth that some measure of an authentic Indian past can be recreated" (Khan 28). In addition, this "wholeness", again, does not always lead to a balance between the individual and society in his fiction, but, as in the present novel, lead away from the society, as in the case of Jagan. Thus, characters like Jagan "choose against maturity and sincerity in the realist mode, although they may achieve authenticity and wisdom within the mode of myth" (Khan 28). The realist mode of Narayan thus is not mere derivation but through the mythic mode, also incorporates ways of narration that are closer to societies like India.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Comment on Narayan's narrative style.

11.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF NARAYAN

Narayan has been seen primarily as a realist, but the critical realism apparent in his work, as can be seen from the above section, does require some clarification. We have already seen the arguments made by Pousse regarding Narayan's portrayal of a modern India in spiritual crisis in his fiction, something that is embodied in Jagan in the present novel. While, Fawzia Afzal Khan talks about the mythic mode that accompanies the Narayan's realism in his fiction. Critics (William Walsh, Alam, Ramtake, Jha, and so on) have also commented frequently on Narayan's preoccupation with the tradition/modernity and East/West binaries. In this novel, these manifest themselves in the generational gap and consequent clashes between the father and son duo, Jagan and Mali. This theme is discussed in detail in the earlier section on themes. Ramtake also discusses the social perspective of Narayan discernible in his treatment of the hypocrisy of Jagan who carefully builds up a distinctive surface and deeper life (symbolised, for example, in his double account books).

Finally, postcolonial criticism of the novel has tried to read the novel as one of decolonisation (as in Reeja Jose P.'s essay "The Decolonized Self in *The Vendor of Sweets*"). Jagan is seen as striving hard to "resist the various phases of colonization" while it is his son Mali, "the extended self of Jagan who plays the role of the agency of imperialistic expansion" (Jose P. 35). The two "together constitute the transitional phase of the Indian colony characterised by economic changes, social upheavals, political outbursts and cultural bombardments", so that the "tussle between past and present" represents "a tug of war between the two extremes of consciousness – 'the colonized' and 'the decolonized'" (Jose P. 35, 36).



11.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you have learnt that R. K. Narayan rendered a major contribution to the development of the genre of Indian English novels before the Independence. You must have understood that the novel *The Vendor of Sweets* provides a picture of traditional India, which is set against the modern India. This novel also reflects Narayan's understanding of the fact that a large number of young men go to America only to return with westernised thinking. They turn a deaf ear to their own native traditions and customs. This aspect is best represented by Mali, Jagan's son. So, from your reading of this unit, you must have formed an idea of Narayan as a major novelist of his generation and the different social issues he raised in his novels. You are now in a position to discuss the different important aspects related to the novel *The Vendor of Sweets.* You must have also learnt how to assess the reception of the novel since its publication.



11.7 FURTHER READING

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5) Mishra, Pankaj. "The Great Narayan". *The New York Review of Books*.

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7) Pousse, Michel. (1995). *R. K. Narayan: A Painter of Modern India*. New York: Peter Lang.

8) Ramtake, S.R. (1998). *R. K. Narayan and His Social Perspective*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors.

Website and Electronic Resources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._K._Narayan

http://www.penguinbooksindia.com/en/content/rk-narayan

http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/403425/RK-Narayan



11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: R.K. Narayan was born in Madras in 1906 in South India… …his novels *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts* are both set in the fictional world of Malgudi… …Narayan's work *The Guide* won him the prestigious National Prize of the Indian Literary Academy… …Narayan has also authored collections of short stories which include *A Horse and Two Goats*, *Malgudi Days*, and *Under the Banyan Tree*…. …In 1980, he was awarded the A.C. Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature and in 1982 he was made an Honorary Member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Narayan died in 2001.

Ans to Q 2: *The English Teacher*… …. *Swami and Friends*… …*The Bachelor of Arts*.

Ans to Q 3: Jagan is extremely frond of her son Mali… …Mali, without his father's permission, discontinues his education, and goes to America to get training to write a book… …A few years later, he comes back

very westernised and brings along a half-American, half-Korean girl, Grace… … Jagan assumes that they are married, though Mali never told him this in a straightforward way, which causes great disappointment to Jagan…. …troubled by the turmoil, Jagan gets confused about the generation gaps.

Ans to Q 4: East versus West/Tradition versus Modernity… …Father Son relationship… …men versus machine and so on.

Ans to Q 5: Jagan is a follower of Gandhi in his youth… …now he is a vendor of sweets… …after Independence, he settled in Malgudi…. …he is dismayed and disappointed by his son's marrying a foreigner and trying to introduce technology into the daily life of the Malgudi people… …their conflict is further aggravated by Mali's expectations that his father should help him financially in the project.

Ans to Q 6: In telling the stories of ordinary people trying to live their lives in a changing world, Narayan uses a realistic style… …this style is marked by simplicity and subtle humour… … his is a critical realism that enables the inclusion of ethical or moral preoccupations into the accounts of everyday lives of his characters… … he introduces Indian words and phrases as well as texts like the *Gita* to evoke the spiritual aspects of Indian life…. …uses contrasts in order to pursue his theme of cultural differences.



11.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the significance of the literary renderings of R. K. Narayan into Indian English fiction.

Q 2: In what ways is the relationship between Jagan and his son Mali central to Narayan's novel *The Vendor of Sweets*? Discuss with reference to the novel.

Q 3: Narayan's preoccupation with the tradition/modernity and East/West binaries is best reflected in the generational gap and consequent clashes between the father and son. Discuss.

Q 4: What are the narrative techniques used by Narayan in this novel? Read the text of the novel carefully and find out the examples of Narayan's use of contrasts in the novel.

Q 5: In what ways, do you think, is *The Vendor of Sweets* an 'Indian' novel although it is written in a non-native language like English?

Q 6: Jagan is suspicious of his son Mali who returns from America with a machine, but he is sympathetic towards Grace. Discuss.

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UNIT 12: MULK RAJ ANAND: *UNTOUCHABLE*

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Mulk Raj Anand: The Novelist

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12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Mulk Raj Anand who mostly dealt with the social realities of pre-Independent India.
- trace the formative influences on Anand that helped him emerge as a novelist with a purpose
- explain the difficulties of the untouchables living in a very inclement society of high caste Hindus.
- get an outline of Mahatma Gandhi's appeal as the greatest leader of Indian national congress through your reading of the novel
- assess the reception of Mulk Raj Anand as an important novelist in Pre-Independence India.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall introduce you to Mulk Raj Anand, an important Indian English novelist and his novel *Untouchable.* Anand, a severe critic of the

fossilised Indian traditions was influenced by western culture and philosophy. Eventually, he tried to incorporate in his writings all the best ideas he had received from the west. In the novel *Untouchable*, you will get a glimpse of the miserable condition of the untouchables in a society, which had been stratified into various parts on the basis of caste and creed. Anand dealt with the subject of untouchability in a very poignant manner by delineating one day of an untouchable young man's life. While doing so, he took resort to one of the most sophisticated modern narrative technique "stream of consciousness" in a modified form to suite his style of narrative in Indian context. In this unit, you will also learn that by exposing the evils of untouchability prevalent in the Indian society to the wide gaze of the world, Anand made a definitive protest against the ancient caste system responsible for the menace of untouchability. Therefore, this unit will not only enhance your knowledge of Anand as a novelist and *Untouchable* as a novel of protest but also shall make you aware of the social realities of pre-Independence India.

12.3 MULK RAJ ANAND: THE NOVELIST

In this section, we shall discuss Mulk Raj Anand's life and works. After reading this section, you will understand why Anand has been regarded as one of the most important novelists of the early 20th century Indian English novel.

Mulk Raj Anand was born in1905. The formative years of Anand were marked by social awakening and political turmoil. Anand's hometown Amritsar was the centre of all political activities, which helped him to become well acquainted with the contemporary political climate of India. In 1919, when the martial law was imposed in Amritsar; Anand came out to the streets. Subsequently, he was arrested for violating the curfew, and by the order of the police superintendent, he was punished with seven stripes on the back. This incident created deep impression on Anand's young mind. Later, Anand also took part in Gurudwara Reform Movement when he was studying in Khalsa College and was imprisoned for this.

Anand's father belonged to the coppersmith community who received

western education and enrolled himself as a clerk in the British army. His father's money-mindedness was a matter of profound dislike for Anand. He became conscious of his sanity and self-respect because of his dislike for his father's meanness, greediness, duplicity, lack of moral scruple and servility towards the British. Anand's mother was very different from his father. Her father was a Sikh peasant who fought for the Khalsa army against the British in various Sikh wars. When Anand was in jail for breaking the curfew in 1919, his mother went to the jail for seeking his release. Anand's father could not accept his behaviour, but his mother went to receive him when he was released. In this way, Anand grew into manhood in a very difficult situation because of the confluence of two opposing forces i.e., the influence of his father and mother. He got the spirit of rebellion and patriotism from his mother.

Anand's adopted uncle Dev Dutt, a Sanskrit scholar and a prominent leader of Arya Samaj, also influenced him very much. Through him, Anand became aware of the blind superstition and meaningless rituals practised by the coppersmith community. Those practices were intolerable for Anand. The Urdu poet Mohammad Iqbal's poem *Asrar-i-Khudi* attracted him so much that he even went to Lahore to meet Iqbal who supported Anand when he stated about the atmosphere of slavery and falsehood responsible for creating in him a sense of despair and disgust. Similarly, Guru Nanak's fight against inequality and injustice shaped Anand's moral understanding. Inspired by the preaching of Guru Nanak, Anand decided to fight against the cruelty prevalent in India of his time. It was Guru Nanak's attempt of finding truth, which inspired Anand to visit England in search of his identity at the age of twenty. It was because, in India at that time, there were many restrictions on individual sensibility and so it was not possible for Anand to get the desired identity he was searching for.

In 1925, Anand went to London and enrolled himself in the University College. There he came in touch with the members of 'Bloomsbury group' such as—E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, John Strachey, Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf. In 1927, he went to Ireland and was immensely influenced by W. B. Yeats. With utmost attention, he noticed Yeats' adequate representation of

the village life of the Irish common men in his writing. It was as if Anand received the much-needed way through the maze to decide his goal. The general strike of England in 1926 also had a great impact on Anand. He was shocked to observe that in England like in India, class-consciousness was very much intense. During the strike, the upper class people were against the workers who were fighting for better wages. Anand supported the strike, and he had to face physical assault for this. Anand realised that in exploiting the poor, the situations in England and India were alike.

However, the failure of the general strike was a baffling incident for him. He discussed with his Marxist friends about the possibilities of communism in eradicating the social problems. In 1932, Anand got the opportunity to read the writings of Karl Marx on India, which influenced him greatly. After his perusal of *Communist Manifesto,* he began to take part in the discussion of Marxism with the famous trade unionist and pamphleteer Allen Hall. Anand said that after this he began to look at the world with different perspectives. Anand was charged as a communist propagandist, which pained him much, and to clarify such a charge, he said that he got the idea of socialism from Tolstoy, Ruskin and Mahatma Gandhi. Inspired by Marx's writing, Anand also published his *Letters on India.* Anand in his Letters on India castigated the ruthless exploitation of British government of the Indian masses.

In 1927, when he visited India, he spent a few months in Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmadabad. He had read Gandhi's banned book *Hind Swaraj* (1909) when he was at school. From that time onwards, he was influenced by Gandhi. While living in his Ashram, Anand consulted with Gandhi regarding the first draft of his novel *Untouchable.* Gandhi however, did not consider it favourably, because according to him, the draft carried the touch of 'Bloomsbury' spirit in it. Therefore, Anand revised the draft. Later, he stated that Gandhi made an indelible impression on him.

In 1938, Anand extensively travelled across India, spent a few months with the communist leader Kanwar Brajesh Singh of Kalakankar, and helped him in organising Kisan Sabhas. After that, he returned to London. He had planned to return to India soon, but in the mean time, World War II started.

Therefore, he decided to contribute his share of participation in India's freedom struggle while still living in London. There he collaborated with V. K. Krishna Menon, the great Indian nationalist, diplomat, and politician, in raising the awareness of the Englishmen and the Indians living in England. While doing so, he was also aware that the British were not the only entity to exploit the poor Indian masses. Anand envisioned a huge panorama of native exploitative forces in India and he decided to fight against them, so that he could liberate the exploited. Anand believed that in the Indian society there were many social evils due to the blind faith of the Indian masses on God and god-men.

Mulk Raj Anand began his novelistic career with *Untouchable.* He revolutionised Indian novel in English when he made an untouchable the protagonist of his first novel. Only a writer like Anand who dedicated his literary career for the exploited and the oppressed could dare to do so. Anand's love for the suffering masses of India was unprecedented. It only speaks of Anand's immense love for human beings however debased their position may be in the social hierarchy. All his novels are testament to his uncompromising love for the lowest dregs of the society. Along with his love for his exploited countrymen, he also portrayed burning social issues of his time through his novels. *Coolie* (1936) was Anand's second novel. It is about the sufferings of Munoo a fifteen years old boy from Kangra hills. His uncle forcefully placed him in the household of Babu Nathoo Ram as a domestic help. The plight of Munoo ended only when he breathed his last in Simla while working for Mrs. Mainwaring.

Two Leaves and A Bud (1937) was the third novel of Anand where he delineated the sufferings of the tea-plantation labourers. Protagonist Gangu and his family came to Macpherson tea estate of Assam in search of work, land and happiness but in the process lost his wife and his own life leaving his son and daughter in the wilderness. *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) are known as the Lal Singh trilogy where Anand delineated the poignant tales of the condition of the Indian peasants with Lal Singh as the protagonist of all the novels. Anand's next novel *The Big Heart* (1945) was his last novel before

the independence. The novel realistically represented the travails of the thathiars due to setting up of an industry by the wealthy thathiars. The protagonist Ananta met with a tragic end for his readiness to support the machine. In *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960) which is later renamed as *Gauri*, Anand portrays the character of a peasant girl Gauri who was at first forsaken by her husband but later she became self-reliant and independent. *The Road* (1964) is written on the theme of untouchability but the success of *Untouchable* was missing. *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) is a moving detail of a prince Victor and his sufferings because of the accession of his state to independent India. *Seven Summers* (1951) is a fictional autobiography with its hero Krishan. The novel encompasses the first seven years of Krishan's life. *Morning face* (1968) is a sequel to the earlier novel *Seven Summers* where we have Krishan in his boyhood. Krishan's college life is portrayed in *Confession of a Lover* (1976). The novel attempted to delineate the academic ambience of a college with considerable success.

Apart from these novels, Anand also wrote six collections of short stories. These collections are –*The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Other Stories* (1947), *Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other Stories* (1953), *The Power of Darkness*, *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973). In mode, spirit and tone, his short stories are wide ranging. Both rural and urban settings are used with felicity by Anand. His characters also belong to various strata of the society. Fable, parable, bardic narrative and folk tales etc are various forms that Anand used in his short stories.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did the writings of Karl Marx influence Anand?

Q 2: Mention the two novels of Anand written on the lives of the coolies.

12.4 READING THE NOVEL: *UNTOUCHABLE*

This section will help you to understand the novel in its essential detail. It is suggested that you should read the novel in its entirety so that you can have a firsthand experience of Anand's character delineation as well as his narrative style.

