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# **CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH**

**[M.A. ENGLISH]**



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MA [ENGLISH]



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# SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

## Contemporary Indian Writing in English

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Keki Daruwalla- ‘Hawk’, ‘Wolf’	<b>Unit 2:</b> Keki Daruwalla: ‘Wolf’ and ‘Hawk’ (Pages 23-46)
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Vikram Seth – ‘ <i>The Humble Administrator’s Garden</i> ’ from <i>The Golden Gate</i>	<b>Unit 5:</b> Vikram Seth: <i>The Humble Administrator’s Garden</i> (Pages 87-98)
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Amitav Ghosh – <i>The Shadow Lines</i>	<b>Unit 2:</b> Amitav Ghosh: <i>The Shadow Lines</i> (Pages 141-156)
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K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar – <i>Indian Writing in English</i>	<b>Unit 1:</b> Iyengar: <i>Indian Writing in English</i> (Pages 263-298)
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# INTRODUCTION

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Indian English literature (IEL) defines the body of work by Indian writers who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Indian writing in English has a relatively short but highly charged history. In 1793, Sake Dean Mahomed wrote perhaps the first book by an Indian in English, called *The Travels of Dean Mahomed*. However, most early Indian writing in English was usually non-fictional work, such as biographies and political essays. In the present day, Indian English literature has been associated with the works of the members of the Indian diaspora which include Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, who are of Indian descent. Indian authors have long since carved a niche for themselves in the minds of readers worldwide. With their uniquely Indian style of writing characterized by satirical descriptions of their land, fluidity of language and a melancholy vibe, writers from the far eastern subcontinent are adored by critics and the common populace alike.

The content of the book, *Contemporary Indian Writing in English*, is divided into four blocks:

## **Block A: Poetry**

**Unit 1:** Jayanta Mahapatra- 'The Abandoned Cemetery at Balasore'

**Unit 2:** Keki Daruwalla- 'Hawk' and 'Wolf'

**Unit 3:** Kamala Das- 'My Grandmother's House' and 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'

**Unit 4:** Adil Jussawalla- 'Missing Person,' Part II

**Unit 5:** Vikram Seth- 'The Humble Administrator's Garden' from *The Golden Gate*

## **Block B: Fiction**

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**Unit 2:** Amitav Ghosh- *The Shadow Lines*

**Unit 3:** Raja Rao- *Kanthapura*

## **Block C: Non-fiction**

**Unit 1:** Nehru: *An Autobiography* (Chapter 1, 3, 4, 19, 51 and 53)

**Unit 2:** Nirad C. Chaudhuri: *A Passage to England* (Part I-Chapter 7, Part II-Chapter 2 and Part III-Chapter 1 and 3)

**Block D: History of Indian English Literature**

**Unit 1:** K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar-*Indian Writing in English*

**Unit 2:** M.K. Naik- *A History of Indian English Literature*

**Unit 3:** Gauri Viswanathan-*Masks of Conquest*

The book follows a self-instructional format. Each unit of every block begins with an outline of the objectives, which is followed by an introduction to the topic. Each unit also contains two simple 'Check Your Progress' questions, allowing you to assess your understanding of the units covered. The content is followed by a summary of the topics covered and a glossary of key words discussed. Finally, there is a list of questions at the end to help you revise the topics discussed and a list of suggested reading for the topic.

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## **BLOCK-A: POETRY**

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# UNIT - 1

## JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: ‘THE ABANDONED BRITISH CEMETERY AT BALASORE’

### Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
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- 1.2 Jayanta Mahapatra: An Original Poet
- 1.3 Qualities of Mahapatra’s Poetry
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- 1.9 Suggested Readings
- 1.10 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

### 1.0 Objectives

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

- Identify Jayanta Mahapatra, the poet
- Evaluate the quality of Mahapatra’s poetry
- Analyse Mahapatra’s poem ‘The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore’
- Examine various themes in ‘The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore’
- Construct a detailed analysis on the poem ‘The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore’

### 1.1 Introduction

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Jayanta Mahapatra was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1928 in Cuttack, India. He completed his early education at Stewart School, Cuttack. He finished his Master’s Degree in Physics scoring a first class. He then joined as a teacher in 1949 and served various government colleges in Orissa.



Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the best known English poets and any discussion on Indian English poetry is incomplete without reference to his poetry. Noted physicist, bilingual poet and essayist, Mahapatra holds the distinction of being the first Indian English poet to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981 for his poem 'Relationship.' He was also awarded the Padmashree Award for his literary contributions. Over time, he has managed to carve a quiet, tranquil poetic voice of his own—distinctly different from those of his contemporaries. His wordy lyricism combined with Indian themes put him in a league of his own. Some of his outstanding works include poetry volumes *Shadow Space*, *Bare Face* and *Random Descent*. Mahapatra also experimented with prose. A collection of short stories, *The Green Gardener* is his lone published book of prose. Jayanta Mahapatra is a distinguished editor who runs a literary magazine *Chandrabhaga* from Cuttack. In this unit, we will analyse his poem 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore,' which is set in colonial India.

## 1.2 Jayanta Mahapatra: An Original Poet

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Mahapatra writes in English and in Oriya. However, he is internationally recognized as a writer of English. Initially starting his literary career as a short story writer, he began writing poetry quite late. Well-anthologized and heavily published in distinguished periodicals both at home and abroad, he has to date published seven volumes of verse, which are as follows:

- *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (Dialogue Publications, 1971),
- *Svayamvara and Other Poems* (Writers Workshop, 1971)
- *A Rain of Rites* (University of Georgia Press, 1976)
- *A Father's Hours* (United Writers, 1976)
- *Waiting* (Samkaleen Prakashan, 1979)
- *The False Start* (Clearing House, 1980)
- *Relationship* (Greenfield Review Press, 1980)

Both in quantity and quality, his poetry is amazingly impressive, almost startling.

Mahapatra is in many senses an original poet. That he won the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1981 for his long poem 'Relationship' and earlier the Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award of 1975 for his poems published in *Poetry* (Chicago) simply vindicates his legitimate title to originality. His originality can also be proved indisputably if we view his profession as a physics teacher at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, which helped him bring a sense of scientific intuition, questing and approach to human issues.

Mahapatra belongs to that category of eminent poets as Keki N. Daruwalla, Gieve Patel, Pritish Nandy, R. Parthasarathy, Arun Kolatkar,

Dilip Chitre, and Kamala Das, who do not happen to teach English literature and thus his poetic sensibility has not really been framed by an in-depth pursuit of canonical literature and popular criticism. The result is a refreshingly new approach to the selection of poetic themes and their treatment. Unlike many Indian-English poets, he does not show the obvious influence of world poets, as he has not read much poetry in his life. Without being shy, he admits it in an interview with N. Raghavan, ‘You see, I haven’t read much poetry in my life. As a matter of fact, I hadn’t read any poetry until I started writing myself. No, not even poets like Eliot or Whitman or Tagore. I was trained to be a physicist. But I have veered away from Physics in a way.’

Mahapatra’s poetry is steeped in an authentic individuality of perception, expression and tone. His is a distinctively unsentimental voice, now conversational, now dramatic, now lyrical, now prosaic, now questioning, now searching, but always strikingly unpretentious and powerful. What makes that voice additionally original is its origin in a scientific imagination:

Physics did teach me a certain discipline. And when I started writing poetry, my science training pushed me onto an excessive compression in my poems. But it has taught me to see inside things ..., to realize too how apparently inanimate objects like a butt of wood or iron, so inert on the outside, hide whirling electrons inside—and how we can look at our static world and imagine the tremendous amount of motion happening all the time.

Another element of Mahapatra’s originality is the rigour and tenacity with which he is an Oriya poet inside out. By virtue of his birth and upbringing Mahapatra is firmly rooted in the landscape of his native land Orissa. The important places of his state, Cuttack, Puri, Bhubaneswar, Balasore, Konark, the Chilika Lake, its legends, history and myths, its tradition and culture, its past, present and future, have been integrated into his mental landscape from where he culls materials for his poems. These places in Orissa are not only politically or commercially important, but they are important also in terms of the rich heritage of the people. It is from this rich heritage of people, places and culture that have fostered him like mother figures that his poetry originates. In reply to the citation of the Award of the National Academic of Letters (Sahitya Akademi), he said:

‘To Orissa, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which lies my beginning and end, where the wind knees over the grief of the River Daya and where the waves of the Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Konark, I acknowledge my debt and my relationship.’

Yet, it is not simple—a love of the land that holds Mahapatra to Odisha and writing. A much deeper link between the poet and his journey towards self-discovery is hinted in excerpts like the one quoted below. And given the fact that this arduous journey of self-discovery had to be undertaken through poetry, what other theme than Oriya heritage, people and culture,

something embedded in the genes of this poet, could be used. It is almost like saying that if Mahapatra was to write in the mode of self-exploration and discovery, Oriya was the only ethos he could write from.

‘I love the language and I love my land. I would never forsake my India for any other country. I have, now that you ask me, had occasion to travel outside the country a number of times, but have always come back—at times before the expected date of my return. There is something in our place which is totally relaxing, something in the scent of mango blossoms and in the summer dusts and in the rain and the sea, challenging the earth ... so I can’t explain this ... But I can mould the English language to my own private needs ... to poetry. Yet, today, I write poems in Oriya, but they are rather limited in language—because my Oriya vocabulary is so very inadequate.’

Although Mahapatra with more exposure to the West in his later years speaks increasingly of himself and his themes as Indian, his motivation to write is neither a part of a state or national politics. When asked why he started writing poetry, Mahapatra responded with a complex individual response so reminiscent from his poetry:

‘When I started writing... I had wanted to be a writer. With the years however, this changed. It appears now that I wanted to write because I wanted to find myself in this world. There was a certain discipline which made me sit down, day after day, in the isolation of my room, to write. Perhaps I began slowly to discover a certain trust in my writing, a sort of faith. And this writing taught me to be myself to “liberate” myself from whatever held me prisoner...Today, it is a different thing altogether. At this moment, I feel my poems have served no purpose at all. How many readers do I have? twelve? or twenty? And all these poems with their depictions of pain (like the poem ‘Hunger’ for instance) have not made any ripple ever in the lives of my friends. What does all this tell me? That I would be better off doing something else rather than sit down and labour to make a poem. But perhaps, I shall go on writing—because there is very little I can otherwise do. It is a pointless thing, this writing...

### **Check Your Progress-1**

1. For which poem did Mahapatra win the 1981 Sahitya Akademi Award?
2. What is the relevance of Orissa in his literary works?

### **1.3 Qualities of Mahapatra’s Poetry**

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Mahapatra’s themes are varied, ranging from sex to nature, from the religious to the superstitious, from the metaphysical to the mythical, from the personal

to the impersonal. But whatever his theme, there is a profound brooding, meditative quality in his poetry, that holds the reader hypnotized. Above all, his sensibility, absolutely uncontaminated, always remains authentically Indian, thanks to his umbilical cord always remaining unsevered from his motherland. Consequently, his poetry is rooted deeply in Indian socio-cultural heritage. In fact, he enjoys the distinction of being the only poet who proudly interprets the glorious past of India and sincerely voices our uniquely rich and complex cultural heritage in a uniquely individualistic way.

Mahapatra's poems reveal in action a dialogue and a process of self-discovery. He writes driven by a quest for his inner self, or for a definition of what his inner self is? The assumption that works behind his writings is that he is profoundly unsure about himself until interaction with an external entity elicits responses from him that help him surmise something about himself.

'Perhaps my poems, the writing of them, I mean—become a sort of private ritual of discovery, relationship and of a reaching out to others. Maybe the writing of a poem simply makes me feel better, although the process, the act of writing is a terribly lonely thing. I cannot explain it but something makes me sit down to write in the isolation of my room, as I keep on struggling with words and feelings, and as I keep on seeing their blank face of despair, my sheet of paper. For me, making a poem is always a painful process. It has always been like that, ever since I started writing poetry. Maybe my poems are a ritual towards finding myself, finding this other one inside me, who I haven't found as yet. It is simple for me to begin a poem, with some phrase or an image perhaps; but then the going becomes difficult as I grope around from word to word, line to line; as though I had been left behind in a dark room and was trying desperately to find a way out into the light ... Writing a poem becomes a time of pain.'

Perhaps, in Mahapatra we have a tragic self that discovers the world as a tragic space. And like all tragedians, what drives the self in its journey of self and external discovery is a profound humanism seeking a kind of life for man that can realize the humanistic ideals of fulfillment, harmony, wholeness and happiness in each human life. It is not only Mahapatra's writing but also his poetic vision is painful, sombre and tilts towards tragedy. K. Ayyappa Paniker, in his essay, "Peacocks among Patriarchs," observes:

'There is a remarkable poise about the way he organizes things: The dominant concern is the vision of grief, loss, dejection, rejection. The tragic consciousness does not seem to operate in the work of any other Indian poet in English as disturbingly as in that of Jayanta Mahapatra.'

This poem is a sombre piece that encapsulates the tragic vision of the poet. In it he, while questioning the meaning of history, sadly broods over the tragedy of 'the dying young'. The poem appears to be a continuous narration

of the isolation, loneliness, solitude, alienation of the self from external realities in a world that appears to have no apparent or at best only a hostile purpose. This is the existential dilemma of most modern literature. While Mahapatra's world is filled with personal pain, remorse and desire what could actually lead to an alleviation of these conditions is not clear.

Perhaps, in Mahapatra we have a tragic self that discovers the world as a tragic space. And like all tragedians, what drives the self in its journey of self and external discovery is a profound humanism seeking a kind of life for man that can realize the humanistic ideals of fulfillment, harmony, wholeness and happiness in each human life.

In moments of analysis and critique, Mahapatra looks upon contemporary life and comes close to what in critical terminology has been referred to as modernist despair:

Torn from our root of culture, incapable of adopting ourselves to the present age; this state of our being in a no-where, with nothing to adhere, nothing to assert, we stand helpless against our unidentifiable existence. So, it becomes, in a way, a trace for identity. Ours, so rich a tradition is rendered forbidden...

We no longer take our 'lives seriously.' We are only 'the tensed muscles of the rock hearing the voices of old waves drift into silence'. That is, we do not listen to or respond to traditional wisdom not because we are firm and confident in our present status but despite the fact that in the present we experience muscles so tense that they feel like rocks. The metaphor here is of the human body, specially its muscles, going stiff and tense under the influence of stress.

In this bleak present he sees a ray of light ahead in the promising bearings of 'ochre clad prophets' or poets. It is for the poets to reinterpret the past and the present so as to re-introduce us to our surroundings as a meaningful space with values that are relevant in the contemporary world so that our existence becomes centered and meaningful. In this journey he makes us alert to the teachings of the past: how the common people were sacrificed at the altars in the name of our country to transform it into a land of remarkable architecture; how our ancestors sailed across the seas as the carriers of rich culture. He also takes us through the anarchy and chaos of the contemporary world. The hope is that in assessing and responding to the present and the past we will not only become conscious of the link between the past and the present and thereby provide an explanation for the cause of the present being what it is, but also gain a critical perspective on ourselves. This helps us understand and assess who we are, what our values and judgments are which makes us assess our past and present the way we do. Poetic composition thus becomes a critical and meta-critical operation.

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. How does K. Ayyappa Paniker describe Mahapatra in his essay “Peacocks among Patriarchs”?
2. What are the various themes that have been highlighted in Mahapatra’s poetry?

## **1.4 Major Themes in ‘The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore’**

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Mahapatra’s poetry reflects a mature technique that is balanced by his personal vision. It is this vision that evokes the repressed promptings of the mind and the heart. His poetry exhibits the value of mankind that is constantly explored in terms of philosophical concerns and psychological affinities. In the poem, ‘The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore,’ India, the poet’s reflections upon entering a cemetery in which a number of young British lives lay buried, presents with a resigned, meditative poise, the bond between death and the self.

### **1.4.1 Death in the Poem**

If there is one idea or image that stands out in the poem it is that of cholera and the resultant premature death. This preoccupation with death is characteristic of modernist poetry but death encounters a very different treatment here compared to the simple lamentation of the inevitability and destructiveness of death.

The first aspect of cholera induced pre-mature death that bothers the poet here is the apparent invincibility of the disease as it continues to destroy young lives for the past hundreds of years now. This is not death as a metaphysical entity but as a real threat that destroys beautiful and productive potentialities. In modern mankind’s ongoing struggle against the different causes of death, it has been able to conquer many but cholera still rules as one of the causes.

This invincibility of cholera bothers the poet not as a physicist who would want to win every fight of the human mind against matter or phenomenon in the service of humanity. Instead he begins to see an existential dimension in it in which cholera begins to sound like a synonym for death. It lurks, hides, waits, rests and attacks and destroys at an opportune moment, but destroy it certainly does. In the last stanza it waits out there in the world like a deity, acting like earth’s gravitational force, pulling man into the grave.

There is a certain cynicism that creeps into the poem stepping well into the realm of helplessness in the poet's description of the powers of death:

- Death remains unvanquished and continues to ruin valuable human lives.
- A large section of humanity seems helpless in the face of it.
- Death moves swiftly through the past and the present, as if it were unaffected by time.
- Death waits patiently for the next crop of young humans which it will destroy at an opportune moment.
- People dying of it die with a triumphant smile as if others will also follow them inevitably. They have the satisfaction of being destroyed by a transcendent cause.
- Death has come to acquire the proportions of a destructive deity.

#### **1.4.2 Relation with the Colonial Past**

The poem begins in an overtly colonial setting. The cemetery was established by the colonial powers, the people who lie buried in it are the colonizers, its purpose is to perpetuate the memories of the colonizers not only in the minds of the colonizers but also in the colonized. Remember the cemetery is situated on Indian soil but those interned in it are foreigners. Yet the poet says that the colonial dimension does not bother him. This insensitivity to the colonial dimension of his reality can be read two ways.

First in terms of the avowed political indifference of Mahapatra. In an interview to Abraham, Mahapatra says:

I don't think of my writing as politically motivated. I am interested as a poet who wants to show the pain and suffering he feels around him. I cannot close my eyes to what is happening in the country today. And, I've already told you I can't stand the sight of pain. When people are in pain, because of social or political reasons, it becomes agonizing for me unless I write about it. Because that is all I can do. It is a passive, weak sort of protest at what I feel is injustice and unnecessary suffering.

What concerns Mahapatra is the continued pain and suffering being inflicted on humanity for the past so many centuries and this humanity constitutes both the European as well as Indian population.

He is not interested in a critique of the colonizing powers or in analysing native resistance to them which may be inscribed in some of the tombstones in that cemetery and is definitely a potent presence in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century European-native relationship. What he is concerned about is reading that pass through a lens that helps him understand the challenges of the present. We may have been freed from colonial oppression but no freedom has been achieved from the killing effects of cholera.

This maybe for some a potent political statement. Irrespective of Mahapatra's disavowal of politics it now becomes a question of 'at which level one wants to interfere in politics.' The level could be of nationalist politics or it could be at the intra-national level where one could be critiquing the persistence of cholera despite advances in medicine. Without targeting governmental apathy towards the poor Mahapatra could utter an undirected cry against all sections of the society and polity responsible for these unnecessary deaths and the poem can be read as **"passive, weak sort of protest at what [he] feels is injustice and unnecessary suffering."**

### 1.4.3 Elements of Modernism and Post Modernism

Mahapatra seems closer to the modernist movement of the first half of the Twentieth century with its open-ended form and reliance on recurring symbols to provide coherence to non-linear, fragmented structures. Mahapatra's persona is of an estranged, distanced, sensitive artist rather than that of an invisible or playfully prominent post-modernist author. Meaning and significance are still stable entities for the poet and within the framework of the poem one could say that a world in which the young do not die of cholera is a goal that he would still consider worth achieving.

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. His poetry takes the past into its orbit, infuses it with the present and looks forward to the future. It at once encompasses the history, the myths and embodies a vision for the future. Hence it defies the exact terminology 'modern' and 'postmodern' for it is imbued with the sense of contemporaneity that includes both modernism and post-modernism.

Think of the poem under study. The colonial past as it reflects in the cemeteries does not bother him as an exploitative past but becomes a lens through which he can see the continuing fatalities in the present. This helps him foresee a future free of such unnecessary suffering.

In Mahapatra's poetry everything is problematic, put into doubt, as Mahapatra observes his environment and listens quietly, sensitively to his inner feelings, the sources of his poetry, bringing momentary perceptions of relationships and fleeting images of contrast. Notice the ambiguities of the key phrases in the poem which cut both ways as in the case of the half-buried anchor bearing a smile. It is this ambiguity that accounts for most of the density of the images that one encounters after stanza six in the poem.



### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. What major idea stands out in Mahapatra's poem 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore'?
2. What do the cemeteries in the poem 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore' reflect about the colonial past?

## **1.5 Analysis of 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore'**

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As the title of the poem indicates, the poem is written after/during a visit to an abandoned British cemetery at Balasore. The poet visits the cemetery and records the effect of the visit, mainly the thought processes and associations evoked in his mind during the visit and upon thinking of the visit. The most powerful thought that the visit triggers is of unanguished diseases causing premature deaths. It pushes the young into the ever-advancing realms of history. The poet's anguish is caused not by the sight of ancient graves of young girls and boys who died a hundred and fifty years ago. It is the sad thought that countless lives continue to be lost in their prime to various diseases that actually disturbs the poet and occasions the poem. This poem has been composed in short stanzas of four lines each and is full of wordscapes created by beautiful and unusual images.

### **1.5.1 Reference Points**

- **This is history:** The reference is to the thirty-nine British graves that surround the poet on his visit to the cemetery. The graves date back to about 150 years ago and were deserted by the British when they left India after their colonial rule came to an end.
- **Coma of alienated decay:** Coma is a state of deep unconsciousness usually caused by severe injury or illness. The decay around is of the structures as well as of the bodies that die buried. The decay is alienated or distanced from the poet because he cannot identify with the people or their cause and lives. It appears as if this alienated decay is held here in a state of deep unconsciousness. This image of distant and alienated death and decay is supposed to build up an immense distance between the poet and the people who lie dead there. The distance is needed because he is going to compare it with the immediacy of the needless deaths that he is witnessing around him in the contemporary world.

- **Archaic:** Very old or belonging to an earlier period. It is used in reference to the dead suggesting a sense of irrelevance due to being very distant in time. Notice the building up of distance yet again.
- **A hundred...offend my ways:** The British cemetery fails to move or upset the path ways here refers to the paths and actions of the poet in the cemetery. The presence of the graves does not interfere with his mood, actions or movements.
- **A quietness...weed:** Bramble refers to a mild prickly bush. Combined with the grass and the weed, the reference here is to the wild vegetations that grow in the cemetery. Perhaps because there is no wind, the vegetation is quiet and the poet fixes his gaze on a weed.
- **Twilight of baleful littoral:** Twilight refers to the more darkened, less lighted state between darkness and dawn/dusk. Littoral relates to the shore of a sea or lake and baleful refers to something having a harmful effect. The image that the poet conjures here is that the legends of the dead British float in a twilight zone, by a shore with a menacing air around them.
- **Flaking history:** The poet's presence in the graveyard does not bring to life (even if it is only for him) the remote and almost forgotten history of the British lying there.
- **Awkward in the silence...over an alien name:** These lines strengthen the image of dark, brooding silence. Alien name refers to the non-natives who lie buried in the cemetery.
- **In the circle...of our Lord, eighteen hundred:** The names and other details on the epitaphs are not of interest to the poet. He only notices that the graves belong to young Britishers who died of cholera in a distant land.
- **Timeless ennui:** Eternal boredom. History of his ancestors' conquest by the British is a topic which bores the poet.
- **It is the cholera...with ruin:** The deadly disease that brought to a tragic and untimely end— the lives of many young people who could have led a happy and fruitful life.
- **Hump of earth:** Refers to the round, raised mounds of earth or graves.
- **Vanquished country:** Refers to the fact that though the British have left, the country is still under the yoke of disease (cholera) that killed in the past.
- **Triumphant smile:** The poet suggests that the dead probably know that future generations would also fall prey to the disease that cuts short life so abruptly.

- **The earth's unwavering gravity:** Brings to mind the powerful attracting force of the earth that seems to be drawing human beings to itself, as well as its unchanging seriousness.
- **To keep history awake:** In contrast with 'flaking history' (explained earlier), this suggests an effort at updating or renewal in order to retain interest and relevance. The new generation of people born will keep human life and civilization rolling, thereby adding another page into the history books.

### 1.5.2 Summary and Analysis

#### Stanza 1

*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?*

The poet visits an abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore and records his reaction while walking through the graves. The first thing that registers in his mind is the 'partners of the graveyard and its historical character. The people who made the graveyard as well as the people who lie buried in it are all separated by a huge barrier of time. He does not want to disturb anything in the graveyard whether it be the ruins of stone and marble or the crumbling boundary wall made of bricks or the entire place lying in a state of alienated decay. Then a note of doubt creeps into his mind whether his reaction to the dead in the graveyard is correct or it ought to be. This leads him to ask the question— how exactly should we behave on seeing the graves of the archaic dead? This question justifies his distanced feeling from the dead or people whom he did not know and for whom he cannot feel anything.

#### Stanza 2

*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?*

If the poet had lived a hundred and fifty years ago, he would have been in some kind of contact with the people buried there and then it would have been possible to have some feelings on their demise or near their graves. However, given the time gap that separates them, the poet can afford to remain unaffected and undisturbed in the graveyard. He stops to read names of cholera epidemic victims.

**Stanza 3**

*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.*

Even in this state of distant indifference the poet walks around the thirty-nine graves of the forgotten dead. The stories of their life and death hang in a twilight atmosphere and the poet's intrusion into the graveyard does not bring to life any of the flaking history of the foreigners.

**Stanza 4**

*Awkward in 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.*

The poet dramatizes his walk through the grave by mentioning a thin evacuated lizard watching him with its shrewd, hooded gaze. The lizard is an awkward presence in the silent graveyard. Like the lizard, a scorpion sits with two of its arms spread over the foreign name inscribed on one of the marble tombstones.

**Stanza 5**

*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...*

The tombstones probably have a circular figure on them on which inscribed the epitaphs. Florence, wife of Captain R, Helen, aged seventeen who are some of the people that have died in eighteen hundred...due to cholera.

**Stanza 6**

*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.*

The poet, unmoved by the graves is also not concerned about an empire that has vanished. The story or the history of the conquest of the poet's ancestors by a long line of invading armies does not interest him either and

causes him endless ennui. He is concerned about the young people who are still dying because of diseases like cholera that remain unconquered. The grass growing in the graveyard indicative of the death and destruction in the past does not show the grief that remains hidden in the poet's heart—it is the continuing death of the young in the present that does.

### **Stanza 7**

*Who watches now in the dark near the dead wall?  
The tribe of grass in the cracks of my eyes?  
It is the cholera still, death's sickly trickle,  
that plagues the sleepy shacks beyond this hump of earth,*

The continuing threat of the total cholera still plagues the people who live in the shacks that lie beyond the hump on earth on which the graveyard is located. It is this deadly disease that watches from the graveyard wall the young and helpless population that it will devour.

### **Stanza 8**

*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*

This deadly killer disease with its quick power moves easily and swiftly from the past into the present, turning the growing young population into bones, that is killing them. It steadily erodes valuable human life into ruin.

### **Stanza 9**

*rusting in the vanquished country, the blood's unease,  
the useless rain upon my familiar window;  
the tired triumphant smile left behind by the dead  
on a discarded anchor half-sunk in mud beside the graves:*

This deadly killer disease is like on iron rusting in a country that has been completely conquered. Death has destroyed all the young lines and like a sword that rusts after it has killed everyone, cholera rests here. It is also what causes uneasiness in the blood. The rain on the window is useless because it is incapable of washing away the cholera or of nourishing the life of the poet who lies in the dry area on the other side of the window. The dead have left behind their tired triumphant smiles because they have become tired contesting the disease but are dying triumphant because they know that this disease will awake none. This is a cynical kind of triumph. Alternatively the triumphant smile can be read as evident on a discarded anchor half sunk

in the mud beside the graves. This is a complex image that can imply that the smile is triumphant because the dead in the act of the burial have actually anchored themselves in the mud. Death has not been able to divorce them from their origin.

### Stanza 10

*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.*

The killer cholera waits out there in the world like a deity, acting like earth's gravitational force, pulling man into the grave. It waits to witness the elaborate ceremonies observed by people on a birth or on the coming of a new generations so that human history can continue. It can then kill them and even stifle the cry of the survivors.

### Check Your Progress-4

1. What do you understand by the phrase 'this is history' in the poem 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore'?
2. Summarize the following stanza of the poem 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore':

*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.*

## 1.6 Let Us Sum Up

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- Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the best known English poets and any discussion on Indian English poetry is incomplete without reference to his poetry. Noted physicist, bilingual poet and essayist, Mahapatra holds the distinction of being the first Indian English poet to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981 for his poem 'Relationship.'
- Some of Mahapatra's outstanding works include poetry volumes *Shadow Space*, *Bare Face* and *Random Descent*. Mahapatra also experimented with prose. A collection of short stories, *The Green Gardener* is his lone published book of prose.
- Mahapatra writes in English and in Oriya. However, he is internationally recognized as a writer of English. Initially starting his literary career as a short story writer, he began writing poetry quite late.

- Mahapatra's poetry is steeped in an authentic individuality of perception, expression and tone. His is a distinctively unsentimental voice, now conversational, now dramatic, now lyrical, now prosaic, now questioning, now searching, but always strikingly unpretentious and powerful.
- Another element of Mahapatra's originality is the rigour and tenacity with which he is an Oriya poet inside out. By virtue of his birth and upbringing Mahapatra is firmly rooted in the landscape of his native land Orissa. The important places of his state, Cuttack, Puri, Bhubaneswar, Balasore, Konark, the Chilika Lake, its legends, history and myths, its tradition and culture, its past, present and future, have been integrated into his mental landscape from where he culls materials for his poems.
- Mahapatra's themes are varied, ranging from sex to nature, from the religious to the superstitious, from the metaphysical to the mythical, from the personal to the impersonal. But whatever his theme, there is a profound brooding, meditative quality in his poetry, that holds the reader hypnotized. Above all, his sensibility, absolutely uncontaminated, always remains authentically Indian.
- The poem, 'The Abandoned Cemetery at Balasore' is a sombre piece that encapsulates the tragic vision of the poet. In it he, while questioning the meaning of history, sadly broods over the tragedy of "the dying young". The poem appears to be a continuous narration of the isolation, loneliness, solitude, alienation of the self from external realities in a world that appears to have no apparent or at best only a hostile purpose.
- Mahapatra's poetry reflects a mature technique that is balanced by his personal vision. It is this vision that evokes the repressed promptings of the mind and the heart. His poetry exhibits the value of mankind that is constantly explored in terms of philosophical concerns and psychological affinities.
- The poem, 'The Abandoned Cemetery at Balasore' begins in an overtly colonial setting. The cemetery was established by the colonial powers, the people who lie buried in it are the colonizers, its purpose is to perpetuate the memories of the colonizers not only in the minds of the colonizers but also in the colonized. Remember the cemetery is situated on Indian soil but those interned in it are foreigners.
- 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. His poetry takes the past into its

orbit, infuses it with the present and looks forward to the future. It at once encompasses the history, the myths and embodies a vision for the future.

- The poem, 'The Abandoned Cemetery at Balasore' has been composed in short stanzas— of four lines each—and is full of wordscapes created by beautiful and unusual images.

## 1.7 Key Words

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- **Scrawny:** Not having much flesh on the bones
- **Epitaph:** Words inscribed or written on a tombstone in memory of the person who lies buried under it
- **Ennui:** Listlessness and dissatisfaction resulting from lack of interest
- **Contemporaneity:** The quality or state of being contemporaneous or contemporary

## 1.8 Terminal Questions

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1. What effect does the visit to the abandoned British cemetery have on the poet?
2. The poet is awed rather than moved by the tombstones of the 'archaic dead.' Elucidate.
3. What do the epitaphs on the tombstones tell us about the dead who lie buried beneath them?
4. How can the poet's insensitivity towards the colonial dimension of his reality be understood?
5. Explain the following phrases:
  - (i) *A hundred and fifty years ago...who survived?*
  - (ii) *And yet, awed...animate*
  - (iii) *Of what concern...the grass shows no more*
  - (iv) *It is the cholera still...all truth with ruin*
  - (v) *Tired triumphant smile left behind by the dead*

## 1.9 Suggested Readings

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Prasad, Madhusudan, ed. (2000). *The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: Some Critical Considerations*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation.

Sarangi, Jayadeep, Gauri Shankar Jha, eds. (2006). *The Indian Imagination of Jayanta Mahapatra*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons



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Zama, M. (2004). *Poetry Down the Ages*. Kolkata: Orient Longman Private Limited.

## 1.10 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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### Check Your Progress-1

1. Mahapatra won the 1981 Sahitya Akademi Award for his poem ‘*Relationship*’.
2. Orissa is Mahapatra’s native place and therefore is of extreme relevance to his literary works. By virtue of his birth and upbringing, Mahapatra is firmly rooted in the landscape of his native land Orissa. The important places of his state, Cuttack, Puri, Bhubaneswar, Balasore, Konark, the Chilika Lake—its legends, history and myths, its tradition and culture, its past, present and future—have been integrated into his mental landscape from where he culls materials for his poems. These places in Orissa are not only politically or commercially important, but they are important also in terms of the rich heritage of the people. It is from this rich heritage of people, places and culture that have fostered him like mother figures that his poetry originates.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. K. Ayyappa Paniker describes Mahapatra’s work in his essay, “Peacocks among Patriarchs,” as painful, somber and slightly tragic. He observes:  

‘There is a remarkable poise about the way he organizes things: The dominant concern is the vision of grief, loss, dejection, rejection. The tragic consciousness does not seem to operate in the work of any other Indian poet in English as disturbingly as in that of Jayanta Mahapatra.’
2. Mahapatra’s themes are varied, ranging from sex to nature, from the religious to the superstitious, from the metaphysical to the mythical, from the personal to the impersonal. But whatever his theme, there is a profound brooding, meditative quality in his poetry, that holds the reader hypnotized.

### Check Your Progress-3

1. If there is one idea or image that stands out in ‘The Abandoned British Comebay at Balasore’ it is that of cholera and the resultant pre-mature death. This preoccupation with death is characteristic of

modernist poetry but death encounters a very different treatment here compared to the simple lamentation of the inevitability and destructiveness of death.

2. The colonial past as it reflects in the cemeteries does not bother him as an exploitative past but becomes a lens through which he can see the continuing fatalities in the present. This helps him foresee a future free of such unnecessary suffering.

#### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. The phrase 'this is history' refers to the thirty-nine British graves that surround the poet on his visit to the cemetery. The graves date back to about 150 years ago and were deserted by the British when they left India after their colonial rule came to an end.
2. The poet, unmoved by the graves is also not concerned about an empire that has vanished. The story or the history of the conquest of the poet's ancestors by a long line of invading armies does not interest him either and causes him endless ennui. He is concerned about the young people who are still dying because of diseases like cholera that remain unconquered. The grass growing in the graveyard indicative of the death and destruction in the past does not show the grief that remains hidden in the poet's heart—it is the continuing death of the young in the present that does.



# UNIT - 2

## KEKI DARUWALLA: ‘WOLF’ AND ‘HAWK’

### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Keki Daruwalla: A Short Biography
- 2.3 An Introduction to Daruwalla’s Poetry
- 2.4 ‘Wolf’
  - 2.4.1 Introduction
  - 2.4.2 Meaning of Key Words
  - 2.4.3 Summary and Analysis
- 2.5 ‘Hawk’
  - 2.5.1 Introduction
  - 2.5.2 Meaning of Key Words
  - 2.5.3 Summary and Analysis
- 2.6 Major Themes in the Poems ‘Wolf’ and ‘Hawk’
  - 2.6.1 Animals as Metaphors
  - 2.6.2 Violence and Terror
  - 2.6.3 Human Life as Tragic
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Terminal Questions
- 2.10 Suggested Reading
- 2.11 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

### 2.0 Objectives

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

- Identify Keki Daruwalla, the poet
- Describe the poetry style of Keki Daruwalla
- Analyse Daruwalla’s poems ‘Wolf’ and ‘Hawk’
- Examine various themes in the poems ‘Wolf’ and ‘Hawk’

### 2.1 Introduction

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Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla is regarded as one of those writers of English poetry who have worked towards the growth and development of modern creative poetry. Keki Daruwalla is one among the Parsi quartet of Adil Jussawalla, K. D. Katrak and Gieve Patel. Daruwalla’s poems leave an imprint of his own individuality and calibre. Sardonic and sarcastic, he is a

poet with a hard heart, as he feels sentimentality has nothing to do with it. Daruwalla observes everything with his hawkish imagery and landscape of delving. Violence, pestilence, epidemic, drought, famine, bloodshed, riot, murder, suicide, enmity, vengeance, wrath, anger, animality and curfew are the specific words of the poet. In this unit, we will discuss two of his poems ‘Wolf’ and ‘Hawk’ and describe the major themes in these two poems along with a detailed analysis of Daruwalla’s writing style.

## 2.2 Keki Daruwalla: A Short Biography

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Daruwalla is a leading figure in Indian poetry in English today. Born in Lahore, his family moved over to the Indian side of undivided India after the partition. As a part of his cultural memory, he therefore carries images of an undivided India and what politics can do to human beings, civilizations and cultures. Most of his education was completed in India with Daruwalla holding a Masters degree from Punjab University, Chandigarh. He joined the Indian Police Service in 1958, and served the force continuously until his retirement even while continuing to write poetry. The recurrent theme of violence in his poetry has frequently, and somewhat reductively, been attributed to his choice of profession. He is retired and lives in Delhi.

With the publication of his very first book, *Under Orion* in 1970, Daruwalla established himself as a name to reckon with in Indian poetry. Senior Indian poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel applauded his work as ‘impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness.’

Daruwalla is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1984) for his poetry collection *The Keeper of the Dead* and the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1987) for Asia. Recently, he was awarded Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in India, in 2014. He is the president of The Poetry Society of India, and is presently based in Delhi.

### Books

- *Under Orion*. Writers Workshop, India, 1970.
- *Apparition in April*. Writers Workshop, 1971.
- *Sword & Abyss: A Collection of Short Stories*. Vikas Pub., 1979.
- *Winter Poems*. Allied Publishers, 1980.
- *The Keeper of the Dead*. Oxford University Press, 1982.
- *Crossing of Rivers*. Oxford Univ. Press, 1985.
- *Landscapes*. Oxford University Press, 1987.
- *A Summer of Tigers: Poems*. Indus, 1995.

- *The Minister for Permanent Unrest & Other Stories*. Orient Blackswan, 1996.
- *Night River: Poems*. Rupa & Co., 2000.
- *The Map-maker: Poems*. Orient Blackswan, 2002.
- *The Scarecrow and the Ghost*. Rupa & Co., 2004.
- *A House in Ranikhet*. Rupa & Co, 2003.
- *Collected Poems (1970–2005)*. (Poetry in English). Penguin Books India. 2006.
- *For Pepper & Christ*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.

### Check Your Progress-1

1. How has senior Indian poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel described Keki Daruwalla's work?
2. Name the first book published by Keki Daruwalla.

## 2.3 An Introduction to Daruwalla's Poetry

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Daruwala has published over nine books in more than three decades and through this long period his poetry has journeyed a long way both formally and thematically. However, it retains certain strong distinguishing characteristics: an ironic stance, an evocation of the multi-layered contradictory realities of Indian life, a preoccupation with diverse cultural, historic and mythic landscapes, a terse, vigorous and tensile style, supple imagism, sustained narrative drive, an ability to segue between metrical patterns and free verse, and a capacity to combine an epic canvas with a miniaturist's eye for detail. Many of these features are evident in the two poems 'Wolf' and 'Hawk' that we will discuss.

