PGEG S3 04

Indian English Literature

SEMESTER III

ENGLISH

BLOCK 2

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

1. **Prof. Pona Mahanta**, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University
2. **Prof. Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami**, Former Srimanta Sankardeva Chair, Tezpur University
3. **Prof. Bibhash Choudhury**, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Coordinator : Dr. Prasenjit Das, Associate Professor, Discipline of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
6-8	**Dr. Malati Mathur** Department of English, IGNOU
9-10	**Dr. Prasenjit Das**

Editorial Team

Content: **Prof. Bibhash Choudhury**
Department of English, Gauhati University

Structure, Format and Graphics: Dr. Prasenjit Das

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SEMESTER 3
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 4: INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE
BLOCK 2: POETRY AND DRAMA

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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 GirishKarnad—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 1: This unit 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 2: This unit 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 3: This unit 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 4: In this unit, you will get 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 5: This unit 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.

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 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

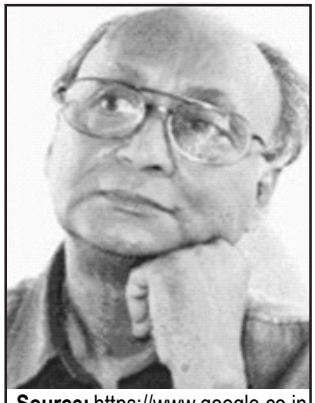
This is the first unit of Block 2 of the course on Indian English Literature. This unit deals with two poems written by Jayanta Mahapatra,

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?

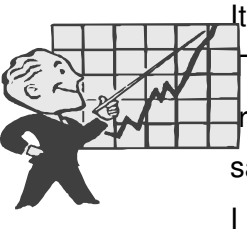
Q 2: How did the experiences of life influence Mahapatra's poetic writings?

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.

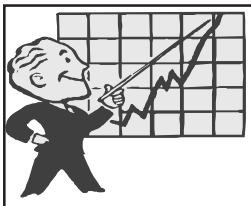
In the seamless unification of the past and present towards which he so intensely strives, is the belief that only this merging will give meaning to the present and that it will sow the seeds of new myths, embodied in the boy-hero of the Konarak temples. In addition, in a thought that is strongly reminiscent 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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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:



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

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 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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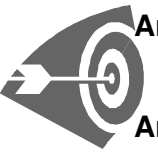
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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

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

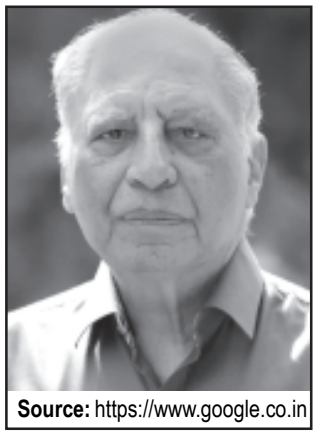
This is the third unit on Indian English poetry. This unit deals with two poem namely "Wolf" & "Hawk" written by Keki N. Daruwalla (1937-) who is a major poet and short story writer in the field of Indian Writing in

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:

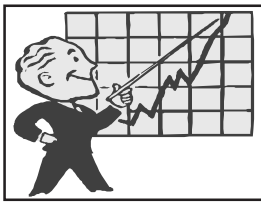
In his frequent use of animal imagery, one can see a marked resemblance to the British poet Ted Hughes. However, whereas Hughes uses myth and dramatic monologue to great effect in his poetry, often imbuing his animal images with supernatural powers, Daruwalla, although similar in his use of animal imagery, 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

Daruwalla, Keki. (Ed.). (1980). *Two Decades of Indian Poetry; 1960-1980.* New Delhi: Vikas.

Inamdar, F. A. (Ed.). (1991). *Critical Spectrum: The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

Mehrotra, A. K. (1992). *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets*. Oxford India Paperbacks.

Pandey, Birendra. (Ed.). (2001). *Indian Poetry in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

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Singh, Ram Ayodhya. (1992). *Keki N. Daruwalla: Assessment as a Poet*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot.

Sinha, Ravi Nandan. (2002). *The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: B.R. Pub. Corp.

Viswas, Asha. (2011). *Keki N. Daruwalla: The Poet and Novelist*. New Delhi: Bahri Publication.

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?

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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

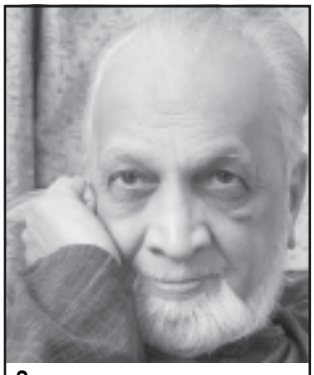
- gain some ideas about the life and works of the Indian playwright Vijay Tendulkar
- explain in detail the story of the play and discuss its significance in the context of the 18th century Pune in Maharashtra
- read the text in its other possible contexts and identify the different philosophical and 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

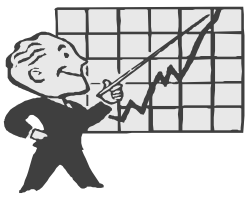
the power games men play in society and which are connected to corruption, violence and sensuality. His play *Gidhade* (*The Vultures*) displays how violence becomes an end in itself. While his *Sakharam Binder* explores the complication of human nature and the manifestation of physical lust and violence 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*.



10.8 FURTHER READING

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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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