12.4.1 The Storyline

Untouchable is Anand's first novel. Here, he portrays a day in the life of Bakha—a sweeper boy. The novel is about Bakha's gradual self-realization of his caste and the stigma of untouchability associated with it. Bakha lives in the outcaste's colony outside the town of Bulandshahr. In the mud-walled houses of the colony, there lived the outcastes. The colony was quite unhygienic to live in because it lacked adequate drainage system; its lanes were covered with donkey, sheep, horse, cow and buffalo dung; and the air was filled with the odious smell of hides and skins of dead carcasses. Bakha lived a simple life with his father Lakha who was the Jemadar of all the sweepers along with his brother Rakha and his sister Sohini. Because of his old age, Lakha stopped his work of latrine cleaning, and left it for his eighteen year old son Bakha. The sweeper family lived in a small and dark cottage and they accepted the caste realities without any protest. But, Bakha gradually found it hard to understand why he couldn't get due respect as a human being in spite of working very hard all day long from the dawn to the dusk. He was fascinated by the manners of the Tommies as they treated him amiably. He also had fondness for his friend as they called him as 'Pilpali Shahib' due to his English attire.

As a scavenger, Bakha was efficient and quick in his work. The havildar Charat Singh liked Bakha's alacrity of latrine cleaning. He praised Bakha and promised to give him a hockey stick as reward. Bakha's sister Sohini had very attractive physical features. She faced many injustices because of her young age and attractiveness. Bakha

and his sister Sohini were destined to suffer from various unfair treatments from the caste-ridden society because of their ancestral work of scavenging. One day, he accidentally touched a high-caste Hindu for which he was insulted and beaten. Then, his sister Sohini also faced an attempt of molestation by the village priest Pundit Kali Nath at the temple on the pretext of helping her. Bakha was helpless because he was aware of the fact that he could do nothing. When he went for the customary begging trip to have food items, a high caste Hindu woman threw down a piece of bread to Bakha from the balcony of her house. Such inhuman treatment and humiliations were really intolerable for him.

However, he went on facing them without any complaint but it burned his inner being considerably. He faced the humiliation without any complaint but inwardly he burned in fury. His frustration was unlimited because of the insults he faced throughout the day. He was sad and heartbroken. He met the Salvation Army chief Colonel Hutchinson who asked him to come to church to pacify his disturbed mind. But, Colonel Hutchinson's soothing words were ineffective in pacifying his indignation at the society. Later, he went to Golbagh where he got the chance to listen to Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's embalming words uttered in support of the untouchables were really thrilling for Bakha. He was fascinated by the support Mahatma promised for the untouchables. But, his anguished heart was pacified when the poet Iqbal Nath Sarashar mentioned the modern invention of flush system in latrines. At last, Bakha became hopeful of finding a solution to the curse of his low birth.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: In what condition did the outcastes of Bulandshahr live?

Q 4: How did Bakha get rays of hope at the end of the day?

12.4.2 Major Themes

The following are the major themes of the novel *Untouchable*. These themes are seemingly interconnected with the life of the central protagonist Bakha. While reading the novel, you should learn to demarcate them on the basis of your understanding.

Exploitation of the Untouchables:

Thousands of years ago, the ancient Indian society was divided into different classes so that all the communities living within it would function properly. Such a classification might have contributed greatly to the development and prosperity of man's life during that time. However, with the changing time, the social necessities and basis must also change. Throughout the ages, the Indian society changed in multiple aspects, but the strict structure of caste system had been still a dominant one. In fact, casteism had been associated with many social and economic evils, which dampened the progress of Indian society towards having modern and progressive outlook.

In Indian society, caste is related to birth and therefore cannot be chosen. In ancient times, the Indian society consisted of four classes–the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudra. The Brahmans were entrusted with the duty of imparting knowledge and performing priestly rituals. The Kshatriyas were the people belonging to ruling classes. The Vaishyas were the class of people consisting of tradesmen and peasants. The Shudras were at the lowest strata of the society. In the caste system, the Brahmans were on the top of the hierarchical order. The Kshatriyas followed them. The Vaishyas and the Shudras were next to follow. Carpenters, weavers and blacksmiths were included in the artisan caste, whereas tanners, barbers, washermen, potters and oilpressers belonged to the menial caste. Both these two castes i.e., artisans and menials belonged to the Sudras. The lowest among all the castes were the scavenger castes. These castes were regarded unclean and

untouchable. Inter-marriage amongst the castes was prohibited, and if any violation was observed it was dealt with severe punishments. Like inter caste marriage, inter-dinning was also strictly prohibited amongst the higher castes and lower castes.

Every society has its unwritten laws, which it enforces on its members. Most often, in the Indian society, social and religious rules have close relationship and there are specific sets of rules for specific castes, which were to be followed with strict adherence. Sometimes, for the higher castes the public opinion served as rules. For the lower castes, caste authority was strictly maintained by the Panchayats to obtain obedience from them for the customary rules. Panchayat acted as standing body to look after any transgression or violation of the rules related to castes. The caste authority like Panchayat dealt with the breaches of caste rules for marriage, and laws relating to eating and drinking amongst the castes. There were various punishments for the offender when the offence was established. The general form of punishment was in the mode of fine, and depending on the caste status, the amount of the fine varied. Sometimes, the punishment was delivered in the form of feast to be fed to the Panchayat or the community. Purification ceremony following the rules of shastras was also prescribed by the Panchayat. The severest punishment was social excommunication. Such a dreaded punishment was offered only when the offender was found to be rebellious and recalcitrant.

Constant subjugation and humiliation of the untouchables bred a mental attitude, which was fatal to their development as human beings. To avoid pollution, the untouchables were made to live in isolated places away from the inhabiting places of higher caste people. No public well was open to them and their children could not study in all schools. Though they were Hindus, the doors of the temples were restricted to their entry. The extent of exclusion was such that even the mere shadow of the untouchable could pollute the high caste person. In this way, in the Indian society, the caste

system nullified the right to equality and destroyed the self-esteem of the lower-caste people, basically the untouchables. It also debarred the untouchables from any kind of freedom since ancient times. They were in constant fear of transgressing the caste rules and the consequent punishment to be followed for such violation. Generation after generation passed facing different kinds of exploitation and subjugation, which imprinted indelible impression on the untouchables. Sometimes, occasional sense of resentment might arise in their minds, but that was too faint to get expression from their dominated heart. No help from any quarter was there for these people. They were accustomed to their lowest position in the society and never ever tried to change it. They knew in acceptance lay their happiness and they went on doing so.

In *Untouchable,* Anand created the character of Bakha who became a glaring example of the suffering youth of the untouchable community. The hopes and dreams of Bakha were similar to that of every other youth of his time. His dissatisfactions and agonies were at work to expose the menace of untouchability in the Pre-independence Indian society. His discontent against the obsessively guarded ritualised rules of caste hierarchy against slightest of violation was justified because it approved of the sufferings of the untouchables which led to their dehumanisation. But, his fellow untouchables accepted their humiliating position without any apparent show of dissatisfaction. They were censored throughout the ages. Such censorship often put indelible impressions on their body and mind. Thus, Anand's first novel *Untouchable* became a living testament of the pain, misery and distress of the untouchables of India. The novel most faithfully represented the realities of the hardships confronted by the untouchables in their day-to-day life through the character of Bakha.

Conflict between Traditional and Modern Values:

Untouchable was written in the early period of 1930s, a period marked by national agitations led by Gandhi. Men and women

followed his dictums to fight against the colonisers and the degrading social practises. Consequently, many social customs and beliefs could no longer sustain their hold on to the society as they did in earlier periods. It was a transitional society where there was conflict between tradition and modernity. This theme of the clash of values old and modern gained ground in the character of Bakha, the protagonist of the novel. He was an untouchable bodily but within himself, he had a mind, which was always questioning his traditional place in the society. He knew that he was destined to suffer a life of seclusion, but he would like to change it if possible, for which he was wandering aimlessly to have his questions answered. Sometimes, he wanted to change his lot by having dressed like a European. His cherished desire was to be a white sahib but not a caste Hindu. Unlike Bakha, other untouchables were not at all concerned about their degraded lot. They accepted their position in the society without even dreaming to change it. Bakha's father and brother were two such untouchables. Mahatma's speech in the Golbagh and the poet Iqbal's arguments with Bashir offered the promise of change for which there was eager waiting on the part of yearning souls like Bakha.

Social Criticism:

In *Untouchable*, Anand portrayed the character of Bakha, revolving whom the whole action of the novel proceeds, keeping in mind the actual social ambience of the society of his time. The rigidity and strictness of the caste system was such that the outcastes and lower castes had to face discrimination in every step of their life. It was as if they were not human beings but beasts of burdens. The majority sentiment was that even if some day they would vanish from the earth, there would not be any harm to the human race. Nobody would deny the harmful effect of such a standing regarding the members of the society who all the time found them at the receiving end of the caste system. For thousands of years, they had been subjected to discrimination on the basis of caste. Result

of such discrimination is very severe one because whatever is portrayed in *Untouchable* may be fictional, but the suffering of the untouchable in the caste ridden Indian society is very much real. They had been deprived of all the amenities of civilised life. The untouchables were given secluded place away from the high caste people to live in, they were not allowed to draw water from the public well, they needed to shout out loud about their approach on the road, they were not permitted to worship in the religious place where 'clean' and 'noble' jatis used to go etc. These are some of the instances of injustice done to the untouchables, which got expressed in *Untouchable.* Though there was no frequent dissatisfaction amongst the untouchables, occasionally they showed their discontent when situation demanded. Apart from Bakha, his father Lakha also once violated the norms of the caste system when he entered into the Hakim's chamber to get medicine for dying Bakha. There is no denying that the untouchables are obsequious to the demands of the society regarding caste, but at the same time, it is also true that in extreme conditions they expressed their anguish and discontent. Anand successfully delineated the sufferings of the untouchables in his first novel *Untouchable* and made forceful critique of the menace of untouchability.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Give an account of the four classes of the Indian society.

Q 6: How do you estimate Anand's handling of the theme of untouchability with reference to the caste system?

Q 7: Do you think Anand is successful in portraying the condition of the untouchables in his novel?

12.4.3 Major Characters:

It is apparent, the development of the plot in *Untouchable* is solely dependent upon its central protagonist Bakha's psychological

broodings and negligible actions. However, there are some other characters, who also contribute significantly to the unfurling of actions in the novel. They are discussed along with the character of Bakha. Of course, you should create your own understanding of the characters with reference to their context inside the novel.

Bakha:

In *Untouchable,* the central character Bakha was dissatisfied with his life from the very beginning. Time and again, he had been expressing his discontent towards the inhuman treatment meted out to his fellow beings. He was an untouchable but at the same time, he was a jovial young man with all the characteristic dreams and wishes. Unlike his fellow untouchables, he never learnt to see himself as an untouchable. He wanted to be a Babu because his uncle told him about the life style of a Babu. Sometimes, he was fascinated by the British sepoys and tried to imitate them by living like them or dressing like them. All the trials and tribulations made him aware of his untouchable status in the society. It was the grim reality of being an untouchable, which haunted him like anything. His sufferings made him strong but at the same time, it also made him aware of the difficulties of an untouchable. He realised that his caste would never let him live a free life.

Bakha had to face numerous difficulties in the society due to his caste. He was oblivious of the stigma of untouchability. He wanted to live life to the brim. He had an indomitable desire to play hockey and when Havildar Charat Singh offered to give him a hockey stick, he was overjoyed. He was full of gratitude and characteristic servility of a slave was apparent in him. As a cheerful young boy, he wanted to go to school because he wanted to become a sahib but his father did not fulfil his wish. His father told him that schools were not for the Bhangis. It was later when he could understand the reason of his father's refusal to send him to school. He understood that he was a sweeper's son and could never become a babu. He also realised that no school could admit him for fear of pollution to other

high caste Hindu. When Bakha was abused by the upper caste men on the street, he could have fled away. However, he did not do so because many upper caste men who surrounded him would have been defiled by his touch. Of course, he would have liked to run away from the spot. There was no scope of revolt for the untouchables. After this incident, the bitter reality dawned upon Bakha, and most pathetically, he treaded on the road shouting at the pedestrian cautioning them about his approach. Such inhuman abuses and humiliations were familiar occurrence for the untouchables. But, for Bakha it was new and so he could not reconcile such treatment and a faint shade of rebellion was visible in him. Later, in a show of defiance, he entered into the temple, which he was unable to think of earlier. There was curiosity in his heart regarding the temple for he never in his life entered in to a temple. His determination was like that of a murderer in his attempt to enter into the temple. There was more surprise waiting for him when he met his sister Sohini, who told him how the temple priest Pundit Kali Nath attempted to molest her. He was mad with anger and declared menacingly that he would go and kill him. However, it was only a verbal threatening. He was unable to attempt physical violence because he could not overcome the psychological barrier created by thousand years of oppression. He wanted to take revenge but he could not, he was shackled by an abstract intangible power. It was a psychological barrier, which restrained him to go against the high caste Hindus.

It is true, whenever he faced an adverse reaction from any member of the high caste Hindu society, he was angry and inwardly showed his anger. However, he never tried to turn it to physical action. In fact, he was a lonely figure amongst the untouchables who used to look deep into the norms of orthodox Hindu society and found them inhuman and prejudicial. He never liked his vocation of cleaning the latrines and he expressed it candidly, whenever he got a chance. That is why, he was elated when the poet Sarashar

talked about the flush to remove all the Harijans from the task of cleaning the latrines. Bakha thought they would be able save themselves from the stigma of untouchability when the flush system would be introduced to the latrines. Therefore, it is clear that Bakha is a conscious untouchable who could dare to think of showing dissatisfaction against the severe rules of caste system. He could have fought against the caste system, had he been an educated young man with the knowledge of the way of the world. Whenever he faced humiliating situation, he asked himself many questions, which were remained unanswered. He was not having any way out from the web of the caste system, which entwined him and his fellow untouchables in a python grip.

Lakha:

Lakha is the peevish and short-tempered father of Bakha. He is the Jamadar amongst the sweepers but routinely avoids work due to his old age. Unlike Bakha, he regards the caste Hindus as his superiors and tells Bakha to respect them. Passive and meek, he can never think of fighting for his self-respect. He is fond of delicious food and so he always sends Bakha to collect food items for him. Of course, his warm-heartedness is revealed when he recounted his past days in which he did his best to save the life of his young son Bakha. Lakha represents the common untouchables and his weaknesses as such only highlighted Bakha's superiority and uncommonness.

Sohini:

Sohini is the daughter of Lakha. She is charming and modest but hard working young girl. In the absence of her mother, she has to look after all the household work and go for cleaning the houses of high caste Hindus. Apart from such works, she also goes for drawing water from the public well. It is an arduous task as she cannot do it by herself. The untouchables are debarred from using the public wells. It is only if a high caste Hindu takes pity on them and draws water from the well, they can have it. It is in such an

outing to draw water that she comes to the notice of Pundit Kali Nath's lustful eyes. Sohini represents those beautiful untouchable girls who are simple, innocent, and prone to fall victim to the lust of some evil minded high caste Hindus.

Colonel Hutchinson:

Colonel Hutchinson is not a military officer but the chief of the Salvation Army with the primary duty of propagating the messages of Christ. He visits the colony of the untouchables for possible converts. He does his best in telling the untouchables about Christ and his messages of love and the Kingdom of Heaven. He thinks that it is the duty of the missionaries in India to go closer to the native Indians instead of expecting the Indians to come closer to the missionaries. He is clever enough to learn Hindustani to come closer to the Indians. At the same time, he finds it necessary that the missionaries should dress like the natives to bring about a feeling of closeness. He tries his best to convert Bakha by saying that in Christianity, Brahmin and Bhangi are treated equally. Bakha could have impressed but when the Colonel's wife indirectly refers to him as a dirty Bhangi, he loses all interests and moves away from the place. The colonel represents some of the Christian missionaries who come to India for the purpose of helping the Indians by converting them to Christianity.