Daruwala is known for his bitter, satiric tone and as one who writes from his experience of violence, (of the brutal nature of man encountered in the police department), he shows a preoccupation with some of the darker sides of existence particularly with death and destruction. He believes, like many other poets writing in recent years, that poetry should derive its inner strength from a social awareness and sense of commitment to human and humane values.

The Indianness of Daruwalla's poetry derives not so much from his portrayal of Indian life as he has seen and experienced as a police officer on duty, nor from a conscious effort to make his writing Indian but from the rural Indian landscape which has inspired it. According to the poet's own

admission his poems are rooted in the rural landscape and his poetry is earthy which means that he has avoided that sophistication which ‘while adding gloss, takes away from the power of verse.’ Notice that the landscape in the two poems you will read are rural and urbanity enters only indirectly and through implications.

Also, the strength of his poetry derives equally from his use of symbols, images and metaphors as also from a craftsmanship which is said to be creative and flexible. The poems in *Under Orion* show, in the words of Nissim Ezekiel, ‘a fine blend of freedom and discipline, metrical rhythms and the word order of prose, compact, harsh alliterative phrasing and relaxed movement.’ This description is true of almost all his other poems.

While his early poems, especially those written from his experience as a police officer, show an acuteness of observation and sharpness of expression, the later poems show an intensification of social awareness, of a deep consciousness of the environment in which a poem is set. But the real significance and power of his poetry ‘emerge from the interaction between his subjective responses and the larger context that includes both myth and actuality.’ (Hari Mohan Prasad and N P Singh).

A remarkable feature of Daruwalla’s poetry is its ability to vividly materialize its abstractions, to strike a creative tension between image and statement. His poetry has the narrative energy and sweep to paint, for instance, a vast portrait of post-Independence India as ‘a landscape of meaninglessness’: ‘Then why should I tread the Kafka beat/ or the Waste Land,/ when Mother, you are near at hand/ one vast, sprawling defeat?’

But it can also offer a fine-tuned vision of the particular, evident in his evocation of the rumbling innards of a miserable multitude listening to the speech of a corpulent political leader: ‘Within the empty belly/ the enzymes turn multi-lingual/ their speech vociferous/ simmering on stomach wall’. As you read on you will feel the power of his focus and specificity in his description of the animal kingdom and its characteristics and features.

His landscapes extend from the ancient kingdom of Kalinga under the reign of the great Indian emperor Ashoka to the seething contradictions of the modern metropolis of Bombay, from the salt-filmed landscape of a desert to the unusual location of his village on the edge of the wild.

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. How has Keki Daruwalla’s writing been characterized?
2. Mention at least one remarkable feature of Daruwalla’s poetry.

## 2.4 'Wolf'

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### 2.4.1 Introduction

*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 soft & subtle sound,  
 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.*

Like other animal poems, this poem by Daruwalla is also enigmatic. The poet does not have a clear thesis but builds on a series of associations with the wolf's body, behaviour and actions. The poem can be clearly seen as



divided into two movements—the first that describes the wolf’s physical features, behaviour and actions and the other that records the effect of these features, behaviour and actions on the poet. So the wolf is a reservoir of primal energy which shows through its burning eyes and its ability to see through all kinds of darkness. Carrying a black snout at the end of a pale yellow body it can sniff the air for the imperceptible and is a perfect prowler, attacker, killer with a super human intuitive perception.

Its effect on the poet is powerful, decisive and all pervasive. Not only does it nudge into the poet’s consciousness at its own will, it can even sniff his approaching dream. It circles the poet’s past and its cries draw a ring around the poet’s night. In the conscious and the unconscious, in the past as well as the present, the wolf exercises a definite and controlling influence over the poet’s life.

However, things have changed between the poet’s and his daughter’s generation. All the wolves have been slaughtered and they have been replaced by a hedge of smoking gun barrels in his daughter’s dreams. Violent, pervasive and controlling force of one kind has been replaced by similar forces of another kind between the two generations.

#### 2.4.2 Meaning of Key Words

- **Half silhouette and half myth:** The wolf is partly a dark outline of something seen against a light background and partly a myth.
- **Snout:** The front part of the animal’s head that contains the nose and is used for sniffing.
- **Sulphur body:** Its body is compared to a substance pale yellow in colour that also burns with a bright flame.
- **Nudged his way:** To touch or push someone especially with one’s elbow. The wolf enters the poet’s mind by pushing all other thoughts gently but firmly away.
- **Prowler, wind-sniffer, throat-catcher:** To prowl to move quietly, quickly and stealthily when catching a prey. To sniff is to draw air in the nose noisily.
- **Drew a ring:** Create a circular structure that contains everything and prevents spillover.
- **On the forest edge:** Perpetually under the threat of attack from the wild.
- **Fall of dew:** Soft and subtle sound, almost imperceptible by human ears, made by the fall of a dew drop.
- **Sense a shadow:** Can know that a shadow is there without necessarily looking at it moving across a hedge.

- **Your approaching dreams:** Even the dreamer is unaware of it until it approaches but the wolf can sniff it before it comes.
- **Lit up/by the dark torch of his eyes:** His eyes are intensely bright in the dark. He can see through the deepest darkness. Darkness cannot hide anything from him.
- **A hedge of smoking gun-barrels:** If you visualize a number of guns that have just been fired (and are thus emitting smoke) standing in a row, they will start resembling a smoking hedge.

### 2.4.3 Summary and Analysis

This poem is not divided into conventional stanzas but is composed of four or five sentences presented as fragments in the twenty-eight lines. Each fragment of the sentences is presented as a line broken at critical points to achieve the desired poetic effect. Therefore, this summary is organized according to the sentences.

#### Sentence 1

*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.*

The Wolf circles the poet's past, that it is a dominant and circumscribing presence in the poet's past. The wolf is described as fire-lit. Perhaps like Blake's tiger burning brightly in the forests of the night, this animal too is animated by a wild fire inside him. Because of its stealthy predatory activities in the night, the wolf kills by night when it is visible only as half-silhouette and half myth. It does not announce its presence to the prey, like the tiger, until it attacks and kills. The animal's paws tread the dried leaves into the bed of soil until it rests with its black snout on extended paws joined together.

#### Sentence 2

*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.*

The Wolf's mysterious, threatening and predatory description continues with its black snout standing out against its pale yellow body. The wolf has slowly nudged its way into the poet's consciousness just as it nudges through the bushes to the place where it will eventually kill. His body and mind are designed as a perfect killing machine which enables him to prong stealthily before the kill, sniff its prey's presence through the blowing wind and instructively trains him to attack to kill by catching the prey's throat. The wolf's cries have drawn a ring around the poet's might. It has come to monopolize the poet's mind in the night so that no other thought can enter his head. The poet is of course narrating this effect on him when he was a child. A child's night is filled with apprehensions and terrors (like the inhabitants of a village) because it is perpetually under the threat of attack from the wild.

### **Sentence 3**

*My mother said  
his ears stand up  
at the fall of dew soft & subtle sound,  
he can sense a shadow  
move across a hedge  
on a dark night;  
he can sniff out  
your approaching dreams;*

The poet's mother has told him what sound like the legendary qualities of a wolf. Its senses are so perfectly turned, sharp and its instincts so sensitive that it can even detect the fall of a dew drop, something entirely imperceptible by the human ear. It can know the presence of someone without looking at the body or even its shadow on a dark night. Its perceptive powers are so sensitive that it can sense a weak shadow on a dark night without even looking at it. It can even sense your approaching dreams which even you may not be conscious of and its eyes are perfectly adapted to see everything even in pitch darkness. This is what is meant by its eyes lighting everything.

### **Sentence 4**

*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.*

Things have changed in a generation. The wolves have been slaughtered. For the next generation poet's daughter does not dream of them or their cries anymore. Instead, a hedge of smoking gun barrels, probably the weapons (gun barrels) used to kill the wolves, rings (circles) in the daughter's dreams.

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. What is depicted in the poem 'Wolf'?
2. State the two movements in which the poem 'Wolf' has been divided?

## **2.5 'Hawk'**

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Daruwalla's poem 'Hawk' has an interesting interplay of perspective. The poem begins in the first person where the poet recounts seeing a hawk. The first stanza has an almost primitive aggression where the predatory aspects of the hawk are capitulated. The recurrent image is that of a bird filled with hatred that swoops down on its prey without mercy. This is the nature of a hawk but if this image is disturbing then the domesticated hawk that falls under man's shadow is a monster created by man solely for his own purposes.

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

This is related to the point about the tamed hawk being worse than the free one. The tamed hawk is trained to build on these natural survival skills in a systematically cruel and ruthless way. Whatever it remembers as its natural instincts, is erased and replaced by other capacities that are more in tune with the interests of the trainer rather than its own survival.

The recurrent image, in the poem is of the bird filled with hatred swooping down on its prey without mercy. This is the nature of a hawk but if this image is disturbing then the domesticated hawk that falls under man's shadow is a monster created by man solely for his own purposes.

Man is shown to be crueler than the hawk for by nature a hawk is a predator that must kill to eat; but man makes the hawk kill for his own pleasure and diversion which is a perversion of what the hawk must do. What makes it additionally problematic is the way that training is undertaken. A captured hawk is first blinded. Its eyes are sewn up and it is left in that

state for a while until images from its free life have been almost fully erased. Then, bit by bit, the stitches are removed. The pain of such perverted treatment turns the hawk into an additionally devilish creature. This hawk when allowed to hunt takes out all its hate on its prey and shows no mercy for it got none. Thus, the domesticated hawk is even more formidable than the wild one.

The third stanza is a haunting depiction of a hunt where a mother hawk teaches her offspring to hunt. They chase after a hare and since they cannot kill it in one swoop they attack him repeatedly tearing at its flesh bit by bit. In the fourth stanza we have the domesticated hawk speaking out. What makes its statements terrible is that many corrupt human beings in positions of power and authority have the same agenda too. Does this mean that such civilized or domesticated man is the worst of all predators?

Just like the cut-throat modern world where the stronger crush the weaker, the hawk filled with hate sets out to kill its prey. Many a time people's experiences embitter them so much that they in turn begin to prey on people who once resembled what they went out to seek. The hawk is not merely a domesticated hawk; it is a killer with the voice of a man who is so filled with apathy for life that he sees no pain in hurting others. The hawk is a metaphor for all people whose motto is: as people did to me so shall I now do to the others.

### 2.5.2 Meaning of Key Words

- **Ascending wind:** A wind that is picking up speed to carry the hawk into the upward direction.
- **Drilled sky:** A drill refers to a training exercise. The hawk's gracious flight appears to be like a deadly training exercise.
- **Filmed with salt:** Covered with a thin layer of salt. Making it unsuitable for any life form to survive.
- **Momentum of his own gyre:** Repeated circular movement with expanding or contracting diameter.
- **Frustrated parricide:** A parricide is one who has killed his own close family member. The killing has happened because of a feeling of being unsuccessful or discouraged. That is what makes the kite a frustrated parricide.
- **Fuse of hatred:** The birds' hatred is like a lit fuse that can explode the bomb of killing in the kite's mind any moment.
- **Hovered:** To fly in a way so that it remained at one place.
- **Spick:** A small piece of dirt or dust.
- **Bared passion:** A strong or powerful feeling embodied in a hooked and sharp.

- **Roost:** Settling to sleep on a high level, usually the top of a tree.
- **Raucously:** To make a loud and rough sound.
- **Ran amuck:** Run around with a frenzied desire to kill.
- **Harem:** Separate part of a traditional Muslim house in which the women live.
- **Skewered:** Meat run through with a pointed metal or wooden structure for cooking.
- **Dregs:** What lies in a cup of liquid at the bottom.
- **Shared:** Trapped
- **Scar over his vision:** The painful task of sewing the hawk's eyelids scars his eyelids.
- **Morsels of vision:** A morsel is a small portion of the food we pick up from our plate and put into our mouth. Because a small amount of light enters the hawk's eyes through the perforations on his lid, the poet refers to it as morsels of vision.
- **Relenting stitch:** As the eyelids are being unstitched now, the stitches seem to be less harsh or strict.
- **Burgeon:** To develop or grow rapidly.
- **Ether:** In medieval English the substance with which the cosmos is filled, here a synonym for air.
- **Eyrie:** The hawk's nest built in a high inaccessible place.
- **Ferocious floats:** The bird's body language and gaze, are referred to as fierce and violent while it is floating in the city.
- **Splayed:** Widely spread out.
- **Smoking flare:** A brought but brief flame.
- **Quarry bird:** A bird that has been caught in a quarry.
- **Gonging:** Cutting out with a sharp pointed tool used to cut around a hollow in a wood.
- **Flushed:** Act of cleaning something, especially with a sudden force.
- **Fell swoop:** Its task in one movement.
- **Patch of ripped fur:** A small amount of fur that has been ripped away.
- **Squall:** A sudden violent wind with rain or snow.
- **Burning stable:** A burning enclosure, usually thatched with hay in which horses are kept.
- **Whinnying:** Neighing and whining (of a horse).

- **Scuffed:** Scraped
- **Blue slide:** A sample of sky blue colour.
- **Black prophecy:** A prophecy that presages death and destruction.
- **Moth-soft cocoon:** The cocoon of the silk worm is soft. The hawk will hover without causing any harsh effects on its prey.
- **Sights of a gun:** The cross wire on a gun's barrel that helps the shooter aim.

### 2.5.3 Summary and Analysis

#### Stanza 1

*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 opening image is of the big hawk-king riding a wind in its gracious flight up into the sky. The manner in which the bird is conducting its flight indicates as if it is undertaking a deadly training exercise. The land over which he was flying was covered with a thin layer of salt making it unsuitable for any life form to thrive. Neither grass-seed nor insect, nor bird could survive on this

salty terrain. But the bird in its circular, gyre like movement seemed unconcerned about the deserted and sterile nature of the land it flew over. It was not concerned about the fact that the terrain over which it was conducting its flight drill could not give it any food. No wonder he is referred to a frustrated killer who could kill his own father or immediate family member. The fuse of his hatred that would blow up into his destruction capacity is lit still and he could pounce upon and kill his prey any moment.

In the evening his flight path changed and he flew around one place where the graves were located. Horning at one point it looked like a small spot or piece of something in the sky. But the spick was actually organism of strong feelings which powered his barb like claws. In its downward swoop, it is the hawk's body that would power the kill while its barbed clans would execute it.

In the groves, crows, pigeons and mynahs roosted while parakeets flew around making a loud and rough sound. On seeing or hearing the birds roosting or crying out loud, the kite would fly around with a frenzied desire to kill. It would behave like a rapist in a harem, taking its pick on which woman to sexually exploit. As he flew up with a pigeon whose soft body had been pierced with its sharp and pointed talons, it would look down upon the other birds, it would scan the other birds to decide which would be his next victim. The destructive contempt with which he looks at them makes them appear like the leftover in a cup after the liquid on the top has been drained.

## Stanza 2

*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.*

*Discovering his eye*

*and the earth and sky*

*with it, he leaps from earth to ether.*



*Now the sky is his eyrie.  
 He ferocious floats on splayed wings;  
 then plummets like a flare,  
 smoking, and a gust of feathers  
 proclaims that he has struck.  
 The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man  
 Hawking is turned to a ritual, the predator's  
 passion honed to an art;  
 as they feed the hawk by carving the breast  
 Of the quarry bird and gouging out his heart*

Having established the brute ferocity, hatred and killing capacity of the wild hawk, the poet now turns to the tame hawk, the one which has been domesticated by man and calls it worse precisely because it has been domesticated by man through a torturous and difficult process. After being snared in the woods, his eyelids are sown with a soft but firm silk threads. As a result, the hawk is blinded, no light can enter his eyes and he is additionally starved. Man tries to make him unlearn all that the kite has learnt in nature through this confinement and torture. In a sense, his entire body from the foot to the hood breaks. Slowly, small holes are made into his eyelids so that small morsels of vision can enter his eyes. The next line clarifies that the perforation in the eyelid is made, unstitching them, stitch by stitch—another painful and torturous process.

As the bird regains its vision, the world takes shape for him again. The mud walls of his captive space and the trees around it begin to grow rapidly. As stitch after stitch is removed from his eyes, the world becomes a whole rapidly. His sight travels rapidly with amazing speed as he rediscovers his eye and he leaps up in flight into the open air. He starts enjoying his free flight into the air and makes the open sky his nest.

Now the hawk floats on spread out wings and looks down upon the land below with his ferocious gaze. Then the hawk executes a disc with lightning speed as if he was a smoking flare falling towards the earth. Although his prey may not be visible a gust of feathers emanating from the struck bird indicates that he has made his kill.

All this may sound like natural activity for the hawk but the tamed hawk is worse because under man's training his predatory instincts are polished further for ruthless execution. The hawk-trainer practices the rituals of a profession to train the hawk into a ruthless and efficient killing machine. He feels the hawk with a bird's heart carved out carefully with a sharp painted tool.

**Stanza 3**

*They have flushed him out of the tall grasses,  
 the hare, hunted now  
 in pairs by mother hawk and son.  
 They can't kill him in one fell swoop.  
 But each time the talons cart away  
 a patch of ripped fur.  
 He diminishes, one talon-morsel at a time.  
 He is stunned by the squall of wings above.  
 His heart is a burning stable  
 packed with whinnying horses.  
 His blood writes stories on the scuffed grass!  
 His movements are a scribble on the page of death.*

This stanza depicts a hunt in which a mother hawk teaches her young one to hunt. Together, the two have driven the hare out of the tall grass by scaring it with its repeated attacks. They cannot kill him in one swoop because the animal is relatively big and is hiding among the grasses. But in each attack, the hawk tears off one morsel of flesh and fur from the hare's body and carries it away in his class. The hare cannot figure out what is attacking him and from where but is stunned at the sudden and fierce flapping and descent that rips off a part of his body. The hare's heart is compared to a burning stable packed with horses that can feel the heat but cannot run out of the burning enclosure because either they are tied or the stable doors are closed. Therefore, they can only whine and neigh. His blood spills over on the grass scraped by its movement as well as the bird's attacks as if it were trying to write a story on the page of deaths.

**Stanza 4**

*I wouldn't know when I was stolen from the eyrie  
 I can't remember when I was ensnared.  
 I only know the leather disc  
 which blots out the world  
 and the eyelids which burn with thwarted vision  
 Then the perforations, and yet  
 the blue iris of heaven does not come through.  
 I can think of a patch of blue sky  
 when shown a blue slide.*

*But I am learning how to spot the ones  
 crying for the right to dream, the right to flesh,  
 the right to sleep with their own wives  
 I have placed them. I am sniffing  
 the air currents, deciding when to pounce.  
 I will hover like a black prophesy  
 weaving its moth-soft cocoon of death.  
 I shall drive down  
 with the compulsive thrust of gravity,  
 trained for havoc,  
 my eyes focused on them  
 like the sights of a gun.  
 During the big drought which is surely going to come  
 the doves will look up for clouds, and it will rain hawks.*

In this stanza, the tamed hawk speaks. He wouldn't remember when he was stolen from his nest or caught in a snare because he was very young then, barely able to stand on its feet and fly. He only remembers the sewn eyelids and the leather disc which frustrated all attempts by its eyes to see. This is why the eyelids burn. Then the unstitching process began but because the openings are small as yet, he cannot see the complete sky. His previous memories of the blue sky however remind him of it when he sees a patch of blue on a slide. In the new training he is receiving from man (because he has forgotten).

#### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. What is the recurrent image of Hawk portrayed in Keki Daruwalla's poem?
2. What does the tamed hawk speak about in the poem 'Hawk'?

## **2.6 Major Themes in the Poems 'Wolf' and 'Hawk'**

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### **2.6.1 Animals as Metaphors**

Both the poems that you read here have images drawn from the animal world that convey the vehemence of nature. R.N. Sinha while commenting on Daruwalla's handling of animal images writes, "They perform different functions depending on the context of the poem, but whenever they have been used, they have been etched with a sureness of touch, so typical of Daruwalla".

The animals that he uses are mostly wild, for Daruwalla seems to have an obsession for the sheer physical power, cunning, strategy, ruthlessness and precision that are required for survival in the wild. So his animals are mostly either brutes or deadly predators like the wolf, Haranag or the Hawk. These animals are at least endowed with those fearful qualities that have a life of their own and an extraordinary capacity to overcome anything that threatens their survival.

Having grown up and matured with stories of the Partition in the past and as a policeman constantly exposed to the dark underside of human society manifesting in the crime, terror and violence, it is not surprising that human society and civilization should feel like a jungle to him and civilized man having more bestial abilities than human ones. Think of what happened during the partition or what happens in the riots even today and you will probably understand what I am saying here. However, it is not merely in the riots and carnages that the bestiality of man surfaces. Daruwalla sees it as surfacing in the day to day life of ordinary humans. There is too much of an uncanny similarity between the minds and actions of animals and humans. In Daruwalla's insight, civilization does not seem to have taken man too far from the savage world of the animals. In fact, as Hawk argues, it seems to have made both man and the animals worse.

His poems are thus not only an objective record of the superhuman qualities these animals require for their survival in the food chain. These beasts are constantly used to comparatively highlight or simply assert the dark psychotic forces latent in civilized man.

In 'Haranag'

*...she of a sudden saw  
him luminous with deathly fires,  
green of body and golden –irised  
eyeing her intently.  
In naked terror she screamed.  
Later she did not remember  
if he hissed, whether his eyes  
were elliptical or round.  
All that remained with her  
were impressions of thirst  
and a feel of oil.*

The purpose of the animal world is clearly human in his poems for he sees all these wild tendencies either latent or active in man. So, "The village squats round it now/ like a carnivore around its kill." or "half- water and half

stream/ came out rasping/like the fore- claw/ of a caged animal.” These images do not specify the exact animal and the symbol associated with it, rather these are depictions of the bestial features of human conduct.

The wolf in its cunning, stealth, ferociousness and superhuman senses and intuition is not only a sly presence on the periphery of human civilization in Daruwalla’s poem. It comes to symbolize the subconscious forces lurking in the psyche, one’s memories and desires, a powerful thought or idea or even the creative process that completely monopolizes the mind both in its conscious and unconscious states. Depending on which way one reads the poem, each of these metaphorical senses is capable of explaining the poem in its entirety. You could read the poem with any of these terms as what the wolf symbolizes and a complete story will emerge.

We can thus see a particular strategy operating in Daruwalla’s creative process. An in depth assessment and critique of a process or faculty creates a welter of ideas in the poet’s mind which are too diverse to be caught in a conventional concept. Then, perhaps, the thought of a beast with similar attributes comes to the poet’s mind and a process of symbiotic definition begins. As the beast’s attributes help define the process, the process forces its attributes on the construction of the beast.

The process is perhaps best evident in ‘Hawk.’ The poet was trying to attack the ruthless ferocity with which corruption operates in independent India. Corruption takes numerous terrible forms like stalking for an opportune moment, striking to kill, choosing the especially weak and poor, and a special training for executing this kind of kill for cynical and wrong reasons. Then perhaps the image of the hawk comes into his mind. Close observation of hawking as a sport and the hawk’s hunting skills suggests a remarkable similarity between the birds’ training and hunting and the way corruption is propagated and practiced in this society.

### **2.6.2 Violence and Terror**

Violence and terror as they operate in human society are an important part of Daruwalla’s poetry.

True to the ethos of a policing mind, the poet constantly apprehends attack through violence coming in the shape of riots and rapes, case-conflicts, police brutality and politicians’ forcefulness—each reminiscent in some senses of the activities of a tamed hawk—the hawk can be fruitfully read as a symbol of positions of authority in a power driven society. Daruwalla’s poem distinguishes two kinds of hawks, one wild, and the other tamed. The wild hawk king symbolizes ruthless hate and violence. He is a “rapist in the harem of the sky”, who ruthlessly kills defenseless birds like the mynahs, crows, and pigeons. In human society, the wild hawk would correspond to

those figures that enjoy their predatory skills in social and familial relations just by virtue of their superior intellect, strength and tactics.

“The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man.” The tame one is more competent for it exercises deceit and guile to devour the weaker and the worthy. It does not hunt because it is hungry but kills because it enjoys its power to kill, specially the weak and the downtrodden. The hawk admits:

*But I am learning how to spot the ones  
crying for the right to dream, the right to flesh,  
the right to sleep with their own wives-*

These are the most underprivileged sections of the society which it will be easiest to kill and the hawk has been trained to spot them. It has unlearnt natural savagery and violence and has imbibed deliberate, planned and targeted killing for its own personal aggrandizement. The closing couplet strikes an apocalyptic note of mass destruction when society is divided into the innocent and the ruthless killers and there are no natural or supernatural forces intervening to save the innocent

This happens, not only in contemporary India but has been a feature of the human civilization from ancient history. In another poem in the same collection, ‘The King Speaks to the Scribe’ Emperor Ashoka is seen meditating on atonement after slaughter, enslavement, severed relationships with a simple dignity which asks that the Scribe engrave with care the lessons learned by the Emperor from the terrible massacre. The earth reeking with slaughter is described thus:

*A hundred thousand courted death, mind you.  
The battlefield stank so that heaven  
had to hold a cloth to its nose. I trod  
this plain, dark and glutinous with gore,  
my chariot-wheels squelching in the bloody mire.*

Here the king proposes a strange atonement of wiping human slaughter with bare words. The backdrop is of despair induced by the battle. History is not bereft of wars and genocide, but here the poem reveals the political ideology of the ruler who by projecting himself mortified tries to regain the public confidence. However, he would do so only with his deluding sympathetic words and not action. “Cut deeper than the cuts of my sword/ so that even as moss covers the letters/ they are visible.” The narrator tries to disclose the politics of power play that allows the rulers to maintain their authority. The poem ends with Ashoka’s instruction as; “Mind you, Kartikeye, between me and them is blood. /Your words will have to reach across to them/ like a tide of black oxen crossing a ford.”

### 2.6.3 Human Life as Tragic

What is it that makes violence and terror such an indispensable part of human life. Why is it that one's relationship with one's subconscious or creativity is like that with a prey with a wolf? Questions such as these bother the poet at a later stage of his life and we can see the earlier poems building up to it.

This worldview is developed in his later meditative poem *Ruminations* and is very relevant to interpreting 'Hawk.' One can see the earlier poems building up to it. The poet here glimpses what he considers to be the true nature of life. He can see violence and hatred in the air. They are so omnipresent! Man cannot wash away these evils from his mind, try hard as he will! They stick deep.

#### But Why?

Flesh is man's ultimate destiny. Alas! it is a prey to corruption. Neither rose-water nor incense-sticks nor flowers can drown the smell of death. Can man ever have a cleansed feeling at the existential level similar to the one he gets while walking to the temple after a river-bath? No, says the poet. Nature has a cleansed look after rain.

*the hedge smiles*

*the leaf loses its coat of dust*

*the scum spills from the pool*

Alas for man! He can never experience the cleansed feeling! Sin sticks so deep that civilized man is incapable of redemption. The poet does not have a cause for this essential fallibility of the flesh. It feels like an essential and defining quality of being human.

*I have misplaced it somewhere*

*in the caverns of my past!*

Only escapist answers like these are available. And it is this inherent fallibility that creates the feeling of sin. Is this his version of the Christian notion of the Fall?

What baffles the poet more is man's indifference to the tragedy that befell other human beings. It is time for celebration for some! Women come in chauffeur-driven cars to collect driftwood to decorate their drawing-rooms. Nature's orgy of destruction is not yet over. Fishes in the fields are strangled to death through an unholy alliance between the sun and mud! The world depicted by Daruwalla is a hostile one where man is at the mercy of relentless elements.

*As violence and hatred reign all around, the natural corollary is death- wish.*

*Death I am looking*

*for that bald bone-head of yours!*

The problems of the human condition, their certainty and inescapability and their terrifying effects are all outlined in Daruwalla's poetry. What is missing is the solution. The absence of the solution stands out distinctly because Daruwalla writes from India, the land that has been the source of philosophical and metaphysical insights into challenges like these for the rest of the world.

### **Check Your Progress-5**

1. What similarities does Daruwalla see in humans and animals?
2. What does the wild hawk symbolize in Daruwalla's poem?

## **2.7 Let Us Sum Up**

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- Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla is regarded as one of those writers of English poetry who have worked towards the growth and development of modern creative poetry. Keki Daruwalla is one among the Parsi quartet of Adil Jussawalla, K. D. Katrak and Gieve Patel. Daruwalla's poems leave an imprint of his own individuality and caliber.
- With the publication of his very first book, *Under Orion* in 1970, Daruwalla established himself as a name to reckon with in Indian poetry. Senior Indian poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel applauded his work as 'impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness.'
- A remarkable feature of Daruwalla's poetry is its ability to vividly materialize its abstractions, to strike a creative tension between image and statement. His poetry has the narrative energy and sweep to paint, for instance, a vast portrait of post-Independence India as 'a landscape of meaninglessness.'
- Daruwalla's poem *Hawk* has an interesting interplay of perspective. The poem begins in the first person where the poet recounts seeing a hawk. The first stanza has an almost primitive aggression where the predatory aspects of the hawk are capitulated. The recurrent image is that of a bird filled with hatred that swoops down on its prey without mercy. This is the nature of a hawk but if this image is disturbing then the domesticated hawk that falls under man's shadow is a monster created by man solely for his own purposes.



- Daruwalla's poems are thus not only an objective record of the superhuman qualities these animals require for their survival in the food chain. These beasts are constantly used to comparatively highlight or simply assert the dark psychotic forces latent in civilized man.

## 2.8 Key Words

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- **Sardonic:** Mocking or cynical
- **Imagism:** A movement in early 20th-century Anglo-American poetry that favoured precision of imagery and clear, sharp language
- **Metaphors:** Figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable
- **Myth:** An idea or story that is believed by many people but that is not true
- **Parricide:** The killing of a parent or other near relative

## 2.9 Terminal Questions

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1. For which book did Daruwalla receive the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984?
2. What is Keki Daruwalla's belief while writing poetry?
3. In the poem 'Wolf,' what changes are visualized between the poet's generation and his daughter's generation?
4. How has the poet's mother described the legendary qualities of a wolf?
5. In the poem 'Hawk,' how does a mother hawk teach her young one to hunt?
6. What does the poet mean by 'Your approaching dreams' in the poem 'Wolf'?

## 2.10 Suggested Reading

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- Inamdar, F. A. ed. (1991). *Critical Spectrum: The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Singh, Ram Ayodhya. (1992). *Keki N. Daruwalla: Assessment as a Poet*. New Delhi: Prakash Book Depot.
- Sinha, Ravi Nandan. (2002). *The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation.
- Borah, Manash Pratim. (2012). 'ELT Voices-India' - Volume 2, Issue 2. Bhavnagar, Gujarat: Ignite (India) Publishing.

## 2.11 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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### Check Your Progress-1

1. Senior Indian poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel applauded Keki Daruwalla’s work as ‘impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness.’
2. *Under Orion* was the first book published by Keki Daruwalla in 1970.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. Daruwalla is known for his bitter, satiric tone and as one who writes from his experience of violence, (of the brutal nature of man encountered in the police department), he shows a preoccupation with some of the darker sides of existence particularly with death and destruction. He believes, like many other poets writing in recent years, that poetry should derive its inner strength from a social awareness and sense of commitment to human and humane values.
2. A remarkable feature of Daruwalla’s poetry is its ability to vividly materialize its abstractions, to strike a creative tension between image and statement. His poetry has the narrative energy and sweep to paint, for instance, a vast portrait of post-Independence India as ‘a landscape of meaninglessness’.

### Check Your Progress-3

1. The poem ‘Wolf’ depicts a series of associations with the wolf’s body, behaviour and actions.
2. The poem ‘Wolf’ can be clearly seen as divided into two movements—the first that describes the wolf’s physical features, behaviour and actions and the other that records the effect of these features, behaviour and actions on the poet.

### Check Your Progress-4

1. The recurrent image of Hawk, in the poem is of the bird filled with hatred swooping down on its prey without mercy. This is the nature of a hawk but if this image is disturbing then the domesticated hawk that falls under man’s shadow is a monster created by man solely for his own purposes.
2. The tamed hawk basically describes his life and how it got to be like this in the first place. He also suggests that he doesn’t remember when he was stolen from his nest or caught in a snare because he was very young then, barely able to stand on its feet and fly. He only

remembers the sewn eyelids and the leather disc which frustrated all attempts by its eyes to see. This is why the eyelids burn. Then the unstitching process began but because the openings are small as yet, he cannot see the complete sky. His previous memories of the blue sky however remind him of it when he sees a patch of blue on a slide. In the new training he is receiving from man (because he has forgotten.)

### **Check Your Progress-5**

1. According to Daruwalla, there is too much of an uncanny similarity between the minds and actions of animals and humans. In Daruwalla's insight, civilization does not seem to have taken man too far from the savage world of the animals. In fact, as Hawk argues, it seems to have made both man and the animals worse.
2. The wild hawk king symbolizes ruthless hate and violence. Daruwalla goes on to describe the wild hawk as a 'rapist in the harem of the sky,' who ruthlessly kills defenseless birds like the mynahs, crows, and pigeons. In human society, the wild hawk would correspond to those figures that enjoy their predatory skills in social and familial relations just by virtue of their superior intellect, strength and tactics.

# UNIT - 3

## KAMALA DAS: ‘MY GRANDMOTHER’S HOUSE’ AND ‘A HOT NOON IN MALABAR’

### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Kamala Das: A Short Biography
  - 3.2.1 Awards and Recognition
- 3.3 Kamala Das: The Poet
- 3.4 ‘My Grandmother’s House’: An Overview
  - 3.4.1 Introduction
  - 3.4.2 Summary and Analysis
- 3.5 ‘A Hot Noon in Malabar’: An Overview
  - 3.5.1 Introduction
  - 3.5.2 Summary and Analysis
  - 3.5.3 Major Themes
  - 3.5.4 Reference Points
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Key Words
- 3.8 Terminal Questions
- 3.9 Suggested Readings
- 3.10 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

### 3.0 Objectives

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

- Identify Kamala Das, the poet
- Examine the writing style of Kamala Das
- Discuss Kamala Das’ poem ‘My Grandmother’s House’
- Analyse Kamala Das’ poem ‘A Hot Noon in Malabar’

### 3.1 Introduction

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Kamala Das is one of India’s most renowned contemporary women writers. Expressing herself in two dialects, English and Malayalam, Das has authored numerous autobiographical works and books, some critically acclaimed collections of verse in English, many volumes of short tales, and prose compositions on a variety of themes. Immediately after the publication of her first collection of poems, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), Das was identified

as a significant voice of contemporary times, exemplified by moving beyond the existing voice and composing in a distinctly Indian tone other than taking up the methods of the English modernists. Das' challenging verses are characterized by their intense investigation of the self and feminine sexuality. It revolves around city-centric life and women's functions in an Indian surrounding. It mentions the political and individual conflicts of marginalized people. Das' work, especially written in English has been read and published in India, Australia, and the West. She has brought home numerous accolades and honours.

In this unit, we will analyse two of Kamala Das' poems—'My Grandmother's House' and 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'.

### **3.2 Kamala Das: A Short Biography**

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Kamala Das is one of the first generation modern English poets who gave rise to a new poetics for themselves and started new themes and techniques around the 1960s. Kamala Das is a dominant voice of the 60s post-colonial era. Kamala Das' poetry is characterized by the best expression of feminine sensibility suppressed by a patriarchal order. Her poetry is considerably confessional and autobiographical in nature, but sometimes she generalizes personal elements of her life. She is perhaps the first Hindu woman to write honestly about sexual feelings and her physical needs. She was also short listed in 1984 for the Nobel Prize. Feminist consciousness and language found an exponent of sensuality and spirituality in Kamala Das, who unmindful of brickbats and accolades, carried on untiringly creating poems of abiding charm, enduring empathy and inconceivable audacity. According to Malayalam poet Satchidanandan, 'She is not any woman or the incarnation of essential womanhood if at all there is one; she is an Indian poet, writing in English when Indian poetry in English is breaking free from the rhetorical and Romantic tradition.'

#### **3.2.1 Awards and Recognition**

Kamala Das has received many awards for her literary contribution, including:

- Nominated and shortlisted for Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984
- Award of Asian PEN anthology - 1964
- Kerala Sahitya Academy Award - 1969 (for Cold)
- Sahitya Academy Award - 1985
- Asian Poetry Prize - 1998
- Kent Award for English Writing from Asian Countries - 1999
- Vayalar Award - 2001
- Honorary D. Litt by University of Calicut - 2006

- Muttathu Varkey Award - 2006
- Ezhuthachan Puraskaram - 2009

Compilations of some of Das' important works are as follows:

### **English**

- 1964: *The Sirens* (Asian Poetry Prize winner)
- 1965: *Summer in Calcutta* (poetry; Kent's Award winner)
- 1967: *The Descendants* (poetry)
- 1973: *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (poetry)
- 1976: *My Story* (autobiography)
- 1977: *Alphabet of Lust* (novel)
- 1985: *The Anamalai Poems* (poetry)
- 1992: *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (collection of short stories)
- 1996: *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (poetry)
- 1979: *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (with Pritish Nandy)
- 1999: *My Mother At Sixty-six* (Poem)
- 2001: *Yaa Allah* (collection of poems)

### **Malayalam**

- 1964: *Pakshiyude Manam* (short stories)
- 1966: *Naricheerukal Parakkumbol* (short stories)
- 1968: *Thanuppu* (short story, Sahitya Academi award)
- 1982: *Ente Katha* (autobiography)
- 1987: *Balyakala Smaranakal* (Childhood Memories)
- 1989: *Varshangalkku Mumbu* (Years Before)
- 1990: *Palayan* (novel)
- 1991: *Neypayasam* (short story)
- 1992: *Dayarikkurippukal* (novel)
- 1994: *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam* (novel, Vayalar Award)
- 1996: *Chekkerunna Pakshikal* (short stories)
- 1998: *Nashtapetta Neelambari* (short stories)
- 2005: *Chandana Marangal* (Novel)
- 2005: *Madhavikkuttiyude Unmakkadhakal* (short stories)
- 2005: *Vandikkalalakal* (novel)

### Check Your Progress-1

1. How is Kamala Das' poetry characterized?
2. In which year was Kamala Das shortlisted for the Nobel Prize?

### 3.3 Kamala Das: The Poet

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Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Suraiyya, was a sophisticated Indian poetess born on March 31, 1934. She is a distinguished Indian writer who composes in English as well as Malayalam, her native language. Much of Kamala Das' writing in Malayalam are published under the pen name 'Madhavikutty'. Her mother was a Malayalam short story writer. She also embarked on her literary career as writer by writing Malayalam short stories. But after the publication of her Indian English verse collection *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), she gained a wider recognition as an author and creative writer. The success of this collection paved her way to the publication of two other poem collections: *The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old Play House and Other Poems* (1973).

Kamala Das' work celebrates the spirit of the Indian women of contemporary times and chronicles their agony of being bereft of love and longing for emotional fulfillment. The nature of her poetry is confessional. Her poems express her inner-most desires in their existing sentiments stripped of any superfluous veil of emotions. Her poetry reflects the desires of the physical body and a quest for the beautiful and the serene that is not within her reach. This Indian poetess was also fond of writing about memories of childhood, family relations, and the family's great house.

Love and marriage are ever-permeating themes in Das' poetry. These themes are mostly always rooted in her Nair heritage, her own home situated in Kerala and her grandmother's place. Her poems like 'Summer in Calcutta', 'In Love', 'Composition', 'The Suicide', 'An Intensity' reflects the intensity of her feelings with an underlined feeling of protest. Das' autobiography *My Story* was published in 1976. She wrote two novels, *Manas* (1975) and *Alphabet of Lust* (1976). She was honored with Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985 for her literary contributions.

Das released six volumes of verse between 1965 and 1985. Drawing upon devout and household symbolisms to investigate a sense of individuality, Das notifies of intensely individual knowledge, encompassing her development into womanhood, her failed quest for love within and outside the ceremony of wedding, and her existence in a matriarchal dominated world within the rural confines of southern India especially after inheriting the home that belonged to her forefathers.

After the publication of *Summer in Calcutta*, Das has been courted with controversy. She soon became renowned for her use of odd imagery and outspokenness in her poems. For example in her poems 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' and 'The Freaks', Das sketches the exotic to talk about her sexuality and her journey to fulfill her need. In 'An Introduction', Das takes the problems of women to a universal level and address openly those topics which were hitherto conventionally considered as personal knowledge, proposing that women's individual sentiments of yearning and parting are part of the collective know-how of woman's life. In next collection of poems *The Descendants* (1967), the verse 'The Maggots' interlinks the agony of lost love with existing Hindu myths, while the verse 'The Looking-Glass' explains the idea that women are expected to carry out in love and passion, those very things that humanity usually marks as unclean. Yet, these are things the women are presumed to deliver when in love. The verse suggests that an unexpressed love is equal to no love experience; only a total engrossment in the emotion of love can provide fairness to this experience. In *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1975), verses like 'Substitute,' 'Gino,' and 'The Suicide' analyze the malfunction of corporal love to achieve fulfillment, to help oneself release from his/her ownself, or to invoke the past, while in works like 'The Inheritance' looks into the integrity of the creative self in the light of devout fanaticism. In *Tonight, This Savage Rite: The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy* (1979), Das remembers Krishna in her investigation of the stress between personal love and religious transcendence. *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), is a sequence of short verses which was written after Das lost the parliamentary elections in the year 1984. Some poems like 'Delhi 1984' and 'Smoke in Colombo' remind the readers the massacre of the Sikhs in India and the civil war that rocked Sri Lanka.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. What pen name did Kamala Das use while writing in Malayalam?
2. What does Kamala Das discuss in her poem 'An Introduction'?

### 3.4 'My Grandmother's House': An Overview

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*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?*

### 3.4.1 Introduction

The poem, 'My Grandmother's House' is a part of Kamala Das' maiden publication *Summer in Calcutta*. There is an intriguing sense of nostalgia and uprootedness in this short poem. This poem suggests the eternal quest for love in a 'loveless' world, when the poet suddenly remembers her grandmother. When thinking about her grandmother, certain emotions which were long forgotten and buried within resurface. This is an ironic visualization of her past which is in tragic contrast to her present situation. This poem is filled with nostalgia and anguish.

The poet describes her grandmother's house which is far from the place she currently resides. She also states that her grandmother's house is the house where she 'received love' and felt secure. However, the same house where she felt secure and loved by all changed drastically after her grandmother's demise. The house that was once a representation of security and love for the poet was now filled with grief. There was now an eerie dead silence that haunted the house. And although, the poet couldn't read books at that time, she had a feeling of snakes moving among them, which suggest a feeling of deadness, horror and repulsion. These horrible and melancholic feelings affected her so much and she describes these feelings making her blood go cold and her face become pale as the moon. The poet often thinks about visiting her Grandmother's House just so she can peek through the '*blind eyes of the window*' which have been dead-shut for years, or just to listen to the '*frozen*' air.

The ironical contrast between the poet's past and present has also been depicted. The poet states that her present is tormenting and even the darkness of the house does not horrify her anymore and proves to be a comforting companion in her present state of affairs. The poet suggests that she will happily (in wild despair) pick up a handful of darkness from her grandmother's house and bring it back to her house, so that the memories

of the Old House and its comforting darkness, a rather ironical expression, might fill assurance and happiness in her present life.

She ends the poem by saying that it is difficult to believe that she once lived in a house where she felt secure and was loved by all. She lived her life with pride and her life was once filled with pride. Her present life is in sharp contrast to her happy past life. She states that her present lacks the love and pride that she once felt at her grandmother's house. The poet says that in her desperate quest for love, she has lost her way as she has not received any feelings of love from people who she calls her own. In order to receive love, she now has to knock on strangers doors and beg them for love—if not in substantial amounts, then at least in small change, i.e., in little measure at least.

The poet has intensified the emotions of nostalgia and anguish by presenting a contrast between her childhood and her grown-up stages. The fullness of the distant and absence and the emptiness of the near and the present give the poem its poignancy. The images of '*snakes moving among books*', blood turning '*cold like the moon*', '*blind eyes of window*', '*frozen air*' evoke a sense of death and despair. The house itself becomes a symbol—a cradle of love and joy. The escape, the poetic retreat, is in fact, the poet's own manner of suggesting the hopelessness of her present situation. Her yearning for the house is a symbolic retreat to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity.

### 3.4.2 Summary and Analysis

Kamala Das, the Indian poetess recalls her ancestral home and her dead grandmother in the poem 'My Grandmother's House'. Kamala Das' poems as well her imagery is extremely personal and drawn from life. This poem takes the form of a confession comparing her present broken state with that of being unconditionally loved by her grandmother. Published in 1965 in summer in Calcutta the poem is a reminiscence of the poetess' grandmother and their ancestral home in Punnayurkulam in Kerala. Her memory of love she received from her grandmother is associated with the image of her ancestral home.

*There is a house now far away where once  
I received love.....*

The poem begins like a story introducing a house which was visited long back and it's too far from the place where the poetess lived and at the same time it indicates the farness of the embracement that Kamala Das once received. But one thing is clear, the house is still there physically standing without any live activity in it. The poetess expresses very clearly that love was received, which throws light on the fact that now she is bereft of love

and that's why she craves for that which is lost. The poet now lives in another city, a long distance away from her grandmother's house. But the memories of her ancestral house make her sad. She is almost heartbroken. The intensity of her emotions is shown by the ellipses in the form of a few dots. Now, in another city, living another life, she longs to go back. With the death of the Grandmother, the house ceased being inhabited. It now became an isolated and remote entity, echoed by the phrase 'far away'. The poetess asserts that with the death of her grandmother, silence began to sink in the house.

*'.....That woman died,  
The house withdrew into silence,.....'*

The poem is a reminiscence of the poetess' grandmother and their ancestral home at Malabar in Kerala. Her remembrance of love she received from her grandmother is associated with the image of her ancestral home, where she had spent some of the happiest days of her life, and where her old grandmother had showered her love and affection. With the death of her grandmother the house withdrew into silence. When her grandmother died, even the house seemed to share her grief, which is poignantly expressed in the phrase 'the House withdrew'. The house soon became desolate and snakes crawled among books. Her blood became cold like the moon because there was none to love her the way she wanted. She understands that she cannot reclaim the past but she wants to go back home, look once again through its windows and bring back a handful of darkness – sad and painful memories, which she would have made her constant companion, to keep as a reminder of her past happiness. The poet is unable to proceed with her thoughts for sometime as is indicated by the ellipses (dots). The poet is now garroted with the intensity of grief. She hankers for love like a beggar going from one door to another asking for love in small change. Her need for love and approval is not satisfied in marriage and she goes after strangers for love at least in small quantity. But she does not get it even in small change or coins. Her love-hunger remains unsatisfied, and there is a big void, a blank within her, she seeks to fill up with love but to no avail. The image of the window is a link between the past and the present. It signifies the desire of the poet for a nostalgic peep into her past and resurrects her dreams and desires.

*'.....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...'*

The moon is being an emblem of love. The worms on the books seem like snakes at that moment, in comparison to the size of the little girl; and in keeping with the eeriness of the situation. The poetess also implies that the deserted house is like a desert with reptiles crawling over. The poetess now longs to 'peer' at a house that was once her own. She has to peek through the 'blind eyes' of the windows as the windows are permanently closed. The air is frozen now, as contrasted to when the grandmother was alive-the surroundings were filled with the warmth of empathy. Kamala Das pleads with us to 'listen' to the 'frozen' air; that is an impossibility. Neither is the air a visual medium, nor can air cause any displacement because it is 'frozen'. In wild despair, she longs to bring in an 'armful of darkness'. Note firstly, that it is not a 'handful' but an armful. Secondly, 'darkness' that generally has negative shades to it, has positive connotations here of a protective shadow. It also reflects the 'coziness' inside the house. This armful of darkness is her essence of nostalgia.

*'.....you cannot believe, darling,  
Can you, that I lived in such a house and  
Was proud, and loved....'*

Kamala Das was very proud about her grandmother and the love she received. The Ellipsis after the word loved shows how much she grieves at the loss of the person who unconditionally loved her and satisfied her to the core. She was so convinced by the environment in which she lived, that the loss of it was indigestible, and uncompromisable. She feels so proud of her grandmother and the house in such a way that she wants all the others know how promising and satisfying was the atmosphere at the grandmother's house.

*'.....I who have lost  
my way and beg now at strangers' doors to  
Receive love, at least in small change?'*

The pronoun 'I' here is very emphatic and also melancholic. Emphatic in order to tell the world that no one would or could have come across such an admiring part of life the poetess lived and melancholic to let the readers know that she is a great loser and there can be no loser like her in the world. It also echoes her inner reverberations that when her grandmother was alive she was rich with love and after her demise she became bankrupt and started begging at stranger's door. She dint expect the equal amount of love that she received from her grandmother from the society she was in but only little. Even that little love she was deprived of. This makes it clear that Kamala Das' grandmother was an embodiment of unconditional love.

### Check Your Progress-3

1. What does Kamala Das state in her poem 'My Grandmother's House'?
2. What phrases in the poem 'My Grandmother's House' evoke a sense of death and despair?

### 3.5 'A Hot Noon in Malabar': An Overview

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*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 palm 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,  
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 .....*

#### 3.5.1 Introduction

This is an intensively emotional and personal poem of longing and love. It's one of her typical works evoking life in the Malabar and her unbreakable bonding and sense of belonging to the Malabar of her childhood and the kind of life and love that she envisions for herself there.

Allapat Tharavad is the place where she spent her childhood which stands as a symbol of the joy of youth, of wild thoughts, men and love, for the security, belonging, and last though not the least as a symbol of innocence.

Memories of life at her ancestral house crowd the first three-fourth of the poem which is implicitly contrasted with the dull, routine and circumscribed nature of life lived in the cities. The poem thus contrasts an irresistible past with a miserable present. The entire panoply of events that unfold on the verandah of her ancestral house at Malabar comes to symbolize her childhood days and she recaptures it to regain the self that is being thwarted by city life.

Recollecting the old days, she remembers the totally unrestrained and unrestricted life she had led in Malabar. She fondly recollects how she used to swim in the pale green pond when her grandmother warned her: 'You must stop this bathing now /You are much too big to play/Naked in the pond.'

This freedom and unrestrained atmosphere has framed the horizon of her expectations in a particular way. It has also redefined for her the meaning of her body and sexuality which refuses to be contained by the patriarchal control structures of the bourgeois society to which she is expected to conform eventually.

However, the intensity of the longing and desire indicate that the past is not yet dead in her and neither is it going to die soon. In the tussle between the idealized freedom of the past and the reality of the constricting present, it is the past that refuses to yield, even if it is at an immense psycho-social cost.

### **3.5.2 Summary and Analysis**

The poem begins by recollecting a peculiar sight from the poet's childhood and spinster days. Her ancestral house, located by the side of a main street was a concrete structure with cemented verandahs in the front and the sides and small draped windows, when the afternoon became really hot, beggars came to its door asking for alms with loud whining voices.

A retinue of other persons also came to gather on the verandah to shelter themselves from the heat. Among them were the men from hills. They were fortune tellers. It was their livelihood. They carried parrots in a cage and fortune-telling cards. Those were the instruments with which they created faith among the simple believers of the small towns in the Malabar region.

The fortune telling cards were stained with time and were old. The hot noon was suitable for brown Kurava girls to come to Malabar to carry on their livelihood. They used to read palms in light singsong voices. Apart from these girls were the old bangle-sellers. They chose the poetess's veranda

as it was shaded and relatively cool. They sat there spreading their red, green and blue bangles for sale.

The bangles were attractive while the bangle sellers were covered with the dust of the road in front. The bangle sellers had to walk down long. The road was rough and hot. Therefore, the heels of their foot cracked. They climbed to the veranda making a rough scraping voice with their foot which the poet as a little girl found different from the voices that the other feet made on the floor. In fact she found it strange.

The hot noon was marked by the strangers who fearfully opened the window-drapes and looked in the room but were unable to see anything because their eyes were affected by the hot rays of the sun. It was impossible to see anything with that eye in a shadowy room. They turned away and looked at the well with great eagerness. They wanted to quench their thirst. There were also strangers who suspected each other. They remained silent. If they were excited, they became angry and their voices ran wild, as wild as free animals in forest.

Thus, the hot noon in Malabar was very exciting for the poet. She wishes to spend the noon amidst those wild men, with wild thoughts making wild love. It was a torture for her to be away in the city in the controlled atmosphere of an air-conditioner. She had wild thoughts in that hot noon and a hot passion for love builds up in her.

### 3.5.3 Major Themes

#### Past vs. Present

As the end of the poem 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' suggests, the poem presents a contrast between the past and the present lives of the poet. She compares her barren monotonous life in a city to the life of hectic but unscheduled activities which was routine when she was residing in Malabar. The exotic men from hills became a fantasy for her as they bring their fortune-telling cards and parrots locked in cages and entertain her in stark contrast with the mundane and boring life of the city.

Then there are the brown *kurava* girls whose eyes gleam with the traditional knowledge that has been passed on from generation to generation promising the excitement of fortune telling. The bangle sellers brought various colours of bangles and laid them on the cool black floor, the cool black floor reminds her of the warmth of acceptance contrast with hostility and suspicion in a city. Even strangers came along with companionship. She's referring to the assimilating features of her house; everybody comes in ease and settles down so comfortably as though they are family and not strangers. From here she speaks of strangers who are not strangers at all. These words remind us that she not only yearns for the beautiful ambience but also

for the lost experiences of that wholeness or togetherness. We almost hear an agony in her cry when she says.... 'To be here far away .....is torture.'

Her married life in the city is in certain senses the opposite of the kind of life she has led in Malabar. Marriage has perhaps bound her mind and body in a way so that she finds neither sexual, nor intellectual fulfillment or freedom. Compared to wild variety unfolded on her verandah, city life presents the same dull monotony every day. People and society are fragmented and no assimilation takes place at any level. Strangers are to be feared rather than accommodated and life is experienced as a fractured. However she has lived a life so colorful that she wants to return to it. Her memory disturbs her. She feels that she has lost her past life forever as she stays in a confined city home and is far away in time as well as in distance. That is why city life is a torture.

### **The poem as a feminist statement**

The desire to break through the normative and preferred life of marriage, city and loveless, unfulfilling sexuality in the poet is a powerful and daring critique of the patriarchal system in which she finds herself imprisoned. To understand the power and daring nature of this critique one has to first understand how a woman experiences her subjectivity in a patriarchal culture.

In most societies a woman defines herself through interpersonal relationships. Sudhir Kakkar states that a woman's dependence is a marked tendency in the Indian context. Patriarchy constructs her as deficient and weak which she internalizes about herself. The woman transforms her cultural devaluation into feelings of unworthiness and inferiority.

No wonder, a woman's life becomes a dehumanizing and humiliating experience in a patriarchal society. The struggle to become an equal human being with legitimate drives and desires is a struggle that awaits a woman in all patriarchal societies.

This struggle is manifested in women's literature in manifold forms. In women's poetry the persona assumes different forms corresponding to the various roles a woman is forced to assume. The different guises the persona assumes lead to multiple voices. Besides the multiple roles of daughter, wife and mother, a woman poet plays out the roles of unhappy woman, unsated mistress, selfless lover, reluctant nymphomaniac, innocuous doll, vicious seductress and ferocious witch. Each of these voices is an assertion of the woman's acceptance of the challenge spoken of earlier. The voice of the unsated wife and the discontented dweller at the home that we hear in this wife are voices of the same struggle. Both thematically and stylistically her poetry shows her experiences of living through this compromised gender state.



Read at another level these voices are also an effort to resolve a crisis of identity. All the poet's creative endeavours are directed to establish a firm, distinct identity with which she can lead a free and fulfilling life. She derives her poetic material from her life's experiences because it is only then that she can use poetry to resolve the crisis that she is undergoing and at least throw a challenge on the patriarchal set-up.

A writer derives inspiration from his life, what else? A writer is like a mirror that has learnt to retain the image reflected in it. Indelible reflection. Those who do not write, retain nothing of life, ultimately. Life runs through their fingers like fine sand.

Devinder Kohli describes her poetry as a sort of: 'compulsion-neurosis' which offers a kind of release, a safety-valve, for her emotions. She views poetry as a continuous torment. Her poems carry the violent energy associated with 'unpremeditated and unreflected emotions'. Writing is a means of self-discovery for her. She says: 'When I write I get closer and closer to my true self... It is an activity that cannot be shared so akin it is to dying'.

The struggle is productive not only in the sense that it manages a crisis but also in that it puts a new identity in place. As Kohli observes 'Kamala Das has more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role to the point of discovering and asserting her individual freedom and identity'. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar also expresses the same idea: 'Kamala Das' is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in largely insensitive man-made world'. Like Camus *Sisyphus* she has found the new identity in the resistance. Moving from one challenge to another, she faces disappointment again and again but does not give up.

### **The metaphor of heat**

Why is heat and its harbinger, the summer such a favourite with Das? This is surprising because summer is most troublesome for those living in tropical countries. During this season, the difference between the haves and have-nots is most poignant. It is the difference between those who have air-conditioned rooms and those who don't which in effect means those who can live and work comfortably versus those who will have to sweat it out or even die.

Heat, as all lovers know, is coded in difference –difference between the normal and excited states, between contained and passionate excitement. In *The Looking Glass*, one of her most famous poems, for instance, the speaker asks for the lover to be gifted with 'the musk of sweat between the breasts' —

*Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,  
The warm shock of menstrual blood.*

When Das writes about the coldness of relationships, as in *The Old Playhouse*, her metaphors posit summer as representative of the higher season of love. ‘The summer/Begins to pall .... Your room is/Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always/Shut. Even the air-conditioner helps so little ...’ In Das, there seems to be an intuitive relation between the summer sun and the vitality of woman’s life. In *The Stone Age*, ‘strong men cast their shadows; they sink/Like white suns in the swell of my Dravidian blood’. The relationship between summer and her womanhood is clear: ‘I did all my growing there/ In the bright summer months’.

In short it is heat that makes the woman active and appealing in a sexual or even non-sexual encounter. In fact Das’ lines quoted above implies that heat is responsible for the distinct and perhaps most valuable part of her life right from childhood to adulthood.

In the context of this poem, it is the heat that transforms the verandah from a cold and isolated space into a street market. It brings all kinds of people – men, women, girls, strangers, parrots into that space and creates a scene that the poet finds unforgettable and irresistible. It is in this heat that the poet as a girl has experienced the fullness of life with all the characters around and has experienced the overpowering influence of her own sexual urge. That is why she can directly link the wild voice of the stranger to the wild love of her life. No wonder, her husband’s closed, air-conditioned room, lighted artificially ‘palls’ her life.

### 3.5.4 Reference Points

**Malabar:** Coastal region of Kerala which because of its proximity to the Equator is really hot in the summers. This is also where Kamla Das’ native village is located.

**Men who come from hills:** Fortune tellers using a parrot and a pack of fortune-telling cards to prophecy the future.

**Stained with time:** Stained because of usage through time.

**Brown kurava girls:** Girls belonging to a particular region in Kerala whose skin has been turned brown because of sustained exposure to the sun.

**Hot eyes brimming with the sun:** Due to sustained exposure of the harsh afternoon sun the eyes of these men have become hot. Because their pupils are extremely contracted by the harsh brightness of the sun they can see nothing into the relatively dark spaces. That is why their eyes are described as brimming with the sun.

**Brick-ledged well:** Most village well had a small circular wall around them which was made of bricks. These thirsty people would look towards the well longingly because they would want to desperately bathe or drink at a well which did not belong to them.

**Wild men, wild thoughts, wild love:** Refer to the poet's own desires to be in a state of complete abandonment and freedom this freedom is not only of thoughts but of being with wild men of her choice with whom she can make wild love.

**Wild feet stirring up the dust:** Reference to the uncontrolled and undirected movement of the poet's feet in the hot Malabar sand and soil that would stir up the dust.

#### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. What are the poet's thoughts at the end of the poem 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'?
2. Why has Kamala Das' poetry style been described as 'compulsion-neurosis'?

### **3.6 Let Us Sum Up**

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- Kamala Das is one of the first generation modern English poets who gave rise to a new poetics for themselves and started new themes and techniques around the 1960s. Kamala Das is a dominant voice of the 60s post-colonial era. Kamala Das' poetry is characterized by the best expression of feminine sensibility suppressed by a patriarchal order. Her poetry is considerably confessional and autobiographical in nature, but sometimes she generalizes personal elements of her life.
- Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Suraiyya, was a sophisticated Indian poetess born on March 31, 1934. She is a distinguished Indian writer who composes in English as well as Malayalam, her native language. Much of Kamala Das' writing in Malayalam are published in the pen name 'Madhavikkutty'.
- Love and marriage are ever-permeating themes in Das' poetry. These themes are mostly always rooted in her Nair heritage, her own home situated in Kerala and her grandmother's place. Her poems like 'Summer in Calcutta', 'In Love', 'Composition' 'The Suicide', 'An Intensity' reflects the intensity of her feelings with an underlined feeling of protest. Das' autobiography My Story was published in 1976. She wrote two novels, Manas (1975) and Alphabet of Lust (1976). She

was honored with Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985 for her literary contributions.

- The Anamalai Poems (1985), is a sequence of short verses which was written after Das lost the parliamentary elections in the year 1984. Some poems like ‘Delhi 1984’ and ‘Smoke in Colombo’ remind the readers the massacre of the Sikhs in India and the civil war that rocked Sri Lanka.
- The poem, ‘My Grandmother’s House’ is a part of Kamala Das’ maiden publication Summer in Calcutta. There is an intriguing sense of nostalgia and uprootedness in this short poem. This poem suggests the eternal quest for love in such a ‘loveless’ world, when the poet suddenly remembers her grandmother. When thinking about her grandmother, certain emotions which were long forgotten and buried within resurface. This is an ironic visualization of her past which is in tragic contrast to her present situation. This poem is filled with nostalgia and anguish.
- The poet has intensified the emotions of nostalgia and anguish by presenting a contrast between her childhood and her grown-up stages. The fullness of the distant and absence and the emptiness of the near and the present give the poem its poignancy. The images of ‘snakes moving among books’, blood turning ‘cold like the moon’, ‘blind eyes of window’, ‘frozen air’ evoke a sense of death and despair. The house itself becomes a symbol—a cradle of love and joy. The escape, the poetic retreat, is in fact, the poet’s own manner of suggesting the hopelessness of her present situation. Her yearning for the house is a symbolic retreat to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity.
- ‘A Hot Noon in Malabar’ is an intensively emotional and personal poem of longing and love. It’s one of her typical works evoking life in the Malabar and her unbreakable bonding and sense of belonging to the Malabar of her childhood and the kind of life and love that she envisions for herself there.
- ‘A Hot Noon in Malabar’ begins by recollecting a peculiar sight from the poet’s childhood and spinster days. Her ancestral house, located by the side of a main street was a concrete structure with cemented verandahs in the front and the sides and small draped windows, when the afternoon became really hot, beggars came to its door asking for alms with loud whining voices.

### 3.7 Key Words

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- **Symbolism:** The use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense
- **Matriarchy:** A social organizational form in which the mother or oldest female heads the family
- **Pseudonym:** A fictitious name used by an author to conceal his or her identity
- **Nostalgia:** A sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past
- **Patriarchy:** A social system in which: males hold primary power; males predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property
- **Compulsive neurosis:** A disorder marked by uncontrollable impulses to perform stereotyped, irrational acts
- **Harbinger:** A person who goes ahead and makes known the approach of another
- **Metaphor:** A thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else

### 3.8 Terminal Questions

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1. What happened when the 'woman died' in 'My Grandmother's House'?
2. Why is the air in grandmother's house described as frozen?
3. What does the line 'to lie behind my bedroom door like a brooding dog' mean?
4. What activities are described by the poet as being undertaken in a hot noon in Malabar?
5. Why are the strangers silent in 'A Hot Noon In Malabar'?
6. Describe how the poet compares the love her grandmother showered on her with her present loveless life in 'My Grandmother's House'?
7. What kind of poem is "Hot Noon in Malabar"?
8. What is the significance of Malabar in Kamala Das' life?

### 3.9 Suggested Readings

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Piciuccio, Pier Paolo. (2001). *Kamala Das: A Critical Spectrum*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist.

Dwivedi, A.N. (2000). *Kamala Das and Her Poetry*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist.

Rahman, Anisur. (1981). *Expressive Form in the Poetry of Kamala Das*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.

Das, Kamala. (1956). *Summer in Calcutta*. New Delhi: Everest Press.

### 3.10 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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#### Check Your Progress-1

1. Kamala Das’ poetry is characterized by the best expression of feminine sensibility suppressed by a patriarchal order. Her poetry is considerably confessional and autobiographical in nature, but sometimes she generalizes personal elements of her life. She is perhaps the first Hindu woman to write honestly about sexual feelings and her physical needs.
2. Kamala Das was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984.

#### Check Your Progress-2

1. Much of Kamala Das’ writing in Malayalam are published in the pen name ‘Madhavikkutty’.
2. In ‘An Introduction’, Das takes the problems of women to a universal level and address openly those topics which were hitherto conventionally considered as personal knowledge, proposing that women’s individual sentiments of yearning and parting are part of the collective know-how of woman’s life.

#### Check Your Progress-3

1. The poem, ‘My Grandmother’s House’ is a part of Kamala Das’ maiden publication *Summer in Calcutta*. There is an intriguing sense of nostalgia and uprootedness in this short poem. This poem suggests the eternal quest for love in such as ‘loveless’ world, when the poet suddenly remembers her grandmother. When thinking about her grandmother, certain emotions which were long forgotten and buried within resurface. This is an ironic visualization of her past which is in tragic contrast to her present situation. This poem is filled with nostalgia and anguish.

2. The images of 'snakes moving among books', blood turning 'cold like the moon', 'blind eyes of window', 'frozen air' evoke a sense of death and despair.

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. The hot noon in Malabar was very exciting for the poet. She wishes to spend the noon amidst those wild men, with wild thoughts making wild love. It was a torture for her to be away in the city in the controlled atmosphere of an air-conditioner. She had wild thoughts in that hot noon and a hot passion for love builds up in her.
2. Kamala Das' poetry style has been describes as compulsion-neurosis as it offers a kind of release, a safety-valve, for her emotions. She views poetry as a continuous torment. Her poems carry the violent energy associated with 'unpremeditated and unreflected emotions'. Writing is a means of self-discovery for her. She says: 'When I write I get closer and closer to my true self... It is an activity that cannot be shared so akin it is to dying'.

# UNIT - 4

## ADIL JUSSAWALLA: *MISSING PERSON*

### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Adil Jussawalla: A Short Biography
- 4.3 An Introduction to Jussawalla's Poetry
- 4.4 An Introduction to *Missing Person*
- 4.5 The Poems of *Missing Person*, Part II
  - 4.5.1 'Sea Breeze, Bombay'
  - 4.5.2 'Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay'
- 4.6 Difficulties in Reading *Missing Person*
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Key Words
- 4.9 Terminal Questions
- 4.10 Suggested Readings
- 4.11 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

### 4.0 Objectives

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

- Identify Adil Jussawalla, the poet
- Describe Jussawalla's poetry style
- Discuss the difficulties in reading Jussawalla's poem the *Missing Person*
- Analyse the Poems of *Missing Person*, Part II

### 4.1 Introduction

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In Indian English poetry, the poet and critic Adil Jussawalla has an influential presence. Jussawalla has written two books of poetry, *Land's End* (1962) and *Missing Person* (1976). He has also edited a seminal anthology of 'New Writing from India' (1974) and co-edited an anthology of 'Indian Prose in English' (1977). Adil Jussawalla is known to write complex poetry and his writing style is characterized as being ironic, fragmented, non-linear and formally strenuous evoking and indicting a dehumanized and spiritually sterile landscape, which is ravaged by contradiction and is perpetually suspended in a state of catastrophe. In this unit, we will discuss Adil Jussawalla, the poet and his remarkable work *Missing Person*, Part II. We will also describe his writing style and discuss the three poems which form a part of *Missing Person*.



## 4.2 Adil Jussawalla: A Short Biography

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Jussawalla was born in Mumbai in a Parsi family. Though raised in the Zoroastrian faith, his father sent him to an Anglican School, primarily because of the disturbances caused by the reigning anti-Semitism around his original Parsi school at the time of the Second World War. This Anglican school gave him a Christian vision, evident in his first volume of poems *Land's End* (1962).

He spent most of the years between 1957 and 1970 in England. His career here was eclectic. He initially studied design to be an architect, intermittently wrote plays that were self-confessedly not up to the mark and definitely non-performable. Jussawalla pursued B.A. from University College, Oxford, and then took a stint in teaching at the International Language Centre, London. Returning to Mumbai, he taught English at St Xavier's College between 1972 and 1975 and later devoted himself to writing poetry. An Honorary Fellow at the International Writing Program in Iowa in 1977, he has participated in several international conferences and festivals.

His 'exile' in England from 1957 to 1969 (with visits to India in 1961 and 1966) occasioned the poems of *Land's End*, which, Jussawalla says, 'tried to show the effect of living in lands I can never leave nor love properly, or belong to.'

However, he was completely disillusioned with life in London and this disillusionment has been recorded in 'Indifference,' an essay from the collection 'Disappointed Guests: Essays by African, Asian and West Indian Students' (1965). But merely being dissatisfied with England did not satisfy Jussawalla's creative thirst. He was struck by the indifference of the Englishmen to what he considered to be the great canonical texts of the Indian culture and the creative ferment that had begun to produce poetry amongst Indian poets writing in English. His efforts to publicize the efforts of this new group of poets culminated in his editing an anthology titled 'New Writing in India for Penguin' (1974).

Jussawalla's poetic output has been small and selective. After 14 years of publishing *Land's End* he brought out his second volume *Missing Person* (1976). Apart from these, two extensive interviews to Peter Nazareth and Vivek Narayanan and Sharmistha Mohanty are also available as his expressive output. Jussawalla has been focused on writing poetry in English, exclusively Indian in style and themes.

### Check Your Progress-1

1. What was Adil Jussawala's first published book of poems?
2. How has Adil Jussawala's poetry been described?

### 4.3 An Introduction to Jussawalla's Poetry

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Jussawalla's is not a simple and readily accessible poetry, nor does it aspire to be. Even trained readers must visit the lines repeatedly to savour his unique taste and flavour. When asked in an interview by Peter Nazareth in 1978 about the peril of being incomprehensible, Jussawalla responded, 'Well, I think the situation of the poet in India is such that being misunderstood is part of his function.' Indeed a problematic past and a threatening present; a questionable ideal and a fractured real; a complex reality and compromised tools of expression like language, all contribute to creating the complexity characteristic of his poetry. The twin facts of exile and return add more complexity to the nature of the experience being projected in his poems. The post-modernist technique of extreme fragmentation, along with collage, montage and such cinematographic techniques and a diction borrowed from pop culture also make his poetry strikingly original.

With huge population transfers across the world and the emergence and collapse of both established and hybrid cultures, the modern man has come to be increasingly disturbed by his social, cultural and political existence. Feelings of alienation and rootlessness are a consequence – feelings that have been given poetic expression by many of the major Indian poets writing in English. An English education in India and elsewhere, prolonged stays abroad, and more importantly, the choice of English as a medium of poetic creation have intensified this feeling and have provided the necessary tension for their poetry.

Jussawalla's highly acclaimed first book, *Land's End*, written almost entirely in England and Europe, was published when he was twenty-two. It was hailed by a critic as a book that captured 'the artificiality and vulgarity of this age, the paradoxical nature of our emotions and desires, the unbridgeable gulf between 'you' and 'I', between dream and reality and the beauty and ugliness of love.' In Jussawalla's poetry, we no longer find the Janus-faced post-colonial impulse of looking to the past to reaffirm the present. Neither is there the nostalgia for or a confidence in a past or a childhood as an ideal state. Instead, this is a poetry of brutal engagement in all its gory complexity. The poet looks the present unflinchingly in the face, in all its disfigured and fractured reality. There is no attempt to escape 'the various ways of dying that are home', no resort to a visionary romanticism nor a nostalgic recreation of a more innocent history.

In the same interview, Jussawalla was asked about the responsibility of the writer in times of crisis. 'I don't know,' he replied. 'I think each writer will deal with the crisis in his own way . . . Maybe I see writing as an activity, at least for me personally, as linked up with a whole life, a whole sense of time. Indian writers do have a different sense of time in relation to

their own work than the writers in the States, in England and in France, which means that we are bound to have a different attitude even to crisis . . . Am I being fatalistic if I say that for Indians, the crisis is perpetual?’

The second book, *Missing Person* was written after his return to India, perhaps as a response to this complex crisis. ‘If Ezekiel speaks of the ‘Unfinished. Man’ and Nandy of the ‘Nowhere Ìàn,’ Jussawalla sketches the *Missing Person* (Prema Nandakumar). While the poetic self that writes these poems wants to assert its reality and individuality, it becomes difficult to ‘locate’ that self in all senses of the term. In this volume, a morally compromised, hollow and absurd world is acknowledged, but the self is also implicated in the failed quest for meaning. ‘If one tried literally to represent the different elements of world culture of which one’s mind is made, one would write a language no one would understand. I have tried to suggest this chaos in ‘Missing Person,’ says Jussawalla.

But also implicit in this evocation of chaos is a critique of the underlying market-centred life-style of the bourgeoisie – a class that ‘can only torment itself with its own contradictions or turn on itself in a fury of self-destruction’. As critic Sudesh Mishra puts it: ‘For Jussawalla, the ironic emphasis on the marginal and the ‘non-human’ is perhaps a way of saying that the processes involved in the dehumanization of art may well, in the future, contribute to the re-humanization of man.’ Perhaps what is being implied here is that once the bourgeoisie self-destructive centre has played out to its destructive end, man will be forced to rediscover his own common humanity with others.

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. How as Jussawalla’s acclaimed book *Land’s End* been described by critics?
2. What was Jussawalla’s response when he was described as being incomprehensible?

#### **4.4 An Introduction to *Missing Person***

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Adil Jussawalla’s *Missing Person* is a difficult text to understand, because it deals with the problem of an ‘exile and return’ self. To feel what the poem is saying you will have to understand the context in which it originated and took shape and how it involved a difficult negotiation with different ideas in the process of stabilizing an acceptable self. Fortunately, Adil’s two extensive interviews help us understand this process. The interviews are also relevant because Adil is responding to many of the questions that have been circulating in critical circles about his works as well as some questions that may come into your mind while reading the poem.

Certain quotes from both the interviews interspersing with linking and explanatory comments in between will help understand Jussawalla's poetry. For the purpose of convenience, the interview excerpts have been presented in italics, commentary and the interviewer's questions are presented in regular type face.

The genesis of *Missing Person* is rooted in an important aspect of Adil's past — his stay and education at London and Oxford respectively and his subsequent return.

Ok, then why did I come back from England? I think again, it wasn't because I felt that it could help my writing. ... But I came back because I felt London and 'the West', if you like, had become a dead end for me. I needed to almost angrily and vehemently go deeper into my Indian side. It happens to every single one of us – I think you both bear me out – every one of us who goes abroad from here does feel that, hey this is not what I expected and why are they so ignorant about me and where I come from... and this had reached a terrible pitch during my first year at Oxford... How is it that friends of mine, undergraduates at Oxford, could pick up my play *Floodwaters*, which was set in India, and say, 'Who's interested in India?' Something of course that still continues. But that I suppose that would be the seed, those responses from which *Missing Person* grew.

The response was not to affirm that native geography, culture and individuality more militantly or ignore what the ignorers were writing. It was to delve deeper into that culture and self towards a richer historical analysis, self-definition and an understanding of where that anger at being ignored was originating.

Upon returning to India he started work on *New Writing in India Anthology*. Seeds of *Missing Person* can be detected in this concrete action programme against the crisis outlined earlier.

...Part of that missing person syndrome also involved your feeling that, these guys are so effing ignorant. You know, they don't know anything about Indian writers. I had that feeling right from the start, during Tagore's centenary – and now it shows how I've aged, because it was fifty years ago – in fact, I wrote a piece on Tagore for *The Times*. Obviously it wasn't going to be published, I didn't know the ropes, right? I just wanted that the writers I knew should be known, and I felt I should write about them. I did that by replying to John Wain's... what I thought was a supercilious piece, about his visit to India. I probably agree with everything he said at that time, but at that time I was furious... To say that 'the most fortunate inhabitants of India are the birds', because they have such freedom and others don't. I probably agree with that now, but at that time I had a sense of outrage. I wrote a reply, sarcastically, to *Encounter*. None of these things got published, but I'm talking about a feeling, which was shared by other Indians there – Farrukh

Dhondy, for instance, who came later, I think in '64, Hubert Nazareth, who came to London to work, and other people like Ajit Singh who was at Cambridge and who later became head of Associated Capsules here in Bombay. Wherever we could – and I say 'we', because there was a sense of some people being together – we tried to promote writers from India. To some extent it was successful.

Jussawalla had hoped that returning would somehow allow him to be whole, that is overcome the feeling of a compromised and fragmented self that he had returned with.

Yes, I think so, but instead it didn't make me whole, it made me a 'Marxist', right? I suppose practically everyone one I knew at that time was intuitively left of centre. In London, I really hadn't studied Marxism or any of the 'required books' of communism and Marx, at all. I did so only after I returned to India. Anyway, instead of becoming whole in India, in a sense, all the different parts of me seem to have exploded or disintegrated, which is what Missing Person is about. Because it seemed to me impossible, and still is impossible, for me to reconcile the extremes to which one is subjected living in India.

The extremes he refers to are not the ones in the society outside but inside his own self. The diverse sympathies, positions, commitments that life in India elicited in him left him fractured.

There was an answer forming at the back of my mind when you talked about my 'divided self being healed in some way' the first time, which was part of that poem 'Letter to Bombay'. I think that yes, in working on this anthology – I've never thought of it this way, but I'm – I am both physician and healer of myself – not a physician to others, but physician in the sense, I am diagnosing things. In that sense, yes, it has been a bringing together maybe of different elements in myself, but this was in some ways exploded in Missing Person.

One of the ways of healing himself was to undo the foreign influences that had made him and rediscover his native source of identity and self.

... if you decide even to undo all that's made you, which includes English literature, and that means Milton, Shakespeare, Hardy, whatever... If you feel that this has made you a worse person than you should be, or you feel that you have a potential of being a more useful, a more creative person, without these, if you like, 'foreign' influences... It seems a very foolish idea when you put it this way, but I think somewhere at the heart of every colonized person, there is this project of wanting to decolonize himself or herself; this has led to some terrible writing, especially in the field of theory, but I ask Peter, what happens is, after you do that, or you think you have done that, then what? What's the new person? You may have simply destroyed yourself, fragile as the self may have been, and fragile as the people must have been, you've just destroyed it with nothing to follow.