Mahatma Gandhi:

At the last part of *Untouchable,* Gandhi appears as one of the characters of the novel to deliver a speech. People react frenziedly to the news of the arrival of Mahatma in the Golbagh and throng the place. In his speech, Mahatma says that he regards untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. He also says that emancipation of the untouchables is one of his strongest desires that keep him alive. But, at the same time, he also puts the onus on the untouchables by mentioning their evil habit of eating carrion.

Iqbal Nath Sarashar:

Iqbal Nath Sarashar is a poet and the editor of *Nawan Jug***.**

He is a young man with a feline face, sparkling eyes and long black curly hair. After the departure of Mahatma, he argues with the Barrister-at-Law Bashir, regarding the poverty of India. He opines that India is poor because she has chosen to depend upon agriculture. But, at the same time, he also states that in terms of natural resources India is one of the richest countries of the world. The poet has a logical mind and he argues fiercely in support of the machine. According to him, India should accept the machine for the much needed progress and development. It will also benefit the untouchable because when the flush system will be introduced the untouchable will no longer have to handle the dung. Again, he says that abolition of the caste system will remove untouchability from the society. Iqbal Nath Sarashar represents the educated Indians who learn to see the world in a new logical perspective.

Pundit Kali Nath:

Pundit Kali Nath is the priest in *Untouchable*. In spite of being engaged in the pious work of serving in the temple, he is full of lust and desire. He is also a very greedy person who loves delicacies offered to him by the devotees. He tries to seduce Bakha's beautiful sister Sohini when she goes to his house to sweep. However, when she declines his immoral advances, he makes hue and cry by shouting "polluted, polluted." He wants to convey the message that by touching him Sohini pollutes him. And, when Bakha proceeds towards him in sheer anger, he cringes behind. Pundit Kali Nath represents those hypocrites who boasts of their high caste status but, when finds opportunity, descends to commit any immoral deeds.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What did Bakha want to be?

Q 9: Discuss the importance of the arguments of Iqbal Nath Sarashar in the context of the novel.

12.4.4 Anand's Narrative Style

Anand stated that he resorted to writing novels out of compulsions. The real people and actual events of his childhood and youth got expressed through his novels. In fact, the inspiration that he received from them was repaid by him in the form of his novels. Anand believed that the Indian English novelists should adopt the comparison and contrast method to achieve excellence in the narrative technique. He preferred the western method of story- telling as he was against authorial intrusions into the narrative. However, at the same time, he believed that an author could always associate himself indirectly with the narrative by the loving the characters, overcoming his own isolation, growing with them and co-existing with them in their joys and sorrows. According to Anand, the novelist must focus on the inner changes of the mind, which he termed as the soul drama. He appreciated James Joyce's 'stream of consciousness' technique, which was later practised by Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. He preferred and supported Joyce's technique as it could reproduce the restless and disturbed consciousness of the modern man in a more subtle and authentic way. However, Anand was not in favour of directly following Joyce but in a modified way in which the novelist could offer value judgements about the characters.

In *Untouchable,* Anand let the readers see the predicament of the protagonist Bakha through his consciousness. All the events of the novel happened in a single day. Anand employed "stream of consciousness technique" in a judicious way. He used flash backs only when occasion demanded. Bakha was the centre of consciousness. The reader could perceive Bakha's humiliation as an untouchable through his consciousness. Anand juxtaposed Bakha's consciousness and the real situations to drive home the complex social milieu of the period. Such a technique also helped the reader to judge the situation for himself. For example, in the

episode where Bakha accidentally touched a caste Hindu, his terror stricken consciousness was placed alongside the abuses of the caste Hindus. Readers found themselves sympathising with the poor untouchable Bakha who was experiencing a great emotional turmoil at such a humiliation. Bakha's torment only authenticated the menace of untouchability in the pre-Independent Indian society. Same is the case with the incident in which Bakha's sister was attempted to be seduced by Pundit Kali Nath. Deep within, Bakha was intensely furious at such a heinous attempt on the modesty of his sister but he was also aware of his inability to move further. Bakha's reaction to different situations whether good or evil contributed to the narrative pattern. As he hardly reacted physically, his psychological reaction was delineated by Anand through the 'stream of consciousness' technique.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How can Anand's narrative style be regarded as distinctively modern?

12.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF ANAND

Novel writing for Anand was a self-imposed duty through which he wanted to change the world. He did not take novel writing for earning fame nor for making money. Writing was a response to his inner call. At the very beginning of his writing career, he faced set back when nineteen publishers refused to publish *Untouchable.* It was this belief in his decision of becoming a writer that helped him continue his pursuit as a writer. Anand also believed that art is for life's sake, and art should always be integrated with the life of community. He stated that the creative artist was suited to change the society. At the same time, he also opined that a creative artist should be sincere about himself since he could elevate men to the heights of their dignity. He regarded the creative artist as the prophet of the age rather than an entertainer. It is in such a backdrop that Anand's critics have judged him as a novelist of Indian English novels.

In her book *The Wisdom of the Heart*, Marlene Fisher considers Anand's commitment to fight against the exploitation of the poor and underprivileged as exposition to his humanism. Saros Cowasjee in *So Many Freedoms* stated that Anand had necessary insight and sensitivity of mind to look into his characters, which make him a formidable Indian English novelist. But, the most important critique of Anand as a novelist came from E. M. Forster when he wrote in the preface to *Untouchable*- "Untouchable could have been written by an Indian and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles". Such an opinion from none other than Forster who has been hailed as one of the most accomplished novelists of the 20th century definitely helped Anand's acceptance as a novelist of stature in the English literary world. Gillian Packham stated that it was Anand's deep sympathy for the oppressed, which helped him to write a novel like *Untouchable.*

Whatever may be the critical reaction to the novels of Anand, there is no denying that he started novel writing in such a period when most of the educated Indians devoted themselves either to the nationalistic cause of fighting against the British or to their own upliftment by accepting lucrative positions in the administrative service of the British government in India. Anand took novel writing as a means to raise the awareness of the Indians to the problems besetting the Indian society. Perennial interest shown to his novels has proven his popularity and relevance in Indian English literature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Why, according to Forster, *Untouchable* could only be written by an Indian?

Q 12: What did Gillian Packham say about Anand?



12.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have acquainted yourself with Mulk Raj Anand and his immortal work *Untouchable.* Your understanding of Anand as a novelist

will help you to look at Indian English novel in terms of the social milieu of the period. In *Untouchable,* Anand wrote about the menace of untouchability, but at the same time, he gave a definite twist to the plot when he brought in Mahatma to deliver a speech in Golbagh. By doing so, he highlighted the popularity of one of the greatest political leaders of the Indian National Congress and also authenticated Mahatma's concern for the curse of untouchability in the context of the novel. *Untouchable* is a living document, which still carries forward the plight of an untouchable in the Indian social set up. It will go on to be regarded as the seminal text on the protest against untouchability till the time when one shall be able to say-once there was a caste called untouchable in Indian society.



12.7 FURTHER READING

1) Anand, M. R. (1946). *Apology for Heroism*. Bombay: Kutub-Popular.
2) Anand, M. R. (1977). Why I write. In *Indo-English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan.
3) Agarwal, B. R. (Ed.). (2006). *Mulk Raj Anand.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
4) Asnani, S. M. (1985). *Critical Response to Indian English Fiction.* Delhi: Mittal Publications.
5) Berry, M. (1971). *Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist.* Amsterdam: Oriental Press.
6) Cowasjee, S. (1977). *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.
7) Fisher, M. (1985). *The Wisdom of the Heart: A Study of the Works of Mulk Raj Anand.* New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.



12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Anand read the writings of Karl Marx on India… …after his perusal of *Communist Manifesto,* the discussion of Marxism with Allen

Hall.. …Anand said he began to look at the world from different perspectives.

Ans to Q 2: *Coolie* (1936) was Anand's second novel… …Munoo a fifteen years old boy in the household of Babu Nathoo Ram… …*Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) was the third novel… …the sufferings of the tea-plantation labourers… …lost his wife and his own life leaving his son and daughter in the wilderness.

Ans to Q 3: In the mud-walled houses of the colony… …totally unhygienic to live in … …lanes were covered with donkey… …the air is filled… …hides and skins of dead carcasses.

Ans to Q 4: He met Salvation Army chief Colonel Hutchinson… …he went to Golbagh to listen to Mahatma Gandhi… …fascinated by the support Mahatma promised… …the poet Iqbal Nath Sarashar… …flush system in latrines… …hopeful of finding a solution to the curse of his low birth.

Ans to Q 5: The Indian society consisted of four classes… …The Brahmans, performing priestly rituals… …The Kshatriyas, ruling class… …the Vaishyas, tradesmen and peasants… …The Shudras, the lowest strata of the society… …in the caste system, the Brahmans are at the top of the hierarchical order.

Ans to Q 6: In *Untouchable,* Anand created the character of Bakha… …the hopes and dreams of Bakha… …dissatisfactions and agonies… …his discontent against the obsessively guarded ritualised rules… …a living testament of the pain, misery and distress of the untouchables of India… …through the character of Bakha.

Ans to Q 7: Anand portrayed the character of Bakha… …it was as if they were not human beings but beasts of burdens… …for thousands of years, they had been subjected to discrimination… …suffering of the untouchable… …given secluded place… …delineated the sufferings of the untouchables… …critique of the menace of untouchability.

Ans to Q 8: Bakha never learnt to see… …wanted to be a Babu… …he was fascinated by the British sepoys……dressed like them… …his untouchable status in the society.

Ans to Q 9: Sarashar opines that India is poor… …has a logical mind and he argues fiercely… …flush system will be introduced… …handle the dung… …abolition of the caste system …from the society.

Ans to Q 10: According to Anand, inner changes of the mind… …appreciated James Joyce's stream of consciousness technique… …preferred and supported Joyce's technique … …not in favour of directly following Joyce… …value judgements about the characters.

Ans to Q 11: Untouchable… …by an Indian who observed… …No European… …would not have known enough about his troubles.

Ans to Q 12: Gillian Packham stated… …deep sympathy for the oppressed… …novel like *Untouchable.*



12.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the impact of various influences on Mulk Raj Anand in the context of Indian English literature.

Q 2: Discuss *Untouchable* as a social criticism on the evils of untouchability in the Indian society.

Q 3: Discuss the relevance of *Untouchable* in modern times with reference to the important social issues raised in the novel.

Q 4: Write critical commentaries on the following characters:

a. Bakha

b. Colonel Hutchinson

c. The Theme of Untouchability

Q 5: Discuss Mulk Raj Anand as a humanist on the basis of his depiction of the life of untouchables.

Q 6: Write a critical note on Anand's narrative style in the novel *Untouchable*.

Q 7: Critically examine the character of Bakha in *Untouchable*..

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UNIT 13: ANITA DESAI: *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Anita Desai: The Novelist

- 13.3.1 Her Life
- 13.3.2 Her Works

13.4 Reading the Novel: *Clear Light of Day*

- 13.4.1 The Storyline
- 13.4.2 Major Themes
- 13.4.3 Major Characters
- 13.4.4 Desai's Narrative Style

13.5 Critical Reception of Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

13.6 Let Us Sum Up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

13.9 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- reflect on the life and works of Anita Desai, a preeminent Indian novelist of her generation
- form an idea of Desai as a major exponent of Indian English Fiction
- discuss the important aspects related to the novel *Clear Light of Day*
- discuss the plot, characterization, themes, and narrative technique in Desai's *Clear Light of Day*
- make an assessment of the reception of the novel since its publication.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day.* Anita Desai is the author of several novels. She wrote *Clear Light of Day* in 1980. In this novel, she wove the history of Delhi with a middle class Hindu family. Bimala or Bim is a history professor, feels betrayed by her sister Tara and replays her memory in a decaying family mansion in Old Delhi. It is difficult for Tara to understand why Bim does not what to change herself from her sterile existence. *Clear Light of Day* is often considered one of the most successful works of the author, and is praised for "its highly evocative portrait of two sisters caught in the lassitude of Indian life" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). You will note that, through the consciousness of Tara and Bimala, Desai also examines the Hindu Muslim riots in 1947 following the Partition. By the time you finish reading this unit, you will be able to appreciate Desai's acumen as an Indian novelist who is conscious about Indian life, history and society.

13.3 ANITA DESAI: THE NOVELIST

Read the following sections carefully to gain some ideas about the life and works of Anita Desai.

13.3.1 Her Life

Anita Desai was born Anita Mazumdar in Mussoorie, on June 24 1937 in Delhi to a German mother (Toni Nime) and a Bengali father (D. N. Mazumdar). She grew up learning multiple languages, speaking German at home and Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English at school and elsewhere. She grew up surrounded by Western literature and music, but at the same time, she also learned the Indian culture and customs. She wrote her first story at the age of seven and published her first story at the age of nine. She did her B.A. in English at Miranda House, Delhi and was awarded her degree in 1957. She married the businessman Ashvin Desai at the age of twenty-one, and had four children with him. Her daughter, Kiran Desai, is also

an author and her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the Man Booker Prize in 2006.

Desai spoke German as a child, picking up from her parents who spoke to each other in German. Her childhood encompassed the years of the Second World War that she experienced through the anxiety of her mother, a German, especially for her family and home there. Her mother never visited Germany thereafter, and nor did Desai herself until she was an adult (Tandon 2008: 10-11). She has lived in Kolkata (then Calcutta), Chandigarh, Delhi and Pune, all of which figure at different times as the backdrop in her fiction. Anita Desai considers herself as someone who, because of her hybrid situation consequent to being the daughter of an Indian father and a German mother, can take simultaneously an insider as well as an outsider's view on Indian life and culture: "I see India through my mother's eyes, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father's, of someone born here" (Ostberg, 2000).

Though Desai had written short stories even before her marriage, her career as a novelist began only in 1963 with *Cry, the Peacock*. Desai has taught at Mount Holyoke College, Baruch College and Smith College. In 1993, Desai joined the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a creative writing teacher. She is, moreover, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and also of Girton College, and of Clare Hall, Cambridge University. She also writes for the *New York Review of Books*.

Desai has won a number of awards in her literary career, starting with the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize in 1978 for *Fire on the Mountain*. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award in the same year for the same novel. Three of her books – *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody*, and *Fasting, Feasting*–were shortlisted for the Booker Prize. In 1983, she won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize for *The Village by the Sea: an Indian family story*. She also won the Neil Gunn International Fellowship in 1994 as well as the Alberto Moravia Prize

for Literature (Italy) in 2000. She was awarded the Benson Medal of Royal Society of Literature in 2003, as well as a Fellowship by the Sahitya Akademi. Recently in 2014, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. In 1993, Merchant Ivory Productions adapted her novel *In Custody* into an English film by the same name, starring Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi and Om Puri. It garnered much critical acclaim.

Though Desai spends most of the year outside of India, she does not consider herself part of the Indian diaspora. At the same time, she considers herself lucky that she left India quite late in her life, since leaving the country has made her more distant from it as time passes. As she confesses, "I can't really write of it with the same intensity and familiarity that I once had" (Desai quoted in Tandon 2008: 13). Yet at the same time, she also admits that she cannot feel at home in any other place or society (Tandon 2008: 13).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does Anita Desai consider her hybrid background?

Q 2: Name some of the important novels written by Desai.