So I don't think the Missing Person act can be repeated, because it does... it deals with all kinds of failures to connect, to be unable to change. The hope of transcending it all. There's always the hope there. And there's a question mark about whether it happens or not, the transcendence. I'm aware of that problem. I think that's what you asked me about, the disintegration in Missing Person. But I'm also aware of the question, What follows? And so, I'm no longer stressed about these matters as much as I was when I was writing Missing Person. I mean, I have to accept that fundamentally, I can't change, and I have to ask – by I, I don't just mean me, it's also projecting onto other human beings – How far can we change ourselves? Or, in a Marxist sense, how far can we de-class ourselves? I don't really believe it's possible... fully.

When asked specifically about the significance of different voices in Part II and the fact that the first part features only one voice, Adil responded

At a certain stage I saw a clear division, that the second part has different people commenting on or... not directly, sometimes just putting down the thoughts they had on having seen what has gone before. And what has gone before, in the first part, I see – perhaps I should have made this clearer – as something of a horror film. Even the birth of the Missing Person is not to be taken too literally, it's seen in cinematic terms, because I begin with the words 'house full' [in part 1, section 1], which also refers to pregnancy just before birth – that's what I had in mind. And 'it's a shocker' and 'it's all happening' and the birth of a kind of monster. A sort of monster born into troubled times. I mean, this thing at birth has hair all over! Then the second section – I'm not sure if it's really successful, but – indicates that this is a film, called Missing Jack. And I use some clichés of cinema, such as the Western. I suppose – I'm not very sure, but I think what the lines in italics mean is actually the subject of the movie. The baby may be somewhat grown up, talking, saying this is only a movie, it's not so horrible as you think it is.

Asserting that the different voices in Missing Person belong to different persons, Adil refuses to acknowledge who the speaker is

I have said that you know, if you guys are too confused I should perhaps have given headings like, the first one could have been 'Lecturer' or 'Professor'. Because the images have to do with Eng. Lit., basically. The second might be more of a sympathetic biographer or a historian, who sees what process, has been going on, who has some insights into the character. Here again I'm on treacherous ground, because if he's not a real character, then how does he talk about the thoughts at the back of his head? But I think it's ok. He's a cloudy character.

Commenting on the ephemerality of the *Missing Person* Adil says

Is the missing person even missing as a person? Is he a construct, you know, part monster, part whatever. It's a concept I like, because it's something we ask ourselves, are we fully human...and I'm

android, and I'm alien! You know sometimes there are... one gets so disconnected from things that you ask yourself that kind of thing.

So is the second part of *Missing Person* audience members who have watched the film?

That's right. Something like that. Or different people who have seen... let's not call it a film, let's call it a spectacle in which film is involved. At the end of the first part [part 1, section 14], I use the audience too: 'Give up your seats and join the cast of thousands...' I'm asking them to participate in this orgy of destruction. And the head, like Orpheus' head, goes on singing.

And this is what I think this part, [also in part 1, section 14], 'Students of Eng. Lit., /still bunched around her merciful tit' is saying: you face more terror than you can take, and this is how you will end, you will end like the Missing Person, who is not quite a person himself. Which is what I say in that interview with Peter? That if what has made you is something that you resist, you see that as a defence or a carapace and break it, then you do face more terror than you can take. What follows is, you have a nervous and physical breakdown. So this is I think what I'm getting at. In a crude way, a very crude way, the difficulties of de-classing yourself in Marxist terms.

But I would like to put it more as the difficulties of finding yourself as a real person, which is more universal. We all go through this, that we are not what our parents tell us, what our textbooks tell us, and so on.

### Check Your Progress-3

1. Why is *Missing Person* considered to be a difficult text?
2. What are Jussawalla's comments on the ephemerality of the *Missing Person*?

## 4.5 The Poems of 'Missing Persons, Part II'

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Adil Jussawalla is among our highly sensitive 'exile' poets—a quality which at once strikes the reader as he moves with the poet in the quest of the Missing Person. Though not an expatriate in the sense A. K. Ramanujan and G. S. Sharat Chandra are, Jussawalla has had long sojourns abroad and has had painful experiences of the exile. Jussawalla's *Missing Person* collection came out fourteen years after his first collection *Land's End* was printed and the long gap had resulted in the full maturing of a poet in terms of theme as well as technique. *Land's End* does have excellent descriptive passages—they were written during his fairly long stay in Europe—but nothing as sensitive and as penetrating as the self-quest in his *Missing*

*Person.* Keki Daruwalla, another of our excellent poets, pays rich tributes to this long poem in fourteen sections thus: ‘Its staccato visuals, the strident gritty images, the subject that it tackles viz., the predicament of an intellectual of the middle classes, cannot but command respect and attention. The striking originality of this poem deserves critical attention at length. It is not only the technique which is cinematic but also the metaphor...’

#### 4.5.1 ‘Sea Breeze, Bombay’

*Partition’s people stitched  
Shrouds from a flag, gentlemen scissored Sind.  
An opened people, fraying across the cut  
country reknotted themselves on this island.  
Surrogate city of banks,  
Brokering and bays, refugees’ harbour and port,  
Gatherer of ends whose brick beginnings work  
Loose like a skin, spotting the coast,  
Restore us to fire. New refugees,  
Wearing blood-red wool in the worst heat,  
come from Tibet, scanning the sea from the north,  
Dazed, holes in their cracked feet.  
Restore us to fire. Still,  
Communities tear and re-form; and still, a breeze,  
Cooling our garrulous evenings, investigates nothing,  
Ruffles no tempers, uncovers no root,  
And settles no one adrift of the mainland’s histories.*

#### Explanation of ‘Sea Breeze, Bombay’

The poem begins with a description of the psychological and material fates of the people who were affected by the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The flag which acted as a symbol of their freedom and the cause of their displacement actually became a potent symbol of death. Following the flag, many could only use it as a cover for their dead bodies. This happened while inscriptions politicians pretending to be gentlemen partitioned the state of Sindh into two. Recollect that Jussawalla being a Parsi has cultural roots in the semitic tradition that exists in Sindh as well. He is perhaps recollecting the fate of the displaced Sindhi population who had to leave Pakistan and come to India experiencing a profound sense of social, cultural and psychological displacement as well as severing.



It is perhaps because of this that he refers to the refugees as an 'opened people' – people whose hearts and bodies have been splayed open. These opened people... across the line on which they have been cut joined themselves into a new community on this island of Bombay. The act of forcibly and awkwardly joining together what has been torn apart is effectively conveyed through the idea of a knot. Bombay is an island not only because it is surrounded by water on three sides but also because the refugees are surrounded by culturally different people and thus are virtually isolated on a cultural island.

Bombay acts as a substitute for their original house which lay similarly by the coast. The banks, brokers, bays, harbors and ports are all essentials of a port city – Bombay or Karachi. To the refugee ships the sight of the brick buildings on its harbours and its capacity to provide them with the hearth once again, would have appeared very pleasant.

Bombay has not stopped receiving refugees in the present in which Adil writes. New refugees continue to come into the city, this time not from Pakistan but from Tibet. Their attire made from coarse and bright wool contrasts with the fashionable clothing of the city dwellers. It is also out of place because the wool does not fit with the warm and humid weather of Bombay during most of the year.

They come in a decrepit state, scanning the horizon for a corner of safety and stability. They have travelled a long distance and that reflects in the holes and cracks in their feet. Like the earlier refugees they too demand that they be restored to a hearth around which their domestic lives can begin again.

A number of communities continue to break and reform across the word. But when in come across members of these re-formed communities, we seem to be oblivious of the tearing and re-forming which they have undergone in the recent past. The wind is here a metaphor for the atmosphere or environment in which the settlers and the settled interact.

The new settled world does not evoke any hostility in the settlers, does not uncover their roots and assimilates these refugee settlers into the present of mainland India. This assimilation is referred to negatively in the idea that no one is settled 'adrift' or made to settle into a cultural identity different from that of mainland India.

That perhaps is the assimilating, absorbing and 'settling' power of the mainland. Different people, because of different reasons have come to it as refugees and have been able to build a cultural homeland here. The mainland does not reject anyone. It only facilitates their absorptions and settlement.

#### 4.5.2 'Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay'

*Loud benedictions of the silver popes,  
 A cross to themselves, above  
 A union of homes as live as a disease.  
 Still, though the earth be stunk and populous,  
 We're told it's not: our Papa'll put his nose  
 Down on cleaner ground. Soon to receive  
 Its due, the circling heart, encircled, sees  
 The various ways of dying that are home.  
 'Dying is all the country's living for,'  
 A doctor says. 'We've lost all hope, all pride.'  
 I peer below. The poor, invisible,  
 Show me my place; that, in the air,  
 With the scavenger birds, I ride.  
 Economists enclosed in History's  
 Chinese boxes, citing Chairman Mao,  
 Know how a people nourished on decay  
 Disintegrate or crash in civil war.  
 Contrarily, the Indian diplomat,  
 Flying with me, is confident the poor  
 Will stay just as they are.  
 Birth  
 Pyramids the future with more birth.  
 Our only desert, space; to leave the green  
 Burgeoning to black, the human pall.  
 The free  
 Couples in their chains around the earth.  
 I take a second look. We turn,  
 Grazing the hills and catch a glimpse of sea.  
 We are now approaching Santa Cruz: all  
 Arguments are endless now and I  
 Feel the guts tighten and all my senses shake.  
 The heart, stirring to trouble in its clenched  
 Claw, shrivelled inside the casing of a cage*

*Forever steel and foreign, swoops to take  
 Freedom for what it is. The slums sweep  
 Up to our wheels and wings and nothing's free  
 But singing while the benedictions pour  
 Out of a closing sky. And this is home,  
 Watched by a boy as still as a shut door,  
 Holding a mass of breadcrumbs like a stone.*

### **Explanation of 'Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay'**

This poem appears to have been written as the poet approached the Santa Cruz airport in an aircraft while returning from one of his European sojourns, more specifically from Italy. It therefore recollects the benedictions or blessings showered by the Pope on his devotees. The benedictions of the silver popes are lauds because the poet does not intend to recall a specific incident of the pope blessing a congregation but the general process by which white and priests shower blessings on the congregation of devotees. While blessing the people the priests cross themselves as well, but this crossing and benediction actually happen while the pope or the priests stand above a congregation of poor, powerless and deprived people who as a community resemble a diseased portion of the body.

The second movement begins in the face of this massive body of stinking human population that constitutes the cities. Despite this reality of mankind, religious leaders keep denying it and insist that the human masses are actually beautiful.

The poet, seated in an aircraft encircling the Santa Cruz airport, funds himself occupying the position of a God, priest or any other superior figure who looks over a struggling humanity and creates a clean and organized space for himself amidst the chaos. The obvious reference is to the aircraft landing on an airport or a priest inhabiting the ordered and superior confines of a church. That is the complex of ideas and associations indicated by the image of Papa putting his nose down or cleaner ground.

The poet's heart which is circling at the moment in the sky gets overwhelmed with emotions about this pathetic state of a large majority of mankind. From the aircraft, when the poet looks down upon the squalor and poverty of the slums that are located near the Santa Cruz airport, he can see that they belong to the city that he calls his home. However, life is so squalid and depressing in these quarters that it appears as if living here is a preparation for or a way of dying. The poet who arrived at the idea that life in this squalor is about death because he has felt the unavailability and reality of imminent death amidst this poverty and squalor and that in turn has been shanghaied by the opinions of people like the doctor who feels

that 'Dying is all the country's living for' and therefore 'we have lost all hope, all pride'. It is therefore understandable that the thought of the poor living to die triggers the doctors' statements in the poet's mind.

It is with this dominant thought that the poet looks down upon the people on the ground and realizes his own position like a hunting or scavenging bird in the sky encircling its prey, waiting for the right moment to pounce on it and consume it. As a poet, who weaves his poetry out of this death-inducing poverty, Adil feels that his relationship with the poor and the dying masses is somewhat similar to the hunting birds. Like the predator, the poet preys upon their poverty to weave his own poems.

At this point the poet reaffirms the theme of this life as death for the poor by quoting Economists who cite the chairman of the Chinese communist party Mao Tse Tsung's belief that people who are fed on poverty and degeneration eventually become the cause of and the participants in a civil war and perish. In the process they also destroy other people and institutions in their society. The opinion of the Chinese Economist is contrary to the opinion of the Indian diplomat who is seated next to the poet on the aircraft. The Indian feels that the poor are inert and will not react in any significant way, thereby maintaining the status quo. This is the way things have been and will continue to remain. Meanwhile the human population especially of the poor and the miserable keeps multiplying only to be consumed in the fire of death.

The poet's aircraft circles the airport and gets ready for the touchdown. The poet now reports a queasy feeling of confusion, apprehension and loss of bearings which some novice fliers experience while landing. The poet is however interested in this queasy state not because he experiences it while landing but because the landing on Santa Cruz implies coming into contact with the 'death in life' situation in a real way. It is this cultural 'landing' which leads to the same feeling in his body. So, the mind swirls, guts tighten, heart feels clenched and shrivelled but his entire being makes a desperate effort to free itself from this predicament.

The majestic act of a big aircraft's swift touchdown is presented as if the slums sweep up to the wheels of the plane and the poet is back, once again in a land of chains and poverty.

No matter how uncomfortable the reality of the slum-ridden city is, it is nevertheless the poet's home and he must acknowledge it. The poet's landing and/or arrival in his home is watched by a poor boy who stands still like a shut door and holds a mass of breadcrumbs in his hands as if it were a stone.

This concluding image is powerful and every element needs explication. The person is a boy who is just beginning his life watching the world of the rich. A powerful process of anger at the difference and discrimination perceived by the boy may be lurking behind this line. The boy's eyes are

reverted on the landing and that is probably an indication of the inevitability of engagement between the haves and have-nots of this society.

The boy's immobility is a signifier of a stasis that may be the result of the blending of the anger and fascination. The breadcrumbs he holds in his hands signify the little that he has to survive on, while holding it as a stone reasserts the anger flowing through this boy's mind and body. If he could afford it, he would hit with the breadcrumbs but he cannot because he needs it for his survival. Should enough bread find its way into his stomach, this boy's anger will find certain expression in some form of violence and the violence may not be as innocent as pelting stones.

The poet is thus fairly conscious of the fact that the country he lands in is torn by latent strife. The anger of the poor, condemned to live a life for death is at the moment localized to the stare, the fixed body and the clenched fist. But that's not the way it will remain always. The image therefore forebodes a process of change, one that may employ varying degrees of violence.

#### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. What is the poet trying to suggest in the following lines:

*Restore us to fire. New refugees,  
Wearing blood-red wool in the worst heat,  
come from Tibet, scanning the sea from the north,  
Dazed, holes in their cracked feet.  
Restore us to fire. Still,  
Communities tear and re-form; and still, a breeze,  
Cooling our garrulous evenings, investigates nothing,  
Ruffles no tempers, uncovers no root,  
And settles no one adrift of the mainland's histories.*

2. What is the significance of the boy's immobility?

#### **4.6 Difficulties in Reading 'The Missing Person'**

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It has been mentioned earlier that the text in Missing Person is a difficult text. This section will discuss the causes for the text being difficult.

The poetry in it is complex, ironic, fragmented, non-linear, and formally strenuous. His works evoke and indict a dehumanized, spiritually sterile landscape, ravaged by contradiction, suspended in a perpetual state of catastrophe. Jussawalla's take on the post-colonial impulse is different. He does not look at the past to reaffirm the present. Rather, his poetry is born

of a decision to look the present unflinchingly in the face, in all its disfigured and fractured reality. There is no attempt to escape ‘the various ways of dying that are home.’

His poems have a highly political content presented through a highly refracted set of images. ‘Sea Breeze, Bombay’ explores the various problems of India such as Partition, the refugees from Tibet, and complains to the cooling sea breeze ‘investigates nothing’ and settles adrift of the mainland’s histories.’ Instead of accepting Indian life as it is, he asks us to ‘Restore us to fire.’

In ‘Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay’ the poet records not only his ambivalent feelings on his return to India, but sets them within the general political and social context. The slums he sees below are contrasted with the attitudes of the well-off passengers on board.

The poems in *Missing Person* explore his relation to India. By creating the persona of the typical middle-class intellectual the poet sees him as a victim of colonialism, and an ironic representative of the bourgeois romantic. This character is highly disillusioned and disappointed by the circumstances, and is unable to understand the contradiction between his longings and their possible solutions. This signals that Jussawalla’s poetry is becoming politicized as well as depersonalized. The creation of characters and the use of masks are tools to juxtapose the ironies that have become a means to guard the self.

The poem attempts to explore what lies beyond the alienation of the wasteland. In Jussawalla’s own words *Missing Person* is about disintegration, ‘my own personal disintegration has neither been very fundamental nor terrible.’ He continues to reject his upper-middle-class upbringing but no longer attempts to internalize the already dated ideals of European Catholic revivalism. The poet now seeks unity by identifying with a revolutionary process in which the people of the Third World will collectively create a new society.

### **Check Your Progress-5**

1. What does the poem ‘Sea Breeze, Bombay’ explore?
2. What does the poem ‘Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay’ state?

## **4.7 Let Us Sum Up**

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- Adil Jussawalla’s is known to write complex poetry and his writing style is characterized as being ironic, fragmented, non-linear and formally strenuous evoking and indicting a dehumanized and spiritually

sterile landscape, which is ravaged by contradiction and is perpetually suspended in a state of catastrophe.

- Jussawalla's poetic output has been small and selective. After 14 years of publishing *Land's End* he brought out his second volume *Missing Person* (1976). Apart from these, two extensive interviews to Peter Nazareth and Vivek Narayanan and Sharmistha Mohanty are also available as his expressive output. Jussawalla has been focused on writing poetry in English, exclusively Indian in style and themes.
- Jussawalla's highly acclaimed first book, *Land's End*, written almost entirely in England and Europe, was published when he was twenty-two. It was hailed by a critic as a book that captured 'the artificiality and vulgarity of this age, the paradoxical nature of our emotions and desires, the unbridgeable gulf between 'you' and 'I', between dream and reality and the beauty and ugliness of love.'
- The second book, *Missing Person* was written after his return to India, perhaps as a response to this complex crisis. 'If Ezekiel speaks of the 'Unfinished. Man' and Nandy of the 'Nowhere Ìàn,' Jussawalla sketches the *Missing Person* (Prema Nandakumar). While the poetic self that writes these poems wants to assert its reality and individuality, it becomes difficult to 'locate' that self in all senses of the term.
- Adil Jussawalla's *Missing Person* is a difficult text to understand, because it deals with the problem of an 'exile and return' self. To feel what the poem is saying one will have to understand the context in which it originated and took shape and how it involved a difficult negotiation with different ideas in the process of stabilizing an acceptable self.
- The poetry in *The Missing Person* is complex, ironic, fragmented, non-linear, and formally strenuous. His works evoke and indict a dehumanized, spiritually sterile landscape, ravaged by contradiction, suspended in a perpetual state of catastrophe. Jussawalla's take on the post-colonial impulse is different. He does not look at the past to reaffirm the present. Rather, his poetry is born of a decision to look the present unflinchingly in the face, in all its disfigured and fractured reality. There is no attempt to escape 'the various ways of dying that are home.'
- In Jussawalla's own words *Missing Person* is about disintegration, 'my own personal disintegration has neither been very fundamental nor terrible.' He continues to reject his upper-middle-class upbringing but no longer attempts to internalize the already dated ideals of European Catholic revivalism. The poet now seeks unity by identifying with a revolutionary process in which the people of the Third World will collectively create a new society.

## 4.8 Key Words

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- **Collage:** A collection or combination of various things
- **Montage:** The technique of producing a new composite whole from fragments of pictures, text, or music
- **Pop culture:** Cultural activities or commercial products reflecting, suited to, or aimed at the tastes of the general masses of people
- **Janus-faced:** Having two sharply contrasting aspects or characteristics
- **Romanticism:** A movement in the arts and literature which originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual
- **Bourgeoisie:** Relating to or belonging to the middle class of society
- **Dehumanization:** To deprive of human qualities such as individuality, compassion, or civility

## 4.9 Terminal Questions

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1. What life experiences have given Jussawalla's poetry a complex character?
2. What explanation does Jussawalla give for having different voices in Part II?
3. What do the poems in *Missing Person* depict?
4. Give a detailed account of the poem 'Sea Breeze, Bombay.' How does the poet describe Bombay in this poem?
5. Analyse the interview excerpts given in the unit and interpret Adil Jussawalla's viewpoint regarding *Missing Person*.

## 4.10 Suggested Readings

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- Jussawalla, Adil J. (1976). *Missing Person*. New York: Clearing House.
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- Natarajan, Nalini (ed.), Emmanuel Sampath Nelson. (1996). *Handbook of Twentieth-century Literatures of India*. Connecticut, United States: Greenwood Publishing Group.
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## 4.11 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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### Check Your Progress-1

1. His first volume of poems was *Land's End* and was published in 1962.
2. Adil Jussawalla's is known to write complex poetry and his writing style is characterized as being ironic, fragmented, non-linear and formally strenuous evoking and indicting a dehumanized and spiritually sterile landscape, which is ravaged by contradiction and is perpetually suspended in a state of catastrophe.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. Jussawalla's highly acclaimed first book, *Land's End*, written almost entirely in England and Europe, was published when he was twenty-two. It was hailed by a critic as a book that captured ‘the artificiality and vulgarity of this age, the paradoxical nature of our emotions and desires, the unbridgeable gulf between ‘you’ and ‘I’, between dream and reality and the beauty and ugliness of love.’
2. When asked in an interview by Peter Nazareth in 1978 about the peril of being incomprehensible, Jussawalla responded, ‘Well, I think the situation of the poet in India is such that being misunderstood is part of his function.’

### Check Your Progress-3

1. Adil Jussawalla's *Missing Person* is a difficult text to understand, because it deals with the problem of an ‘exile and return’ self.
2. On the ephemerality of the ‘Missing Person,’ Jussawalla comments as follows: ‘Is the missing person even missing as a person? Is he a construct, you know, part monster, part whatever. It's a concept I like, because it's something we ask ourselves, are we fully human...and I'm android, and I'm alien! You know sometimes there are... one gets so disconnected from things that you ask yourself that kind of thing.’

### Check Your Progress-4

1. The poet is suggesting that Bombay has not stopped receiving refugees in the present. They are not from Pakistan, but from Tibet. He further describes their woolen attire which is totally opposite of the fashionable clothing of Bombay. He also emphasizes that their woolen clothes do not fit in the warm and humid weather of Bombay.

The poet describes their mental and physical order stating that they come in a decrepit condition looking for safety and stability. From the holes and cracks in their feet, it becomes evident that they have travelled a long distance. Like the earlier refugees they also demand to be settled, so they can begin their life again.

2. The boy's immobility is a signifier of a stasis that may be the result of the blending of the anger and fascination. The breadcrumbs he holds in his hands signify the little that he has to survive on, while holding it as a stone reasserts the anger flowing through this boy's mind and body. If he could afford it, he would hit with the breadcrumbs but he cannot because he needs it for his survival. Should enough bread find its way into his stomach, this boy's anger will find certain expression in some form of violence and the violence may not be as innocent as pelting stones.

### **Check Your Progress-5**

1. 'Sea Breeze, Bombay' explores the various problems of India such as Partition, the refugees from Tibet, and complains to the cooling sea breeze 'investigates nothing' and settles adrift of the mainland's histories.' Instead of accepting Indian life as it is, he asks us to 'Restore us to fire.'
2. The poem 'Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay' states the poet records—not only his ambivalent feelings on his return to India, but sets them within the general political and social context. The slums he sees below are contrasted with the attitudes of the well-off passengers on board.



## UNIT - 5

# VIKRAM SETH: *THE HUMBLE ADMINISTRATOR'S GARDEN*

### Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Vikram Seth: A Short Biography
- 5.3 Works, Awards and Recognition
  - 5.3.1 His Works
  - 5.3.2 Awards and Recognition
- 5.4 *The Golden Gate*: An Introduction
- 5.5 The Real Humble Administrator's Garden
- 5.6 Analysis of *The Humble Administrator's Garden*
  - 5.6.1 Contents of *The Humble Administrator's Garden*
  - 5.6.2 Themes
  - 5.6.3 Nature in the Humble Administrator
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Key Words
- 5.9 Terminal Questions
- 5.10 Suggested Readings
- 5.11 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

### 5.0 Objectives

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

- Identify Vikram Seth's writing style
- List Vikram Seth's awards and recognitions
- Interpret Vikram Seth's book *The Golden Gate*
- Describe the real *Humble Administrator's Garden*
- Analyse the poem *The Humble Administrator's Garden*

### 5.1 Introduction

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Vikram Seth was born on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1952 at Calcutta, India. He is a well-known Indian poet, novelist and travel writer. Some of his major works include his verse novel *The Golden Gate* (1986) and his epic novel *A Suitable Boy* (1993). Seth's works present a variety of subjects based on his experiences and travels. The poetry collections *The Humble Administrator's Garden* and *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990) merge

Chinese, Indian, and Californian influences. *Heaven Lake* details the hitchhiking trip through Nepal and Tibet that Seth took while a student in China; and *The Golden Gate* is about young professionals in San Francisco, searching for love and identity. In this unit, we will discuss his book *The Humble Administrator's Garden*, which is a collection of his poetry.

## 5.2 Vikram Seth: A Short Biography

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Seth was born on 20 June 1952 to Leila and Prem Seth in Calcutta, one a judge and the other a businessman. Seth was raised in London and India. He spent part of his childhood in Patna since his mother was posted there for a while. He attended St. Xavier's High School.

Seth spent part of his youth in London and returned to India in 1957. He received primary education at Welham Boys' School and then moved to The Doon School. While at Doon, Seth was the editor-in-chief of *The Doon School Weekly*. After graduating from The Doon School in India, Seth went to Tonbridge School, England to complete his A-levels, where he developed an interest in poetry and learned Chinese. After obtaining a degree from Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Seth moved to California to work on a graduate degree in economics at Stanford University. He then went on to study creative writing at Stanford and classical Chinese poetry at Nanjing University in China. In 1987 he returned to India to live with his family in New Delhi. Having lived in London for many years, Seth now maintains residences near Salisbury, England, where he is a participant in local literary and cultural events, having bought and renovated the house of the Anglican poet George Herbert in 1996, and in Jaipur.

Seth self-identifies as bisexual. In 2006, he became a leader of the campaign against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a law against homosexuality. Leila Seth, his mother wrote about Seth's sexuality and her coming to terms with it in her memoir.

### Check Your Progress-1

1. Which novel of Vikram Seth speaks about his hitchhiking trip to Tibet?
2. Name two major works of Vikram Seth.

## 5.3 Works, Awards and Recognition

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He has written several novels and poetry books. He has received several awards including Padma Shri, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, WH Smith Literary

Award and Crossword Book Award. Seth's collections of poetry such as *Mapping* and *Beastly Tales* are notable contributions to the Indian English language poetry Canon.

### 5.3.1 His Works

Seth's first volume of poetry, *Mappings*, published in 1980, did not attract critical attention. It was the publication of his humorous travelogue *From Heaven Lake* (1983), the story of his journey hitchhiking from Nanking to New Delhi via Tibet that actually turned the critics' attention towards his writing. *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985) and *The Golden Gate*, followed. Seth continued to use controlled poetic form in his 1990 collection *All You Who Sleep Tonight*, and he also wrote the 10 stories of *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1992) in tetrameter couplets. A collection entitled *The Poems; 1981–1994* was published in 1995. He turned to prose, however, in *A Suitable Boy*, which depicts relations between four Indian families. The book's compelling narrative and great length invited critical comparisons to Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Honoré de Balzac, and Charles Dickens. His next novel, *An Equal Music* (1999), is a love story set in the world of professional musicians.

### 5.3.2 Awards and Recognition

- 1983** : Thomas Cook Travel Book Award for *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet*
- 1985** : Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia) *The Humble Administrator's Garden*
- 1993** : Irish Times International Fiction Prize (shortlist) for *A Suitable Boy*
- 1994** : Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book) for *A Suitable Boy*
- 1994** : WH Smith Literary Award for *A Suitable Boy*
- 1999** : Crossword Book Award for *An Equal Music*
- 2001** : EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Best Book/Novel *An Equal Music*
- 2005** : Pravasi Bharatiya Samman
- 2007** : Padma Shri in Literature & Education

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. Who has Vikram Seth been compared to by critics after the publishing of *A Suitable Boy*?
2. What is the storyline of Vikram Seth's novel *An Equal Love*?

#### **5.4 The Golden Gate: An Introduction**

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*The Golden Gate* (1986) is the first novel by poet and novelist Vikram Seth. The work is a novel in verse composed of 590 Onegin stanzas (sonnets written in iambic tetrameter, with the rhyme scheme following the *ababccddeffegg* pattern of *Eugene Onegin*). It was inspired by Charles Johnston's translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

Set in the 1980s, *The Golden Gate* follows a group of yuppies in San Francisco. The inciting action occurs when protagonist John Brown, at the advice of his friend Janet Hayakawa, places an amorous advertisement of himself in the newspaper; the latter answered, at length, by trial-lawyer Elisabeth ('Liz') Dorati. A short heyday follows, in which Seth introduces and develops a variety of characters united in part by their interest in self-actualization (often in the form of agriculture) and in part by closeness to Liz or John. Thereafter is depicted the progress of their marriage *de facto* until its dissolution, which results in the legal marriage of Liz to John's friend 'Phillip ('Phil') Weiss', and the birth of their son. Following his rejection of Liz, John finds a second paramour in Janet, until the latter and two other friends die in an automobile collision; and is himself invited to stand godfather to Liz's son.

The novel brought its author the 1988 Sahitya Akademi Award for English, by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters.

At the time of the novel's composition, Seth was a graduate student in Economics at Stanford University; portions of it make reference to the *Printers Inc. Bookstore* and *Cafe* in Palo Alto, California (sections 8.13 and 8.14). Seth described the origins of the novel as a 'pure fluke.' While conducting tedious research for his dissertation, Seth would divert himself with trips to the bookstore.

'On one such occasion, I found in the poetry section, two translations of *Eugene Onegin*, Alexander Pushkin's great novel in verse. Two translations but each of them maintained the same stanzaic form that Pushkin had used. Not because I was interested in Pushkin or Eugene Onegin, but purely because I thought, this is interesting technically that both of them should have been translated so faithfully, at least as far as the form goes. I began

to compare the two translations, to get access to the original stanzas behind them, as I don't know Russian. After a while, that exercise failed, because I found myself reading one of them for pure pleasure. I must have read it five times that month. It was addictive. And suddenly, I realized that this was the form I was looking for to tell my tales of California. The little short stories I had in my mind subsided and this more organically oriented novel came into being. I loved the form, the ability that Pushkin had to run through a wide range of emotions, from absolute flippancy to real sorrow and passages that would make you think, during and after reading it.'

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. What inspired Vikram Seth to use onegin stanzas in his novel *The Golden Gate*?
2. What award did Vikram Seth win after the publication of *The Golden Gate*?

## **5.5 The Real Humble Administrator's Garden**

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It is just another garden if you don't know the history, but if you know the history, the garden in question is a remarkable site that deserves everyone's attention. It is therefore understandable that Seth should use this site to explore an interesting juncture between nature and history. In his poems it emerges as a place where his acute observation of nature can be used in the service of politics and culture. Indeed, Seth's poem reads the garden as a political and cultural text inscribed with as much of history as the present.

Many have described the Humble Administrator's Garden as a renowned Chinese garden in Suzhou, considered by some to be the finest garden in all of southern China. In 1997, it was proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In 1513, Wang Xiancheng, an Imperial Envoy and poet of the Ming Dynasty created a garden on the site of the dilapidated Dahong Temple which had been burnt during the Ming conquest. In 1510, he retired to his native home of Suzhou under the occasion of his father's death. He had experienced a tumultuous official life punctuated by various demotions and promotions, and gave up his last official post as magistrate of Yongjia County in Zhejiang province, and began to work on the garden. This garden, meant to express his fine taste, received close attention from the renowned artist, Suzhou native and friend Wen Zhengming. The garden was named (first evidence around 1517 after a verse by the famous scholar official of the Jin Dynasty, Pan Yue, in his prose, *An Idle Life*, 'I enjoy a carefree life by planting trees and building my own house...I irrigate my garden and grow vegetables for me to eat...such a life suits a retired official like me well.' This



verse symbolized Wang's desire to retire from politics and adopt a hermit's life in the manner of Tao Yuanming. In the Xianju rhyme-prose, he writes 'This is the way of ruling for an unsuccessful politician'. It took 16 years until 1526 to complete. Wen Zhenming wrote an essay Notes of Wang's Humble Administrator's Garden, and painted Landscapes of the Humble Administrator's Garden in 1533 including 31 paintings and poems to commemorate the garden. Wen produced a second album of eight leaves showing sites in the garden in 1551, with different views but the same poems as in 1533.

The garden contains numerous pavilions and bridges set among a maze of connected pools and islands. It consists of three major parts set about a large lake: the central part (Zhuozheng Yuan), the eastern part (once called Guitianyuanju, Dwelling Upon Return to the Countryside), and a western part (the Supplementary Garden). The house lies in the south of the garden. In total, the garden contains 48 different buildings with 101 tablets, 40 stelae, 21 precious old trees, and over 700 Suzhou-style penjing/penzai. According to Lou Qingxi, compared with the layout from the Zhenghe Period in the Ming Dynasty, the garden 'now has more buildings and islets', and although lacks a 'lofty' feeling, it is 'still a masterpiece of meticulous work'.

#### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. Where is the original Humble Administrator's Garden located?
2. Who created the Humble Administrator's Garden?

## **5.6 Analysis of *The Humble Administrator's Garden***

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*The Humble Administrator's Garden* is a collection of poems written by Vikram Seth in 1985. The book has been divided into three sections. Each section depicts a country and its influence on Vikram Seth. The first section is titled 'Wutong' and is inspired by his years of study and travel to China. The second section is titled 'Neem' and speaks of the Indian influences of his native country. The third and final section is 'Live-Oak' and deals with Seth's Californian influences when he studied at Stanford.

### **5.6.1 Contents of *The Humble Administrator's Garden***

#### **(i) Wutong**

- A Little Night Music
- The Master-of-Nets Garden

- The Humble Administrator's Garden
- The North Temple Tower
- The Gentle Waves Pavilion
- The Tarrying Garden
- The Great Confucian Temple, Suzhou
- Nanjing Night
- Evening Wheat
- The Accountant's House
- Research in Jiangsu Province
- From a Traveller
- A Little Distance
- A Hangzhou Garden
- From an "East is Red" Steamer

**(ii) Neem**

- Profiting
- The They
- The Comfortable Classes at Work and Play
- The Gift
- Homeless
- From the BaburNama: Memoirs of Babur, First Moghul Emperor of India

**(iii) Live-Oak**

- Curious Mishaps
- Song: "Coast Starlight"
- From California
- Song: "Waiting"
- Between Storms
- And Some Have Madness Thrust Upon Them
- Spring of Content
- Moonlight
- Abalone Soup
- Love and Work
- Ceasing upon the Midnight
- Unclaimed

The poem opens on a fairly sensuous description of natural life and processes. A plump golden fish is nudging the stem and leaves of a lily making the raindrops on its surface fall of like small droplets of mercury. The owner of the garden who is walking around and surveying this site utters his first words of approval short of appreciation: ‘Not bad, Not bad’

The opening invites us to imagine a lavish and extensive garden built by a powerful administrator. The administrator’s sense of luxury and aesthetics is presented in the way a beautiful and ordered world of nature is interwoven around concrete structures like the Fragrant Chamber and the Rainbow Bridge. The idea behind these structures as well as the beautiful and ordered nature is to suggest the lavish indulgence of the senses that operates in this luxurious garden.

The poet here sneaks in and ironically dismisses the ‘dubious means’ by which Mr. Wang earned the resources to construct this garden. However, the beauty of the garden overshadows the means by which it was achieved because there is no relation between beauty and scruples. The irony here operates at the level of the suggestions that a beauty created out of ‘dubious means’ like appropriation of the rights of the poor should actually appear ugly and oppressive to its viewers who have any moral sense. The administrator is thus established as a callous, insensitive and scrupleless aesthete.

So utterly unconcerned about the moral implications of his earnings and expenditure, this administrator goes on to indulge his senses in the beauty and order of his creation to which nature contributes its glories. So a bee sucks nectar from a lotus and a passing fish is fed with a dumpling. These actions are interspersed with the administrator examining a bamboo grow and plucking the fruits off a loquat tree.

### 5.6.2 Themes

**The Administrator’s Plenty:** As the note on the garden told you, this garden was made by an unsuccessful politician, perhaps as an assertion of his economic, cultural and aesthetic power in the face of his failure as a politician. The means to exhibit these powers have been acquired through dubious ways but this is a blatant assertion of an individual’s power and is thus completely oblivious of its moral implementations.

The richness and extent of the garden at the level of this concept, details and execution indicates that this is less of a garden and more of a kingdom. Drawn away from the larger kingdom, with a frustrated imperial impulse, the administrator recreates a new kingdom from himself in this garden through his dubiously acquired means.

### 5.6.3 Nature in the Humble Administrator

One school of critics believe that the division of Seth's poetry collection titled *The Humble Administrator's Garden* uses markers from nature, specific to the three countries it describes. So India is represented by the section Neem, while China and America by Wutong and Live-Oak respectively. Such a division suggests the poet's keen intimacy and fluent appreciation of nature. Nature provides him with a vocabulary with which he can talk about the politics, culture and economies of different countries in the word.

The detailed description of nature, down to its minutest details that forms the bulk of this poem confirms all the claims made earlier. As words link with other words all the senses come into play— sight, sound, fragrance, touch and a greatly serene atmosphere, as if the Administrator and the garden are in a state of perfect harmony.

That nature is capable of striking this note of harmony with man (or vice-versa) and capable of inducing complete tranquility and serenity in man is one of the important ideas in Seth's poetry. Nature after all, in this structured, organized and beautiful form can become a substitute for an entire kingdom's politics for the administrator. That is the power which awes Seth.

#### Check Your Progress-5

1. In the book *The Humble Administrator's Garden*, what does Wutong depict?
2. What do the three sections of the book *The Humble Administrator* suggest about the poet?

## 5.7 Let Us Sum Up

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- Vikram Seth was born on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1952 at Calcutta, India. He is a well-known Indian poet, novelist and travel writer. Some of his major works include his verse novel *The Golden Gate* (1986) and his epic novel *A Suitable Boy* (1993).
- He has written several novels and poetry books. He has received several awards including Padma Shri, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, WH Smith Literary Award and Crossword Book Award. Seth's collections of poetry such as *Mapping* and *Beastly Tales* are notable contributions to the Indian English language poetry Canon.

- The compelling narrative and great length of *The Suitable Boy* invited critical comparisons to Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Honoré de Balzac, and Charles Dickens.
- *The Golden Gate* (1986) is the first novel by poet and novelist Vikram Seth. The work is a novel in verse composed of 590 Onegin stanzas (sonnets written in iambic tetrameter, with the rhyme scheme following the *ababccdeffegg* pattern of *Eugene Onegin*). It was inspired by Charles Johnston's translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.
- In Vikram Seth's poems, the original Humble Administrator's Garden emerges as a place where his acute observation of nature can be used in the service of politics and culture. Seth's poem reads the garden as a political and cultural text inscribed with as much of history as the present.
- *The Humble Administrator's Garden* is a collection of poems written by Vikram Seth in 1985. The book has been divided into three sections. Each section depicts a country and its influence on Vikram Seth. The first section is titled Wutong and is inspired by his years of study and travel to China. The second section is titled Neem and speaks of the Indian influences of his native country. The third and final section is Live-Oak and deals with Seth's Californian influences when he studied at Stanford.