Q 3: How does Anita Desai consider her displacement from India?

13.3.2 Her Works

Anita Desai has to her credit a number of important novels written in English. This makes her an important exponent of Indian Writing in English in the post independence era. Writing in English, as Desai asserts, had come spontaneously to her: "I can state definitely that I did not choose English in a deliberate and conscious act and I'd say perhaps it was the language that chose me and I started writing stories in English at the age of seven, and have been doing so for thirty years now without stopping to think why." (Desai quoted in Tandon 2008: 9)

Desai has been regarded as belonging to the tradition of the psychological novel, and is seen by many as introducing this manner of writing in the modern Indian English novel (Tandon 2008: 9). She indicates her awareness of the feminist movement in India, and how it has influenced her writing. However, at the same time, she is also aware that her novels may not strike as typically feminist: "The feminist movement in India is very new and a younger generation of readers in India tends to be rather impatient of my books and to think of them as books about completely helpless women, hopeless women. They find it somewhat unreal that the women don't fight back, but they don't seem to realize how very new this movement is." (Desai quoted in Tandon 2008: 9)

Again, Desai argues that another reason why her novels might not conform to the feminist ideals is her realistic way of writing that refuses to idealise: "Women think I am doing a disservice to the feminist movement by writing about women who have no control over their lives. But I was trying, as every writer tries to do, even in fiction, to get at the truth, write the truth. It would have been really fanciful if I had made Bim and Tara [in *Clear Light of Day*] modern-day feminists". (Desai quoted in Tandon 2008: 9)

Her novels are characterised by "her focus on the inner lives of characters and her concern with people previously marginalised in Indian fiction, primarily women, children and the elderly" ((Tandon 2008: 11). The marginalization and oppression of Indian women were the themes of her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* as well as the later *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*. *Fire on the Mountain* was appreciated for its poetic symbolism and use of sounds while at the same time being criticised for relying too heavily on imagery at the expense of plot and characterization (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). *Clear Light of Day* has been considered, on the other hand, as the author's most successful work, is praised for "its highly evocative portrait of two sisters caught in the lassitude of Indian life" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). The autobiographical nature of the novel

is attested to by the novelist herself as expressed in the following lines:

Desai considers *Clear Light of Day*, her most autobiographical book, because she was writing about her neighbourhood in Delhi, although the characters are not based on her brothers and sisters. What she was exploring in this novel, she has said, was the importance of childhood and memories as the source of a life. She had wanted to start the book at the end and move backwards, into the characters' childhood and further, into the childhood of their parents etc., but in the end: "When I had gone as far back as their infancy the book just ground to a halt; it lost its momentum. It told me that this was done, that I couldn't carry it further. But I still have a sense of disappointment about that book, because the intention had been different". (Ostberg 2000)

Baumgartner's Bombay (1988) explores German and Jewish identity in the context of a chaotic contemporary India. Other novels by Desai include *In Custody* (1984; film 1994) and *Journey to Ithaca* (1995). *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) takes as its subject the connections and gaps between Indian and American culture, while *The Zigzag Way* (2004) tells the story of an American academic who travels to Mexico to trace his Cornish ancestry. Desai also wrote short fiction—collections include *Games at Twilight, and Other Stories* (1978) and *Diamond Dust, and Other Stories* (2000)—and several children's books, including *The Village by the Sea* (1982). *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011) collected three novellas that examined the collateral abandonment and dislocation wrought by India's furious rush toward modernity. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)



LET US KNOW

The following is a complete list of Desai's major works.

Cry, The Peacock (1963)

Voices in the City (1965)

Bye-bye Blackbird (1971)
Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975)
Cat on a Houseboat (1976)
Fire on the Mountain (1977)
Games at Twilight and Other Stories (1978)
The Peacock Garden (1979)
Clear Light of Day (1980)
The Village By The Sea (1982)
In Custody (1984)
Baumgartner's Bombay (1987)
Journey to Ithaca (1995)
Fasting, Feasting (1999)
Diamond Dust and Other Stories (2000)
The Zigzag Way (2004)
Hill of Silver, Hill of Lead (2005)
The Artist of Disappearance (2011)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: In what ways, can the works of Anita Desai be perceived?

Q 5: Do you agree that Anita Desai is connected with the feminist movements in India?

Q 6: Do you think that *Clear Light of Day* is an autobiographical novel?

13.4 READING THE NOVEL: *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

Read the followings sections which should help you to read the text of the novel in terms of its different aspects.

13.4.1 The Storyline

The novel is divided into four sections, with the middle two sections progressively taking the reader back to the family history framed by the events in the present that the first and last sections

dwell on. It deals with the Das family, more specifically, the four children: Bim, Tara, Raja and Baba.

Part I opens with Tara coming on a regular visit to India from Washington with her diplomat husband, Bakul. They stay in Old Delhi with Bim and Baba, elder sister and younger brother of Tara's, respectively. This visit coincides with the marriage of Raja's eldest daughter, and thus, paves the way for the re-emergence of some painful memories and conflicts, especially Bim's estrangement from her other brother, Raja, with whom she hasn't had much contact for a number of years. The Old Delhi house holds a number of memories for Tara, including her childhood days and the two decades after India's independence. As Tara and Bim go into their past, old rivalries between the two sisters re-emerge, though by now, both have changed somewhat. Tara wonders how Bim can continue to stay in the old run-down house, taking care of their autistic brother, Baba. The family is as is 'petrified,' which both attracts and repulses Tara. She at one point even wants to escape with Bakul to the refuge of the more modern New Delhi where Bakul's relatives live. Other circumstances also add to the already mounting tension:

The family's "petrified" state particularly becomes a subject of reflection and occasional discussion among its members because Bim refuses to attend Moyna's wedding (Raja's eldest daughter), which is to take place in Hyderabad. Bim holds it against Raja that he abandoned her and Baba after their parents' deaths; and that he also missed his true calling of being a poet, as he had earlier vowed to Bim, and merely became a fat, rich man. Bim herself, of course, has devoted her life to looking after others: Raja during his deadly illness in 1947, the alcoholic Aunt Mira, the retarded brother, and everyone else who needed care (including Hyder Ali Sahib's dog, Begum). (Hashmi 56)

Part II centres primarily on events surrounding Bim during the time when the four were children. It is in this section that the early and sudden death of their parents is recounted. While their

neighbours are kind and affectionate, they cannot give them the security of a family. Again, Raja falls seriously ill with tuberculosis and it is Bim who takes up the responsibility of nursing him to health. Bim is forced to care for Baba and Mira Masi as well. Aunt Mira, who had earlier taken care of the children after the death of their parents (and even before, since they would leave their children behind to mingle with their circle), turns increasingly towards alcohol and soon is left to Bim's care. Bim is thus propelled to take the responsibility of the entire household and ultimately accepts this as her destiny. On the other hand, Raja lives a different life, idealising Hyder Ali, their Muslim neighbour who lived across the street until the summer of 1947. Afterwards, he marries Benazir, the only daughter of Hyder Ali, and moves to Hyderabad after inheriting the latter's property after his death. Tara also marries and stays abroad with her husband, and soon becomes immersed in her duties as a diplomat's wife and in the job of raising her daughters. Bim is thus the only one who is forced to stay back on account of their brother, Baba, who cannot depend on himself in his state of mind. However, the two sisters have some affinities in that "[i]n both sisters' lives, unhappiness and boredom in their house are distinct memories, relieved only by the presence of kind and affectionate (though perhaps not always the best) neighbours" (Hashmi 56).

Part II regresses even further in time to the early childhood of the Das siblings. Bim and Tara have contrasting experiences in school: while Bim loves school and becomes the head girl, Tara hates going to school and cannot adjust to its life. She envies Bim but at the same time feels guilty about it. Towards the end, Tara, through her appreciation of the daughters of the Misra family (their neighbours) who marry early, reveals her desire to live a 'normal' domestic life that will take her away from her dysfunctional family. On the other hand, Bim states her desire to remain single and plans to remain at her home with her aunt and brother, attend college, teach, and become independent and self-reliant. Another important

strand in this part is the birth of Baba and the family's realization as he is growing up that his mental development is slower than that of other children of his age. Again, background to the presence of Mira Masi in the earlier sections is given as she is invited to the Das house not only to give her shelter after her husband's death but also as a caretaker of the children. Aunt Mira grows particularly fond of Baba who she realizes is the one in the utmost need of support.

Part IV, the concluding section of the novel, brings us back to the present. Bim and Tara talk at length about their brother, Raja. While initially Bim seems to resent her brother for abandoning their family, she gradually comes to accept her brother as he is. Tara also expresses her guilt over abandoning the family like Raja by marrying Bakul and leaving with him. She shows her concern for Bim who realizes that her remorse is genuine. The novel then ends with a note of reconciliation between the two sisters who reaffirm their closeness to each other.

13.4.2 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes of the novel *Clear Light of Day.*

Women's Lives

Desai in her novels usually seems to portray Indian women as passive and marginalised characters (through her female protagonists) who face challenges from the mores of a patriarchal society. In this novel too, the central female characters Bim, Tara and Aunt Mira, are to a great extent similarly subordinated by the dominant male member—Aunt Mira by her husband's family and later on her sister's; Tara by her husband and Bim; by having to take upon herself the responsibility of caring for Baba. The novel explores how these women negotiate with circumstances and ultimately find out different ways to assert their existence. The most obvious instance of this is Bim who enters the academia as a teacher

of history in a Delhi college. Pushpa Naidu Parekh, in her essay "Redefining the Postcolonial Female Self: Women in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*" argues that Desai's representation of women contests certain "early feminist definitions of Third World women as a 'homogeneous' group" (Parekh: 273). In her reading, "Bim and Tara represent two identities, among others, that define the postcolonial middle-class Indian woman: She is often the traditional woman who has found her own avenues to change and modernization, the elite woman who has liberated herself in the borrowed world of alien language and culture, or sometimes, both identities in one" (Parekh: 273). Bim, ostensibly more like the Western ideal of a strong, independent and empowered woman who is educated and is a professional, is however imprisoned in the changeless past, "playing out the roles of caring sister, surrogate mother, and daughter in a family whose members are either slowly disintegrating or dispersing" (Parekh: 277). On the other hand, Tara, the passive, isolated, shy, fearful and insecure sister, is the one who escapes from the oppressive atmosphere of the house and what it represents: "decay, decadence, insanity, illness, and stasis" (Parekh: 277). However, her movement towards "affirmation of faith and preservation of self" is made through the more traditional mode of marriage. Thus, both Tara and Bim incorporate past and present, change and tradition. Neither one is herself "better" than the other; rather, they emphasize the connections between past and present and effect the breakdown of essentialist categories such as "traditional" and "emancipatory". (Parekh: 277)

Through this, the novel contests the simplistic equation made between women and nation, in which women and 'womanly' ideals mirror the nation as a feminine entity. The disruption of this connection in the novel, as Hena Ahmad argues, is made from "a position of rootedness in the nation, within national spaces, by taking women's issues, in a sense beyond the nation" (Ahmad: 88). This is proved by the very fact that Desai writes from a cosmopolitan and

also by the fact that national rootedness in the construction of Indian femininity is precisely what is rejected in the novel.

Partition

Clear Light of Day is also about the Partition that looms large as the backdrop of the novel and even comes to the foreground in Section II. However, what Desai centers in the novel are not the larger momentous effects of the Partition, but the very private and everyday impact of the event on people's lives. Kamila Shamsie describes this in her introduction to the novel as the novel's "sidelong view: glancing allusions and attention to tiny details which echo and reverberate, rather than directness" (Shamsie: ix). She cites an example in Raja's decision to pursue Islamic Studies at Jamia Milia Islamia due to his love of Urdu. However, his father does not allow him to do so since he fears that he will come under fire from both Hindus and Muslims due to this decision. As a result, Raja settles down to pursue English Literature instead, which, ironically, is seen as a more viable and neutral option, even though the nation has only just won its freedom from British Rule (Shamsie: ix). Shamsie also argues that though the Hyder family and Raja are ones who most obviously relate to the Partition, there are also other stories that resound with the terrible effects of the event:

Mira Masi's spiralling descent into alcoholism in '47 can be seen as a reaction to the madness of the world outside, and there is a rejection of post-Partition India in Bim's own insistence on staying within Old Delhi where 'whatever happened, happened long ago – in the time of the Tughlaqs, the Khiljis, the Sultanate, the Moghuls – that lot.' This is not a novel of people who are forced to leave their homes by Partition, face violence because of it; it is an altogether subtler tale of how Partition changed the world of Old Delhi. (Shamsie: ix)

At the same time, however, the novel does not seek to return nostalgically to a past which is now lost, as the first three chapters regressively going back to childhood through adolescence might

suggest. Rather, the novel stages a recovery through the last chapter, which brings the narrative to the present both Bim and Tara realize that their present situations are more responses to their private emotional struggles consequent to the disintegration and changes brought about in their family subsequent to the Partition. This confrontation with their private, hidden insecurities enable both of them to come to terms with their circumstances and with themselves, thereby allowing them to attain psychic independence.

Sense of the Past

As the preceding topic shows, the past is strongly present in the novel and determines the way of life and opinions of the central characters of Bim, Tara and Baba. The setting of the novel in Old Delhi and the house itself are signifiers of how the past constantly intrudes upon these characters. In fact, this theme is clearly enunciated in the first section itself when Bim talks about her and Baba's rootedness in Old Delhi and their avoidance of the newer portion of the city:

"That is the risk of coming home to Old Delhi," she announced in the hard voice that had started up the prickle of distrust that ran over the tips of the hairs on Tara's arms, rippling them. "Old Delhi does not change. It only decays. My students tell me it is a great cemetery, every house a tomb. Nothing but sleeping graves. Now New Delhi, they say is different. That is where things happen. The way they describe it, it sounds like a nest of fleas. So much happens there, it must be a jumping place. I never go. Baba never goes. And here, here nothing happens at all. Whatever happened, happened long ago – in the time of the Tughlaqs, the Khiljis, the Sultanate, the Moghuls – that lot...Here we are left rocking on the backwaters, getting duller and grayer (sic), I suppose. Anyone who isn't dull and grey (sic) goes away – to New Delhi, to England, to Canada, the Middle East. They don't come back." (I)

Tara also feels the changelessness of the house and its inhabitants, but at the same time, as she goes back to her childhood

there, does not really want any change in the house itself. She however is baffled by the fact that Bim doesn't force Baba to do away with his old customs and that neither does Bim herself change in her behaviour and deliberately casual way of life. Bim however, does not want to be reminded of her past and would rather not inhabit her memories, which show how much she is entrapped by the past. Another material evidence of such an intrusive presence of the past is the gramophone and the 70s records that Baba is so fond of playing and that constantly jars on Tara's ears (I). Bim however confesses that though the noise used to disturb her it doesn't anymore; she has got used to and resigned to the inevitability of its presence. The same might be said of the past in her own life. Tara on the other hand seems to have moved on with her life and adapted herself with modern ways of living that the car and New Delhi symbolize. However, as she comes back to the old house it gradually emerges that this change in her is only in name; she has actually not changed from the passive and unconfident girl she was in the past, always under the shadow of Bim and Raja. Her desire to stay in the house and not go to New Delhi itself suggests this desire to come back: "Tara is happy in the dull, monotonous surroundings of her home; in fact, it is the 'passive pleasure of having returned to the familiar'. (Sharma: 110)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How does Anita Desai address the issues related to women in the novel?

Q 8: In what ways, is *Clear Light of Day* about the Partition?