## 5.8 Key Words

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- **Tetrameter:** A verse of four measures
- ***Eugene Onegin*:** A novel in verse written by Alexander Pushkin
- **Iambic tetrameter:** A meter in poetry. It refers to a line consisting of four iambic feet. The word 'tetrameter' simply means that there are four feet in the line; iambic tetrameter is a line comprising four iambs.

## 5.9 Terminal Questions

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1. Name one novel which Vikram Seth wrote in tetrameter couplets.
2. List the awards and recognition that Vikram Chandra has received for his literary contributions.
3. Briefly summarize Vikram Seth's first novel, *The Golden Gate*.
4. Describe the original Humble Administrator's Garden. How did it come into existence?

5. What is the poet trying to suggest by the theme of ‘Administrator’s plenty’?
6. Analyse the concept of nature in the book *The Humble Administrator’s Garden*.

### 5.10 Suggested Readings

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- Gupta, Roopali. (2005). *Vikram Seth’s Art: An Appraisal*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist.
- Mohanty, Seemita. (2007). *A Critical Analysis of Vikram Seth’s Poetry and Fiction*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist.
- Seth, Vikram. (1985). *The Humble Administrator’s Garden*. United Kingdom: Carcanet.
- Prasad, G. J. V. (2004). *Vikram Seth, An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- Shah, Nila, Pramod K. Nayar. (2000). *Modern Indian Poetry in English: Critical Studies* Canada: Creative Books.

### 5.11 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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#### Check Your Progress-1

1. *Heaven Lake* details the hitchhiking trip through Nepal and Tibet that Seth took while a student in China.
2. Some of Vikram Seth’s major works include his verse novel *The Golden Gate* (1986) and his epic novel *A Suitable Boy* (1993).

#### Check Your Progress-2

1. Vikram Seth was compared with authors like Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Honoré de Balzac, and Charles Dickens after the publishing of *A Suitable Boy*.
2. Vikram Seth’s novel *An Equal Love* is a love story set in the world of professional musicians.

#### Check Your Progress-3

1. Vikram Seth was inspired by Charles Johnston’s translation of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* to use Onegin stanzas in his novel *The Golden Gate*.
2. Vikram Seth won the 1988 Sahitya Akademi Award for English.

**Check Your Progress-4**

1. The Humble Administrator's Garden is located in Suzhou, China.
2. The Humble Administrator's Garden was created by Wang Xiancheng, who was an imperial envoy and poet of the Ming Dynasty.

**Check Your Progress-5**

1. Wutong is the first section of the book *The Humble Administrator's Garden* and it depicts Vikram Seth's years of study and travel to China.
2. The three sections Wutong, Neem and Live-oak in the book *The Humble Administrator Garden* suggest the poet's appreciation of nature.

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## **BLOCK-B: FICTION**

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# UNIT - 1

## ANITA DESAI: *FASTING, FEASTING*

### Structure

- 1.0 Unit Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Anita Desai: A Short Biographical Note
- 1.3 Introduction to Anita Desai's Writing Style
- 1.4 *Fasting, Feasting*: A Critical Summary
- 1.5 Major Characters in *Fasting, Feasting*
- 1.6 Major Themes in *Fasting, Feasting*
- 1.7 Narrative Technique
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Key Words
- 1.10 Suggested Readings
- 1.11 Terminal Questions
- 1.12 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

### 1.0 Objectives

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

- Identify Anita Desai, the author
- Evaluate the writing style of Anita Desai
- Critically examine Anita Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting*
- Examine the major characters and themes in *Fasting, Feasting*

### 1.1 Introduction

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Anita Desai is an English language Indian novelist and author of children's books who excelled in evoking character and mood through visual images. She is a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London. Anita Mazumdar Desai is an Indian novelist and Emeritus John E. Burchard Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She has been shortlisted for the Booker prize three times. Her daughter, the author Kiran Desai, is the winner of the 2006 Booker prize. In this unit, we will discuss the author Anita Desai, her writing style and critically analyse her novel *Fasting, Feasting* with a thorough examination of the major characters in the novel along with the major themes running throughout the novel.

## 1.2 Anita Desai: A Short Biographical Note

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Born in Mussoorie in 1937, Anita Desai has lived in several cities in India (Bombay, Delhi, and Calcutta) before finally leaving for the United States. Her mother, Toni Nime was of German origin and her father, D. N. Mazumdar was a Bengali businessman. This mixed parentage developed her knowledge of both Indian and Western culture from early on. She grew up speaking German at home and Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English at school and in the city streets. She has said that she grew up surrounded by Western literature and music, not realizing until she was older that this was an anomaly in her world where she also learned the Eastern culture and customs.

At the age of twenty-one, Anita Mazumdar married Ashvin Desai, the director of a computer software company and author of the book *Between Eternities: Ideas on Life and the Cosmos*. She then went on to raise four children, including Booker Prize-winning novelist Kiran Desai before becoming known for her writing. Her first book, *Cry, the Peacock* was published in England in 1963, and her better known novels include *In Custody* (1984), which was also adapted into a movie by Merchant Ivory Productions with the same name and *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988). She once wrote: 'I see India through my mother's eyes, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father's, of someone born here.' Though she taught at MIT, in the United States of America in the later phase of her life, Desai was living in India when she wrote some of the earlier novels that brought her under public gaze. *Fasting, Feasting* being a relatively recent publication (first published in 2000) shows a perspective, on the Indian and American societies, of an insider who is also outside.

Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, was published in 1963, and since then, she has published numerous novels as well as short story collections and children's books. She lived and worked in India until the early 1990s, when she started to share her time between her home country and the United States. Despite her German Indian parentage, she finds her identity 'totally Indian', although she also has made a distinction between her feelings and her thoughts regarding India: 'I feel about India as an Indian, but I suppose I think of it as an outsider'. This outsider's view on India can either be interpreted as strength, as a 'critical distance', or a weakness; some critics even accuse Desai of Eurocentrism: presenting India as a backward country to the already prejudiced western audience.

### Her Literary Works

**1963:** *Cry, The Peacock*, Peter Owen

**1965:** *Voices in the City*, Peter Owen

**1975:** *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Vikas (New Delhi)

- 1977:** *Fire on the Mountain*, Heinemann  
**1978:** *Games at Twilight and Other Stories*, Heinemann  
**1979:** *The Peacock Garden*, illustrated by Jeroo Roy, Heinemann  
**1980:** *Clear Light of Day*, Heinemann  
**1982:** *The Village By the Sea*, Heinemann  
**1984:** *In Custody*, Heinemann  
**1987:** *Baumgartner's Bombay*, Heinemann  
**1995:** *Journey to Ithaca*, Heinemann  
**1999:** *Fasting, Feasting*, Chatto & Windus  
**2000:** *Diamond Dust and Other Stories*, Chatto & Windus  
**2004:** *The Zig Zag Way*, Chatto & Windus  
**2011:** *The Artist of Disappearance*, Chatto & Windus

#### Awards

- 1978:** National Academy of Letters Award, *Fire on the Mountain*  
**1978:** Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize, *Fire on the Mountain*  
**1980:** Booker Prize for Fiction, *Clear Light of Day*, shortlist  
**1983:** Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, *The Village by the Sea*  
**1984:** Booker Prize for Fiction, *In Custody*, shortlist  
**1993:** Neil Gunn Prize  
**1999:** Booker Prize for Fiction, *Fasting, Feasting*, shortlist  
**2000:** Alberto Moravia Prize for Literature (Italy)

### Check Your Progress-1

1. When did Anita Desai publish her first novel?
2. Which of Anita Desai's novels was adapted into a movie by Merchant Ivory Productions?
3. In what year did Anita Desai win the Neil Gunn Prize?

### 1.3 Introduction to Anita Desai's Writing Style

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Desai writes only in English. This, she has repeatedly said, was a natural and unconscious choice for her: 'I can state definitely that I did not choose English in a deliberate and conscious act and I'd say perhaps it was the language that chose me and I started writing stories in English at the age of seven, and have been doing so for thirty years now without stopping to think why.'

She is considered the writer who introduced the psychological novel in the tradition of Virginia Woolf to India. Included in this, is her pioneer status of writing of feminist issues. While many people today would not classify her work as feminist, she believes this is due to changing times: 'The feminist movement in India is very new and a younger generation of readers in India tends to be rather impatient of my books and to think of them as books about completely helpless women, hopeless women. They find it somewhat unreal that the women don't fight back, but they don't seem to realize how very new this movement is.'

Her writing is realistic, she claims: 'Women think I am doing a disservice to the feminist movement by writing about women who have no control over their lives. But I was trying, as every writer tries to do, even in fiction, to get at the truth, write the truth. It would have been really fanciful if I had made [for example, in *Clear Light of Day*] Bim and Tara modern day feminists'.

Desai has typically concentrated on the feminine psyche and feelings of loneliness and alienation. Her stories often involve troubled relationships between married couples or family members. Desai's restriction to middle or upper class characters has sometimes been criticized; some critics find middle class characters 'unrepresentative' of Indian women or India generally. However, even though Desai's characters hardly suffer from poor conditions from a purely material point of view, they do face predicaments of other kinds: the social injustice hidden behind the bourgeois façade. One might also question whether it is realistic to expect a single writer to be able to represent India in a way that would be 'representative' of all the more than one billion people living in India, and whether this kind of representation is possible and necessary.

In an interview in 2001, Desai described a change that was taking place in her literary production. She felt that she was returning to the same topics over and over again—to the portrayal of the lives of women, especially women 'who are confined to home and family'. This is why she deliberately wanted to broaden her horizons and started to write more about male characters. This tendency is evident in her novel *Fasting, Feasting* where the second part of the novel is narrated from Arun's perspective.

She never considered trying to first publish in India because there was no publisher in India who would be interested in fiction by an Indian writer and it was first in England that her work was noticed. U.S. readers were slower to discover her, due, she believes to England's natural interest in India and the U.S.'s lack of comprehension regarding the foreignness of her subject.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. What do Anita Desai's novels reflect of her writing style?
2. What do critics state about the upper and middle class characters in Desai's novels?

#### 1.4 *Fasting, Feasting: A Critical Summary*

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The summary of *Fasting, Feasting* has been divided into a number of subsections. Each subsection speaks about an important event or a plot movement within the story.

The novel begins with a snapshot of MamaPapa frozen in time. This could be a scene that has repeated itself everyday and for a long time now. On the verandah of the house, sharing the seat of a swing they could be asleep, dozing—their eyes are hooded as if in a limbo where nothing matters—until a sudden deluge of ideas hit them and they order their eldest daughter Uma to carry out without delay. Both the parents appear to have merged into a single identity MamaPapa/PapaMama, as if they have a ‘Siamese twin existence’. Hence, whenever MamaPapa say something, and whoever says it, it comes with double the intensity and power so that it cannot be defied at all. ‘Having fused into one, they had gained so much in substance, in stature, in authority, that they loomed large enough as it was; they did not need separate histories and backgrounds to make them even more immense’. Despite a slight variation in the roles they have chosen to play, Papa’s of ‘scowling’ and ‘Mama’s scolding’, in terms of opinion, they never differed from each other. Therefore, if one refused there would not be any ‘point in appealing to the other.

Uma is asked first to inform the cook to prepare sweets for her father, with neglectful impatience that she has been already asked to pack a parcel to be sent to her brother Arun in America. While she comes literally running on her toes, she is entrusted with an additional job of writing a letter to their son. The novel later informs us that this is not an isolated event. ‘All morning MamaPapa have found things for Uma to do. It is as if Papa’s retirement is to be spent in this manner—sitting on the red swing in the veranda with Mama, rocking, and finding ways to keep Uma occupied. As long as they can do that, they themselves feel busy and occupied’ Uma is repressed, oppressed and imprisoned at home and what has been just described is an instance of the nature of oppression and its likely cause. It is as if her parents have clearly forgotten that Uma may have a life of her own and looks upon her as made to serve just them.

The next important section shows Papa taking the women of the house for a walk. Women are not allowed outings usually, but when Papa feels that the women laze around the house too much, then they would be taken to the park for a walk.

On this occasion, like the earlier ones, Uma fails to keep pace with Papa as he walks at a pace clearly unmatched by his wife and daughter. Eventually Papa has walked far away, and she is left in the company of Mama, but she dare not attempt to buy any of the tempting eatables: 'Uma finds saliva gathering at the corners of her mouth at the smell of the spiced, roasted gram but decides to say nothing'. When Papa reaches the end of the park, Uma is blamed for being 'slow' when all the while Uma could not figure out why they were hurrying just to go back home. All this as we shall see is loaded with political meaning.

Likewise, the children are not allowed to have any sense of privacy even when they have grown up. Uma, Aruna as well as Arun are not allowed to shut any doors in the household. For this meant secrets, nasty secrets, which are impermissible: 'It meant authority would come stalking in and make a search to seize upon the nastiness, the unclean blot.'

Where we stop next in the novel relates to children's education. MamaPapa decide which of their children should have education and how much of it. Uma excitedly looks forward to school-going as a pleasant escape from her domestic imprisonment. The convent school for her is 'streaked with golden promise'. So, she always goes early to the school and later finds some excuse to linger there for longer time. Conversely, she feels deprived during dull weekends when she is left at home: 'There were the wretched weekends when she was plucked back into the trivialities of her home, which seemed *a denial, a negation of life* as it ought to be, somber and splendid, and then the endless summer vacation when the heat reduced even that pointless existence to further *vacuity*'.

Later, when Mama gives birth to the third baby, Arun, Uma is forced to stop going to school. Uma protests vehemently but she is coaxed, cajoled and finally threatened to accept her Mama's decision: 'But ayah can do this—ayah can do that—' Uma tried to protest when the orders began to come thick and fast. This made Mama look stern again. 'You know we can't leave the baby to the servant,' she said severely. 'He needs proper attention.' When Uma pointed out that ayah had looked after her and Aruna as babies, Mama's expression made it clear it was quite a different matter now, and she repeated threateningly: 'Proper attention.'

Subsequent pages find Uma looking forward towards her marriage to give her the much-needed relief, yet, unfortunately, she returns home frustrated

after a deceitful marriage and subsequent divorce. Her husband has been an ill-justified choice explainable only through the sense of matching (or getting rid of) a mediocre woman through a callous husband. What is remarkable here is the absence of guilt or grief in the parents after Uma's return. The emotion that rightly describes MamaPapa's response is perhaps disgust. They assess the failed marriage as yet another confirmation of Uma's worthlessness and hold her guilty of not having been able to save the marriage.

But everyone around is not so insensitive. Back at home, Dr. Dutt offers her a job which the parents do not take kindly to. When he persists on taking Uma for the job, Mama lies of an illness for which she needs Uma to nurse her. Similarly, MamaPapa refuse to send her to Mrs. O'Henry's party because of the apprehension that Mrs. O'Henry and her daughter might convince her to be converted into a Christian nun.

Reduced thus to someone who does not deserve education, then a baby-sitter and finally an unpaid servant for her self-centred parents whose freedom is controlled absolutely, Uma finds no escape from this domestic imprisonment.

Even while the novel explores Uma's imprisonment, a brief repose of happiness and freedom occurs when she is allowed to accompany her ailing aunt, Mira-Masi, on a pilgrimage. During their stay in an ashram, Uma hears the barks and howls of the dogs around:

At night she lay quietly on her mat, listening to the ashram dog bark. Then other dogs in distant villages, out along the river bed and over in the pampas grass, or in wayside shacks and hovels by the highway—barked back. They howled long messages to each other. Their messages traveled back and forth through the night darkness which was total, absolute. Gradually the barks sank into it and drowned. Then it was silent. That was what Uma felt her own life to have been—full of barks, howls, messages, and now—silence.

This proves an epiphanic moment for her as she identifies a profound similarity between what went on in her life and the animals' sounds. Notice the associations of chaos, bestiality, self-centered expressions and insensitive commands which these animals' sounds signify. No wonder, Uma reads a similarity between them and the patriarchal voices she hears around herself.

The next important section depicts the imprisoned and exploited Uma with all her bottled-up and repressed grief feel utterly friendless and alone. When at home she is merely surrounded by MamaPapa and their commands. In desperation, she thinks of writing a letter to a friend to share her grief but it only ends up with the realization that she has none to confide with:



She could write a letter to a friend—a private message of despair, dissatisfaction, yearning; she has a packet of notepaper, pale violet with a pink rose embossed in the corner—but who is the friend? Mrs. Joshi? But since she lives next door, she would be surprised. Aruna? But Aruna would pay no attention, she is too busy. Cousin Ramu? Where *was* he? Had his farm swallowed him up? And Anamika—had marriage *devoured* her?

Parallel to Uma's story, functioning like a contrasting foil, are the stories of her two other sisters—Aruna and Anamika. Anita Desai builds up Uma's unattractiveness, clumsiness and dullness of mind with a fair account of detail. Yet, these should not be understood as the causes for her predicament. As if to establish this point, Desai explores the fortunes of Uma's polar opposite, her graceful, beautiful and brilliant cousin, Anamika.

Anamika, an academically brilliant student performs excellently in her final school exams which wins her a scholarship to Oxford. Yet, Anamika lives in a patriarchal society that considers higher education to be the prerogative of men, and women as primarily destined for marriage. The scholarship obtained is used only as a means to arrange a marriage with a man who is considered fit for the family's social position. Anamika's parents are unperturbed by the fact that he is so much older than her, so grim-faced and conscious of his own superiority, and is 'totally impervious to Anamika's beauty and grace and distinction'. But, like Uma, Anamika, enters into another kind of imprisonment the moment she enters her in-laws' house.

Anamika's husband is completely dominated by his mother and stands as a mute and insensitive spectator as his mother beats up his wife regularly. Anamika, who had won a scholarship to Oxford, spends her entire time in the kitchen cooking for a very large family that eats in shifts— 'first the men, then the children, finally the women'. After a miscarriage, which followed a brutal beating, and the belief that she could not bear more children, finally, she is found burnt to death, wrapped in a nylon saree.

And if this gives you the idea that Desai is implying that the un-burnt brides or well-settled ones live a contented life wait until you read the story of Uma's younger sister Aruna. Uma's smart and pretty younger sister makes a discreet choice and marries 'the wisest, the handsomest, the richest, the most exciting of the suitors who presented themselves'. Aruna's marriage to Arvind who has a job in Bombay and a flat in a housing block in Juhu, facing the beach is like a dream-come-true. Yet to live that dream-life fully she transforms herself and desperately seeks to introduce change in the lives of others. She shortens her hair, takes her make-up kit wherever she goes, and calls her sister and mother 'villagers' when they refuse to accept her sophisticated and flashy lifestyle. For that reason, she avoids visiting her parents' home and the rare occasions of her short visits are spent in blaming

the untidiness of the surrounding and the inhabitants. She even scolds her husband when he spills tea in his saucer, or wears a shirt, which does not match his trousers.

Aruna has liberated herself from the customs and dominating home rules that bind the rest of the characters like Uma and Anamika. Yet, in escaping from those bonds, she ensnares herself in her mad pursuit of perfection which has nothing significant to do with the status or condition of women. In order to reach that perfection she needs to constantly uncover and rectify the flaws of her own family as well as of Arvind's. When the problem within the family is not patriarchal, it appears centered in an idea or an ideal that makes harmonious relationship or existence impossible. Uma's analysis of Aruna is pertinent in this regard:

Seeing Aruna vexed to the point of tears because the cook's pudding had sunk and spread instead of remaining upright and solid, or because Arvind had come to dinner in his bedroom slippers, or Papa was wearing a t-shirt with a hole under one arm, Uma felt pity for her: was this the realm of ease and comfort for which Aruna had always pined and that some might say she had attained? Certainly it brought her no pleasure: there was always a crease of discontent between her eyebrows and an agitation that made her eyelids flutter, disturbing Uma who noticed it.

The second part of *Fasting, Feasting*, features Arun, the male character who is imprisoned in his own way. But before we move on to Arun, a few words about Ramu who visits Uma's home in the middle of Section One.

Ramu is Anamika's brother and the son of Papa's brother. A happy-go-lucky character, he is academically the reverse of Anamika, that is, completely unsuited to serious academic pursuits. He eventually settles in a farm house which Desai only refers to but his visit to Uma has its highlight in their visit to a neighbouring restaurant where Uma gets high on shandy. Both of them have a great time there and later, for which Mama showers a bevy of bitter words on Uma and perhaps makes it clear that Ramu's visit is unwelcome. However, the two cousins provide each other with the kind of company that each of them had been craving for. Their relationship permits them the freedom to indulge in their desires and speak their heart out in a way that is not available to them within their own households.

Unlike his sisters, right from his birth, Arun desists eating the food of his family which is symbolic of its values and thus shows signs of resistance, though not to any avail. Much to the dismay of his father, Arun cannot be forced to eat non-vegetarian food, although it has revolutionized his family's life. This, of course, is a cause of disappointment and perhaps is unacceptable for Papa:

Papa was always scornful of those of their relatives who came to visit and insisted on clinging to their cereal-and vegetable-eating ways, shying away from the meat dishes Papa insisted on having cooked for dinner. Now his own son, his one son, displayed this completely baffling desire to return to the ways of his forefathers, meek and puny men who had got nowhere in life. Papa was deeply vexed.

After food and health Papa next desires to control Arun's education. Ironically, it is education, which instead of offering the desired autonomy, paves way for Arun's imprisonment. Papa intends to give 'the best, the most, the highest education to his son. When Arun's examinations are over and its summer holidays at school Papa does not allow him to go to his sister's house in Bombay, since he has planned that time for taking up entrance examinations and applying to foreign universities for 'higher studies'. However, in the eyes of Aruna, her father's manic determination to get a foreign scholarship for Arun is actually on account of his unfulfilled dreams, which he tries to impose on his son. That is why, when the letter of acceptance from Massachusetts finally arrives, it stirs no emotions in Arun:

Uma watched Arun too, when he read the fateful letter. She watched and searched for an expression, of relief, of joy, doubt, fear, anything at all. But there was none.... There was nothing else—not the hint of a smile, frown, laugh or anything: these had been ground down till they had disappeared. This blank face now stared at the letter and faced another phase of his existence arranged for him by Papa.

As a reviewer rightly observes, 'With a deft touch, Desai shows us that MamaPapa's ambitions for Arun are as stifling as their lack of ambition for Uma....' This is because their aspirations are completely disconnected from the personal aspirations, likes or dislikes of their children.

Arun's lack of enthusiasm while planning his American stay is apparent right through the pages where he prepares for the final departure. On the airport he notices for the first time the ageing and bent form of his sister Uma and throws a 'stricken look'. The panic registered may not only be about the state of his unmarried sister but also a subconscious apprehension that his father would end up subjecting him to the same subservience and imprisonment.

From America, Arun's letters come just to indicate his endurance and survival. His messages are diluted, and are devoid of any emotion and substance. 'The most personal note he struck was a poignant, frequently repeated complaint: 'The food is not very good'. The dominance of the father figure over Arun's personality is so overwhelming that even in a country that feasts on individuality, Arun fails to manifest his identity as an individual. Caught in the prison-house of his own family's food habits, he can neither cherish the alien food nor develop a sense of belonging with Patton's family that shelters him during his vacation. The smell of the raw

meat being charred over the fire by Mr. Patton for steak or hamburger is loathsome for Arun.

In the scene that records this revulsion, Mr. Patton fails to understand why Arun really refuses to eat a good piece of meat. While Mrs. Patton sympathizes with Arun, and gives him the vegetarian food items, particularly tomato slices and lettuce on bread, Arun finds them detestable too. Because he thinks that ‘in his time in America he has developed a hearty abhorrence for the raw foods everyone here thinks the natural diet of a vegetarian’. Hence, when Mrs. Patton, quite satisfied with her job of a host, watches him eating with pride and complicity, Arun eats with an expression of woe and a sense of mistreatment. How was he to tell Mrs. Patton that these were not the foods that figured in his culture? That his digestive system did not know how to turn them into nourishment.

It is in the context of food that we are introduced to Mrs. Patton’s daughter, Melanie, who bluntly says she finds the food revolting, and refuses to taste it. Arun has to helplessly eat it. Melanie, however, suffers from bulimia—a disorder in which overeating alternates with self-induced vomiting, fasting, etc. Her bulimia, along with her mother’s frenzy for buying food items to fill the freezer, signifies the consumerist society that she hails from, where excess becomes the malady.

It is in this context that the fourth member of the Patton family Rod becomes significant. Rod, the fitness fanatic spends all his time and energy jogging. He baffles Arun who is perplexed: ‘one can’t tell what is more dangerous in this country, the pursuit of health or of sickness’. He apprehends that like Melanie, who eats then vomits and lies on her vomit most of the time, the people of her country too, go through an inexplicable pain and a real hunger. Yet he cannot reconcile his mind to the unanswerable question: ‘But what hunger a person so sated can feel?’

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. What does Uma realize when she thinks of writing a letter to a friend?
2. Who is Ramu? What is his importance in Uma's life?

## **1.5 Major Characters in *Fasting, Feasting***

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### **MamaPapa**

Notice the way the mother and the father fuse in this common Indian name of the parent figures. The point obviously is about the way they are perceived by their children—as a unified figure which fuses the two distinct identities because when it comes to issues relating to controlling children, the parents

speak in one voice, seldom contradicting each other. This feels like a ‘Siamese twin existence’, as the parents hardly speak about themselves as different selves. As a united team, they have more authority over the children than they could have imposed individually; there is something impressive (if not threatening) in their appearance: ‘Having fused into one, they had gained so much in substance, in stature, in authority, that they loomed large enough as it was; they did not need separate histories and backgrounds to make it even more immense’ (*FF*, 6). This unity as we shall see later can be read from different critical perspectives. But first a little bit of their absent histories reconstructed from the text.

‘Papa, [born] in Patna, the son of a tax inspector with one burning ambition, to give his son the best available education, had won prizes at school, played tennis as a young man, trained for the bar and eventually built up a solid practice’. Papa tells stories about his childhood or youth which outline his struggle for education and highlights how he achieved success in his life, even though the conditions were tough: ‘We did not have electricity when we were children. If we wanted to study, we were sent out to sit under streetlight with our books. ... But we did it – we passed our exams’. It is the same zeal that Papa wants to find in Arun with all his father’s resources available. Without realizing it himself, Papa acts like a slave driver towards his own son. But considering Papa’s own childhood in a family where education was valued more than anything else, Papa’s fixation is understandable; this is also speculated by Uma. Uma even wonders whether Papa is trying to ‘relive’ his life and fulfill his own ambitions through Arun:

Perhaps Papa’s memories of studying under the streetlights and of the painful beginnings in dusty provincial courts filled him with this almost manic determination. Was he fulfilling through Arun a dream he had had there under the streetlights, or in the shabby district courts? Uma watched, trying to find out. Of course he would never tell: how could Papa admit he had unfulfilled dreams? That he had done anything less than succeed, totally?

It is commonplace psychological knowledge today that parents who try to relive their life through their children may suffer from low self-esteem. The children may then be used to raise the parents’ status in the community – and this especially in the Indian society where sons are preferred to daughters, and the inability to produce a son may even be considered a stigma. In such situations parents never see children as individuals with separate worth, value and identities, and the children feel the pressure of fulfilling their parents’ aspirations. This is also the case with Papa and Arun.

The representation of the parents as having ‘fused into one’ also reflects how complete oneness between a married couple is idealized and realized in India. A married human couple must represent ideal oneness:

husband and wife are considered complementary halves of one whole...’ This oneness, however, is not a balanced situation for the spouses: it is achieved by the self-effacement of the wife. This is also the case in the family portrayed here; particularly when it comes to decision-making, it is Papa who has more power.

Mama and Papa usually agree with each other on everyday matters. The only thing they debate about is what to have for dinner; however, it is always Mama who has the final word. But when it comes to more significant questions, Papa makes the decisions alone. When Mama falls pregnant at a mature age, Papa turns a deaf ear to her wishes to have an abortion, even though she suffers from severe nausea. Or, when Uma’s eyesight is worsening and the local optician recommends she should consult a specialist in Bombay, it is Papa who firmly rejects this idea. Neither does Papa listen to Mama’s protests when he wants to send Arun abroad to study; he does not expect her to understand the opportunities offered by a foreign degree. Thus, despite their ‘oneness’, Mama and Papa are by no means equal companions. However, by giving birth to a son, Mama is able to elevate her status considerably: after Arun’s birth, the parents are ‘more equal than ever’. Ironically, Mama herself seems to think of their son merely as Papa’s achievement; as the narrator describes, ‘[m]ore than ever now, she was Papa’s helpmeet, his consort. He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honour, what status’. All in all, Papa and Mama follow the traditional roles: they seemingly act as one entity, ‘MamaPapa’, but ultimately, Papa is the head of the family, and Mama subservient to him.

Some critics have interpreted this fused identity as a way of generalizing the characters; many parents in the Indian middle class could be like them. On the other hand, it could also be that ‘in being unnamed, MamaPapa seems devoid not only of parental nurture but of finer human qualities’. A third possibility is that ‘Mama’ and ‘Papa’ indicate that the parents are mainly presented from the children’s perspective (as restricted to their parental roles rather than as multidimensional personalities).

### **Uma**

Uma, the protagonist of the novel’s first part, is a tragic figure. She seems to fail in everything she tries: she is enthusiastic about school, but she keeps failing in the exams; she is also clumsy and therefore not especially good at housework. To crown it all, her parents’ arrangements for her marriage fall through one after another, and Uma has no choice but to live in her childhood home, under the strict control of her parents. As Uma’s life and fortunes are discussed in great detail through the themes section, we will stop our discussion on Uma right here.

### **Aruna**

Uma's little sister Aruna, is ambitious, attractive and therefore has no trouble in getting married and soon enjoys a modern life in Bombay. Her husband Arvind works for a private company in Bombay where his family owns a flat in Juhu. Aruna seems to have mastered what it needs to have a perfectly successful social life though she is completely hollow internally. So she is immaculate in appearances. Not only does she have a well made up body complete with short fashionable hair, she also carries her make-up kit around her whenever she goes out of her house. She is driven by the same quest for perfect appearances in her daily life and expects that this passion be reciprocated by those close to her, from whom she derived her identity. Therefore she not only makes an elaborate ritual out of the daily dinner but also feels exasperated when Arun comes to the dining table dressed in a bathroom slipper, or Papa goes around the house wearing a vest with a hole in the underarm.

Desai's point through Aruna appears to be questioning the possibility of a mutually fulfilling and harmonious relationship within a marriage even when the major impediments identified in the marriages of Uma and Anamika that is beauty, dowry, husband's cooperation and lack of parental interference are present.

What hollows Aruna's life is a deeper question. But Desai seems to be clearly signaling the fact that what plagues women and their relationships in this urban world is not merely the social ill of patriarchy, though patriarchy is an important factor and could be held responsible in important ways for the debacle in Aruna's life. Keep thinking about it, you will find some leads to answer this question in the themes section.

### **Anamika**

Uma's cousin, who eventually dies as a result of an unhappy and violent marriage (whether it is a suicide or a murder, is not completely clear). Anamika began her educational career with acknowledged brilliance, winning a scholarship to a foreign University. However, the only use this scholarship is put to is in arranging a marriage with a conceited, snobbish and insensitive man many years elder to her. The reasons are not clear but somehow Anamika is a misfit in this huge household where people eat every meal in three shifts. Thanks to a violent mother-in-law, Anamika ends up with an abortion, a supposed infertility and finally death.

The character poignantly foregrounds a wide range of threats that a modest woman faces in a patriarchal set-up that is particularly insensitive, callous, arrogant, exploitative and even violent. Are all patriarchal set-ups

the same? Definitely not, the novel seems to argue but that the particulars of Anamika's case can be linked to some of the important characteristics of patriarchy is indisputable.

### **Arun**

The long-awaited son of the family is overwhelmed by the father's expectations of him. Arun begins as a weak child who took interminably long to do things that the neighbouring Mr. Joshi's child did either quickly or in time.

Relatively lesser critical attention is paid by the novelist to his life in India except for his early childhood and as preparatory to his visit abroad. As a growing child, Arun is something of a disappointment for his father as he does not conform to his father's expectations of a male child. He is neither energetic, nor aggressive, nor physically alert and agile and worst of all he lacks the most potent signifier of strength and courage – a taste for meat. Papa manages to pull him up somehow and Arun performs well enough to earn a scholarship to Massachusetts University. However, although Arun may be in an enviable position as far as other aspirants to foreign scholarships may be concerned, he himself seems to suffer a disconnect from the sources of happiness and vitality within himself.

It is in this state of not-being fully himself that he finally accepts the decision to go to America and finally departs for it. He feels alienated in America too and tries to avoid human contact. During his stay with the Pattons, Arun discovers that freedom does not guarantee happiness: the members of the American family hardly have any contact with each other. Arun is, for example, the only one who notices that the family's teenage daughter Melanie suffers from bulimia. Thus, Desai's idea of America differs from the traditional image of America as the land of unlimited opportunities and happiness.

Arun is used as an effective critique of the American way of life. In a country of abundance, there is feasting, but there is also fasting, Arun observes. It is just the two male characters, the father and the son of the American family, who are 'feasting' both literally on the 'carcasses' of beef and metaphorically on the 'carcasses'-to-become of their female family counterparts, exactly because the patriarchal order has deadly effects on women. On the other hand, the female characters are feasting only seemingly; the mother supplies the household with tons of food but she herself does not know what to eat, and nobody cares. Her daughter Melanie suffers from bulimia, the emblematic disease of young women neglected emotionally; seemingly she is feasting on peanuts and candy bars, which, in reality, brings about starvation (fasting).



Arun himself, supposedly feasting on a first-class education, is starved of any fulfillment and satisfaction because he has difficulties in adapting to the American 'diet,' both literal and metaphorical, the food and the American culture.

Arun's life in America is spoken of as a pilgrimage which we are invited to follow in the introductory passage:

'It is summer. Arun makes his way slowly through the abundant green of Edge Hill as if he were moving cautiously through massed waves of water under which unknown objects lurked. Greenness hangs, drips and sways from every branch and twig, and frond in the surging luxuriance of July. In such profusion, the houses seem as lost, as stranded, as they might have been when this was primeval forest'.

Notice the comparison of the American landscape with the primeval forests. That is how American life registers to Arun. The forest is constituted by showy patriotism, relatively few people, cars and the urge to go as far as one can, jogging, advertisements, baseball matches, and shopping and consumption. Arun also gropes his way through the tangle of interpersonal relationships that he encounters. He has to move cautiously because he meets objects about which he 'knows nothing' as he makes his way as someone 'venturing alone across the border'. He finds himself in an unknown area, where he has never been before and he can only find his way to the recognition of the unknown objects or 'the other side' of the border by moving through the 'masses of water.' So the pilgrim Arun has to make a journey analogical to that of Uma. It is the journey towards recognition, but this recognition is and at the same time is not the same as that of Uma. It is the same because in both cases it is the recognition of the unfavourable condition of women, their suffering, and the necessity to act for their benefit. In this respect it can also be said that it is complementary. And the recognition cannot be exactly the same because Uma is affected directly as she is exposed to the mortifying effects of the patriarchal sun and, as we have seen, her pilgrimage is a journey towards the recognition of the inside.

Arun's pilgrimage approaches its climax when he finally recognizes Melanie's suffering and its cause. It is the recognition of the 'other side,' of the 'object' so far unknown and as such it becomes almost a kind of enlightenment: 'Then Arun does see a resemblance to something he knows: a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against inattention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest. How strange to encounter it here, Arun thinks, where so much is given, where there is both licence and plenty. -- But what is plenty? What is not? Can one tell the difference?' Nevertheless, neither he nor Mrs. Patton, herself a victim incapable of resisting the paralyzing

effects of the beams of patriarchal sun are capable of doing anything for Melanie until the three of them escape temporarily the oppressive heat of the family's males' presence. Then, at the pool, enlightenment and discovery finally start to work for Melanie's benefit.

### **Ramu**

Papa's brother Bakul has two children: the beautiful and intelligent daughter Anamika, and the son Ramu, who has rejected the conventional way of living and who therefore is considered the black sheep of the family. In this sense he is an outcast from the patriarchal world. He is unmarried, and spends his time travelling around; there are even rumours of an alcohol or drug problem.

Once he pays an unexpected visit to Uma's family. Whereas for Uma, the rare visit of her favourite cousin adds variety to the greyness of her everyday life, Mama and Papa cannot share her delight; they are highly disapproving of what they regard as bad manners and impudence. As Ramu takes Uma out for a dinner, the parents are outraged. Finally, by the time of Aruna's wedding, Ramu is excluded from the family and society: 'No one mentioned Ramu; he was not considered fit for society anymore and had not been sent an invitation'. This kind of exclusion from society might result from men's effort to secure their privilege. As Johnson states, men 'are often made invisible when their behavior is socially undesirable and might raise questions about the appropriateness of male privilege.' The case of Ramu shows the need and the process of making the non-conformist invisible.

### **Rod**

Rod is the representative of the younger generation of men in America. He spends most of his time exercising reflecting the American hyper-concern with the body. Apparently, his father has encouraged him to train for a sports scholarship (which Rod later receives). Rod seems so fanatic about sports that he probably would exercise even without his father's encouragement. Physical strength and the athletic ability are the qualities that young American men in particular use in comparing each other (whereas later in life, men compete in financial success as well as success with women). Thus, as a fitness enthusiast, Rod is actually a fairly typical example of a young American man.

What is rather striking about Rod is his lack of compassion for Melanie and his mother. Arun, his Indian 'counterpart', often shows understanding not only for his own sisters but also for Melanie. Rod, in turn, has noticed Melanie's habit of binge-eating and vomiting, but does not realize she is in real distress. On the contrary, he is even scornful of her: 'Wants to turn herself into a slim chick. Ha! ... Man, she's nuts that kid;

she's nuts' Rod sees Melanie's eating disorder merely as foolishness, not as a serious mental problem caused (at least partly) by the emotional vacuum prevailing in the family. Rod also uses Melanie's weakness in order to underline his own strength and difference. Centred in the patriarchal order, Rod cannot feel the difference between individuals and wants everyone to conform to the male norm.

### **Melanie**

Mr. Patton's daughter Rod's sister, Melanie is brought into the ambit of the novel through the perception of Arun. She is a typical American brat who throws tantrums about her food, clothes and personal freedom. The tantrums, however, Arun's analysis reveals are based on a deep malady within the Patton family structure and the American culture as a whole.

Melanie is emotionally starved. She does not have an independent space in the family and is expected to simply conform to the wishes of her parents and her elder brother. Non-conformity to their standards invites censure. This has led to a pathological inward turning in her manifesting in the tantrums and the disease bulimia. Her parents and culture can only diagnose it as a mental problem and she can be treated in a mental hospital for it. The family and the culture are not self-reflexive enough to understand their role in the disease and will not change.

Arun's pilgrimage tells us clearly that the possibilities of woman to escape the suffering in the bonds of patriarchy depend essentially both on recognition and action, i.e., the capability of taking an action. First, the recognition of her 'inside chamber' is necessary for the woman to understand her condition. Melanie must herself become conscious of the emotional starvation she is subject to and not attempt to lose it in the plenty of food around her. Her suffering must then be recognized by those who are around her and especially by those who would have capability (power) willingness to act for her benefit (as in the case of Melanie, who is not yet an adult woman and who has not yet acquired self-recognition). Arun, who has reached the recognition of the condition of women as 'from across the border' from the 'other side,' cannot do anything helpful for Melanie because his position in the American home does not allow him. However, Melanie's father and brother can. Then the two complementary elements of female self-recognition and male capacity of action supported by the recognition of the 'other side' may produce finally some desirable effects.

### **Mrs. Patton**

The wife of Mr. Patton, Arun's summer host in America and the mother of Rod and Melanie, Mrs. Patton represents the uncontrolled, completely self-centred American consumerist ethics on the one hand even as she represents

the exploited and oppressed woman on the other hand. In relation to her husband she is a mute or parroting puppet who does not manifest any signs of an independent subjectivity or interiority in interactions with him. She is completely insensitive to the emotional and nutritional demands of her daughter who has walked into a psycho-somatic crisis for which she will have to eventually seek treatment and professional care. She has watched her son grow fiercely independent without any regard for his parents or his sister and is carrying on the carcass of a family, if by family we understand a network of blood relations that exist in a bond of mutual respect and harmony. It is only in interaction with Arun that she sees the possibility of an alternative life. Arun presents to her the possibility of challenging her husband's non-vegetarianism, a deeper understanding of Melanie's bulimia and a meaningful engagement with Rod's fanatic zeal. However, Arun is on a summer holiday and can only initiate a thought process which it is highly unlikely she has the will and the ability to pursue further.

#### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. How have critics interpreted the fused identity of MamaPapa?
2. How has Arun been used as an effective critique of the American way of life?
3. What does Mrs. Patton's character represent?

### **1.6 Major Themes in *Fasting, Feasting***

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There are three major themes we will study in this section. The first and the most obvious is the theme of feminism and an analysis of what women's condition is in modern India and why. The second asks the same set of questions in relation to men. The third section tries to assess Anita Desai's relation to both these phenomenon and tries to understand what she is trying to project through the novel. Before moving on to these three sections a quick discussion on the basic terms involved – Patriarchy, masculinity and Feminism.

#### **Patriarchy and Masculinity**

The term *patriarchy* is used in three different senses in modern English. First, it is used in the ecclesiastical sense, referring to the power of men recognized as Christian leaders. Secondly, patriarchy is used to refer to the powers of the husband/father over his wife and children. In seventeenth-century England, patriarchy in this sense was extended into a political theory, according to which the power of kings derived from the power of fathers. Thirdly, the term is used in feminist critiques to refer to the male power over women. In this section, it is this third meaning of the term that will be

adopted. Some researchers use other terms in referring to the same concept; for instance, Holter prefers the term ‘structural gender inequality’ to ‘patriarchy’.

The term ‘patriarchy’ was introduced into feminist scholarship in the 1970s by the radical feminist Kate Millett. Feminists see patriarchy as a society in which men hold power, but also, furthermore, as a society ‘reflecting the values underlying the traditional male ideal’. Allan Johnson points out that patriarchy ‘is not simply another way of saying ‘men’’; but a system in which both men and women participate. As Bennett specifies, women are not necessarily innocent, passive victims of patriarchy and neither are all men in positions of control: some women support and even benefit from it. Bennett also remarks that while the concept of patriarchy is basically one and the same everywhere, its specific manifestations depend on the location. Johnson defines patriarchy as characterized by four main features.

1. **Male Dominance:** In patriarchal societies positions of authority (political, legal, educational, religious and so on) are reserved for men. The fact that men occupy these positions also strengthens people’s associations with men’s general superiority to women. However, even if the society has men in positions of power, all men may not be powerful in their individual lives.
2. **Male Identification:** Cultural ideas about what is considered good, desirable and normal are connected to the culture’s ideas about masculinity. The criteria used to define an ideal man also represent the most important values of society. These male-identified qualities include, for example, rationality, autonomy, strength, coolness, toughness, competitiveness and control over emotions. These kinds of qualities are also associated with professions that are most highly valued in patriarchal societies—professions within law, medicine, business and so on. Derivatively and not necessarily empirically, the opposite qualities are associated with femininity and thus devalued: cooperation, mutuality, equality, compassion, emotional expressiveness and intuitive thinking, to mention some. Needless to say, it is impossible to find men who have only the first set and none of the second set. It is also perfectly possible to find some men who have more of the second set in them compared to some women. The point behind this problematization is that the gendered division of qualities is artificial and ideologically motivated. To participate in this ideology is to look at all men as superior because they have the characteristics of the first set and none or few of the second and all women as inferior because they have all the characteristics of the second set and none or few of the first.

On the other hand, some female qualities are selectively valued; women may find appreciation for their beauty. Women, particularly mothers, may also become objects of cultural romanticization for their devotion to the cause of bringing up children or running the family. However, all this brings appreciation but amounts to no real power. In a male-identified society, it is difficult for a woman to attain any position of power. As Johnson states, the more powerful the position of a woman under patriarchy is, the more 'unsexed' she becomes in the eyes of other community members, whereas for a man, the situation is exactly the opposite: the more powerful his position is, the more masculine he is considered.

3. **Male Centeredness.** Johnson argues that the focus of society is usually on men and their achievements. However, men do not always agree with this claim, as they do not feel at the centre themselves. This, according to Johnson, is an ironic consequence of the male privilege. Men learn to think that they can only get acknowledgement through what they accomplish, whereas women are evaluated less by their achievements; what is considered more important is women's ability to empathize with others. If men want to be seen and acknowledged by others, they have to meet the standards of patriarchal manhood (this is also manifested in competition between men). Women's focus on others and men's focus on themselves also reinforce the male-identified and male-centred aspects of the patriarchal society, which, in consequence, supports male dominance in society.
4. **Obsession with Control:** Men maintain their positions of privilege and power by controlling women. The male-identified qualities (such as rationality, strength, logic, unemotionality, being always right and in command of every situation) are used to mark men as superior and justify their privilege. Johnson points out that control as such does not inevitably lead to oppression. In fact, it is even essential for humans: we need control to get things done. However, in patriarchy, control means more than this: it is 'valued and pursued to a degree that gives social life an oppressive form by taking a natural human capacity to obsessive extremes'. And, the more men see control as belonging to their 'essence', the more eagerly they strive to organize their lives around it.

This meaning and pursuit of control transforms society into an unequal space where power to some and oppression over the rest becomes the norm. The depth of the inequality problem is often not obvious to the people practicing or affected by it. The efforts to solve the problem have often been

directed at the ‘symptoms’, whereas the ultimate reason of the problem remains ignored. As Johnson observes:

Thus far, mainstream women’s movements have concentrated on the liberal agenda, whose primary goal has been to allow women to do what men do in the ways that men do it, whether in science, the professions, business, or government. More serious challenges to patriarchy have been silenced, maligned, and misunderstood for reasons that aren’t hard to fathom. ... It is easier to allow women to assimilate into patriarchal society than to question society itself. In other words, it is difficult to change patriarchy, because it is a complex structure, and deep-rooted in society.

Families, schools, media, religion and other such institutions convey ideas of the various social structures around us. People develop a sense of personal identity (including gender) and of one’s relation to other people. This process, in which people learn how to participate in social life, is called *socialization* (Johnson). The ideas people learn through socialization are not necessarily ‘true’, but it is often difficult to contest the dominant ideology.

Challenging what they have learned; challenging the prevailing ideology could lead to one’s disapproval in the eyes of other community members. Johnson uses the term *path of least resistance* to refer to the conscious and unconscious choices people make in social situations. People usually have numerous options of how to react in a certain situation, but they tend to choose the safest, the most comfortable or familiar one; in other words, the path of least resistance. This feature in human nature is one of the main factors sustaining patriarchal structures: as Johnson states, ‘[i]f a society is oppressive, then people who grow up and live in it will tend to accept, identify with, and participate in it as ‘normal’ and unremarkable life. That’s the path of least resistance in any system.’ On the other hand, the chance to make a change in society lies in stepping off the path of least resistance. If someone chooses to object to a certain oppressive practice, it may change other people’s views on what is socially acceptable and what is not. As the social resistance increases, it becomes difficult to stick to the oppressive practices (Johnson).

As a final remark on patriarchy: despite all the discussion of male power that has been presented above, one should keep in mind that *all* men are not necessarily powerful. As Pleck notes, ‘men do not just happily bond together to oppress women. In addition to hierarchy over women, men create hierarchies and rankings among themselves according to criteria of ‘masculinity’’. In fact, since these patriarchal dynamics in male-male relationships are less obvious than those in male-female relationships, they may remain unnoticed. This may be risky for men: whereas women’s situation may be (somewhat) improved by women’s movement, no actions are taken to prevent men’s oppression (Pleck).

### **Patriarchy and *Fasting, Feasting***

The patriarchal ethos that perpetuates gender discrimination in India serves as a background to the narratives of Desai. Men in India, irrespective of their caste or creed, have always shared certain attitudes towards women, producing ambivalent female stereotypes in life and literature, myths and scriptures. In India, to be specific, Hindu scriptures and ancient legal codes both deify and circumscribe women. Those who live up to the feminine 'ideal' as encoded there, are considered divine; those who deviate are 'fallen'. In either case, the Indian woman is denied the status of a normal human and thus forced into a servitude that, in Stanley Wolpert's words, 'border[s] on slavery'. If you think about the novel a little closely all the four aspects of a patriarchal society we referred to in the previous section can be seen clearly operating in the novel.

Men often control not only others but also *themselves* in order to assert their masculinity; so does Papa. He hardly shows any kinds of feelings – except for the negative ones. He is characterized by taciturnity, even bad temper; he always finds something to criticize. Papa finds it necessary to keep himself under control; only a few times the family members witness an emotional outburst by Papa. The most peculiar one takes place when Arun is born (*FF*, 17):

Arriving home, however, he sprang out of the car, raced into the house and shouted the news to whoever was there to hear. Servants, elderly relatives, all gathered at the door, and then saw the most astounding sight of their lives – Papa, in his elation, leaping over three chairs in the hall, one after the other, like a boy playing leap-frog, his arms flung up in the air and his hair flying. 'A boy!' he screamed, 'a boy! Arun, Arun at last!'

As Papa tries to affirm his own masculinity, he simultaneously represses any signs of feminine qualities in his personality. Furthermore, such qualities in general seem to irritate him. Papa cannot, for instance, stand any kind of weakness – either in himself or in the others. As Uma's eyes start to hurt after writing a letter for Arun (dictated by Papa), Papa despises her – even though he himself has been unwilling to let Uma go to an eye specialist. Papa also tends to show a practical, unemotional point of view on most things, and he dislikes sentimentality. For example, when Arun gets the chance to stay with the Pattons during the summer break from the university, Mama is concerned whether the Pattons will 'look after Arun properly'; Papa, instead, 'glares at her and tells her how fortunate Arun is to have a home offered to him free of charge'.

According to Johnson, repressing the feminine qualities in oneself can have tragic consequences for a man's welfare:

... the more men reject ... the qualities that patriarchal culture associates with women, the more limited their inner and outer lives



become. It precludes them from knowing true intimacy with other people, estranges them from their own feelings and the bodies through which feelings are felt, and denies them powerful inner resources for coping with stress, fear, and loss.

There is not much ‘true intimacy’ between Papa and his family members. And we can almost be sure that Papa is not happy with his situation. Uma surmises that Papa would never admit—not even to himself—that ‘he had done anything less than succeed’ pointing to the blindness in Papa about the ideology that controls him. However, Papa’s habitual sulkiness and the scowl on his face do hint at the direction of a somewhat unhappy person. It is obvious that the need for domination, control and order that he is perpetually looking for in order to exist meaningfully under the patriarchal ideology is what is causing all that sulkiness. But another factor behind his unhappiness could be his constant effort to preserve his powerful position – as discussed above, power often entails the fear of losing it. Within the family, Papa’s authority is usually unchallenged, but outside the sphere of the family, Papa feels insecure. He needs to prove his authority, especially for his colleagues, by showing his skills and physical condition in tennis or by cracking jokes that no one else finds amusing. In reality, Papa is ‘rattled, shaken by what he saw as a possible challenge to his status.’ The disapproval of working women and the idea of the public sphere as belonging to men only are also portrayed in this novel. Letting the woman into the public work sphere means a violation of patriarchal codes, specifically losing control over her.

Not only is the woman not going to be available to obey the man’s commands, she may be exposed to control by other men, creating the possibility of competition or rivalry between men. The money she earns may give her a personal freedom and motivation to challenge the male centre. Eventually, this may evolve into a situation where the woman may grow independent of the patriarchal centre or worse still become a competing patriarchal centre herself.

No wonder, when Dr Dutt comes over to offer Uma a job as a housekeeper at the nurses’ dormitory, Papa is almost offended by her suggestion. For Papa, a woman in a highly esteemed profession is a threat to his own position. The fact that Dr Dutt is unmarried and childless makes her all the more suspicious in Papa’s eyes. The expression on Papa’s face reveals his disapproval ‘The frown was filled with everything he thought of working women, of women who dared presume to step into the world he occupied.’ Worse still, the woman dared to offer his daughter a job: for Papa, this is a suggestion of his incapability of providing for his family.

Whether Uma would actually *like* to work, is a question that does not cross his mind. Desperate to get the job, Uma calls Dr Dutt when her parents are not at home; unfortunately, Papa finds out about her phone call afterwards and blames her for the telephone bills: “Costs money! Costs

money!' he kept shouting long after. 'Never earned anything in her life, made me spend and spend, on her dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes, spend till I'm ruined, till I am a pauper'. The irony, again, is obvious: Papa accuses Uma of wasting money but does not let her earn.

For outsiders, Papa wants to give the impression of being modern and liberal, even somewhat egalitarian, but within the family, he supports the traditional role differentiation, according to which only men are allowed (or even encouraged) to adopt Western values: 'Papa was quite capable of putting on a progressive, Westernized front when called upon to do so—in public, in society, not within his family of course' (*FF*, 141).

In Papa's ideology, the ultimate masculinity can be achieved by education as well as by strength— physical and mental—symbolized by meat, cricket and English. Against Papa's masculinist ideals, Arun is characterized by physical weakness: as a child, he catches all the possible infectious diseases from mumps to measles. He also shows a reluctance to eat meat, which Papa finds incomprehensible. Neither is he interested in sports: if he could choose, he would rather stay in his room reading comics rather than go and play outdoors. Instead of accepting Arun as he is, Papa tries to 'promote' Arun's masculinity by pressuring him to study and exercise. Since Arun's childhood, Papa makes every effort to give his son the best education he can. Throughout his childhood and youth, Arun accepts his fate without protest. Uma and Mama witness Arun's condition worriedly: in the evenings he is so worn out by all the studying that he can do nothing but 'rise creakily to his feet, scrabble together his books and notes in a great pile, and shuffle off to his room with the gait of a broken old man'.

Uma is not the only victim of Papa's patriarchal control. Arun's upbringing according to his father's masculinist ideals leaves its imprint on his personality. When Arun receives the letter of acceptance for his studies in Massachusetts, his face remains totally expressionless; there is no sign of joy, relief, fear or any other emotion. As Uma observes, 'all the years of scholarly toil had worn down any distinguishing features Arun's face once might have had'.

While boarding the train to Bombay (from where he will leave for the States), the reader gets an idea (even if a subtle one) of his feelings: 'Looking back, he saw Uma on the platform beside his parents and suddenly noticed how old she looked: his sister Uma, already beginning to stoop and shrink. He threw her a stricken look'. The feeling of 'strickenness' may simply imply Arun's nervousness over his departure, but most likely this nervousness is mingled with the sudden realization of how old his sister has become. During that moment Arun realizes that he and his sister are in the same boat: neither of them has the chance to be free from the shackles of their family's patriarchal control.

### **Masculinity and the Condition of Men**

Some important critics emphasize that while the novel explores the women's inner life, their experience and silent suffering in the suffocating, male-dominated environment, they do not analyse the actions or the personalities of the male characters in detail; male dominance simply 'is there' – as if the male characters in the novel did not really represent this dominance. On the other hand, some critics argue that male chauvinism is not merely an underlying factor in the novel – the male characters actively oppress the women:

The male characters act as a block in the women's process of finding their self and reaching at some sort of realization. In Anita's fictional world it is the males who rule over these women; they hold the reins of all the females in their family and this spoils the efforts on the part of women to find out on their own the core of life.

In other words, the role of men is often interpreted as the oppressor (either as active or a faceless group in the background) and the role of women as oppressed.

However, it is also possible to find another dimension in Desai's representation of the gender relations. Desai is a true humanist who puts the blame not only on men who are suffering with the male-superiority complex but also on women who oppress their kind. Thus, the division of gender roles is more complex than a simple oppressor/oppressed relationship.

Men in the novel who are also depicted as pathetic victims of a power system which far from leading to a fulfillment of their interests and goals actually imprisons and transforms them into puppets. Pick up any of the male figures: Papa, Arun, Bakul, Anamika's husband, Ramu, Rod, and Mr. Patton. If there is any one idea that runs through each of them it is their being helpless puppets in the hands of forces they don't even understand, leave apart control, manipulate and benefit from. Fractured families; compromised selves; dead or compromised children, wives reduced to mute or parroting puppets – this is what men in control get out of their lives. Think carefully, is this what any sane person in a position of control would want from the situation he is controlling? Or are these people manifesting a form of cultural insanity?

### **Feminism and *Fasting, Feasting***

Before analyzing the novel as a feminist document let us first stop to understand what the term feminism refers to. Feminism can be understood as a body of ideas relating to the power struggle in the man-woman relationship, an approach to understanding and ameliorating the condition of women or a political movement to achieve the goals stated above. All the three senses are active in Anita Desai's works.

Desai, when asked how the feminist movement affected her as a woman writer, responded that she found it ‘impossible to whip up interest in a mass of women marching under the banner of feminism.’ This is Desai stating her discomfort with the third sense of the term although her works can be read in a sense as a lone woman’s voice striving to understand and ameliorate the condition of women. Desai writes in a context and with a purpose and the two cannot be delinked in an understanding of her interests and position. This is not to imply that other concerns do not enter her works. As we shall see later Desai has consciously shifted her focus from women in the recent past.

Desai’s female protagonists are Hindu, urban, educated, and middle-class. The men who are their husbands, fathers, or brothers are businessmen or professionals. It is within this social milieu that these women respond as heroines by scrutinizing, criticizing, and reacting to the values espoused by men. It is in this context that Desai raises the feminist issues of empowerment and choice for women vs. patriarchy; socialization which confines women to subordinate roles through education and role stereotypes; and the devaluation of the female perspective.

When Desai was writing in India the 1975 was declared the International Women’s Year. This was an effort to raise the consciousness of the people to the need to improve the condition of women. Desai’s novels are part of the ferment that led to the need to focus attention on women in India and the consequent critical engagements that flow from it.

The year 1975 also saw the publication of the ‘Status of India Report’: education, socialization, patriarchy, and religious traditions. Based on the Report, Indian feminists tried to define the causes of women’s subordination and the intricacies of its politics. Partha Mukherji defines the central orientation of feminism as an effort to counter the:

‘institutionalized system of unequal patriarchal gender relationships, [where] the woman is disadvantaged with respect to man . . . this is in spite of the fact that gender differences, ipso facto, did not make for unequal capacities or capabilities in the performance of societal roles.’

This unequal patriarchal relationship includes: patriarchy, a male dominance system; patrilocality, a bride’s living at her husband’s male-headed joint family home; and patrilineal descent, ancestry and wealth continued from father to son—all of which confirm and perpetuate the Indian woman’s inferior status. Patrilocality is characterized by the joint family, i.e., ‘family property jointly owned by adult men and inheritable only in the male lineage, genealogical relationship of these men, the hierarchical structure of authority, which is arranged according to sex and seniority, dependence of women and children.’ Women are considered outsiders who have to be socialized

and incorporated into the family matrix. The break-up of the joint family in modern urban society is illusory 'since it is structurally oriented towards jointness, the innermost core of which is the father-son relationship.'

Another feminist scholar Maria Mies includes the *purdah* system as part of the same patriarchal ideology that considers women as property in need of protection and reduces them to their sexual function. With her body capable of reproduction, she is a reproducing property who ought to be guarded if she is to procreate only for the husband's family. She concludes that although women may not wear the veil, the *purdah* system still has influence between the sexes in the middle classes, regulating the appearance of women in the masculine public sphere. Mies feels that studying middle class women helps to understand how patriarchy as a system functions since working women 'may be more exploited economically and the housewife is more dependent and sometimes more oppressed.'

Madhu Kishwar attributes men's ability to stay in their own homes, amongst their own people, as being one of the most important components in the maintenance of male power in Indian society. Part of the 'psychological warfare' used by the husband's household to teach a new bride her place and encourage conformity is to deprive her of money and to taunt the new bride about the quality and number of saris given to her when she marries. Lack of privacy and examination and appropriation of gifts is part of a strategy to make the bride accept a subordinate position within the family. Kishwar considers that harassment by the mother and sisters of the husband tends to get overstressed because they are the ones most in contact with the bride in the home. In fact, they would not use harassment as a means of role subordination without 'tacit or explicit approval of the powerful male members of the family' who want to perpetuate their dominant position.

In an article on the issue of women's subordination titled 'On the Construction of Gender,' Leela Dube focuses on socialization patterns which teach young girls the differential value placed on male and female children, the roles appropriate to girls, and how girls shape images of themselves for their future lives as wives and mothers. For women, the positive value of marriage, which signifies 'good fortune and a state of bliss,' is contrasted with the negative and inauspicious significance of widowhood. Another aspect of female socialization is the training for female tasks (preparation and serving of food, housekeeping, and childcare) which are considered natural for females and inappropriate for males. Dube states: 'It is within those limits that women question their subordination, express resentment, use manipulative strategies, often against other women in the family, to carve out a living space and to collude in their own oppression.'

Malavika Karlekar, in her article, 'Woman's Nature and the Access to Education,' asserts that by strengthening the stereotype of woman's natural and primary role as mother, nurturer and homemaker, the field is left open

for male dominance in the positions of public power, authority and decision making. A conflict arises over the ideals of womanhood and the ideals of education: 'The purported aims of education which are the creation among all of a certain measure of independence of thought, a spirit of inquiry, and of objectivity, could well threaten the carefully maintained differences between boys and girls.' Even though girls have access to education, by stressing that certain courses are more fit or natural for girls than for boys, the educational system through its curriculum denies women access to positions of power and dominance and keeps women under strict control.

Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* describes a woman as defining herself as a 'nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate' while a man associates himself with autonomous thinking, clear decision-making and responsible action. By focusing on the female concern with relationships as opposed to the masculine one of autonomy, women's 'concern with relationships appears as a weakness rather than a human strength,' because of theories of psychological development and economic arrangements. Gilligan contrasts the ways in which men and women conceive of morality: for the female, morality is 'concerned with the activity of care [which] centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships'; while the male 'conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules.' She adds that 'the ethic of self-sacrifice is directly in conflict with the concept of rights that has, in this past century, supported women's claim to a fair share of social justice.'

Shoma Chatterji, in 'The Indian Woman's Search for an Identity', calls motherhood a bondage and a 'mirage which never materializes in terms of emotional returns.' She questions why a woman must bear the cost of lost opportunities for a chance to find an identity of her own when the cost is not worth it. Beside her role as mother-nurturer, a woman plays the role of 'vicarious achiever': one who is married to an important man and whose contribution to his career is neither officially recognized nor economically rewarded. She is considered invisible in that it is only her husband who is employed, and though her participation in his career is necessary, she is never thought of as a separate human being. Volunteer work, entertainment of guests, holding parties, and organizing charities are part of her activities; conflict arises when the wife is expected to engage in those activities which she would personally rather not perform. Through the internalization of male values which determine that women should be long-suffering, that 'endurance is part of femininity,' women suffer silently from wife-abuse. Shoma Chatterji relates wife-abuse to the male dominance factor in society and says that the general response to wife-abuse is a 'blame the victim' or 'she must deserve it' attitude: 'This means that a large segment of society and the Indian social ethos in particular, actually legitimizes-emotionally, socially and morally-this practice.'

It is not surprising that the story of Uma, Aruna and Anamika seem to be fictional embodiments of these theoretical positions. Anita Desai's analysis of these women's lives seems to be making roughly the same points although there are a number of other issues interwoven in her depiction. notice the way Partha Chatterjee's point about unequal power and responsibility distribution between men and women is embodied in virtually every married couple in the novel, whether Indian or American. Kishwar's point out the forced socialization of women through a psychological warfare applicable directly to Aruna's life. Mies point about the confinement of women seems an analysis of Anamika's life while Leela's article seems to be written to explain the forces to which Uma is subjected. Shoma Chatterjee helps us understand Aruna's life as a quest for the recognition and status normally available only to men while her point about wife-abuse is writ large in the life of the brilliant Anamika.

Psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar, quoting extensively from ancient Hindu texts, contends that despite urbanization and education, a 'formidable consensus on the ideal of woman hood... still [in the mid-Seventies] governs the inner imagery of individual men and women as well as the social relations between them in both the traditional and modern sectors of the Indian community' (Inner World 68). Desai almost corroborates it in a 1990 article, 'A Secret Connivance': '[The] one hundred thousand ...cults built around the Mother Goddess.... [the ] fecund figure from whom all good things flow....make her not merely the ideal mother but the ideal woman—consort, lover, plaything' (972). Citing illiteracy and material dependence that still make Indian women 'connive at' this mythological idealization, Desai seeks to explain their complicity in their servitude. A recent nation-wide survey of Indian families (National Family Health Survey II) offers a shocking revelation: wife beating is an offence for which most Indian women find some justification or the other. On the other hand, women's organizations across the country have lent active support to the Bill for Protection from Domestic Violence 2002, cleared after significant debate.

### **Women Participating in Patriarchy**

The larger scenario is however not as simple as society organizing a political system called patriarchy in which men exploit women. No simple analysis of women's condition actually has much lasting value. After all several women in *Feasting Fasting* actually end up exploiting other men and women in much the same way as men are accused of and derive personal benefit from it. This forces us to redefine the question of patriarchy's relation to men and women and open it up to a much broader field of operation.

As Johnson implies earlier, women participate in patriarchy because that is where they have been socialized, and they do not see an alternative:

women have learned to identify with patriarchy and even defend it. They accept their inferior status or the inferiority of others in relation to themselves because that is all they can get (or this is what they have learned to believe). Going along patriarchy becomes the women's path of least resistance. In a way, women make the best of what they have and 'build whatever basis of power and influence they can', as Johnson puts it. In *Fasting, Feasting*, the power used by women can especially be seen in the mother-daughter relationships. However, one should also keep in mind that men and women are not equal 'conspirators'; as Johnson (2005, 167) points out, patriarchy 'gives men and women different interests, resources, and experience'.

It seems that Mama uses even more power over Uma than Papa does. Whereas Papa often expresses his disapproval by wordless sulking and only rarely speaks out his anger or disappointment, it is Mama who openly criticizes Uma: as the narrator describes the division of roles between the parents, 'Papa's chosen role was scowling, Mama's scolding'. One of the most conspicuous examples of Mama's verbal abuse against Uma takes place when Ramu and Uma return from their visit to a local restaurant late in the evening, Uma tipsy from the shandy she has been drinking. Uma had never been to a restaurant before, and she is now eager to tell her mother how much fun she had. But instead of sharing her joy, Mama yells at her: "Quiet, you hussy! Not another word from you, you idiot child!" Mama's face glints like a knife in the dark, growing narrower and fiercer as it comes closer. 'You, you disgrace to the family – nothing but disgrace, *ever!*'

What kind of control is mama exercising here and what does she get in return? The desire to control her daughter's life completely so that her entire value framework is moulded to suit the interest of her parents is clear. What Mama gets in return is the possibility of complete subservience which is a function of her will to power, or the cultural structuring of the powerful and the powerless rather than a lesson she has learnt from patriarchy.

If such control structures have been always present in society (we could refer to the Greek society for a similar phenomenon) and the structures can have men as well as women on different ends of the equation, why drag the name of the 'pater' of father to refer to it through patriarchy?

I hope you will keep thinking about this question. Is this a question of naming as metaphor, or using a dominant group to name a power relationship or simply a case of inaccuracy?

There are other mothers in *Fasting, Feasting* who mistreat their daughters. Ayah, the female servant of Uma's family, trivially talks about how she beats her good-for-nothing daughter Lakshmi. In addition to mothers, mothers-in-law are another group of women who resort to violence. It is rumoured that Anamika, Uma's cousin, is regularly battered by her mother-in-law. Mrs. Joshi, Uma's neighbour, had shared the same fate in



her youth. It is worthy of remark that the only kind of violence that is implied in the novel is practiced *by* women *against* women; there are no violent men. Thus, it is women who are responsible for the most flagrant mistreatment of other women. As for Anamika's death, it is unclear whether she commits suicide or whether she is killed by her mother-in-law (who either would have acted alone or together with her son; his potential complicity in the murder is thus the only case where male violence is hinted at).

In Papa arrangement of Arun's life through the obsessive education, we see a similar need for control. Mama's area of responsibility is marrying off the daughters and she is authoritative in the same way about it. Thus, Mama is more actively involved in the actual search of the husbands, whereas Papa mainly takes care of the financial arrangements (dowry and wedding costs). When Mama discovers that Uma's first potential suitor had expressed his interest in the thirteen-year-old Aruna, instead of Uma, Mama is scandalized for his impudence, but shows no compassion for Uma: 'Uma gave a startled look and hurried away. Mama did not notice, or care'. And, when Uma is humiliated for the second time (a family takes a dowry but backs out of the marriage plans), Mama again wallows in her own disappointment, not paying any attention to Uma. Correspondingly, Mama experiences Aruna's prosperous marriage as her own achievement, as a sign of her competence in training her daughter for marriage. This repeated collapse into self-lamentation and self concern points to the unreality of Uma as a human being for the parents and her status as an object that can be controlled to meet personal ends.

Mama supports conservative values, even if they are in an obvious contradiction with women's well-being. When Anamika has a miscarriage, presumably caused by the beating by her mother-in-law, and as a consequence is no longer able to have children ('she was damaged goods'), Uma and Aruna think it would be best for her to return to her childhood home, even though other people might disapprove of a divorce. But for Mama, reputation is all that matters, and she condemns the girls' naïve thoughts: "Don't talk like that," Mama scolded them. "I don't want to hear all these modern ideas. Is it what you learnt from the nuns at the convent?" Mama clearly associates the 'modern ideas' with Western (Christian) culture, as she names the convent school as their potential source. Mama rejects the Western values because they could lead to Uma and Aruna questioning her authority; or, what is worse, the girls could become converted. For this reason, Mama and Papa are unwilling to let Uma go to a coffee party organized by Mrs. Henry, the wife of a Baptist missionary. One cannot fail to notice how differently the parents treat their children based on their gender: whereas the parents (Mama in particular) are concerned about their daughters' 'Westernization', they have no such concerns regarding Arun –

on the contrary, Papa is more concerned of Arun not becoming Westernized *enough*.

In her relationship to her daughters, Mama clearly takes the opportunity to use power; the power over her daughters is, after all, the only kind of power she will ever achieve (this confirms Johnson's statement about women building 'whatever basis of power and influence they can'). In her marriage with Papa, Mama has accepted the fact that she will never be fully equal with him, but on the other hand, she has also created 'survival strategies' which strengthen her position. It is partly difficult to perceive Mama as an oppressed woman, because she seems to enjoy her life, and even furtively indulges in activities that Papa would disapprove of, such as playing rummy with her friends or chewing betel leaves. Against the common expectations, the American housewife, Mrs. Patton, seems even more disempowered than Mama, in the end.

### **The Resisting Woman**

Hindu mythology may be replete with female figures idealizing the virtues of woman's chastity, submission and sacrifice—all to the benefit of men, but it also has a considerable body of cultural imagery that militates against traditional male orthodoxies. Kali in Hindu mythology is one such icon that Desai appropriates. Cast in the image of a semi-naked black woman with a garland of skulls around her neck and her gory tongue outstretched as she steps on the prostrate body of Shiva, Kali is the symbol of cosmic female power and resistance to male control over the ages. 'The product of the pre-Aryan age given over to the predominantly female centred beliefs', Kali presents the most potent counter-discourse to latter-day patriarchal trappings of power and authority (159). Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi also believe that the matriarchal myth of Kali 'tells the story of [Indian] women's continuing power and their resistance to male control'.

Significantly, the contemporary women's movement in India has adopted Kali as a symbol for their goal of freedom from patriarchal hegemony. India's first feminist publishing house, established in 1984, is called Kali for Women. Urvashi Butalia of the publishing house says: '[The name] acquired a lot of meaning for us - as a symbol of womanpower. Kali is the avatar in which Parvati destroys the world, fed up with her husband's intrusiveness after having wondered all over the world. She is not a consort, she is an independent woman. To my mind, she destroys the world in order to create a new world'. 'Kali is not... the murderous cannibal of common perception' (15). Annihilating the mighty demon Raktabija, she poses a threat to the male principle and phallic power. In addition, the figure of Kali is an enabling one for women because of the goddess's legendary sexual dominance over Shiva. The image of Dakshina-Kali, sitting erotically over Shiva, is a case in point.

Desai juxtaposes the two different orders of cultural discourse, both rooted in Hindu mythology, to create a new site for contemporary Indian women. In fact, she situates the patriarchal practices of Indian Hindu society to contest them from within and then brings in alternative, empowering images of Indian femininity to celebrate the transformations of female consciousness. Desai not only uses alternative myths to create new paradigms but recasts old attitudes into new motifs to achieve her liberalist purpose. Thus the nature of resistance varies from suicide as a ‘stand against the general current’ to the severance of all bonds for absolute autonomy. These are positions that she will work upon in her later and non-fictional works but this novel clearly shows an assessment of the complexity of the situation from where such mature responses will be worked out.

## 1.7 Narrative Technique

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*Fasting, Feasting* has a complex structure with no clear plot; the story moves on both in the present time and, through numerous flashbacks, in the past. The chapters in the novel are short and they often begin by first presenting a concrete situation showing interaction between the characters; these situations are then followed by background information (in the form of flashbacks).

This technique is relevant especially in relation to the subject matter at hand. The narration from the consciousness of the narrator and one of the main characters gives us a view of the world as it is perceived by the narrator/character. The narrator/character in the act of trying to perceive the world interprets it. And it is in order to interpret the world that flashbacks are required. Perceived events are linked to past ones in a quest for certainty of meaning as the narrator/character weaves the story. Past and present events interlink to provide a perspective on the character/event under scrutiny.

The narrator in the novel is extradiegetic; however, through internal focalization, it is particularly Uma’s perspective that is presented in the first part and Arun’s in the second part of the novel. In addition, there are a few instances in the first part of the novel where the focalization momentarily shifts from Uma to some other character. Also, the narrator often comments the story, usually in an ironic way.

### Check Your Progress-5

1. What term does Holter prefer to ‘patriarchy’?
2. List the four main features of patriarchy as defined by Johnson.
3. What is the narrative technique used in the novel *Fasting, Feasting*?

## 1.8 Let Us Sum Up

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- Anita Desai is an English language Indian novelist and author of children's books who excelled in evoking character and mood through visual images. She is a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London.
- Anita Desai's first book, *Cry, the Peacock* was published in England in 1963, and her better known novels include *In Custody* (1984), which was also adapted into a movie by Merchant Ivory Productions by the same name and *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988).
- Desai writes only in English. This, she has repeatedly said, was a natural and unconscious choice for her: 'I can state definitely that I did not choose English in a deliberate and conscious act and I'd say perhaps it was the language that chose me and I started writing stories in English at the age of seven, and have been doing so for thirty years now without stopping to think why.'
- The parents in *Fasting, Feasting* appear to have merged into a single identity MamaPapa/PapaMama, as if they have a 'Siamese twin existence'. Hence, whenever MamaPapa say something, and whoever says it, it comes with double the intensity and power so that it cannot be defied at all. 'Having fused into one, they had gained so much in substance, in stature, in authority, that they loomed large enough as it was; they did not need separate histories and backgrounds to make them even more immense'.
- There is an absence of guilt or grief in the parents after Uma's return. The emotion that rightly describes MamaPapa's response is perhaps disgust. They assess the failed marriage as yet another confirmation of Uma's worthlessness and hold her guilty of not having been able to save the marriage.
- Unlike his sisters, right from his birth, Arun desists eating the food of his family which is symbolic of its values and thus shows signs of resistance, though not to any avail. Much to the dismay of his father, Arun cannot be forced to eat non-vegetarian food, although it has revolutionized his family's life. This, of course, is a cause of disappointment and perhaps is unacceptable for Papa.
- Some critics have interpreted the fused identity of MamaPapa as a way of generalizing the characters; many parents in the Indian middle class could be like them. On the other hand, it could also be that 'in being unnamed, MamaPapa seems devoid not only of parental nurture but of finer human qualities'. A third possibility is that 'Mama' and 'Papa' indicate that the parents are mainly presented from the children's

perspective (as restricted to their parental roles rather than as multidimensional personalities).

- Mr. Patton's daughter Rod's sister, Melanie is brought into the ambit of the novel through the perception of Arun. She is a typical American brat who throws tantrums about her food, clothes and personal freedom. The tantrums, however, Arun's analysis reveals are based on a deep malady within the Patton family structure and the American culture as a whole.
- There are three major themes running in *Fasting, Feasting*. The first and the most obvious is the theme of feminism and an analysis of what women's condition is in modern India and why. The second asks the same set of questions in relation to men. The third section tries to assess Anita Desai's relation to both these phenomenon and tries to understand what she is trying to project through the novel.
- In Papa arrangement of Arun's life through the obsessive education, we see a similar need for control Mama's area of responsibility is marrying off the daughters and she is authoritative in the same way about it. Thus, Mama is more actively involved in the actual search of the husbands, whereas Papa mainly takes care of the financial arrangements (dowry and wedding costs).
- *Fasting, Feasting* has a complex structure with no clear plot; the story moves on both in the present time and, through numerous flashbacks, in the past. The chapters in the novel are short and they often begin by first presenting a concrete situation showing interaction between the characters; these situations are then followed by background information (in the form of flashbacks).

## 1.9 Key Words

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- **Eurocentrism:** A political term coined in the 1980s, referring to the notion of European exceptionalism, a worldview centered on Western civilization, as it had developed during the height of the European colonial empires since the Early Modern period.
- **Paradigm:** A typical example or pattern of something; a pattern or model
- **Narrative technique:** The methods that writers use to give certain artistic and emotional effects to a story
- **Extradiegetic narrator:** Merely a narrator, telling a story but indicating no personal involvement in or relationship to this story, which may even be presumed to take place on another level of reality from that in which he or she exists.

## 1.10 Suggested Readings

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- Tiwari, Shubha. (2004). *Critical Responses to Anita Desai*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist.
- Surendran, K. V (contributor). (2002). *Women's Writing in India: New Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.
- Shukla, Sheo Bhushan, Anu Shukla. (2005). *Aspects of Contemporary Post/Colonial Literature*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.
- Singh, Anita. (2007). *Existential Dimensions in the Novels of Anita Desai*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.

## 1.11 Terminal Questions

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1. Why do some critics accuse Anita Desai of Eurocentrism?
2. Name at least two novels authored by Anita Desai that were shortlisted for the Booker Prize.
3. What conscious change did Anita Desai bring in her literary productions after 2001?
4. Explore the ways in which Desai clearly conveys the impact of the pursuit of education on Arun's life?
5. Examine the characterization of Uma in *Fasting, Feasting*.
6. What are the major themes that Desai discusses in her novel *Fasting, Feasting*?
7. How does the character of Uma relate to the theme of gender discrimination in *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai?
8. How has marriage been portrayed in *Fasting, Feasting*?