13.4.3 Major Characters

In this section, let us have a short discussion of the major characters of the novel.

Bim:

Bimla, or Bim as she is more frequently called, is the second

of the Das siblings in the novel. She frequently makes pertinent but cutting comments on the more conservative or traditional views held by Tara. For example in Section I, upon noticing Tara's expression of disapproval at her "extravagance of affection" for her cat, she says: "I know what you're thinking...You're thinking how old spinsters go ga-ga over their pets because they don't have children. Children are the *real* thing, you think." However, the novel focuses mostly on Bim and her life has in the years following India's independence. The other characters become relevant through the manner in which their connections to and interactions with Bim are spelt out in the course of the novel. Bim is a professor of history, and her personality has always been strong and decisive, though she does not care much for convention. She stayed unmarried partly in order to take care of her younger brother. At the same time, however, she is shown to be constantly preoccupied with her family's past and with her own role as a martyr who sacrifices her desires and aims in life for her family. In a way, therefore, she is a little like Baba, who is thoughtlessly occupied with his 1947 record collection; both of them in their own ways are trapped in the past. We see through Bim how difficult it can be to forget the past and move forward when one is forced to inhabit a place full of the relics of that past, the most telling object of which is the gramophone rescued from the abandoned hone of Hyder Ali.

Tara:

The third of the Das siblings. Her relation with Bim is characterised by a state of constant friction and a sense of rivalry, while with Baba she feels concerned, sad and guilty. As the novel begins, Tara, now a wife and mother, comes with her husband to her childhood home in Old Delhi where her sister Bim and brother Baba still live. Tara's visit to India this time is due to a special event: the wedding of her brother Raja's oldest daughter. Tara creates the appearance of being happy with her official duties as the wife of a foreign diplomat and the mother of her sophisticated daughters.

However, it is while in her childhood home that her insecurities regarding herself come to the fore, as she realizes that she has not been able to mould herself into the accomplished and elite wife that Bakul has tried to transform her into. At other times, she also expresses the anxieties of bringing up her daughters in a culture that seems alien to her but which her children adapt to very well. By the end of the novel, however, Tara is able reconcile herself with her past and consequently becomes more independent from her husband who has always tried to shelter and dominate her.

Raja:

The oldest of the siblings. During their childhood, it was Raja who was closest to the Hyder Ali family through his love of Urdu. Again, as children, he and Bim were quite close making Tara feel jealous and a bit left out. He is cast a s a very intelligent and clearheaded person with high ambition. He seems to be the only one of the siblings who has been able to move on from the past. He is married, has five children and is successful in his career. In fact, it is to the wedding of his oldest daughter that Tara comes with her husband. At the same time, he escapes responsibility of looking after his younger sibling, especially Baba, and is also insensitive towards Bim.

Baba:

Baba is the youngest of the Das siblings. He was born with a disability (he is autistic) which became apparent as he grew up since his development was significantly slower than other children of his age. He became the most favoured child for Mira Masi, in contrast to his subordinate position earlier because of his disability. She took care of him and taught him some basic skills so that he could do some things for himself, like feeding himself and playing with pebbles, something that he continues to do even as an adult. After the death of Mira Masi Bim becomes his caretaker and the two of them remain in the family home while the others move on with their lives elsewhere. Though Baba is the only one of the siblings

who appears not to have changed at all, due to his disability, it also becomes evident that this has nothing to do with his everyday life in the sense that he is constantly aware of what goes on around him.

Aunt Mira:

Mira is the sister of Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba's mother. After her husband's death, she is mistreated by his family but she finds relief in her sister who takes her into her family. She lives the remainder of her life in old Delhi bringing up her sister's children. Even after their parents die, she continues to take care of them, providing the love and care the children needed along with a stable home for the children to grow up in. Her special attention is towards the youngest of the siblings, Baba, since it is he who is the most dependent on her and makes her feel wanted. As much as their aunt provides them with the semblance of home, it the children too who provide the same kind of support to her. She turned to alcohol especially after Raja and Tara left the household, since alcohol seemed to provide her with a way to drown her fear of being left alone again in life. It is her alcoholism that finally results in her death.

Hyder Ali:

Hyder Ali is the head of the wealthy Muslim family staying near the Das family in Old Delhi. He is the landlord of the house the siblings live. He welcomes Raja, the oldest of the four Das children, into his house, though after some initial reluctance, and later comes to regard him almost as family, especially with the latter's love for Urdu. He is also very generous and allows Raja to borrow many books from his library. Raja marries one of his daughters later on and inherits Ali's wealth.

Bakul:

The husband of Tara. He stays with his wife and family in Washington. He is in the Foreign Service and works as a diplomat in the Indian embassy. They come to Delhi every three or five years. Bakul is cast as a flat character who is marked by his complacence and authority as Tara's husband. He would not even pour out his

tea but waits instead for someone else to pour it out for him. He pays much attention to custom and appearances even at the cost of his wife's desires. He is thus seen as extremely self-centred, thinking that his standard of life is superior to that of the Das family. He doesn't like staying in Old Delhi and prefers to visit his family in New Delhi, which for him is more modern and progressive. He does not like Bim because of her intimidating, strong personality, which is ironic since he wanted Tara to be more like her elder sister. What appealed in Tara to him was her beauty that was much above Bim's, who had average looks. However, he felt that he had to get Tara out from Old Delhi to show her what the real world was like and to bring her up to his level of sophistication.

13.4.4 Desai's Narrative Style

Desai uses the technique of flashback in order to unravel the memories of the characters in the novel. It starts with the characters in adulthood in Section I where Tara has come back with her husband to her old home in old Delhi. They plan to go to Hyderabad we see both Bim and Tara's past experiences, and the narrative also coordinates their past with their present. This emphasizes the interconnectedness of the past and the present at any given point; it also emphasizes the non-applicability absolute binaries like tradition/modernity, past/present, professional/domestic, and so on in the process of identity-formation.

Again, in this novel, Desai exhibits the acute observation that is so characteristic of her. See, for instance these lines from the very first section: As she stared, a petal rose and tumbled onto its back and she saw uncovered the gleam of a - a pearl? a silver ring? Something that gleamed, something that flashed, then flowed - and she saw it was her childhood snail slowly, resignedly making its way from under the flower up a clod of earth only to tumble off the top onto its side- an eternal, miniature Sisyphus. (I)

Here, the rose petals and the snail come alive through the

immediacy and concreteness of detail, which is then given a literary turn with the mention of Sisyphus.

Another of Desai's characteristic techniques in her fiction is the heavy use of symbols. In the above extract, for example, the snail does not merely represent the animal, but evokes Tara's childhood as well; it thus becomes a metaphor of that phase of her life "childhood snail". Similarly, though in a more involved way, the house and the gramophone serve as signifiers of stasis, decay, decadence and unwillingness to change in the characters themselves. The car is also indicative of the pull and impact of modernity that is also associated with New Delhi.

13.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF ANITA DESAI'S *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

Clear Light of Day has been termed by Desai in an interview as "the most autobiographical of all my books because it's the house and the garden and the neighbourhood I grew up in" (525). In the same interview, she says that it was "an experiment" in that she wanted the narrative to go back in time from old age to childhood. However, she could not sustain this for long and had to come to the present after all at the end, which is the reason why she considers this novel slightly disappointing (525). The novel has been one of Desai's most popular novels, and commentators (like those mentioned in the above sections) have focussed on Desai's sensitivity towards the ennui and passivity the middle-class Indian woman who chooses not to engage herself in a profession finds herself in. At the same time, later criticism of the novel, such as that by Hena Ahmad and Pushpa Naidu Parekh, have looked at the novel as breaking the stereotype of women embodying the national imaginary. Other studies (e.g., Kajali Sharma) have praised Desai on her ability to construct a powerful and evocative, and at the same time, symbolic landscape in the novel, particularly through the depiction of Old Delhi.



13.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that Anita Desai is an important exponent of Indian English fiction. Her novel *Clear Light of Day* seems to be highly autobiographical. In this novel, she wove the history of Delhi with a middle class Hindu family. This novel tells the story of two sisters Bimala and Tara in which Bimala replays her memory in a decaying family mansion in Old Delhi. You must have understood by now that this novel mostly deals with women's lives. Besides, the novelist also takes into consideration how the memories of the Partition and the Sense of the Past influence the psyche of the individual in the present. Although she never calls herself a feminist, Desai is very conscious of the predicaments of the helpless women in the Indian society.



13.7 FURTHER READING

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2) Anita, Desai. (2014). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/158730/Anita-Desai>

3) Desai, Anita. (2007). *Clear Light of Day*. Introd. Kamila Shamsie. Noida: Randon House Publishers India Private Limited.

4) Bliss, Corinne Demas. (Interview). (1988). "Against the Current: A Conversation with Anita Desai". *The Massachusetts Review* 29.3. 521-537.

5) Hashmi, Alamgir. (1983). "A Reading of Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*". International Fiction Review. Vol. 10.1. P-56-58. Web. 18 March 2014. <journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/download/13601/14684ý>

6) Naidu Parekh, Pushpa. (1996). "Redefining the Postcolonial Female Self: Women in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*" in *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*. Eds. Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva. Temple University Press. 270-283. Google Book Search. Web.

7) Ostberg, Elizabeth. (2000). "Notes on the Biography of Anita Desai". http://www.haverford.edu/engl/engl277b/Contexts/anita_desai.htm. 18 March 2014. Web.

8) Shamsie, Kamila. "Introduction" *Cry, the Peacock*. Vii-xi.

9) Sharma, Kajali. (1991). *Symbolism in Anita Desai's Novels*. Abhinav Publications.

10) Tandon, Neeru. (2008). *Anita Desai and Her Fictional World*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.



13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Anita Desai was the daughter of an Indian father and a German mother… …thus, she could take simultaneously an insider as well as an outsider's view on Indian life and culture… …she wrote: "I see India through my mother's eyes, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father's, of someone born here".

Ans to Q 2: *Fasting, Feasting… … Fire on the Mountain… …Clear Light of Day… … In Custody… …Cry, the Peacock* and so on.

Ans to Q 3: Desai does not consider herself to be part of the Indian diaspora… …she also feels lucky that she left India quite late in her life… …she has confessed: "I can't really write of it with the same intensity and familiarity that I once had"… …she also admits that she cannot feel at home in any other place or society than in India.

Ans to Q 4: Anita Desai has to her credit a number of important novels written in English… …she introduced the tradition of the psychological novel in India… …she indicates her awareness of the feminist

movement in India, and how it has influenced her writing… …her novels are characterised by her focus on the inner lives of the marginalised characters primarily women, children and the elderly.

Ans to Q 5: Both yes and no… …her novels may not strike as typically feminist… …she talks about helpless women, but also states that feminism is a new movement in India… …besides she writes realistically without idealising… …She states: "Women think I am doing a disservice to the feminist movement by writing about women who have no control over their lives. But I was trying, as every writer tries to do, even in fiction, to get at the truth, write the truth."

Ans to Q 6: Desai considers *Clear Light of Day* her most autobiographical novel… …she is writing about her own neighbourhood in Delhi… …but the characters are not based on her brothers and sisters… …she is exploring the importance of childhood and memories as the source of life.

Ans to Q 7: Desai portrays Indian women as passive and marginalised… …they always face challenges from the mores of a patriarchal society… …the novel explores how these women negotiate with circumstances and ultimately find different ways to assert their existence… …Bim and Tara represent two identities—Bim is strong, independent and empowered, while Tara is passive, isolated, shy, fearful and insecure.

Ans to Q 8: The novel is about the Partition… …Desai's concerns in the novel not on the larger effects of the Partition, but on the very private and everyday impact of the event on people's lives… …Raja's decision to pursue Islamic Studies at Jamia Milia Islamia University due to his love of Urdu… …but his father does not allow him to do so since he fears that he will come under fire from both Hindus and Muslims due to this decision…. … Hyder family and Raja are the ones who most obviously relate to the Partition.



13.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Do you think that Anita Desai is obsessed with the idea of the Past? In what ways, does Anita Desai use the Past in *Clear Light of Day*?

Q 2: Would you like to call Anita Desai a feminist writer? Illustrate with reference to what she herself states about her own oeuvre.

Q 3: How would you like to consider the character of Bim in Desai's *Clear Light of Day*? Why does she remain unmarried?

Q 4: Discuss the theme of Partition as implied by Desai in the novel *Clear Light of Day* in the light of Raja's decision to pursue Islamic Studies at Jamia Milia Islamia University and his father's dissent.

Q 5: Comment on Anita Desai's use of flashback as a narrative technique in the novel *Clear Light of Day*. How does Desai use the memories of the different characters in the novel?

Q 6: Discuss Anita Desai's contributions to Indian English fiction with reference to the major themes she often engages herself with.

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UNIT 14: AMITAV GHOSH: *THE HUNGRY TIDE* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Amitav Ghosh: The Novelist

14.3.1 His Life

14.3.2 His Works

14.4 The Storyline of the Novel *The Hungry Tide*

14.5 Critical Reception of Ghosh

14.6 Let Us Sum Up

14.7 Further Reading

14.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.9 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- reflect on the life and works of the Indian author Amitav Ghosh
- form an idea of Ghosh as a major exponent of Indian English Fiction
- discuss the importance of his novel *The Hungry Tide* and narrate the story in your own words
- make an assessment of the reception of Ghosh as an Indian author.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to Amitav Ghosh and his novel *The Hungry Tide.* Born in Kolkata and now a resident of New York, Amitav Ghosh has been one of the most renowned *Indian* English authors of recent times. A recipient of the coveted Padma Shri Award by the Government of India in 2007, Ghosh has by now established himself as one of the most versatile of the "post Rushdie" generation of expatriate Indian authors writing in English. Together being a social anthropologist, his fame also lies in

being a historian, a fiction writer and a journalist. As a writer, Ghosh travels and remaps the world drawing connections across the boundaries of modern nation states. His creative engagement with historical and political realities and truths, redrawing of cultural and political lines that both divide and unite, make him the writer he is. Since his childhood days in Calcutta, Ghosh got the chance to visit a number of South East Asian countries including Sri Lanka, Iran and Bangladesh, because of his father was serving in Indian Army following which their family had to move in and out of India several times. Thus, many of Ghosh's fictional works are autobiographical in the sense that they reflect on his personal life history. Ghosh, who often seeks to assert his national identity, and resists being called a Commonwealth or postcolonial writer, has written his fictional works on India mainly to tell stories about how globalisation affects international movements of labour. This unit shall serve as an introduction to Amitav Ghosh—the author and his novel *The Hungry Tide* that tends to focus on a 'micro' culture within the region namely, the Sundarbans or the 'tide country". However, Ghosh, in this novel, also dramatises the last phase of the refugees struggle in the Sundarbans.

14.3 AMITAV GHOSH: THE NOVELIST

The following is a discussion on the life and works of Amitav Ghosh.

14.3.1 His Life

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in July 1956. He did his schooling from the Doon School, Dehra Dun. After doing his BA in History, from St. Stephen's College, Delhi University, in 1976, he obtained an MA Degree in Sociology in 1978. Then, he went to St. Edmund Hall, Oxford and in 1979, obtained a diploma in Social Anthropology. He also spent some time at Tunis where he learnt Arabic. He was awarded his Oxford D. Phil. in Social Anthropology for his thesis on "Kinship in Relation to the Economic and Social Organization of an Egyptian Village Community" in 1981. It needs mentioning that his pursuit of Social Anthropology and his

subsequent visit to Egypt to do field work for his doctoral thesis had a shaping influence on him as a writer.