## 1.12 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

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### Check Your Progress-1

1. Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, was published in 1963, and since then, she has published numerous novels as well as short story collections and children's books.
2. Anita Desai's novel *In Custody* (1984) was adapted into a movie by Merchant Ivory Productions by the same name.
3. Anita Desai won the Neil Gunn Prize in 1993.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1. Desai has typically concentrated on the feminine psyche and feelings of loneliness and alienation. Her stories often involve troubled relationships between married couples or family members.
2. Desai's restriction to middle or upper class characters has sometimes been criticized; some critics find middle class characters 'unrepresentative' of Indian women—or India generally.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1. When Uma decides to write a letter to a friend to share her grief, she realizes that she does not have anyone to write to.
2. Ramu is Anamika's brother and the son of Papa's brother. A happy-go-lucky character, he is academically the reverse of Anamika, that is, completely unsuited to serious academic pursuits. He eventually settles in a farm house which Desai only refers to but his visit to Uma has is highlight in their visit to a neighbouring restaurant where Uma gets high on shandy. Both of them have a great time there and after, for which Mama showers a bevy of bitter words on Uma and perhaps makes it clear that Ramu's visit is unwelcome. However, the two cousins provide each other with the kind of company that each of them had been craving for. Their relationship permits them the freedom to indulge in their desires and speak their heart out in a way that is not available to them within their own households.

**Check Your Progress-4**

1. Some critics have interpreted this fused identity as a way of generalizing the characters; many parents in the Indian middle class could be like them. On the other hand, it could also be that 'in being unnamed, MamaPapa seems devoid not only of parental nurture but of finer human qualities'. A third possibility is that 'Mama' and 'Papa' indicate that the parents are mainly presented from the children's perspective (as restricted to their parental roles rather than as multidimensional personalities).
2. Arun is used as an effective critique of the American way of life. In a country of abundance, there is feasting, but there is also fasting, Arun observes. It is just the two male characters, the father and the son of the American family, who are 'feasting' both literally on the 'carcasses' of beef and metaphorically on the 'carcasses'-to-become of their female family counterparts, exactly because the patriarchal order has deadly effects on women. On the other hand, the female characters are feasting only seemingly; the mother supplies the household

with tons of food but she herself does not know what to eat, and nobody cares. Her daughter Melanie suffers from bulimia, the emblematic disease of young women neglected emotionally; seemingly she is feasting on peanuts and candy bars, which, in reality, brings about starvation (fasting).

Arun himself, supposedly feasting on a first-class education, is starved of any fulfillment and satisfaction because he has difficulties to adapt to the American 'diet,' both literal and metaphorical, the food and the American culture.

3. The wife of Mr. Patton, Arun's summer host in America and the mother of Rod and Melanie, Mrs. Patton represents the uncontrolled, completely self-centred American consumerist ethics on the one hand even as she represents the exploited and oppressed woman on the other hand. In relation to her husband she is a mute or parroting puppet who does not manifest any signs of an independent subjectivity or interiority in interactions with him. She is completely insensitive to the emotional and nutritional demands of her daughter who has walked into a psycho-somatic crisis for which she will have to eventually seek treatment and professional care. She has watched her son grow fiercely independent without any regard for his parents or his sister and is carrying on the carcass of a family, if by family we understand a network of blood relations that exist in a bond of mutual respect and harmony. It is only in interaction with Arun that she sees the possibility of an alternative life. Arun presents to her the possibility of challenging her husband's non-vegetarianism, a deeper understanding of Melanie's bulimia and a meaningful engagement with Rod's fanatic zeal. However, Arun is on a summer holiday and can only initiate a thought process which it is highly unlikely she has the will and the ability to pursue further.

### Check Your Progress-5

1. Holter prefers the term 'structural gender inequality' to 'patriarchy'.
2. The four main features of patriarchy as defined by Johnson are as follows:
  - (i) Male dominance
  - (ii) Male identification
  - (iii) Male centredness
  - (iv) Obsession with control
3. The narrator in the novel is extradiegetic; however, through internal focalization, it is particularly Uma's perspective that is presented in



the first part and Arun's in the second part of the novel. In addition, there are a few instances in the first part of the novel where the focalization momentarily shifts from Uma to some other character. Also, the narrator often comments the story, usually in an ironic way.

## UNIT - 2

### AMITAV GHOSH: *THE SHADOW LINES*

#### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Amitav Ghosh: A Short Biography
- 2.3 *The Shadow Lines*: An Overview
  - 2.3.1 Important Characters and Events-based Summary
  - 2.3.2 Themes
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Key Words
- 2.6 Terminal Questions
- 2.7 Suggested Readings
- 2.8 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

#### 2.0 Objectives

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

- Describe Amitav Ghosh's life and literature
- Analyse the literary works of Amitav Ghosh from a critical perspective with special emphasis on *The Shadow Lines*

#### 2.1 Introduction

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Amitav Ghosh was born on 11 July 1956 in Calcutta. He pursued his education at the Doon School and then continued his higher studies at St Stephen's College, Delhi University; Delhi School of Economics and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, where he was awarded a D. Phil in Social Anthropology. He started his career with his first job at the Indian Express in New Delhi. Ghosh lives in New York, and has been a Fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. He joined as a distinguished professor in Comparative Literature in 1999 at Queens College, City University of New York. He has also been a visiting professor to the English department of Harvard University since 2005.

This unit focuses on his book, *The Shadow Lines*, which can be analysed from a critical perspective.

## 2.2 Amitav Ghosh: A Short Biography

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Amitav Ghosh presently resides in New York with his wife, Deborah Baker. His wife is the author of the Laura Riding biography *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (1993); she is also a senior editor at Little, Brown and Company. Amitav and Deborah have two children named Lila and Nayan. After having been a part of the faculty at Queens College, City University of New York, Ghosh returned to India and initiated work on his *Ibis* trilogy. Out of the three novels, two novels have been published to date—*Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*.

In 2007, Ghosh was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India. He was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2009.

The more important among his works include *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and *Sea of Poppies* (2008). *The Circle of Reason* won the Prix Médicis étranger, one of France's top literary awards. *The Shadow Lines* won the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Ananda Puraskar. *The Calcutta Chromosome* won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for 1997. *Sea of Poppies* was shortlisted for the 2008 Man Booker Prize. It was the co-winner of the Vodafone Crossword Book Award in 2009.

The following are the works of Amitav Ghosh:

### Novels

- *The Circle of Reason* (1986)
- *The Shadow Lines* (1988)
- *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995)
- *The Glass Palace* (2000)
- *The Hungry Tide* (2005)
- *Sea of Poppies* (2008)
- *River of Smoke* (2011)

### Non-Fiction

- *In an Antique Land* (1992)
- *Dancing in Cambodia and At Large in Burma* (1998; Essays)
- *Countdown* (1999)
- *The Imam and the Indian* (2002; Essays)
- *Incendiary Circumstances* (2006; Essays)

### Check Your Progress-1

1. In which year was Amitav Ghosh awarded the Padma Shri?
2. Which novel of Amitav Ghosh won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1997?

### 2.3 *The Shadow Lines*: An Overview

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Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Shadow Lines* chooses to narrate a story that permeates through the line of reality and fiction, memories and assumptions, time and space. This is Ghosh's second novel that shelters his place as one of India's best writers in English. Ghosh's novels are believed to be ingrained with minute information of the time written about along with the situation in which the novel is based and his words are imbued with lot of meaning. With so many novels having penned down, his work seems to reinvent with every new work he writes but *The Shadow Lines* can be said to be his best novel.

*The Shadow Lines* is a novel narrated by an unnamed narrator and is a story in recollection. Unlike most novels, this novel is written in a non-linear pattern where the narrator, while recapitulating, seems to put together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. This pattern of story telling is exclusive and also beguiling where the story unfolds as time and space fuse together to help the narrator make sense of his past in a better way. In a globalized world, this story revolves around the motif of nationalism where Ghosh repeatedly questions the idea of freedom and borders across countries that practically seem to both build and isolate. *The Shadow Lines* travels through the memories of the characters and covers about 70 years through these memories. It is here that the unnamed narrator reminisces his past and narrates the memories of his past portraying his own viewpoints along with that of the others. The novel seems to portray the ideas and sentiments of the entire South-east Asia even when the novel is based mainly in Calcutta, Dhaka and London underlying the idea of Independence and the agony of Partition.

*The Shadow Lines* is a story about a middle class Indian family based in Calcutta. The unnamed narrator puts forward the sentiments and ideas of his family members and immediate extended family members that helps in moulding a well defined character for each of them. The character that stands out among all the others is Tha'mma, the narrator's grandmother, who is the most realized character in the story. Tha'mma gives a definite idea of the heroism, grandeur and the passion with which people worked towards the strengthening of the nation immediately after independence. In

a way, she is the mouthpiece of Ghosh through whom Ghosh delivers the message and idea of the entire novel, i.e., the vanity of building nation states, the irrational drawing of boundaries that promptly divide people even when their memories remain undivided. All the characters in the novel are fully developed. Tridib, the narrator's uncle, is one of the most unique characters of our times. Tridib is a character who travels the world via his imagination and hence the narrator's obsession with him is quite measurable. Ghosh quite skillfully works to do away with the myth that borders regulate and restrain people, since there are no borders in imagination. Though we see that Ghosh is a little mean towards the portrayal of Ila, the narrator's cousin and first love, even then her portrayal is important in bringing out the confusions that people living outside their native land face and the animosity they face. Ghosh provides enough space to the British Price family and unlike most of the writers, he does not stereotype them.

### **2.3.1 Important Characters and Events-based Summary**

*The Shadow Lines* is a story of a Bengali family. It is through this story that Ghosh attempts to put forward, analyze and question the contemporary issues being contested in India. Through the portrayal of three generations of this family, the story explores not only the development of Calcutta as a city but also India as a nation over a period of three decades.

#### ***Tha'mma***

The issue of the Bengal Partition, the entire idea about a nation, nationhood and nationalism—are all explained through the character of Tha'mma, the narrator's grandmother. The idea of history being dubious is highlighted through the character of the erratic historian cousin, Tridib. Ila comes under the third generation through whom Ghosh brings forth the problem of diaspora and racial prejudice. The most important character is the narrator who forms the central character as it is through him that Ghosh voices the other characters' views and fuses these viewpoints and ideas to throw light on the fact that both public arenas like history and personal arenas like real life incidents are incomplete till they are integrated.

*The Shadow Lines* opens with the eight-year-old narrator reminiscing of his experiences of his childhood and school days, living in the Gole-Park area in Calcutta. The narrator makes his readers acquainted with the two sides of his family—that of his grandmother's side and that of his grandmother's sister, Mayadebi's side. The narrator's father is a middle class manager in a tyre company and his grandmother Tha'mma is a school teacher. Mayadebi's family is richer than the narrator's family where her husband is a high-ranking officer in the foreign services and her two sons, Jatin and Robi, being an economist with the United Nations and a Civil

Servant respectively. It is only Tridib among her sons who is not that successful career wise. However, the readers are not at all unaware of his knowledge, even if being erratic, Tridib in the real sense is the storehouse of all esoteric knowledge.

The two sisters, Tha'mma and Mayadebi are often thick with each other, even when Tha'mma is religiously on her guard on receiving aid and support from Mayadebi. Here, it becomes essential to brief the reader of her past experiences. Tha'mma, as a young woman who used to live in Dhaka, was married off to a young Engineer posted in Burma prior to the Partition of Bengal. Tha'mma happens to lose her husband very early in life and is helpless in raising her only son as a single mother. She struggles to provide the basic necessities of life and hence starts her career as a school teacher in Bengal. She raises her only son independently and lives a simplistic life where 'wasted time stinks'. She was a self-made woman who denied the help of her rich relatives. In the middle of the narrative, she happens to retire from her school and her life comes to a full circle.

The novel highlights Tha'mma's ideas and perception of certain past historical events along with her idea of the nation, nationhood and nationalism. Tha'mma, as a young woman is attracted to the extremist nationalist politics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and also wishes to be a member of such extremist systems such as *Anushilan* and *Jugantar*. Robi, her sister's son, is her favourite nephew as he not only possesses a good education but also a good body that is very important for the pursuit of nation building.

She is not affected by the fact that she is a dislocated Bengali woman until she pays a visit to her sister in Dhaka. She is compelled to look into her partitioned self while compiling her immigration papers for her visit to Dhaka. Ghosh here inquires into the conception of physical and psychological spaces. Ghosh talks of 'Phantom distances' through the shadow lines that the state ideologies mark so as to emphasize the idea of a nation. In a country as diverse as India in terms of its cultural, economic, social and linguistic arenas, the idea of nationhood is established through these 'imagined communities'. But, on the other hand, there are communities who resided in pre-partitioned Bengal who were thrown apart on different sides of the boundary by barbed wire fencing, passports and immigration papers emphasizing a much wider sense of psychological distance between the two.

The only person residing in Tha'mma's ancestral house is her uncle (father's brother) as he is unable to take in the fact that a country has been or can be partitioned. In fact, her uncle is completely out of touch with reality. Ghosh, through this character, delves into the idea of collective madness and normalcy. The question as to who is normal and who is mad is being dwelt in the novel. Ironically, the uncle is being named mad by the so called normal people in not believing the partition of the country, in fact,

those people have undergone a phase of collective madness who have supported this act of partition and they are the ones who have forced the non-conformists to the edge of madness. This uncle of Tha'mma also portrays the violence that history wreaks. Trauma post partition is a common thing for people who have undergone the agonies and distress of Partition and this takes the form of madness for many people, Tha'mma's uncle being one of them.

As a child, Tha'mma while in Dhaka, used to build stories about the contended upside down house. Their house was partitioned into two and this artificial construction of the partitioned house is somewhat similar to the nation as constructed by the politicians—a partitioned country. Previously, the two nations were part of one country similar to the two parts of the house which was a united one in the beginning, but time and the path that history took divides them and to maintain this separation between the two nations, difference has to be created. The fact that is ironic here is that Tha'mma who should have seen through this situation is happily uninformed of the political strategy employed by the state.

It could be that this oblivion on the part of Tha'mma was a deliberate part on her side to avoid the admission of certain facts that were deeply disturbing to her. Hence, this oblivion of Tha'mma becomes the means of her survival strategy. However hard she tries to run away from this situation, she has to confront it later when she has to go to Dhaka to bring back her old sick uncle. This becomes a very upsetting situation for her. She is forced to ponder over her identity while documenting her personal details for her visa.

There are certain places that are minutely described by Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* like the narrator's house in Gole Park, 44, Lymington Road, the house at Raibazar, the Price household, the Shodor Bazaar in Dhaka and the feud-ridden Dhaka house. All these places can be plotted on a street atlas. These certain places have a strong power of evocation and hence they add up to the realism of the story. These places have a power of permanence and hence they are not only the means to discover a particular location, they are also the means on which civil, political and private strife survive and still remain unaltered. Therefore, when compared to nations as a body, some locations surpass nations in terms of their strength. Nations are formed and they even die, while cartographers and politicians reorganize these spaces, but these locations remain unaffected by these changes.

### ***Tridib***

Tridib, the narrator's erratic cousin is an atypical character who does not seem to belong to the aristocratic atmosphere of his family. He is a research scholar who is gathering information on the ancient Sena dynasty of Bengal

and is often seen surrounded by his books. His voice is the one that carries the weight of the historical vision. He is a character who is seen to be thirsty for knowledge right from the beginning of the novel.

It is through Tridib that the narrator receives his first-hand information on scholarship and he is also gifted with a Bartholomew's Atlas from his cousin which is found years later in the narrator's hostel in Delhi, symbolizing the strong influence that Tridib had on the narrator. The other side that the narrator portrays of Tridib is that of an eloquent talker. Tridib has an audience or *adda* of people in the neighbourhood of Gole Park in Calcutta. He is placed at the centre of these people with *chai* in their hands and listening to his quotidian talks. Here, he is more of a talker and performer than a historian. In these *addas*, the Tridib that talks is someone who exaggerates and twists the truth in front of an attentive audience who are struck in awe of his knowledge.

Tridib is a different character altogether in his family house in Calcutta. He is surrounded with his books in a quiet room in his house in Calcutta. The narrator confesses 'it was that Tridib that I liked the best: I was a bit unsure of the Tridib of the street corners.' Tha'mma too did not approve of this side of Tridib where he is seen in the streets lecturing people about various things that made his time stink. Through Tridib, the author is describing the two facets of a historian—the quiet and serious researcher and the boastful, powerful loud talker who twists the truth and manipulates his listeners. From here, we can say that the novel questions the political role of history.

### **May**

The relationship between May and Tridib begins with the passing on of friendly letters between the two till the one Tridib writes. Tridib, in the letter proposes to May where he describes an intimate love making scene between a couple in a theatre house in London which happens to be ravaged by war. He proposes to meet her 'as a stranger in a ruin.... as completest of strangers, strangers-across seas' without context or history. May is confused in the beginning but then she cannot resist his invitation and hence finally reaches India to meet him. But gradually this romance ends up in a discord between the two. Tridib and May assigned different meanings to the things surrounding them. When driving towards the Diamond Harbour along with the child narrator, they come across an injured dog. The narrator covers his eyes to escape the sight and Tridib drives along without any sign of compassion and love. May asks Tridib to drive back to the injured dog and she relieves the injured animal of his pain by helping him to die peacefully. Annoyed by the entire situation, May tells Tridib that 'he is worth words alone'.



Something similar happens when they along with Tha'mma, Mayadebi and Robi are cornered by the communal fights going on in Dhaka while they were bringing back the old uncle who used to live in Dhaka. All the others except the uncle who was following them in a rickshaw, were in a car and the angry mob first attacked the car and after being repulsed, the mob attacked the old man. Here, again Tha'mma instead of saving the old man, displays the same nonchalance that Tridib had once shown towards the injured animal and requested the driver to moov on without looking behind. May, here again gets out of the car and moves towards the mob to save the old man. Tridib, helpless cannot allow her to embrace death and hence follows her. In this accident, the angry mob attacks Tridib and he is killed. Tridib gets a promise from May that even he would get a peaceful death like the dog and this promise seems to be true in this situation where he gets a peaceful death like the dog. Of this incident the narrator gets to know only in the end when dissatisfied with other people's versions, he asks May to recount to him the cause of Tridib's death.

### *Ila*

Ila is the narrator's cousin who again casts an important influence on the young narrator. She is a globetrotter and settles in London. It is her experience of diverse places like Colombo and Cairo and her school experience of these exotic places that initiates the line of imagination for the child narrator. Along with Tridib's historical and geographic information, it is Ila's experience of her vibrant life across the globe that provides the narrator with colourful imagination outside his drab and dark Gole Park flat. Ila's colourful schoolbooks become an outlet for his imagination yet unseen for the narrator and althemore alluring.

For Ila, the important factor is the first hand experience of a situation that leads historicity of the situation to the background. When the narrator imagined the city of Cairo, all he could imagine is the pointed arch in the history of mankind, but for Ila 'Cairo is merely a place to piss in.' She flits from experience to experience with a heightened sensual gusto but failing to 'arrive' at any stage in the novel to a state of greater knowledge, insight or evolution. Tridib often said of her that 'the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places she had not travelled at all.'

The story also explores the model of citizenship of Ila living in London as an Indian along with the theme of partition. Even then, her experience as a student in London and then marrying a white man throws up an entire polemics about the diasporic community. When she happens to tell the narrator the story of a fantasy child Magda, it is quite obvious that the child is a result of her own mixed marriage. She imagines the classroom of the

child and is quite scared of the atmosphere, shows that she is facing these questions related to race associated with a mixed marriage. Her husband betrays her and her insecurity as a woman, doubly marginalized is brought to the fore, first as a woman and second as an Indian marrying a white man. Her life comes to a full circle from that anxious schoolgirl boasting about nonexistent boyfriends to the distraught adult finding it difficult to come to terms with an unfaithful husband.

### ***The unnamed narrator***

The narrator is introduced to us as an eight-year old child who is surrounded in an aristocratic atmosphere where the child is only expected to excel in his studies. The narrator escapes through this situation by meeting his uncle Tridib who teaches him to gain knowledge and not eat up knowledge. The narrator is given a gift of an atlas by his uncle which is considered to be a symbol of 'transference of knowledge' that exists between the two. Through Tridib, the author acquires the sensitivity towards knowledge. This sensitivity becomes an important part for the task of narration he undertakes later on.

The role of the narrator is not only to narrate the story, but he is the means that brings together all the other versions of the story to make a complete picture. It is essential to note that the author himself comes across more of a storyteller than an anecdote teller. The story narrated by the author has no beginnings, ends or does not belong to any particular person.

### ***Riots***

*The Shadow Lines* is influenced by a real life historic event: The 1984 Anti-Sikh riots, that changed the entire nation after the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. This very riot is here in the novel based in Calcutta that is experienced by the child narrator and which is deeply engrossed in his psyche. These riots as well as the riots described in the novel are ways to comment on our formal political institutions either of our past or even of the newspapers.

The narrator as a school student describes extensively a day during the Calcutta riots in 1964 and years later when he recalls those moments in front of his college friends, he is disappointed to know that none of them remember any such riots. To prove his description of these riots, he goes on to look for old newspapers to look for information of these riots. To his disappointment, the newspapers paint the incident in regular *journalese*. While going through the description of the communal riots experienced by him in Calcutta, he also comes across a similar event that took place simultaneously in Dhaka. It is at this moment that he is able to link up the two riots and he realizes that this is the same riot that claimed Tridib's life.

The novel questions the silence of these events in history. Probably because, the author says, these do not cohere well with constructs like a nation that the state has so painfully nurtured earlier: 'the madness of a riot is a pathological inversion, but also therefore, a reminder of that indivisible sanity that binds people independently of their governments. And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of the government, for it is the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relation between people...'

### 2.3.2 Themes

**History:** To put it simply, history records the past actions of people of a certain time. But when seen as a discipline, its importance as a means to record and disseminate selected ideas emerges. The old definition of history, which formed the basis of Western Historiography since Enlightenment, did not consider the varying perspectives which may colour the recording of events. Modern historians, however, recognized this and in fact, emphasized the subjectivity of the historian which appeared to play a role in the seemingly objective retelling of events. They realized that what would have happened was more likely much more complex and multilayered than it appeared to be from one historian's eyes. With the emergence of postmodernism, the mode of writing History has been also revisited.

The postmodernists argue that any telling of an event is subjective and cannot possibly be purely objective even if the historian intends it to be so. The historian, in fact, is powerless in the face of his/her own perspective which is certain to seep into their writing no matter how sincere their intentions may be to avoid it. In fact, a few thinkers, like Hayden White, feel so strongly about it that they claim that there is very little difference between retelling of historical events and fiction writing.

Historical retelling of events, inherently, is approved by the authorities first and then endorsed by the general public. With the credibility of public narrations coming into question, writers like Ghosh show the misleading description of Partition in Indian History. Not only do historiographers falsely claim that Partition was essential because of difference among the two sides, they also fail to correctly depict the human suffering the Partition led to. Further, the Calcutta riots, despite having been so traumatic for the author seem to have not registered as significant enough by historians to be recorded as an event.

**Shadow Lines:** The title *The Shadow Lines* signifies the random and manmade boundaries that divide nations. It represents a major theme of the novel, especially when seen in the context of Partition of India. The element which seems to be in complete opposition to an entity is actually a part of

the entity. In the novel, a house is used to explain the dichotomy. When they are young, Tha'mma and Mayadebi see their father and his brother fighting over the house which ultimately leads to a division.

Tha'mma, when she is a child, imagines their uncle's part of the house to be upside down in the stories she tells her younger sister. In Tha'mma's eyes therefore, the uncle's house represents the 'other' and something artificial or unnatural. This in a way, depicts people's mindset about the partitioned part of the nation. The nation used to be one whole and just in order to maintain a sense of the 'different' was partitioned. The Partition was ultimately a failure of the leaders' visionary powers. The idea and definition of nationalism is also redefined as a result of the idea of the 'other' having emerged from the self. While the very purpose of nationalism is to dilute the lines formed among various communities, it ends up adding to the concreteness of these lines further. From the perspective of the theorist Bhabha considers this an exercise of 'the narratives ... that signify a sense of 'nationness': the... pleasures of one's hearth and the... terror of the space of the other.' However, this idea, when applied to the Indian subcontinent, takes another shape because the differences have been created on purpose to justify the Partition. People in the created nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh are forced through narration 'language, signifiers, textuality, rhetoric' to consider differences where none exist.

**Partition:** 'At the origin of India and Pakistan lies the national trauma of Partition, a trauma that freezes fear into silence, and for which *The Shadow Lines* seeks to find a language, a process of mourning, and perhaps even a memorial' (Suvir Kaul in the essay 'Separation Anxiety').'

It was in the year 1947 that a large number of Indians became conscious of the idea of a nation. The major factors included the freedom from the British rule and also the Partition of India and the resulting mass movement of people away from their established homes into a future of uncertainty. The birth of new nations did not come without the agonizing labour pains—the Partition. Urvashi Butalia in her book *The Other Side of Silence* has noted that no monuments or memorials have been created to mark the huge event that dots India's history. However, none of the families that were affected can ever forget the trauma and still relive it through stories and anecdotes passed down through the generations. In fact, a number of novels and documentaries resulted from the experiences people had as a result of the Partition.

**Community and communal strife:** *The Shadow Lines* addresses the issue of Partition (1947). In fact, the author provides a detailed analysis of the very idea of a nation as it resulted from the Partition. Before the Partition, the idea of community was clear cut and in fact something that influenced narratives of its people. When North India was forced to split into India and

Pakistan and East into India and Bangladesh in 1947, 15 million people had to leave their homes and communities suddenly. The dislocated masses arrived into new nations, clueless, homeless and disoriented and immediately forced to celebrate in Delhi the independence of India. So, the Partition disrupted natural communities. Sudipta Kaviraj has differentiated between natural communities and interest-led communities in the following manner: “We can think of two kinds of communities: a primary, traditional group, to which ‘one does not make an interest actuated decision to belong’.”

Meanwhile the other type is a secondary one, which is formed on the basis of common political and economic ideas/interests. Partition leads to the disruption of the first in order to create the second. This newly created community can place their boundaries in time and space anywhere they like.’...unlike the former which have ‘naturally limited contours.’

As per the basis of the community, the narratives also differ. Narratives, as per Kaviraj, ‘are always told from someone’s point of view...they try to paint a picture of some kind of an ordered, intelligible, humane and habitable world...literally produce a world in which the self finds home.’ Whereas the natural community thrives on stories passed down through generations and a shared history of momentous events, the secondary type of community is usually represented by officially sponsored and scripted histories. So, in this sense, the Partition played an instrumental role in replacing the natural community with a secondary community which was bound by the idea of a ‘nation’. The stories of this nation were more scripted rather than natural as they would have been in a primary community.

There are many characters in this novel, specifically of the grandparents’ generation who feel the violence of this act and refuse to acknowledge it as valid in any sense. The refusal to acknowledge, however, does not make it any less real. Their refusal to acknowledge this new and powerful reality, the novel argues, makes them misfits in the new society and eventually kills them.

**Home/Homelessness:** In this novel, homes stand in an allegorical relationship with nation. The story of Tha’mma’s upside-down divided house in Dhaka is the story of partitioned India. The division of the house is so clear that a line is actually drawn down the center of the house, which divides every thing, even the commode. This deliberately ridiculous division represents the irrationality and avoidability of the idea of a partition of a whole. The partition of the house also highlights another aspect of the partition of India—the ‘other’ becomes strange and inaccessible suddenly whereas it was home earlier. So, the women are restricted to their parts of the house and cannot cross over.

‘The line drawn through the middle of the house not only divides the house. It also divides the fortunes of the people staying in it, their ideas of themselves and others and the way they look at the original community of which they were a part. Something similar happens when lines are drawn to create nations on a map. This imagined line not only divided the land, but also divided the fortunes of the people and determined their image of the self and the other.’

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. Briefly explain the story of *The Shadow Lines*.
2. What is the relevance of unnamed narrator in *The Shadow Lines*?

## **2.4 Let Us Sum Up**

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- Amitav Ghosh lives in New York with his wife, Deborah Baker, author of the Laura Riding biography *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (1993) and a senior editor at Little, Brown and Company. They have two children, Lila and Nayan. He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian government in 2007. In 2009, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.
- The more important among his works include *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and *Sea of Poppies* (2008).
- *The Shadow Lines* is the story of a Bengali family through which the author presents analyses and problematises many contemporary issues being debated in India. Through three generations of this family the story explores not only the growth of Calcutta as a city but also India as a nation over a period of over three decades.
- There is Tha'mma, the grandmother of the unnamed narrator through whom the issue of the Bengal Partition and the whole idea of nation, nationalism and nationhood gets discussed. There is Tridib, the eccentric Historian cousin, through whom the idea of history being problematic gets highlighted. Then there is the third generation Ila, the narrator's second cousin through whom the author brings to fore the issues of diaspora and racism.
- The novel begins with the eight-year-old narrator talking of his experiences as a schoolboy living in the Gole-Park neighbourhood in Calcutta. He introduces the reader to the two branches of his family tree – the families of his Grandmother Tha'mma and that of the Grandmother's sister, Mayadebi.

- The narrator is introduced as an eight-year-old child who is ensconced in a genteel middle-class existence where young children are concerned only with doing well in studies. However, the narrator finds means to escape it through his uncle Tridib who sensitizes him to the exciting enterprise of acquiring knowledge.
- The title *The Shadow Lines* is evocative of one of the major concerns of the novel: that of the creation of nations with boundaries that are both arbitrary and invented. This issue becomes more pertinent when viewed in the context of Partition of the Indian subcontinent. That which, on surface, is projected as completely opposed to another is actually a part of it.
- The title *The Shadow Lines* is evocative of one of the major concerns of the novel: that of the creation of nations with boundaries that are both arbitrary and invented. This issue becomes more pertinent when viewed in the context of Partition of the Indian subcontinent.
- In this novel, homes stand in an allegorical relationship with nation. The story of Tha'mma's upside-down divided house in Dhaka is the story of partitioned India. The division of the house is so tangible that an actual line is drawn in the middle of the house dividing everything including the commode. In this ludicrous detail the partition comes out for the reader as an event that was both irrational and avoidable. Another aspect of Partition of the house that is later applied to the nation is about the ideological division that follows this material division. Once the Partition has taken place, the other side of the house becomes inaccessible to everybody including the two women, Tha'mma and Mayadebi.
- Tha'mma talks of the house as the upside down house in which everything is the opposite of how things naturally are. The two nations just like the two parts of a household were united at one time but the course of history divides them and for sustaining their separation the difference has to be created. These stories that Tha'mma creates to bring alive to her younger sister the situation of the other part of the house are in spirit comparable to the modern version of fake national pride that is also likewise based on false stories of difference.

## 2.5 Key Words

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- **Allegory:** A story, poem, or picture which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.
- **Nationalism:** A belief, creed or political ideology that involves an individual identifying with, or becoming attached to, one's nation.

- **Communal strife:** Conflict between communities.
- **Rhetoric:** The art or study of using language effectively and persuasively.

## 2.6 Terminal Questions

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1. What is the basic theme of *The Shadow Lines*?
2. Give a brief character sketch of Tridib.
3. What is Tridib's relationship with May?
4. How is the concept of 'community' portrayed in the novel?
5. What relationship has been depicted of 'home' and the 'nation' in *The Shadow Lines*?
6. How is the novel *The Shadow Lines* both an example of and diversion from the Bildungsroman.
7. What are Tha'mma's views on nation and nationalism? How are her views challenged in the novel?
8. In the context of the Partition of India as depicted in history books, discuss how Amitav Ghosh shows the complimentary and oppositional relationships of the 'public chronicles' and the 'private chronicles'?
9. Critically evaluate the notion of 'Shadow Lines' as it emerges in the novel.

## 2.7 Suggested Readings

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## 2.8 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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### Check Your Progress-1

1. Amitav Ghosh was awarded a Padma Shri in the year 2007.
2. *The Calcutta Chromosome* won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for 1997.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. *The Shadow Lines* is the story of a Bengali family through which the author presents, analyses and problematises many contemporary issues being debated in India. Through three generations of this family the story explores not only the growth of Calcutta as a city but also India as a nation over a period of over three decades.
2. The narrator is not only a storyteller but also the strand that brings together other available versions in order to make a complete picture. It is significant that the author himself comes across as more of a storyteller than a historian or an anecdote teller. Stories in this book are in circuitry, without definite beginnings and endings; they are indiscrete and seem to belong to no one.

## UNIT - 3

### RAJA RAO: *KANTHAPURA*

#### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Raja Rao: A Short Biography
- 3.3 A Working Summary of *Kanthapura*
- 3.4 Major Characters in *Kanthapura*
- 3.5 Narrative Technique used in *Kanthapura*
- 3.6 Major Themes in *Kanthapura*
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Key Words
- 3.9 Terminal Questions
- 3.10 Suggested Readings
- 3.11 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

#### 3.0 Objectives

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

- Identify Raja Rao, the author
- Analyse the novel *Kanthapura*
- Describe the major themes used in *Kanthapura*
- Examine the narrative technique used in *Kanthapura*

#### 3.1 Introduction

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Raja Rao is known to be one of the most respected and honoured Indian writer of English language novels and short stories. All his works are characterized by Hinduism. His novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) established Raja Rao as one of the finest Indian stylists. *The Serpent and the Rope* is a semi-autobiographical novel which refers to the seeking of spiritual consciousness in Europe and India. In this unit, we will discuss in detail Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*.

#### 3.2 Raja Rao: A Short Biography

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Raja Rao was born on 8 November, 1908, in Hassan, in the state of Mysore into a well-known Brahmin family. He was the eldest of nine siblings (two brothers and seven sisters). His father taught Kannada at Nizam College

in what was then Hyderabad State. His mother died when he was four and that left a lasting impression on the novelist. This may also be the reason of orphanhood being a recurring theme in his novels. Another influence from early life was his grandfather, with whom he stayed in Hassan and Harihalli.

Rao was educated at Muslim schools, the Madarsa-e-Aliya in Hyderabad and the Aligarh Muslim University, where he became friends with Ahmed Ali. He began learning French at the University. After matriculation in 1927, Rao returned to Hyderabad and studied for his degree at Nizam's College. After graduating from the University of Madras, having majored in English and history, he won the Asiatic Scholarship of the Government of Hyderabad in 1929, for study abroad for which he joined University of Montpellier in France. He studied French language and literature, and later at the Sorbonne in Paris, he explored the Indian influence on Irish literature. He married Camille Mouly, who taught French at Montpellier, in 1931. The marriage lasted until 1939.

Returning to India in 1939, he edited with Iqbal Singh, *Changing India*, an anthology of modern Indian thought from Ram Mohan Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru. He participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. In 1943-1944 he co-edited with Ahmed Ali a journal from Bombay called 'Tomorrow.' It is in this phase of activism that *Kanthapura* was conceived. He was the prime mover in the formation of a cultural organization, *Sri Vidya Samiti*, devoted to reviving the values of ancient Indian civilization; this organization failed shortly after inception. In Bombay, he was also associated with *Chetana*, a cultural society for the propagation of Indian thought and values.

In 1988, he received the prestigious International Neustadt Prize for Literature. *The Serpent and the Rope* was written after a long silence during which Rao returned to India. The work dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. The serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope to reality. *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) was a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels.

Rao eventually settled in the United States and was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin from 1966 to 1983, when he retired as Emeritus Professor. Courses he taught included Marxism to Gandhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Indian philosophy: The Upanishads, Indian philosophy: The Metaphysical Basis of the Male and Female Principle, and *Razor's Edge*. One of his students and literary critic Robert D King fondly recalls his experiences as Rao's student:

'...it is as teacher that I know Raja Rao best... Raja Rao began his formal affiliation with the University [of Texas] as a member of the Faculty of Philosophy in 1966... He was a campus icon, acclaimed for his lectures on Buddhism and Eastern thought.'

Raja Rao would deny that he is a teacher, and above all that he is a guru—no, above all not a guru. He shuns those designations. But there he is wrong. He is a teacher, a guru, and a generation of his Texas students are the witnesses. His method is subtle, seductive, humorous at times. I do not think Raja Rao is aware of whether he is talking to a class or to many people or to only one person. It is always a subdued discourse, a monologue at times, quiet, level, steady. ...

‘Raja Rao’s lesson, though I could not absorb it whole at any one time, has always been that we must each of us seek our way to salvation in our own way. It is a lonely search, not communal; each man is alone. Out of our emptiness will come knowledge, understanding, forgiveness—all that matters. There is only the One Way: not Indian, not Western, but both. Never the dualistic Either-Or; always the monistic Both-And. The secrets lie in our own hearts. ... “His message, I have now come to know, is not so much knowledge and understanding as it is something very close to the supreme achievement of love. Or perhaps it is simply love.”

That, in the end, is what we all learnt from Raja Rao, Our Teacher. We learnt love. That is our debt, a debt that can never be repaid in full but only in karmic installments, of which this is one.’

In 1965, he married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. They have one son, Christopher Rama. In 1986, after his divorce from Katherine, Rao married his third wife, Susan, whom he met when she was a student at the University of Texas in the 1970s. Rao died on July 8, 2006 at Austin, Texas, at the age of 97.

### **Check Your Progress-1**

1. What does ‘rope’ and ‘serpent’ refer to in Raja Rao’s novel *The Serpent and the Rope*?
2. What reasons are given for orphanhood to be a recurring theme in Raja Rao’s novel?

### **3.3 A Working Summary of *Kanthapura***

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The summary of this novel has been divided into various subsections, each relating an important event or plot movement within the story. It should be noted that this section is not intended to substitute a firsthand reading of the novel. You should read this section only after reading the whole work and it will serve as a good reminder of the main events, characters and issues that you encountered while reading it.

### 1. Kanthapura: A Small Indian Village

The story of the novel is set in Kanthapura, a small, obscure village in a remote corner of south India. Rao seems to be drawing from his memory of Hassan and Harihalli in conceptualizing the nature of this state.

The people here are mostly poor, illiterate and backward. The village is ridden with three major ills: caste, class and toddy. Different quarters in it house people of different castes—the highest caste being Brahmins, the lowest, the Pariahs. But despite the ills, people from different castes and classes manage to live harmoniously accommodating peacefully the demands one makes on the other. People are also extremely religious-minded and at least among the lower classes Goddess Kenchamma is the presiding deity enshrined in the village temple.

### 2. Village Katha Man's Arrest

The protagonist of the novel is a young Brahmin boy, named Moorthy. Moorthy was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Although he had never met Gandhi personally, he had read enough of his ideas and heard about his speeches to be influenced by his ideas and had even seen him once in a vision. What appealed to him in Gandhi's ideas was the quest for the realization of equality among all and based on this, the need to resist British occupation through non-violent protest.

One day Moorthy found a half-buried linga in the village. He dug it out, installed it at another place and built a temple there. This temple soon became the center of social life in the village. Moorthy arranged various religious ceremonies and *kathas* here. One day one of the speakers who delivered the *katha* named Jayaramachar mixed his *kathas* with political propaganda. Instead of speaking only about the gods and parables he introduced the villagers to the ideals of Gandhi and the need to free the country from British occupation and slavery. Religious and political messages mixed inseparably in his story with religious figures and events becoming a metaphor for the political condition of the country and how it could be improved.

The foreign government got a wind of this and arrested him. The Government was on the lookout for the first stirrings of nationalism and resistance to the British in the village and when it noticed it, it tried to contain the stirrings with force. In one sense this was the first instance in Kanthapura when an external entity had interfered with their religious actions and had prevented them from doing something that they so ardently desired. The villagers were quick to sense the desire to control and exploit that the British government was trying to direct at them.

### 3. Awakening Against Foreign Exploitation

Sensing trouble, the British administration posted a policeman, Bade Khan to keep an eye on the villager's activities. Being a Mohammendan and being perceived as an instrument of foreign control, he could get no accommodation in the village. The sahib of the neighbouring Skeffington Coffee estate fearfully referred to as Hunter Sahib (probably because he carried a whip or was fond of hunting or both) opened a hut for him and lodged him in his estate.