Ghosh has by now established himself as one of the most versatile of the "post Rushdie" generation of expatriate Indian authors writing in English. Although his popularity rests mainly as a fiction writer, it is very difficult to label and categorise his works. Together being a social anthropologist, his fame also lies in being a historian, a fiction writer and a journalist. It is not an exaggeration to state that Ghosh is the most cosmopolitan among the Indian English writers. As a writer, he travels and remaps the world drawing connections across the boundaries of modern nation states. His creative engagement with historical and political realities and truths, redrawing of cultural and political lines that both divide and unite, make him the writer he is.

Ghosh's own father Lieutenant Colonel Shailendra Chandra Ghosh was a civil servant who fought in the Second World War and took part in the Burma campaign in 1945. Since his childhood days in Calcutta, Ghosh got the chance to visit a number of South East Asian countries including Sri Lanka, Iran and Bangladesh, because his father was serving the Indian Army following which their family had to move in and out of India several times. Thus, many of Ghosh's fictional works are autobiographical in the sense that they reflect on his personal life history. Ghosh, who often seeks to assert his national identity and resists being called a Commonwealth or postcolonial writer, has written his fictional works on India mainly to tell stories about how globalization affects international movements of labour.

Products of the Bengal Renaissance, Amitav Ghosh's fiction are marked by a rational explanation of established notions of society, which is quite apparent in the early novels. However, Ghosh also makes historical consciousness a part of his career as a writer. His later novels are characterised by strong themes that may be roughly identified with Postcolonialism but could also be labelled as historical novels. In a sense, Ghosh is writing 'metanarratives' against history's

'grand narratives' to use Lyotard's terms. As Novy Kapadia states, the major influences on him were the stories of his father, the World War II (1939-1945), and the Indians in British Indian army fighting against the Germans or the Japanese. From his father, Ghosh learnt that the Indian officers and soldiers had ambivalent feelings about serving the colonial army. Many of them even realised that without the support of the Indians the British would not have been able to rule the subcontinent. This aspect of historical reality fascinated Ghosh, and it helped him construct the concept of freedom and its different connotations in the modern world as reflected in a novel like *TSL* (10). The departures and arrivals of the characters should necessarily influence their identity and history in most of Ghosh's fictions. Incidentally, the Far East like Combodia and Burma, have always been an obsession with Ghosh because of some personal reference points (16). Central to Ghosh's works is also the idea that the 'non porous nature of modern borders which is brought to the forefront when contrasted with the inclusiveness of older communities where no concept of nationality with all its modern trappings of passports and visas existed.



LET US KNOW

Amitav Ghosh's sensitivity towards issues of political and cultural significance, can be seen in his rejection of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2001 for his fifth novel, *TGP* (2000), Because, as the author tells, this had happened without his knowledge, and promptly he withdrew the novel from the competition mainly on the grounds that it was based on a disputed aspect of the past instead of the realities of the present day (Ghosh 2002, 35). He also stated that the term "Commonwealth" was not an appropriate attribute for a cultural and literary group that included many other languages and realities beside those represented by the English language.

Ghosh's first three novels clearly show his experiments with a diversity of forms and genres –for example Magic Realism and the Picaresque in *The Circle of Reason* (1986), family history in *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and a combination of detective and science fiction in *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996). *The Shadow Lines* won the Sahitya Akademi Award, India's most prestigious literary award. His next novel *The Glass Palace* (2000) embraces the genre of a realist and historical novels of the 19th century. However, his experiences in Egypt following his field research would eventually shape into one of his most important works *In An Antique Land* (1992). Ghosh's fictions have exhibited a remarkable geographical spread, taking in India, the Gulf Region and Algeria for *The Circle of Reason*; India, Bangladesh and London for *The Shadow Lines*; India and America for *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and Burma, India and Malaya, for *The Glass Palace*. But, the scope of his novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004), which we are discussing in this unit, is much limited compared to Ghosh's other novels, as it centers on the Sundarbans, the natural ecosystems of a small and highly particular area of India near Bengal. He also wrote a novella named *Countdown* (1999) on India's Nuclear Policy. His recent works of fiction are *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2010) the first two novels of his supposed IBIS trilogy—an epic saga, set just before the Opium Wars that foreshadows the colonial history of the East. The third, *Flood of Fire*, completing the trilogy, has been published in 2015, which has attracted many positive reviews. Ghosh stated that what interested him most is "the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the connections and the cross-connections between these regions."

Ghosh has also penned prose-collections like *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1998), and *The Imam and the Indian* (2002) on different themes like fundamentalism, history of the novel, Egyptian culture and literature. His writings appear in newspapers and magazines in India and abroad. His most-recent non-fiction

book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) exhibits his concern on why modern literature has failed to address issues of climate change, and how radical transformation due to nature has become 'unthinkable'.

Ghosh currently lives in Brooklyn, USA. So far, he has been conferred various prestigious positions. He has been a Fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. He joined as Distinguished Professor in Comparative Literature, the faculty at Queens College in the City University of New York in 1999. Since 2005, he has also been visiting professor to the English department of Harvard University. He has been a journalist too. In 2007, he was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India. Ghosh has recently purchased a property in Goa and it is assumed that he is returning to India.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Is it possible to categorise Amitav Ghosh's works?

Q 2: Make a list of the novels written by Amitav Ghosh.

14.3.2 His Works

In the previous section, you have got some ideas regarding the works of Amitav Ghosh. In this section, we will discuss his works in some detail.

To speak of the novels first, *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is his first novel. Ghosh in this novel adopts a very unique form of the Indian Raga by dividing it into three sections entitled –Satwa (Reason), Rajas (Passion), and Tamas (Death). This novel also represents the two most important preoccupations of Ghosh as a writer: colonial experience and displacement of people across the world. Himself being a victim of the Partition of Bengal, Ghosh makes the Bengali village of Lalpukur, the locale of the novel. Mainly written for non-Western readers about India and Bengal in particular, Ghosh

suggests that one cannot rationally solve human problems if the history of the people of a particular place is ignored. This novel is one of his earliest attempts to examine the cobwebs of relationships of the Indians across the world—a theme that he cares to incorporate in detail in his later novels.

The Shadow Lines (1988), is set in postcolonial India. One of Ghosh's finest novels, it won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award in 1989. In this novel, he beautifully blends Indian nationalist history, and postcolonial identity. The novel centers on a Hindu narrator's family, which fled from their ancestral home in Dhaka to Calcutta during the riot that erupted after the formation of East Pakistan in 1971. The time span in TSL is important as they exhibit actual influences on the writer. This novel traverses a time span from 1981 to the 1960s and 1940s. Ghosh's adherence to exact dates makes his portrayal of India much more authentic. In this novel Ghosh also shows how the different cultures and communities are becoming antagonistic. This is a major issue in contemporary India. Novi Kapadia writes that historical events like the Freedom Movement in Bengal, World War II, the Partition of India, the communal clash erupting in East Pakistan after the Hazratbal incident in Sri Nagar in 1964 etc. have provided Ghosh with the raw materials against which he studies the historical truths like the meaning of nationalism and political freedom in the modern world.

One way to look at the novel *In An Antique Land* (1992), although its form cannot be readily identified, is to examine the ways Ghosh makes a connection between historiography, ethnography and philology with the representational strategies of fiction. This becomes obvious in the way the narrator searches for medieval documents in Cairo as well as in various museums in the West. The narrator, who may be identified with Ghosh himself, brings along anthropological fieldwork in Egypt and India, the history of a Hindu slave of a Jewish merchant in the 11th century, and Ghosh's own diary written during the fieldwork. However, the book also acts as a

travelogue. You will find it interesting to note that the narrator sometimes appears to be a historian and sometimes an ethnographer, during 1990s, which provides a critique of colonialism and its continuing impact. However, the main purpose of Ghosh, in this novel, is to draw attention to today's political problems between Hindus and Muslims, or Jews and Arabs, caused by the ruptures brought about by colonialism and the all-invading power of modernity.

His third novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) is also based in Bengal and Calcutta to be more precise, as the title of the novel itself suggests. Bringing together advanced computer science, religious cults and the parallel world of the Victorians and the contemporary Indians, this novel tells the adventure of the Calcutta-born researcher Murugan who is engaged with the history of Malaria Research conducted by the Nobel winning British scientist Sir Ronald Ross, the army doctor in Imperial India during1998. The Calcutta born scientist Murugan, is almost sure that Ronald Ross, who was awarded the Novel for his malaria research in Calcutta, was never the 'lone genius', as he believed that there is a secret history behind the research that had been erased from colonial records. Murugan's search for truth not only reveals many secrets of the city of Calcutta, but also proves Ghosh's inclination towards the "Subaltern Studies" group. This novel thus provides room for an alternative historiography the malaria research itself.

Ghosh's next novel *The Glass Palace* (2000) can be read as a historical novel, which employs the form of a family saga to tell an epic narrative about Burma and India of the late 19th century. Ghosh's interest in history is clearly visible in the way he discusses how the Indians were engaged as workers, coolies and sepoys under the British troops in Burma, a colonial hub under the British. Moreover, the setting of Burma along with India was also important because Burma invited many ambitious Indians with many lucrative opportunities. This novel is autobiographical to a great extent. What makes this novel an extraordinary book is that the history of

colonialism is described through the eyes of the common and ordinary people or the 'subaltern'? Ghosh's interest in an alternative historiography is clearly seen in the revisionist approach that he adopts to narrate particular historical events in this novel.

Mainly written in the form of a travelogue, this novella *Countdown* is based on Ghosh's experiences of the grief and sorrows and the horror caused by the nuclear explosion in the mind of the people after his visit to Pokhran, Pakistan and Siachen. This novella can be further seen as a satire on the state policies, which care little for the peace and prosperity of the common people. This book opens with the aftermath of the nuclear explosion on 11th May, 1998 at Pokhran, which the author visits three months later.

Sea of Poppies (2008) is the first book of Ghosh's projected IBIS trilogy and is based on the Opium War one of the most crucial events in world history. Once again, this novel confirms Ghosh's art of storytelling in the form of history. This novel highlights many of the previous concerns of Ghosh as a novelist—such as the movement of people from one place to the other, crossing of geographical boundaries, impact of economic pressures on the common lives of the people, questioning the past and so on. *River of Smoke* (2011), the second part of Ghosh's IBIS trilogy, begins from where the previous novel ends. From the details of the changing lives of Indian migrants in Mauritius, the novel traces the fate of other characters from IBIS and describes the opium trade in China. It is set in Fanqui town, a famous place for the local Chinese traders, an year before the first Opium War.

However, Ghosh has also written some very important non-fictional prose collections. Many of such writings serve the purpose of enlightening the readers about what he has to say directly or indirectly about his fiction. For example, the book *The Imam and The Indian* (2002) is a collection of eighteen essays written at various phases of his career which according to the author "are arranged instead in accordance with the circumstances of their writing" (vii).

This book is even more interesting as it has helped in reading his novels in a more systematic manner, as he claimed, his nonfictional works signalled the 'gestation' of the novels. This can be verified by yet another self-proclamation, which reads like this: "Readers who persevere with these pieces will discover that despite the differences in form and diction, they share with my fictions certain characteristic subjects and concerns, most notably my patterns of work" (x). Similarly, his other non-fictional work, *Dancing in Combodia and Other Essays* that comprises five essays, deals with a variety of issues which Ghosh the anthropologist-turn-novelist brings alive more formidably. Mainly a study of different societies, this book presents a compelling account of the people in those societies. For example, his novel *The Glass Palace* can be supplemented with a reading of the essay "At Large in Burma" available in this collection.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is the significance of Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines*?

Q 4: In what ways, are Ghosh's non-fictional works important?

14.4 THE STORYLINE OF THE NOVEL *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

The novel begins with 42 year old Kanai Dutt, a translator in an office based in New Delhi, standing on a railway platform in Calcutta and observing Piyali Roy. When they finally meet in the same railway berth, it becomes clear that both are heading towards Canning in the Sundarbans. Kanai had been there for a few months back in 1970s when he was a schoolboy and was sent to live with his aunt and uncle. Then he befriended Kusum—a girl in her mid teens. What motivates him to conduct the visit relates to his aunt Nilima who told him that his uncle Nirmal had left a journal and none but Kanai should open it. Although the journal had been written probably around 1979, the year Nirmal died, it had only recently been discovered somewhere in the house. Piya or Piyali Roy, had been

born in Calcutta, but had moved to the United States when she was only one year old. She does not know Bengali. Now she is a student of Cetology at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California. On this trip to India, she is interested in observing the marine mammals, which are unique to the Sundarbans. She is heading towards Canning, which is the last station to go to the Sundarbans. Kanai, on the other hand, is heading towards Lusibari, the farthest island of the region, where his aunt Nilima runs an NGO called the Badabon Trust.

After arriving in Canning, Piya heirs a dubious guide and a 'guard' provided by the Government. However, soon she gets fed up with these two men, and approaches a poor fisherman called Fokir who, she hoped, could direct her to the dolphins she wishes to study. In the process, she falls into the river and is saved by Fokir from the salty vegetation filled water. Fokir does not know English but both manage to do their best to communicate.

Gradually, we learn that the Badabon Trust, now run by Nilima Bose, and the high school established by her husband Nirmal, were actually built over the site of a commune established by a British idealist and visionary named Sir John Daniel Hamilton. The house is called "Lusibari" or "Lucy's House" named for Hamilton's wife Lucy who died suddenly on her way to India. Hamilton had bought ten thousand acres of the Sundarbans and invited the poor people to come and populate the place on one condition that there would be no caste system, and no tribal nationalisms. Although these people were mostly farmers, they decided to become fishermen in a place of crocodiles, tigers, snakes and dangerous tides. These people arrived in Sundarbans in three waves – in 1920s, in 1947 after Partition, and in 1971 after the Bangladesh war. Nirmal and Nilima Bose who arrived in Lusibari in 1950, 11 years after Hamilton's death, were to take over the management of Hamilton's estate, which almost fell in the last 11 years. Nilima established a "Woman's Union" which by 1980s developed into the Badabon Trust. Kanai learns that Kusum, his childhood friend, had been abandoned by her mother who had been tricked to work in brothels. To save the child from similar fate, the Woman's Union raised Kusum who

later married Rajen, a poor man crippled by an accident in Calcutta. They bore a son whose name is Fokir. But just four years after his birth Rajen falls in front of a train and dies.

Kusum tells Fokir the story of Bon Bibi, a good spirit who fights with the evil spirit Dokkhin Rai for control of the forest and waterways. The story of Bon Bibi relates to a man named Dhona who is seduced by Dokkhin Rai into offering a young lad named Dukhey as food to Dokkhin Rai who sometimes also takes the form of a tiger. However, Bon Bibi saves Dukhey at the last moment. Kususm, in a way, wanted Bon Bibi to take the place of Fokir's father. Her father had built a little temple on the island of Garjontola in Bon Bibi's honour. This story had a lasting impact on the minds of Fokir and Kusum's grandson Tutul who frequently visited that place. But, Kusum also admits sadly that Bon Bibi had not helped her years before when her own father could not be saved from a tiger. Finally, Kusum abandons Fokir as she had been told by her friend Horen that Dilip, who had forced her mother into prostitution, was now hunting for her.

Nirmal writes his journal, for which Kanai is sent for in the present. He tries to warn Nilima of the danger caused by the influx of the Bangladeshi refugees who had fled to Morichjhapi from the resettlement camp in central India to which they were forcefully sent. Morichjhapi was a tiger reserve and the Indian Government considered the refugees to be destroying the natural habitats of wild animals. Nirmal however empathises with the refuges. Kusum takes Nirmal to Garjontola and during that time, he was protecting Kusum from Dilip. Horen proposes marriage to her, but the next day, she is killed in a massacre perpetrated by the Government against the 'squatters'. He son Fokir was only five years old at that time.

However, the event narrated in the journal had happened a good many years before the immediate present with which the novel begins. At present Fokir is an adult and is married to Moyna who is an educated woman. Now she wants to go to nursing schools. When Kanai meets her for the first time, he admires Moyna for her determination and ambition. Piya heirs Fokir to take her out into the water so that she can observe the dolphins, and this continues for several weeks. During one such visit to the water,

Horen and Kanai accompany them, but soon Kanai senses that a cyclone is approaching. They also know that Piya and Fokir had gone out in Fokir's small boat. As the storm approaches, Horen decides that he can no longer wait for them and return to Lusibari. Meanwhile Fokir moves towards Garjontola, with the hope of Bon Bibi's intervention on behalf of the poor, they climb the highest mangrove tree and tie themselves to the trunk. The storm is soon upon them hitting them repeatedly with full force followed by a massive tidal wave. Although it subsides eventually, Piya sees that Fokir has died in shielding her from the lashing. As he was dying, he was whispering his wife's and son's names to Piya.

Fokir is cremated. After a few days, Kanai returns to New Delhi, and Piya reads the letter he had left to her. In the letter, he admits that he understands himself poorly, and wishes her happiness. He has left her a full translation of the Bon Bibi legend so that she can better understand Fokir's spirituality and his struggle for life. He also wants her to understand that in different ways, she was loved by both Fokir and Kanai. She too understands that she was drawn towards both of them. Piya leaves for a month but returns to work at the Badabon Trust. She plans to raise money and tries that Nilima's dreams live long—first by financing a house for Moyna and college education for her son Tutul. Piya also thinks of using the Badabon Trust for conservation of endangered dolphins in consultation with the local fishermen. She can very well remember Fokir because of her GPS, which recorded all that happened in the waterways in Sundarbans. She starts calling Nilima's house her 'home'. Kanai decides to write down from what he remembers from reading Nirmal's journal. Finally, the book ends with the haunting presence of the spirit of Fokir.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What are some of the revelations at the end of the novel?

Q 6: What is contained in Nirmal's journal for which Kanai makes a visit to Lusibari?

14.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF GHOSH

Amitav Ghosh has often been hailed as an important Indian English novelist after Salman Rushdie. Most of his fictional works have won prestigious awards. *The Circle of Reason* won the Prix Médicis étranger award—one of France's top literary awards. *The Shadow Lines* won the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Ananda Puraskar. *The Calcutta Chromosome* won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for 1997. *The Glass Palace* won the International e-Book Award at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2001. In 2005, *The Hungry Tide* was awarded the Crossword Book Prize, which is a major Indian award. His novel *Sea of Poppies* was shortlisted for the 2008 Man Booker Prize. This novel was however the co-winner of the Vodafone Crossword Book Award in 2009, as well as co-winner of the 2010 Dan David Prize. *River of Smoke* was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize 2011. As already mentioned, the Government of India awarded him the civilian honour of Padma Shri in 2007. He also received, together with Margaret Atwood—the Israeli Dan David Prize. Ghosh has received the lifetime achievement award at Tata Literature Live, the Mumbai LitFest on November 20, 2016.

Ghosh's works have been translated into more than 30 languages. Besides, his essays have been published in *The New Yorker, The New Republic* and *The New York Times.* He has taught in many universities in India and the USA, including Delhi University, Columbia, Queen's and Harvard University.



14.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have understood that Amitav Ghosh is an important exponent of Indian English fiction. Ghosh, in his novel *The Hungry Tide* deals with the region namely, the Sundarbans or the "tide country". Besides, having a substantial amount of ideas regarding the life and works of Amitav Ghosh in this unit, you must have also realised that the novel *The Hungry Tide* is an important addition to Indian English fiction. You must

have learnt that the 'Subaltern concerns' and locatedness are the two most important thematic aspects of Amitav Ghosh's career as an Indian English novelist.



14.7 FURTHER READING

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7) Khair, Tabish. (Ed.). (2003). *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi: Permanent Black.
8) Mondal, Anshuman A. (2007). *Amitav Ghosh.* Manchester: Manchester UP.
9) Piciucco, Pier Paolo. (Ed.). (2004). *A Companion to Indian Fiction in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
10) Rollason, Christopher. (2005). "In our translated world: Transcultural Communication in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide.*" *The Atlantic Literary Review.* Vol. 6, No. 1-2: pp. 86-107.
11) Tiwari, Subha. (2003). *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

Websites and Electronic Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amitav_Ghosh



14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Not possible… …although he is popular as a fiction writer, it is very difficult to label and categorise his works… … Together being a social anthropologist, his fame also lies in being a historian, a fiction writer and a journalist.

Ans to Q 2: *The Circle of Reason* (1986)… …*The Shadow Lines* (1988)… …*The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996)… … *Countdown* (1999)… …*The Glass Palace* (2000)… …*In An Antique Land* (1992)… …*The Hungry Tide* (2004)… …*Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2010).

Ans to Q 3: *The Shadow Lines* (1988), is about postcolonial India… …it won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award in 1989… …in this novel, he beautifully blends Indian nationalist history, and postcolonial identity… …the story centers around a Hindu narrator's family which fled from their ancestral home in Dhaka to Calcutta during the riot that erupted after the formation of East Pakistan in 1971.

Ans to Q 4: Ghosh's no-fictional prose collections serve the purpose of enlightening the readers about his fictional works… …his *The Imam and The Indian* (2002) help in reading his novels in a more systematic manner… …his other non-fictional work, *Dancing In Combodia and Other Essays* deals with a variety of issues which Ghosh the anthropologist-turn-novelist brings alive more formidably.

Ans to Q 5: Kanai returns to New Delhi, and in a letter admits that he understands himself poorly… …he also wants Piya to understand that in different ways, she was loved by both Fokir and Kanai… …Piya too understands that she was drawn towards both of them… …Piya also thinks of using the Badabon Trust for conservation of endangered dolphins in consultation with the local fishermen… …she can very well remember Fokir because of her GPS which recorded all that happened in the waterways in the Sundarbans.

Ans to Q 6: The journal vividly describes the Morichjhapi incident… …he warned Nilima of the danger caused by the influx of the Bangladeshi refugees who had fled to Morichjhapi from the resettlement camp in central India… …Morichjhapi was a tiger reserve and the Indian Government considered the refugees to be destroying the natural habitats of wild animals… …the Indian Govt. perpetrated a massacre against the 'squatters'.



14.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss in detail Amitav Ghosh's contributions to Indian English Literature with particular reference to his fictional works.

Q 2: Explain the importance of the *The Hungry Tide* as an Indian English fiction.

Q 3: What are the major preoccupations of Amitav Ghosh as a novelist? Do you think that he has been successfull in extolling the idea of 'Indianness' in his fictional works?

Q 4: Write a note on the non-fictional works of Ghosh. In what way do they help in understanding Ghosh as a writer?

Q 5: Comment on the critical reception of Amitav Ghosh as an Indian English writer.

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UNIT 15: AMITAV GHOSH: *THE HUNGRY TIDE* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Reading the Novel

15.3.1 Major Themes

15.3.2 Major Characters

15.3.3 Ghosh's Narrative Style

15.4 Critical Reception of the Novel

15.5 Let Us Sum Up

15.6 Further Reading

15.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

15.8 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- make a list of the important aspects related to the novel *The Hungry Tide*
- discuss the plot, characterisation, themes, and narrative technique in *The Hungry Tide*
- comment on the significance of the novel as an important addition to Indian English fiction.
- make an assessment of Amitav Ghosh as an Indian English writer with reference to the novel *The Hungry Tide.*

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will take you to a discussion of the various aspects of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*. From you reading of the previous unit, you have learnt that the incident of Morichjhapi massacre that took place in 1978-79, when the government of West Bengal forcibly evicted thousands

of Bengali refugees who had settled on the island, forms one of the backgrounds for the novel that you are studying. The novel is set in the Sundarbans the immense labyrinth of tiny islands in the Bay of Bengal. For the settlers here, life is extremely dangerous with possibilities of attacks by tigers, unrest and eviction by the Government. Many a times, without warning tidal floods rise and surge over the land, causing devastation everywhere. In this place of vengeful beauty, the lives of three characters belonging to different worlds collide—Piyali Roy, Fokir and Kanai Dutt. Piyali is a young marine biologist, an Indian American in search of a rare, endangered river dolphin, *Orcaella brevirostris*. Her journey begins with a disaster, when she is thrown from a boat into crocodile-infested waters. Rescue comes in the form of a young, illiterate fisherman, Fokir. Although they don't understand each other because of their different languages, Piya and Fokir are powerfully drawn to each other, sharing an uncanny instinct for the ways of the sea. Piya engages Fokir to help with her research and finds a translator in Kanai Dutt, a businessman from Delhi whose idealistic aunt and uncle are long-time settlers in the Sundarbans. As the three of them launch into the elaborate world of the Sundarbans, they are drawn unawares into the hidden undercurrents of this isolated world. As you finish reading the unit, you will learn that the novel explores topics like humanism and environmentalism, especially when they come into a conflict of interest with each other.

15.3 READING THE NOVEL

The following sections will guide you to read the novel in terms of the various aspects. Ghosh's main concern in the novel is the placing of an individual against a broader historical and geographical backdrop. The book is divided into two sections: "The Ebb" and "The Flood", and is mostly set in the Sundarbans which stretches across coastal India and Bangladesh, from the Hooghly River in West Bengal to the shores of the Meghna in Bangladesh. It is also the home of the Bengal tiger which has killed thousands of people, but which is also an endangered species.

15.3.1 Major Themes

Ghosh in this novel provides a realistic depiction of the Sundarbans situated on the islets of the Ganga Delta lying in the Southern part of Kolkata or the Bangladesh frontier. Besides providing a pictorial idea of the Sundarbans, this novel also deals with history as a recurring theme as Brinda Bose has argued: "Ghosh's fiction takes upon itself the responsibility of re-assessing its troubled antecedents, using history as a tool by which we can begin to make sense of – or at least come to terms with—our troubling present". The following are some of the important themes of the novel.

Morichjhapi Massacre:

The novel helps in discovering the role of Amitav Ghosh as a novelist, a journalist and a historian. It dramatises the last phase of the refugees struggle in the Sundarbans. After the Partition, they had moved to West Bengal in search of better life. In the 60s, they were pushed inland from their deltaic origins into central India. Dandakaranya was conceived as a long-lasting solution to their problem. However, ironically enough, it increasingly turned out to be 'banishment' rather than rehabilitation. The refugees felt alienated, and between 1965 and 1978, more than 12,000 families deserted the settlement. The West Bengal government managed to send many of these refugees back, but about 25,000 managed to return to West Bengal and build a settlement on the island of Marichjhanpi. The West Bengal government was averse to the idea of old refugees returning back to the state and deeply unhappy with this development. It was declared that the Morichjhapi settlement was an illegal encroachment by 'deserters' on forest land in an area earmarked for the protection of endangered tigers. The refugees were given an ultimatum to evacuate the island by 31st March 1979; when that proved futile, the government started an 'economic blockade' that severely affected the refugees; and the state police finally cracked down in mid-May 1979. In the *Hungry Tide*, the

Morichjapi Massacre is traced through a witness, Nirmal, and his diary to his nephew (Kanai). In *The Hungry Tide*, Kanai reconstructs, via his uncle's journal, the revolt of a group of resettled refugees from the then East Pakistan, their creation of a short-lived community in the Sundarbans with visible utopian-rationalist features, and the bloody retaliation of the authorities. Kusum, Fokir's mother, is part of that revolt, and dies in the course of its repression.

The Sundarbans:

In his essay "The March of the Novel through History" Ghosh stated that a novel must always be set somewhere. It must have its setting, and within the evolution of the narrative this setting must, classically play an important role. Most interestingly, *The Hungry Tide* is one of the novels in which the lived sense of place becomes very prominent. The narrator personifies Sundarbans as "the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her Sari, the achol that follows her, half wetted by the sea" (6). The narrator further tells: "At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's hostility to their presence" because "every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, are killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles. Those that survive face not only frequent cyclones but the sight of ebb tides that becomes the source of the birth to a forest every day, before swallowing it again." (8) Ghosh is interested in what is called imaginary geographies and the selection of the Sundarbans for the setting of the novel is connected to that interest. The Sundarbans are placed as 'borderless', a 'utopia', where one's familiar markers of identity are constantly shifting. According to Hamilton, "it was possible to tell who was who, and what their castes and religions and beliefs were". Besides, in that place, there were no borders "to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea."

Subaltern Concerns:

Being the contemporaries of the "Subaltern Studies" group one can find traces of "Subalternist" concerns in this novel in Ghosh's attempts to produce an alternative historiography about India and

about those excluded from the grand narratives of history. You will note that the term "Subaltern" was first deployed as a critical term by the Italian communist thinker Antonio Gramsci. In his use, it refers to the non-elite classes, including the proletariat. In India, the term "Subaltern" was shaped by its discussion around the late 1970s and early 1980s by a group of Marxist historians who later became known as the "Subaltern Studies Group". These historians adapted Gramscian ideas about hegemony, subordination and "subalternity" within a discourse designed to contest the dominance of elitist historiographies of colonial India. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are the most prominent members of the Indian group. The narrators of Ghosh aim towards critiquing the ideological underpinnings of the Indian nation-state, through an evaluation of its colonial past and postcolonial present, and a reconsidered approach to the slurs in Indian political history. The Subaltern figure Fokir is at the heart of the novel and the ethical interpretation of the novel focuses on his place, or lack of place, on the scheme of things often determined by state authorities in Calcutta and New Delhi.

Use of Mythology:

One way to look at Amitav Ghosh as an 'Indian' writer is his use of Indian mythology. The novel presents an interesting example of Ghosh's use of mythology that helps to explain the notion of Indianness in his novels. Here, Ghosh seeks to find out why Indian myths and legends are so rooted in the psyche of an Indian people. The reference made here is to Goddess Ganga and the legend of her descent from heaven. References made to the tearing off Ganga's torrents by Lord Shiva exemplify such rootedness. Ghosh's preoccupation with the idea of Indianness in this novel can be best examined in terms of his re-interpretation of Hindu mythology and legends, and their connections to the creation of the Sundarbans. As Kanai, the Delhi based reporter, reads through the pages of his Bengali script:

"In our legends it is said that the goddess Ganga's descent

from the heavens would have split the earth had Lord Shiva not tamed her torrent by tying it into his ash-smeared locks. To hear this story is to see the river in a certain way: as a heavenly braid, for instance, an immense rope of water, unfurling through a wide and thirsty plain. That there is a further twist to the tale becomes apparent only in the final stages of the river's journey—and this part of the story always comes as a surprise, because it is never told and thus it is never imagined. It is this: there is a point at which the braid comes undone; where Lord Shiva's matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle." (6)

However, like it is typical of all Ghosh's novels to re-interpret facts and established ideas, *THT* presents an interesting parallelism between mythology and geology. In addition, this is where Ghosh is at his best while rationally explaining certain aspects of life and society in terms of Indian mythologies. Once again, we find Ghosh hinting at the idea of circularity when Nirmal utters these lines:

"Look at the size of their heroes, how immense they are….heavenly deities on the one hand , and on the other, the titanic stirrings of the earth itself— both equally other worldly, equally remote from us. Then there is the way in which the plots go round and round in both kinds of stories, so that every episode is both a beginning and an end, every outcome leads to other. And then of course there is the scale of time yugas and epochs, Kaliyuga and the Quaternary. And yet mind this—in both, these vast durations is telescoped in such a way as to permit the telling of a story." (180)

Nirmal further relates Ganga to an incarnation of Vishnu and God's missteps. He begins like this: "May be I would start with the story of Vishnu, in his incarnation as a divine dwarf, measuring out the universe in three giant strides: I would tell them about God's missteps and how an errant toenail on one of his feet created a tiny scratch on the fabric of creation. It was this pore [of Ganga]." (181) Then again to express that the tide country is better explained by myth than geology, Nirmal states: "'Look comrades, look', I would say. 'This map shows that in geology, as in myth, there is a visible

Ganga and a hidden Ganga: one flows on land and one beneath the water. Put them together and you have what is by far the greatest of the earth's rivers'" (181). Following his interests with location and history, it can be assumed that in almost all his major fictional works, Ghosh implicitly or explicitly argues that history can irrevocably alter the lives of the common people and in the context of India, it has been done so alarmingly. Colonial history has already brought in such alternations.

Human Communication:

Ghosh's novel takes as its task the exploration of a vast field of human communication, testing both its possibilities and its limits as the characters seek to cross multiple barriers – the barriers of language, religion and social class, those between human beings and nature, between traditional and cosmopolitan India, between urban and rural, between India and the wider world. The tension between global and local is articulated through the characters, with, for most of the novel, globalisation embodied by the Americanised Piya with her hi-tech GPS device, local identity symbolised by Fokir, and Kanai, the Delhi-resident, part-globalised modern entrepreneur, shifting uncertainly somewhere in between. Thus, one of the major elements in the plot of the novel is the growing relation between Kanai and Piya, another being Piya's developing understanding of Fokir.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What ideas of the Sundarbans are expressed by Amitav Ghosh in the novel *The Hungry Tide*?

Q 2: What do you mean by the term 'Subaltern'? Do you think that *The Hungry Tide* is an example of Ghosh's inclination towards the Subalternist concerns?

Q 3: Do you agree that the use of Indian mythology help in defining Ghosh's Indianness in this novel?

15.3.2 Major Characters

Let us in this section quickly have a look at the major characters of the novel.

Kanai

Kanai is a representative of the highly educated urban Indian generation. He is a translator by profession and is expert in six languages. He is an interpreter, and runs his bureau to serve 'expatriate' communities, which is a group of people usually emerging in Amitav Ghosh's novels. But his importance in the novel also lies in his being the nephew of an elderly women popularly called by the local people as Mashima ('great aunt') who had established the Badabon Trust—a non-governmental development agency. This agency became instrumental in building up modern infrastructure including a school, hospital and other welfare activities. As the novel starts, Kanai is on his way to the Sundarbans to examine the newly recovered notebook written by his dead uncle Nirmal who had been a poet scholar and a revolutionist. Significantly, being a translator, Kanai offers to act as interpreter for Piya, who only knows English and has no means of communication with the local Bengali speakers whose knowledge and lore are vital for her research. Nirmal's written records are presented to the reader *translated* (from Bengali into English) by Kanai who also *mediates* between Piya and Fokir. Thus, Kanai's role in the development of the plot of the novel is very important. Kanai is a proud and arrogant and not above using his status to get his own way. He tries to be always in control of the relationships of his life. Nilima describes him as "one of those men who likes to think of himself as being irresistible to the other sex. Unfortunately, the world doesn't lack for women who're foolish enough to confirm such a man's opinion of himself, and Kanai seems always to be looking for them."

Piyali Roy:

She is a principal figure in the novel. The daughter of Bangla

parents who had immigrated to Seattle, Piya is a cetologist by profession and her particular field of expertise concerns the fresh water river dolphins, which are to be found in the great waterways like the Indus, the Mekong, the Irawaddy, and the Ganges. She is the daughter of an Indian immigrant to the US, so naturally, she has very little contact with India, her ancestral country. However, she is drawn to her parent's native Bengal in order to conduct a survey of the marine mammals in the Gangetic delta. The novel opens with her meeting Kanai. After the course of incidents, she decides to come back to the Sundarbans and extend all necessary help to the Badabon Trust. With an official permit, she's forced to use a government-approved guide and guard, but she finds herself at their whims until events land her in the small boat belonging to Fokir, who is fishing for crabs with his son. Fokir brings Piya to Lusibari, where the paths of Piya, Kanai, and Fokir all merge.

Fokir:

Fokir first appears as the saviour of Piya from the two dubious 'guides'. Fokir is perhaps the truest soul in the novel. He is an illiterate man, but possesses more knowledge of the river and its wildlife than all the outsiders who don't understand him. Piya feels an affinity for Fokir and his life, which matches the rhythms of his environment. Kanai, attracted to Piya and envious of Fokir, decides to accompany them on a trip up the river to study the dolphins. The three of them embark on a trip into the heart of the tide country, which will bring lasting change to all of their lives. He is a representative of the Subaltern figure who is very honest, but also complex. Fokir is at the heart of the novel and the ethical interpretation of the novel focuses on his place, or lack of place, on the scheme of things often determined by state authorities in Calcutta and New Delhi.

Nilima and Nirmal:

In 1950, 11 years after Hamilton's death, Nirmal and Nilima Bose arrived in Lusibari. An year before their arrival, Nirmal had attended a conference of the Socialist International held in Calcutta.

Nirmal was then teaching at Ashutosh college and Nilima was his student. They were to take over the management of Hamilton's estate, which almost fell in the last 11 years. Nilima established a "Woman's Union" which by 1980s developed into the Badabon Trust. Nirmal writes his journal, for which Kanai is sent for in the present, in the village of Morichjhapi the year after his retirement as a headmaster. In the journal, he researches his own life, which he takes to be a big failure. He also reassesses his marriage, which according to him, is overshadowed by his wife Nilima's dedication to the Badabon Trust and her dismissal of his leftist ideologies. When the novel begins, Nilima is a 76-year-old woman, and still runs the charitable organisation called the Badabon Trust.

Bon Bibi:

According to this story the twins, Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli, were born in the holy city of Medina to a Sufi Faqir Ibrahim through the intervention of Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel forecasted that they had been chosen for divine mission, that they were to travel from Arabia to the "country of eighteen tides"–atthero bhatir desh—in order to make this region fit for human habitation. Subsequently, both set off for the mangrove forest of Bengal dressed in the simple ropes of Sufi mendicants. However, the jungle of the 'the country of eighteen tides' were under the command of the demon king Dokkhin Rai who kept within his power every living being in the island and who was antagonistic to human. With the arrival of Bon Bibi, there began a battle in which the demon king was defeated and the merciful Bon Bibi divided the island into two parts—one for herself and the other for Dokkhin Rai to maintain a balance between human settlement and wilderness. Thus, Bon Bibi became the tutelary deity of the island. (THT, 103). Bon Bibi is not physically present in the novel. However, her presence is felt everywhere.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What role does Kanai play as a character in the novel *The Hungry Tide*?

Q 5: Explain the significance of the story of 'Bon Bibi'.

15.3.3 Ghosh's Narrative Style

The novel *The Hungry Tide* is told from the perspective of two main characters—Kanai Dutt, a Delhi businessman, and Piya Roy, an American scientist who has come to the Tide country to study the rare Irrawaddy dolphin which lives in the rivers of the tide country. Amitav Ghosh in this novel uses narrative techniques like alternative narrative strands, the use of flashback and memory, insertion of textual fragments that offer alternative avenues into a forgotten history. For most part, as Anshuman Mondal writes, the narrative time frame only extends over some thirty to forty years and, in contrast to his preoccupation with the diasporic conditions prevalent in his earlier novels, the action is concentrated on one geographical area—Sundarbans. The notebook Nirmal left behind allows Ghosh to inlay the narrative with an account of the forgotten incident in the history of postcolonial India—the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979. The use of the 'tide' as a metaphor is important. The tide comes twice daily those results in the constant reshaping of the land and uprooting of everything permanent. Thus, this can be seen as an apt symbol of the ebb and flow of history and the uprooting of the populace due to reasons more than one. This style of writing is unique to Amitav Ghosh.

Perhaps, Amitav Ghosh is at his best with the use of storytelling a technique in this novel. The character called Nirmal writes in his letter to Kanai: "To think of all the years when I had nothing but time and yet wrote not one word. And now like some misplaced, misgendered Scheherazade I am trying to starve the night off with a flaying, fleeting pen…" (148). Once Kanai starts

reading Nirmal's diary, many stories, of the 'subaltern' like Kushum, start gaining narrative space. This novel is also an excellent example of oral storytelling represented by the story of Bon Bibi. Ghosh has tried to express why certain stories are so important in the daily life of the common people of the tide country or the Sundarbans. The story of Bon Bibi, which is a superstitious story, finds its place in the common parlance of the people of the 'tide country', which has been used as the central metaphor in the novel.

Amitav Ghosh is usually considered a writer of postmodern fiction, because his stories travel throughout time and space. In *The Hungry Tide*, he traverses between the Morichjhanpi incident from Nirmal's point of view, and the present day travels of Piya Roy, Kanai and Fokir. This time-travel is vital to the story and created an intricacy of sub-topics and plots. Another trait of Ghosh as a novelist, as reflected in *The Hungry Tide,* is the research he undertakes in mixing fiction and fact to the extent that they stand undifferentiated. Touching upon various topics such as refugees, freedom, war etc. to the life of the common people in the Sundarbans, the absence of language in communication, development, women trafficking and much more, Ghosh takes the reader through a whirlwind of events and emotions. He includes the myths of the people who are living in the Sundarbans to explain the nature of living in a country whose shape is determined by tide and extreme weather. This is what makes the narrative style of the novel so unique.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Comment on Ghosh's narrative style in *The Hungry Tide.*

15.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE NOVEL

In the blurb of the Harper Collins edition of *The Hungry Tide,* it is stated, "Amitav Ghosh has discovered another new territory, summoning a singular, fascinating place, another world, from its history and myth and

bringing it to life. Yet *The Hungry Tide* also explores another and far more unknowable jungle: the human spirit. It is a novel that asks at every turn: what man can take the true measure of another?" Besides, there are several praises for the book. It has been stated by *India Today* that what remain permanent, in terrifying beauty, are the river and the forest, and it is their overwhelming presence that provides *The Hungry Tide* a dark, elegiac elegance. *The Telegraph* remarked, "Ghosh's storytelling is at best tempting the reader on as if with an unsolved mystery, focussing dramatically on edgy exchanges between unusual individuals, blending tale into tale in a vast seeming narrative close to the Bengali tradition of the river novel." Similarly, *The Pioneer* had remarked, "He is a writer who looks, listens and tells the story. If you want to see the Sundarbans painted in words, and read a bit of its history, myth, and the story of an American Indian in search of the rare river dolphins, an impromptu translator and logical guide, then grab a copy of *The Hungry Tide*." Such reviews help in claiming that the novel *The Hungry Tide* is an important addition to Amitav Ghosh's oeuvre, as well as to Indian English Fiction.



15.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that the main intention of Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* is to explore the Morichjhapi Massacre of 1979 in the Sundarbans, and the history of the riverine dolphins *(Orcaella brevirostris)* which are integral part of the island's history and ecology. In order to do so, Ghosh provides a realistic depiction of the Sundarbans situated on the islets of the Ganga Delta lying in the Southern part of Kolkata or the Bangladesh frontier. However, the narrative continues through an intensified tension between the global and the local, the global being represented by the American Piya, with her hi-tech GPS device, and the local by Fokir who represents the repressed histories of the Sundarbans. This novel is one of the remarkable examples of Ghosh's discussion of the plight of the 'divided' communities residing in different parts of India.



15.6 FURTHER READING

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Website and Electronic Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hungry_Tide

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15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: In his essay "The March of the Novel through History" Ghosh stated that a novel must always be located somewhere… …in this novel the lived sense of place becomes very prominent… …Ghosh is interested in what is called imaginary geographies and the selection of the Sundarbans for the setting of the novel is connected to that interest… …The Sundarbans is placed as 'borderless', a 'utopia', where one's familiar markers of identity are constantly shifting.

Ans to Q 2: The term "Subaltern" was first deployed by Antonio Gramsci to refer to the non-elite classes, including the proletariat… … In India, the term was shaped by its discussion around the late 1970s and early 1980s by a group of Marxist historians… …Yes… …Ghosh's Subalternist concerns can be traced through his attempts to produce an alternative historiography about those excluded from the grand narratives of history… …

Ans to Q 3: Yes… …Ghosh's use of mythology in this novel helps to explain the notion of Indianness… …Here, Ghosh seeks to find out why Indian myths and legends are so rooted in the psyche of an Indian people… …several references are made to Goddess Ganga and the legend of her descent from heaven.

Ans to Q 4: Kanai is a translator by profession and a polyglot… ….he is an interpreter, and runs his bureau to serve 'expatriate' communities… …he is also the nephew of an elderly women popularly called by the local people of Sundarbans as Mashima ('great aunt')… …Kanai offers to act as interpreter for Piya, who only knows English and has no means of communication with the local Bengali speakers… …he also presents Nirmal's written records to the readers in English… …Kanai's role in the development of the plot of the novel is very important.

Ans to Q 5: Bon Bibi is the deity of the of Sundarbans… …archangel Gabriel sent her with her brother in a divine mission from Arabia to the "country

of eighteen tides"–atthero bhatir desh—in order to make this region fit for human habitation… …the region was already under the command of the demon king Dokkhin Rai who kept within his power every living being in the island… …there began a battle between both party and the demon king was defeated and the merciful Bon Bibi divided the island into two parts—one for herself and the other for Dokkhin Rai to maintain a balance between human settlement and wilderness.

Ans to Q 6: Amitav Ghosh uses alternative narrative strands such as the use of flashback and memory, insertion of textual fragments and so on… …the narrative time frame extends over some thirty to forty years… …Nirmal's note book allows Ghosh to inlay the narrative with an account of the forgotten of postcolonial India—the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979… …the use of storytelling as a unique technique to unfold the narrative.



15.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the characters of the novel against Ghosh's concern over the repressed history of the people of Lusibari.

Q 2: Read the text of *The Hungry Tide* and comment on the ending of the novel. What do you think about the death of Fokir?

Q 3: Do you agree that the 'hungry tide' serves as a metaphor in the novel? Discuss with reference to the text of the novel.

Q 4: Do you think that Fokir is more admirable than the other characters in the novel? Elaborate.

Q 5: What are the narrative strategies used by Ghosh in this novel? What purpose do the use of flashback and memory serve in the novel? Discuss.

Q 6: What is 'Indian' about the novel *The Hungry Tide*? Discuss Ghosh's use of Indianness as an important theme of the novel.

Q 7: In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, the Morichjapi Massacre is traced

through a witness, Nirmal, and his diary to his nephew Kanai. Discuss.

Q 8: Do you think that by including an American-Indian woman who feels often out-of-place, Ghosh is trying to help the readers in unfolding the story of *The Hungry Tide*?

Q 9: What is your reaction to the story Kanai discovers about Nirmal and his past? Comment on the differences in perspectives between Nirmal and his wife Nilima about their shared past?

Q 10: Did the events of the storm at the very end of the book take you by surprise? How did you feel about the novel's ending?

*** ***** ***



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