Meanwhile Moorthy's political exposure grows. The congress committee of the nearby Karwar city influenced Moorthy immensely who came back to the village with lots of congress literature and wearing home-spun khaddar. One of the messages he has brought into the village related to Gandhi's call of *swadeshi*: discard foreign cloths and thus stop the economic exploitation of Indians by foreigners. Use of indigenously manufactured khaddar was to have manifold effects: not only would it generate employment for a host of unemployed Indians, specially women, making them self-dependent, it would also stop the sale of British manufactured textiles thereby resisting the colonial use of India as a market by the colonizing powers. Khaddar would generate a distinct visual identity for the Indians which would have potent political implications in the national movement.

### 4. Moorthy Excommunicated

Moorthy, in fact, had turned into a follower of Gandhi since he saw the Mahatma in a vision. He then discarded his foreign clothes, adopted khadi and returned to his village Kanthapura. In one sense he was bringing city-bred ideas to the village. Here he preached Gandhi's ideals of truth and *ahimsa* to the villagers. Though a Brahmin, he began to mix freely with the pariahs in an effort to spread the Gandhian message far but also because he wanted to practice the political ideal of liberty and equality in his personal life.

Bhatta, the village Brahmin did not like this. What Bhatta saw in Moorthy's actions was not a conscious political programme that would free them from British control but its logical corollary— an attack against the centuries old caste-system which kept the Brahmins at the center of social and religious power. He complained against Moorthy to the religious head of the region, called the Swami. Swami was an orthodox Brahmin and an agent of the British government. Realizing the kind of challenge the Gandhi man posed to the power structure operating within the society, the swami excommunicated Moorthy. The excommunication caused severe shock to Moorthy's mother and she died of grief.

Moorthy now began to live with the Rangamma, a childless widow of the village. Rangamma was an educated lady and was a supporter of

Moorthy, the freedom fighter. Moorthy was now on the religious, moral and political periphery of his society and it is from this periphery that he began his political struggle decisively.

### **5. Violence in Skeffington Coffee Estate**

The Skeffington coffee estate was spread over a vast sprawling expanse in the neighbourhood of Kanthapura. The owner of the Estate, an Englishman, ruled the coolies with an iron hand, using their physical labour in an unrestricted way and freely using their womenfolk for sexual ends. It was a veritable slavery under a lone slave master and his system.

Once the two Brahmin clerks on the estate invited Moorthy to create an awakening among the pariahs there both by teaching them how to read and write and exposing them to the ideals of Gandhian politics. As Moorthy approached the gate of the coffee estate, Bade Khan hit him with his lathi. The pariahs at the estate sided with Moorthy and attacked Bade Khan. Moorthy reminded his followers to remain non-violent which stopped the fight, but the violence left Moorthy sad and sorrowful.

A pariah named Rachanna was thrown out of the coffee estate, along with his family, for beating the policeman severely. He began to live in Kanthapura and became a strong congress worker.

### **6. Moorthy's Three Day Fast**

Moorthy held himself responsible for the violence at the coffee estate and felt the need to purify himself. So he undertook a fast for three days. Fasting was another stock Gandhian practice. Fasting when directed against an erring system was supposed to put moral pressure on the system to accept the wrongs committed and undo them. When directed against the self for a mistake committed by the self, fasting worked not only as a penance but also as a purification ritual.

Both these effects are evident in Moorthy's life. At the conclusion of the fast, he felt his whole inner being over brimming with love for all mankind. The world seemed to be bathed in a new light. He felt happy and satisfied. He walked out to preach 'don't-touch-the government campaign'.

### **7. Kanthapura Congress Committee Formed**

Moorthy's next step was organizing his political activities better. He contacted various people and succeeded in establishing the Kanthapura Congress Committee. Moorthy was unanimously elected the president of the congress committee, with Range Gowada, Rangamma, Rachanna and Seenu as the other office bearers. The committee had twenty three members. They vowed to spin every day, practice ahimsa and seek truth. The larger aim obviously was to begin a grass root level political movement based on Gandhian values that could fight for the freedom of their motherland.

## **8. Moorthy Arrested**

One night the police arrived at Rangamma's house and arrested Moorthy. When people protested, they were beaten. This time, however, Moorthy's supporters were non-violent. Seventeen of them were beaten and were taken to the Santur police station, where they were beaten again and eventually set free. Moorthy was taken away to Kanwar jail and a case of political conspiracy against the state and inciting villagers to use violence against the police lodged against him.

Eminent lawyers like Sankar and Ranganna met him in the prison and offered to contest his case but Moorthy declined any legal aid, asserting that truth was its best self-defense. His stand was that truth, if it was genuine was self-evident and did not need to be bolstered by a lawyer's arguments. Standing unrepresented in the court, Moorthy was sentenced to three months rigorous imprisonment by the British Judge. A pall of gloom spread over Kanthapura. People fasted in protest but none of them could think of a strategy to counter this injustice of the British.

## **9. Kanthapura Women's Volunteer Corps Founded**

As the political energies of the people of Kanthapura recuperated in Moorthy's absence, Rangamma became active. She thought of forming a woman's volunteer corps or sevika sangha. She inspired the women of Kanthapura by telling them stories about historic patriotic women who had devoted their lives to resisting the British like Maharani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Rajput princess, Sarojini Naidu, etc. Thus she instilled in them the courage to fight for the freedom of their country, but in the Gandhian non-violent manner. Soon the women's volunteer corps in Kanthapura was formed and became active.

## **10. Moorthy Released**

Three months later in the month of Vaisakh came the news that Moorthy was going to be released. On the appointed day, the people of Kanthapura erected victory arches and gathered to welcome their hero. But the police brought Moorthy to Rangamma's house through a secret route. When people learnt this, they gathered there, shouting slogans like 'Mahtma Gandhi ki jai' and 'Vande Matram'. The crowd was asked to disperse peacefully and they obeyed because that was their leader's wish as well. People noticed no change in Moorthy. He was, to use the author's words, "as ever—as ever".

Imprisonment hadn't saddened Moorthy therefore freedom did not elate him. Like a true Gandhian he had learnt to keep his feelings in control even under extreme provocation and had also learnt to hate the colonial system not the people who administered it on him.



### **11. Gandhi's Dandi March**

When the news of Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March, Moorthy told the villagers that the Mahatma had left for the Dandi beach, along with eighty-two of his followers. He would prepare salt here and would break the salt law. The people of Kanthapura joined Mahatma Gandhi in his venture. The very moment Gandhi was supposed to make salt, the villagers took batch, led by Moorthy, and shouted: 'Mahatma Gandhi ji ki jai'. Then came the news that Gandhi had been arrested for breaking the salt law which prohibited people from manufacturing the essential salt for their own use and forced them to buy imported salt from the market.

People were filled with resentment against the foreign government and were prepared to make any sacrifice for their Mahatma. Gandhi's march had managed to bring back the spirit of political protest into the people that had been disoriented because of Moorthy's arrest.

### **12. Boranna's Toddy Grove Picketing**

Moorthy addressed meeting of the Kanthapura Congress inspired by the next step in Gandhi's struggle against the British. First it was swadeshi, and then the voluntary breaking of law in the Dandi March and now it was the non-cooperation and swarajya movements. The movement entailed complete withdrawal of cooperation in all forms with the British government. He told them that they would not pay the taxes, the land revenue and would establish a parallel government. Ranga Gowda would be their Patel and they would refuse to recognize the new Patel of the foreign government. Moorthy gave a clarion-call for a struggle against the British government but he stressed that their struggle must remain non-violent.

As a part of the next campaign- an anti-alcohol drive, it was decided to picket Boranna's toddy grove. On the appointed day, Moorthy marched at the head of one hundred and thirty people to the toddy grove. The police tried to stop their march, but they didn't stop. They forced open the gates of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Rachanna and others rushed into the estate climbed the trees and began to break the twigs and branches. The police deployed in strength, rained lathi blows on the satayagrahis. Many of them were caught, loaded in lorries and left in the far off jungles at the time of night. Cartmen on their way back brought them back to the village.

One another day Moorthy and his satayagrahis picketed Boranna toddy booth outside the coffee estate where the coolies of the coffee estate were brought to spend on drinking. As the coolies moved towards the booth, the stayagrahis sat in the front of the shop, blocking their way. The police beat the coolies to drive them into the satayagrahis. Upon this assault the freedom fighters stood close-knit, leaving no space for coolies. Helpless in breaking the movement, the police rained lathis blows on the freedom fighters yet again.

### **13. Police Brutalities and Repression**

The news of picketing spread in the neighbouring areas. As a result, as many as twenty-six toddy booths were closed down in the vicinity of Kanthapura. Moorthy had become a hero for them. Many came to meet this great man when the imprisoned satyagrahis returned to Kanthapura after their release. The satyagrahis narrated harrowing tales of police brutalities on them inside in the jail.

Soon, the British government intensified its repression on the people of Kanthapura. A new Patel was appointed and people were told to pay the revenue. Only a few obeyed. All the others refused to pay under Moorthy's instruction's .Then one morning, people found a heavy posse of police over Kanthapura. To the accompaniment of the beating of drums, the new beadle announced that the people must pay the revenue or be prepared to pay a punitive tax. Moorthy however allayed the fears of the people, promising them full support of the freedom fighters. Haunted by apprehensions, the people kept awake all that night, but nothing happened.

One morning the people of Kanthapura found that the thirty-three coolies who had escaped from the Coffee Estate were being marched back to the estate by the police. Moorthy, Rangamma and others had been arrested and taken away during the night. Women and children came out and pelted stones at the police. The police beat the children and tried to molest the women. While running away from the chasing police a seven month pregnant woman gave birth to the baby in the open itself .The police locked the temple door from outside where the upper caste protesters had taken shelter from the police and they stayed there hungry and thirsty. It was only early in the morning, after the police had left, that one of the lower class women rescued them.

### **14. Police Firing on Satyagrahis and the End**

The misfortunes of the people of Kanthapura were not over. One day the sahibs, along with the city coolies arrived and announced that the lands of the people were going to be auctioned for the non-payment of land revenue. As the night fell, the city coolies began to reap the fields. The people of Kanthapura took out a procession. The procession was given the look of a religious one, but they eventually started shouting political slogans. The police rushed at them with lathis. The coolies from the Skeffington Coffee Estate and the cities coolies from the fields joined them. Many satyagrahis were wounded others ran away and escaped to another village Kashipur. Almost one year and two months later, thirty refugees from Kanthapur had settled in Kashipur. They often recalled those turbulent days in Kanthapura and missed their fellow men who were either dead or in jail. On the whole the people had the satisfaction that they had done something for their country.

When however Gandhiji signed a truce the British Viceroy leaned towards Jawaharlal Nehru who was more practical than the Mahatma. But people, by and large looked upon Gandhi as Lord Ram who would slay Ravana, the British and free Sita, their motherland.

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. How has Raja Rao described the population of Kanthapura?
2. How has Mahatma Gandhi been portrayed at the end of the Satyagraha?

## **3.4 Major Characters in *Kanthapura***

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### **Moorthy**

Moorthy is conceived as a force of change. As a Gandhian, he is responsible for doing two things in the story. First, to make people conscious of the age old inequalities that they are mired in and link these inequalities to colonial oppression. His second role is to liberate the people from these inequalities so that they are automatically harnessed to the cause of the freedom struggle. He is characterized as the force that will cause both these changes.

Moorthy begins by challenging the villagers' presuppositions and ideas about hierarchy. Moorthy is the character that inspires the women in the village to embrace change and teaches people not to relent in his beliefs, even when subjected to force and abuse. It is here that Rao's characterization of Moorthy is most compelling. Moorthy becomes a signifier of something clicking in Rao's thought that such a force is indeed active in the country and can be personified in the form of a literary character.

### **Rangamma**

She is a wealthy young Brahmin who is converted by Moorthy to Gandhi's views. Widely respected but lonely because of the death of her husband, she doesn't really give up and is definitely not dejected with life. She reads extensively and nurtures curiosity about other countries. As the freedom struggle grows, she publishes a weekly political pamphlet and sponsors daily discussions on the nationalist movement, turning her home into Kanthapura's center for Congress Party activities. Bold in a traditionalist context, she refutes Bhatta's self-serving religiosity and inspires many villagers to follow Gandhi's teachings. When Moorthy is imprisoned and her father, a Vedantic teacher, dies, she continues both as an organizer for the Gandhians and as a Vedic interpreter and yoga teacher. Eventually, she organizes the

women of Kanthapura as the Sevis into a sevika sangh, who lead nonviolent resistance marches, a role that results in her being beaten and imprisoned. She too is uprooted at the end of the novel to find a new home and redefined identity in Kashipur.

### **Kamamma**

She is Rangamma's traditionalist sister. A strict adherent to the Vedic caste system, she rejects Rangamma's conversion to Gandhi's teachings and her own daughter Ratna's modern behaviour and attitude. Kamamma embodies the larger conflict within the village through her divisive stance within the family, being far more concerned with Ratna's eligibility for remarriage than with her daughter's role in the swaraj movement.

### **Ratna**

She is the fifteen-year-old widowed daughter of Kamamma. Thoroughly modern in her behavior of speaking her mind and walking alone in the village, the educated, attractive niece of Rangamma follows her aunt's example by joining the resistance movement. She breaks tradition by assisting Rangamma in the teaching of the Vedic texts as justification for Gandhi's views, suffers beatings in the protest marches, and is nearly raped by a policeman. When Rangamma is imprisoned, Ratna assumes leadership of the Sevis and, eventually, also suffers imprisonment. After being released, she leaves Kanthapura to continue her activism in Bombay.

Ratna, like others in her age group in this novel represents the hope and idealism of the youth in their vision and ability to craft a new future for themselves. Not only are they ready to look up to elder leaders like Moorthy but they are also ready to contribute with ideas and efforts to a cause that they believe in.

### **Sankar**

He is the twenty-six-year-old secretary of the Kavar Congress Party. If you recollect, Kavar Congress office is the place where Moorthy visits in the early part of the novel and gets his Gandhian literature from which is subsequently disseminated amongst the villagers. A saintly, ascetic widower with a young daughter, he is a lawyer of renowned integrity who embodies Gandhian ideals. He wears khadi, the homespun, symbolic cloth of resistance; eschews expensive status symbols such as the cars and fine Western-style suits that his colleagues acquire; insists on using and teaching Hindi as the nationalists' language; and renounces the use of tobacco and liquor. He contributes heavily to the Congress Party funds, and he teaches Rangamma the organizational skills of activism. When Bhatta attempts to harvest the Gandhians' crops and auction their lands in retaliation for their refusal to pay taxes to him, Sankar organizes a massive resistance from other villages and

Kawar to prevent Bhatta from succeeding in his punitive seizure of their properties.

### **Seenu**

Seenu is one of the junior members of the newly formed Kanthapura Congress Committee. Rao probably intended him to be in teenage thereby implying the sway of the movements appeal to the young and the idealistic. He is introduced to us as an affectionate youngster who fetches Moorthy to his house when desired by his mother or accompanies Rangamma to the temple late in the evening when Moorthy has decided to fast.

Moving around Moorthy Seenu is used to bring out a number of issues that Moorthy can otherwise only articulate through a sologny. On the issue of fasting, for example, Seenu tells Moorthy that he should not try to be like Gandhi because Gandhi was not an ordinary mortal to which Moorthy's response is "Never mind-let me try. I will not die of it, will I?"

In that state of fasting and hunger how is it that he could meditate so deeply thought Moorthy? Once again it is to Seenu that the answers are given. "Thoughts seemed to ebb away to the darkened shores and leave the illumined consciousness to rise up into the back of the brain, he had explained to Seenu. Light seemed to rise far from the horizon. . .infuse itself through his toes and finger-tips and rise to the sun-centre of his heart".

Seenu's role as an associate and an assistant in this small group is highlighted throughout the movement whether it is grieving with Rangamma over Moorthy's swooning, or leading the bhajan singing or lighting the oil lamps in the temple and taking around the camphor senses, it is difficult to visualize the completeness and unity of this small group without this young boy.

### **Achakka**

She is an old and simple village woman who tells us the story of Kanthapura as a witness-narrator. Like the Greek Teresa's figure she knows the past, lives in the present and foresees the future. She has firsthand knowledge of the Satyagraha movement as she was herself a participant. Refer to the Narrative Technique in the themes section to figure out the methods and techniques with which she relates to her audience.

Achakka symbolizes the hopes and aspirations of not only the women but the entire generation of exploited people in Kanthapura. Gifted with insight, intelligence and a sense of practical wisdom, she can comprehend the real meaning of satyagraha in the lives of people who are otherwise caught in a host of daily problems and issues. It is perhaps this that makes her the most tolerant and progressive character in the novel. She does not object to Ratna's wearing of bangles or colours and accepts the fact that Ratna is romantically attached to Moorthy. She is neither harsh nor censorious

towards Puttamma or waterfall Venkamma. It is not that she always speaks in myths and digressive comparisons. She can be very simple and straightforward when she has to state the facts:

Notice her descriptions of Bade Khan being given a hint by Mr. Skeffington:

Bade Khan went straight to the Skeffington Coffee Estate and he said, 'Your Excellency, a house to live in?' And Mr. Skeffington turned to his butler and said, 'Give him a hut,' and the butler went to the Maistris' quarters and opened a tin shed.

As a woman, Achakka represents the fundamental force of both social and cultural change within Kanthapura and India is general. Her life becomes a representation of how Indians at that time were torn between accepting reality as it was or remaking it as it should be. She is also representative of how women despite being caught in traditions can embrace change and be an active agent of reconstructing reality.

Although she is an old woman, sustaining a family of sons and grandchildren (one of them is Seenu) she seems ageless in her strength and charity. The strength of her personality derives from her physical and mental vigour which impress her to study the Vedic texts and yoga along with Rangamma. A full-blooded political activist, she participated in the non-cooperation movement and pickets tobacco and liquor shops during which she is beaten up. When her house is burned along with others in Kanthapura she goes to live in the nearby village of Kashipura.

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. Why has Moorthy been portrayed as a force of change in Kanthapura?
2. Who is Kamamma and what are her concerns?

### **3.5 Narrative Technique used in *Kanthapura***

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Before discussing Rao's narrative technique in Kanthapura let us stop for a while to discuss what is meant by this phrase. In common terms it means the methods involved in telling a story. Different individuals and cultures use different techniques to tell the same story in order to score different points and achieve different effects. Changing the narrator and his/her style can, for example, change the meaning of a story. Imagine hearing a story about the first rains after the summers from a child and an old woman. You will obviously savour the burst of an enthusiastic and energetic outcry in the old woman as you will miss a calm and serene understanding of the cycle of seasons in the child. This is just to mark the beginning of the differences between the two.

Rao was facing a problem while writing this novel which tried to present a uniquely Indian reality in a foreign language, i.e., English. In the preface he observes: “the telling has not been easy”. He had to “convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own”. Adjustments had to be made at multiple levels. I will discuss only some of them here:

- (a) The puranic narrative devices
- (b) Using an old woman as a narrator.
- (c) Use of myths, legends and symbols

Puranas are a set of ancient texts among the Hindu religions scripture that eulogize various deities through divine stories employing a rich variety of narrative devices. Keeping in tune with this style Rao builds a narration that is robust in its main trunk even while being rich in its branching. The rich digressions from the main narrative serve to underline important issues engage with them.

The use of metaphors is perfectly in tune with the tone and content of the novel. Moorthy invites Jayaramachar to conduct Hari-Katha sessions at Kanthapura and it is Jayaramachar who speaks to the illiterate villagers through metaphors: As he Jayaramachar talks of Damyanthi and Shakuntala and Yashoda, he must say something about India and something about Swaraj. The subtlety of Gandhian thought and the complex situation of Pre-independence India could be explained to the villagers only through legends and religious stories of Gods.

Myths are an integral part of Indian village folk lore and perhaps that is what accounts for its ability to communicate to the masses. Every village in India is replete with its own myths and its special place in the myths writes Rao:

“There is no village in India...that has not a rich ‘Sthala Purana’ or legendary history of its own. Some god or god-like hero has passed by this village— Ram might have rested under this Peepal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself on one of his pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut.”

The myth of the descent of Kanchanma from heaven to kill the demon is puranic but when the narrator links it to the colour of a specific hill near Kanthapura, legend and Purana mix together to make a Sthala Purana. Jayaramachar gives Gandhi the status of a God as he is first identified with Ram for killing the demon Ravana (The Red Man) and then with Krishna, killing Kaliya (The poisonous British Government). Gandhi’s emergence in Indian politics is linked to Krishna’s prophetic cry wherever there is decay of righteousness I shall come. Gandhi’s visit to England for the Second Round Table Conference is presented there:

Or simply reflect the narrator's mind frame where a set of completely discordant thoughts may come up not linked overtly but through a complex chain in the narrator's mind.

The narrator is undertaken with the breathless garrulity of a puranic tale. Simple words flow continuously, effortlessly and simply from the narrator's mouth as if what was going on was a simple conversation. Rao says in the preface that the story is told in the oral tradition without any break: "episode follows episode and when our thoughts stop, our breath stops and it moves on to another thought. This was and still is ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story." The western method of chapter decision is not followed and the narrator talks to the reader as if it was one continuous tale:

"Our village- I don't think you have heard about it- Kanthapura is its name and it is in the province of Kara."

Achakka, the narrator uses the language typical of old women, expressing her feelings without any inhibition: "If rain comes not, you fall at her feet and say, Kenchamma, goddess, you are not kind to us. Our fields are full of Younglings and you have given us no water."

Yet another relation between Rao's narrative style and the Puranas is the extensive use of religious myths, legends, symbols and metaphors.

"They say that Mahatma will go to Redman's country...he will get us Swarajya... come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of air"

The use of such myths and legends is also linked to the use of the old woman Achakka as the narrator and her illiterate audience. A villager born and brought up in the Indian tradition understands easily a contemporary problem if it is explained through a myth of that tradition. It was easier for the old woman to explain the subtleties and complexities of the Indian nationalist movement through the legends and myths. The entire freedom struggle becomes the Derfa's campaign against the Azim's in which Gandhi becomes a veritable god symbol! The strength to fight the British can now be tapped from religious faith and it is through religious appeal that the villagers can join the Satyagrahis. Temples are used to recruit workers for the Congress, vows of ahimsa, love and truth are taken in the temple sanctum and Moorthy, Gandhi and Kanchamma merge into one.

It is in this context that they interpret the destruction of Kanthapura towards the end of the novel. It is seen as symbolic of a new life emerging out of the dead one. Kashipura is the new phoenix that arises out of the ashes of the dead Kanthapura. This is also like the end of *Kalyug* with *Pralay* engulfing the whole village. Range Gowda goes to Kanthapura to find it completely deserted. This is like a new *Yuga* emerging from an old one—a trumpet call for change heard by Range Gowda who responds to it with a heart "beat[ing] like a drum".



### Check Your Progress-4

1. What do you understand by Narrative Technique?
2. What problems did Raja Rao face while writing *Kanthapura*?

## 3.6 Major Themes in *Kanthapura*

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### Gandhi in *Kanthapura*

Around the beginning of the Twentieth century emerged an Indian leader who taught the people belonging to different class, caste, language and religion how to unite to gain freedom. He stripped them of their cultural baggage which formed their divisive identities and taught them to see each other only as humans. It was a strange war where non-violence and love for enemy was prerequisite. Before taking on external enemy he wanted people to eliminate the enemy inside themselves. He stormed the ancient bastion of untouchability which had colonized a large section of the Indian society. People across the country were following his directions as if enchanted by him and the entire social and cultural order was undergoing a huge churning. Raja Rao was a committed follower of the man who was causing these cataclysmic changes in the Indian society. He perceived Gandhi as an idealistic leader but acknowledged his profound influence on the individual and society.

Rao captures *Kanthapura* when as it is sucked into the vortex of the freedom struggle which in its initial phase was mostly an urban phenomenon located most intensely in the cities where the leaders operated. Although colonial exploitation is evident in *Kanthapura*, none seems to be aware of its implications. It is an archetypal Indian village which is lost in a web of age old traditions, conventions and orthodoxies. They worship nature and natural forces and any event is seen as manifestation of will of village deity Kenchamma.

Rao remarks in his preface that there is no Indian village that doesn't have a *sthala purana* or legendary history of its own. Rao respects that living tradition and presents it as a reality of Indian villages. This immersion in tradition is its past. As time progresses we find Gandhi entering the mythical framework and according to Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the *shala purana* turns into a "Gandhi purana." Gandhi is represented as an incarnation whose purpose is to liberate India from clutches of evil.

In early parts of novel we find Gandhi's tale interspersed with harikatha. Jayramchar equates swaraj with Siva. "Siva is three eyed and swaraj too

is three eyed: Self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, khaddar.” He manages to bring in swaraj into every topic of discussion. One day he decides to narrate the harikatha of birth of Gandhiji putting him on same pedestal as with Siva, Krishna and other celestial beings.

The entire episode throws light on close nexus between religion and politics discussed elsewhere. Moorthy uses the villagers’ religious devotion to turn their attention towards contemporary politics. He uses religious idiom to convey his message. Rather than jolting them rudely out of their religiously drugged state and presenting stark reality he dexterously maneuvers their religious sentiments. He uses the immense power of faith which has acted as a cornerstone of their existence and replaced god and religion with Gandhi and adherence to swaraj respectively.

Moorthy is the central character who invites Jayaramachar and leads the Gandhian movement in Kanthapura. He has read Gandhi and has undertaken the mission to spread his teaching and practices. He was in complete awe of the great being and his body showed signs of it. He felt like losing his identity and dissolving into a greater stream. It was a magical moment which made him realize the futility of his life until then. He understood the essence of his teaching and followed them with conviction. He gave up his education, changed sartorial preferences and decided not to marry.

He is an agent of Gandhi who works as per the directions of the Mahatma. He ensured the presence of women in harikathas and sought their contribution as well. Gandhi had firm faith in their abilities and worked for their emancipation. Jayramchar too in his subtle manner narrates the stories of Damyanti, Shakuntla and Yashoda the three legendary women famous for their exemplary courage. Gandhi sought to motivate them to display courage in the fight for swaraj.

Slowly the seeds of swaraj begin to germinate in Kanthapura. Moorthy then proceeds to eradicate the evil of untouchability. It was Gandhi’s biggest challenge to manage and eradicate untouchability and uplift the condition of the untouchables. Centuries of caste practice had rigidified the people’s outlook and it was an uphill task to achieve caste equality. It was only by improving their condition that they could be made to participate in India’s struggle for independence. Gandhi needed each and every individual to contribute in the struggle and saw a tremendous untapped political potential lying dormant in the women and members of the lower caste.

Moorthy understands the dual reasons for this upliftment and struggles hard against the social inertia which provided formidable resistance to change. Rao here shows how freedom struggle had to face internal resistance as well. Venkamma and Bhatta symbolize orthodox forces which feared losing their privileged status. They tried their best to deter Moorthy by sneers, jibes, social ostracism and even excommunication. But Moorthy perseveres

in his decision of mixing with the lower caste. During the process he grows distant from his mother who couldn't bear his son's ways. Tension between mother and son grows and later she succumbs to it. This is the beginning of an upheaval in Kanthapura which was to face complete destruction.

Under the leadership of Moorthy several young activists distributed books and charkha to everyone. The Non-cooperation movement was by now in its full sway and Gandhi stressed on swarajya and self-reliance. However, young activists had to face the ire of the traditionally minded upper classes. Brahmins were livid as they were asked to do what was the job of a lower caste weaver. But Moorthy succeeded in convincing Nanjamma and the rest agreed too.

Skeffington coffee estate is a centre of exploitation of the native coolies. Not only are they paid less after exacting hours of work they are treated inhumanly. The new master forced them to submit their women to his lust. He was accused of murdering a Brahmin who refused to yield his woman but walked out free. Moorthy is invited to the estate to teach them. Fearing his reputation and popularity among the masses Bade Khan doesn't let him enter the estate. It triggers pent up humiliation and anger in coolies who despite Moorthy's pleas to shun violence beat up the policeman.

He is gravely disappointed and announces three day fast as penance. This period of self-contemplation reveals him metaphysical truths. He emerges as more tolerant and loving. He forgives Venkamma's jibes. He learns to control his desires and emotions. He is ashamed when he recollects his earlier feelings for Rachanna. More and more people came to see him and revere him as it was an incredible feat. Moorthy's fast induces guilt in others and they decide to cast out violence from their lives too. Their devotion for him is shown at his arrest. It is a dramatic scene where people of all caste are assembled standing next to each other to prevent his arrest. They peacefully resist and don't hit back. They court arrests and face police brutalities but stay non-violent. They later stage various marches and picketing of liquor shops in a non-violent way.

Gandhism however encounters a crisis at the end of the novel. Police atrocities, seizure of land and a survival crisis force the Gandhians of Kanthapura out and they ultimately find refuge in Kashipura. Gandhi's ideals may be very appealing but they are found impractical as they do not address issues of hunger, thirst, security and brute survival until the time when Gandhian politics has overturned the exploitative system. As a mode of resistance Gandhian philosophy, as you will see in the decolonization section is found wanting in the face of the brute forces of colonization. If poor people must live while struggling, grow their food and tend their families while they are struggling politically, Gandhian thought must change and incorporate a different tactics.

## Religion as Politics

In his autobiographical account, Gandhi observed that “those who say religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion is” That there is a clear link between the two and that one can serve the other is something that has been proven in human history repeatedly. However, the nature of the link is complex and can take a myriad forms, each specific to the context in which the interaction between the two actually takes place. Gandhi was deeply aware of this fact and transformed this into a political strategy. Two strands of this linkage are however clear in *Kanthapura*. Religion provides the physical location in which political meetings, fasting, speeches and protests can take place is obviously the first. Religion also provides the vocabulary and the truths in terms of which the issues and truths of the freedom movement can be explained to the common illiterate villager and their role in taking the movement further can be explained to them. Shahid Amin in his essay *Gandhi as Mahatma* (1988) discusses how Hindi journalism played an immensely significant role in the upheaval of the nationalist sentiment in Gorakhpur post 1919.

“In April of that year two important papers— the weekly *Swadesh* and the monthly *Kavi* — made their appearance. These, especially Dasrath Dwivedi’s *Swadesh*, were to exercise an important influence in spreading the message of Gandhi over the region.”

Amin goes on to discuss how this influence in the district led to the idea of Gandhi to be appropriated by the peasants to validate their own means of addressing local problems, very much as depicted in *Kanthapura*.

Such re-appropriation of Gandhian thought implied a radical redefinition of the role of religion as experienced in the day to day lives of the common people and the change was clearly experienced as a contested power struggle. However, the fact that the temple becomes the site of the conflict indicates that is in the realm of religion that the larger and deeper political goals have to be negotiated because they can reach state politics.

In *Kanthapura*, the temple begins as a place of strict traditionalism. As Moorthy attempts to propagate social change by meeting with people of the Pariah caste, the village religious leader declares that he will outcast every Brahmin who follows Moorthy’s example and mixes with the Pariahs. When Moorthy attempts to talk about Gandhi in the Brahmin temple, a village woman is outraged. Her son, “who too has been to the city,” says, “but, Mother, [Gandhi] is...a holy man”; to which the woman declares, “Holy man or lover of a widow, what does it matter to me? When I go to the temple I want to hear about Rama and Krishna...and not all this city-nonsense”. The Gandhian ideals of social change are initially unwelcome in a village deeply rooted in tradition.

Critic Meeta Chatterjee provides more understanding of the context of Gandhi and the changes he promoted.”The erosion of hierarchy, the breakdown of ‘caste pollution’ rules and the disregard for the occupational stratification of the caste system is a threat that Gandhi’s ideology in general posed.” As a Gandhian representative promoting Gandhian ideals in the village, it is Moorthy who poses the direct threat to the tradition and hierarchy of Kanthapura. Moorthy is both a physical and metaphorical representative of the modern ideological change which is battling the deep seated traditions.

Two crucial events illustrate the change: a three-day period which Moorthy spends in the temple fasting, and a violent clash between villagers and English law enforcement in which the village women take refuge in the temple. The first event—Moorthy’s three-day fast in the temple—is the first time in the novel that external politics enters the internal space of the religious building.

The ideological and physical invasion, however, does not occur without confrontation. As Moorthy fasts and meditates in the temple, a village woman “roused him with her loud laughter: ‘Ah, the cat has begun to take to asceticism...As though it were not enough to have polluted our village with your pariahs! Now you want to pollute us with your gilded purity!’”. The insults are not the only rebukes Moorthy receives. Another woman “laughed and mocked at Moorthy”; a village leader, “furious that Moorthy was pretending to be pious ... insulted him and [swore] he would...denounce [his] conversion”. As Chatterjee explains, “The internal confrontation between high caste Hindus who want to preserve their status, and Moorthy is a power struggle.” Through Moorthy, then, modernization directly challenges the traditionalism of the village. The location of the temple as a battlefield makes the confrontation a metaphor for all social activism in India that opposes a religious tradition.

The conflict determining the future of the temple—whether it will maintain its rigid traditionalism or succumb to the modern activism Moorthy brings into it—is not settled until several days after Moorthy’s three-day fast. Because of Moorthy’s unwavering love towards the villagers, the people decide that he “is grown-up and great, and he has wisdom in him”. He then gives a speech declaring his social and political intentions. Previously, villagers were vehemently opposed. After Moorthy’s speech, they respond, “He will be our Mahatma”. The binary opposition between orthodox and modern is settled decidedly in favour of the modern.

The second crucial event of *Kanthapura* that occurs in the temple demonstrates the drastic ideological and physical transformation of the temple. During one of the villagers’ final political marches, violence erupts between demonstrators and authorities. Many of the village women take refuge in the temple. Outside the temple, an opposition policeman seals the door closed,

trapping the women inside. The narrator, Achakka, recounts: “[W]e cry out hoarse behind the door, and we cry and moan and beg and weep and bang and kick and lament, but there’s no answer...and...as the afternoon drew on, our stomachs began to beat like drums and our tongues became dry”. The women suffer through the rest of the day and all through the night. The next morning a Pariah woman steals a key to the temple and “[rushes] up to the temple to unlock it”. How drastically the village has changed is illustrated when a pariah frees them from the temple that in former times she would not have even been allowed to enter. A lower-caste woman as a savior to the Brahmin women demonstrates the complete revision of the local social standard. In the beginning of the novel, a Pariah woman would have been scorned and rebuked for even nearing the temple; at the end, she has saved the women from the very temple they would have earlier denied her.

Notably, the entrapment of the women in the temple also makes visible the deficiency of the temple as a physical protectorate. It is as a realm of ideas that the temple is significant and not as a physical fortress. The women enter the temple seeking refuge, but the immediate threat of starvation is presented. The temple can only offer temporary physical shelter but not any long term protection from the British. It is in what goes on inside the temple, namely the politico-spiritual discoursing that political protection lies.

### **Decolonization in Kanthapura**

Frantz Fanon is a renowned postcolonial thinker known for his two seminal works *Black Skin and White Masks* (1986) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1991). One of the issues Fanon’s explorations center around and return to often is how ill equipped are the former colonies to function as independent nations and offers a critique of present day bourgeois nationalism that operates in third world nations after the departure of the European powers.

Fanon views decolonization as a violent phenomenon replacing one set of political values by another and the two having a clear oppositional relationship with each other. It executes the strategy in which, “The last shall be the first and first last”. The settler inaugurates and perpetuates his illicit statute on the colony with violence through the police and the army. It is to be noted that the famous Battle of Plassey (1757) laid the foundation stone of British dominion in India followed by numerous local rebellions like the Maratha war, the Chauri-Chaura incident and the tribal movements of Jharkhand, each marked by the same bloodshed.

Fanon’s argument is that the violent trait of decolonization is a natural corollary of its predecessor, imperialism. In order to reverse the multi-

faceted violence that colonization inflicts upon its target culture, a corresponding violence of reversal is necessary. Violence here is to be read as occurring at all levels - physical, rhetorical, emotional, socio-cultural etc. In this Fanon is different, even opposed to Gandhi who saw *ahimsa* or non-violence as one of the pre-requisites to decolonization. Moorthy's negotiation with all the villagers, specially the upper-caste ones, the villagers' negotiation with each other, Bade Khan, the police man's negotiation with the villagers and the changes that occur in the minds of the villagers, each of these instances is an example of the kind of violence Fanon speaks of here.

The struggle in Kanthapura is thus one of de-colonization. Fanon sees a critical role for the native intellectuals as agents of decolonization. Despite his western education, the native intellectual will sympathize as well as empathize with his countrymen and slowly but surely he will lead the mass mobilization against the colonial regime. In *Kanthapura*, Moorthy is the native intellectual who succeeds in that endeavour. He is the educated Brahmin youth who joins the hands of men and women, Brahmins and pariahs, and potters and coolies of the village against British dominion. He intimates all the village men on the deterioration of the native economy and exhorts them to foster indigenous goods. Other educated youth like Seenu, read Gandhiji's *Story of My Experiments with Truth* to his illiterate village men and Ratna transcends the stigma and limitations of her widowhood to enlighten the women folk.

The people of Kanthapura, under the influence of Moorthy have crossed the first major hurdle towards decolonization. They have realized the need for new liberating ideas and if necessary taking recourse to violence, though Moorthy has taught them the lesson of non-violence. That the ideas reign supreme is evident in the fact that they are ready to overcome their prejudices and come together in their fight for the common cause of freedom. Indeed, "The national unity is first the unity of a group, the disappearance of old quarrels and final liquidation of unspoken grievances" writes Fanon. All the Brahmins, pariahs, and even the lumpen proletariat of the Skeffington Coffee estate come under a single flag. The break-up of the colonial government is their one and only target to accomplish.

Fanon resurfaces in our analysis of *Kanthapura* through his analysis of how myths, tribal dances and occult practices of the natives abet their spirits and contribute to their cohesion for a common cause. The faith in Kenchamma, the presiding deity of the village is one such conviction joining the people of Kanthapura. In the place of tribal dances, the harikathas of Jayaramachar enliven their fight. Jayaramachar jumbles up Indian mythology with contemporary politics as swaraj is, like Lord Siva three-eyed; khaddar, self purification and Hindu-Muslim unity. The camphor ceremonies and

bhajans held during the Sankara Jayanthi, the Ganesh festival and the Krishnashtami are the Indian equivalents of Fanonean tribal affairs.

Fanon also speaks of decolonization as a positive and creative struggle which binds the natives together and inculcates in every native mind the vibrant ideas of national destiny and collective history. If colonialism is a divide and rule policy, decolonization is its counter- a mass movement resisting parochial divisions in every form. The native believes a renewed and invigorating life will arise from the ashes of the colonizer's corpse.

Fanon's colleague, Aime Cesaire shows how colonization works by the perverse logic of denigrating the native culture and asserting the western culture as superior. Decolonization therefore will involve recovering the lost sense of pride in one's own native culture which is what we see happening in Kanthapura. On the individual level, the struggle will purge of the native's inferiority complex and reclaim his self respect. In each moment of 'don't touch the government campaign,' reluctance to pay taxes and toddy picketing in Kanthapura one can perceive the self esteem and vigour of the people.

The process of decolonization cannot function without facing violence from the colonizers, warns Fanon. In Kanthapura, there is a wave of arrests and police parade to engender panic among the innocent people. But as Fanon prophesied it fans the anti-colonial flames. At the zenith of the anti-colonial struggle, "On every hill a government in miniature is formed and takes over power. Everywhere in the valleys and in the forests, in the jungles and in the villages we find a national authority. Each man and woman brings the nation to life by his or her action and is pledged to ensure its triumph in their locality". This statement by Fanon can be applied word by word in the case of Kanthapura if one replaces hill by a village.

The colonizer's violence erupts in the Satyanarayan procession. The initial slogan of 'Satyanarayan ki Jai' later becomes 'Inquilab Zindabad and they shout:

*"Lift the flag high  
O, Lift the flag high  
Brothers, sisters, friends and mothers  
This is the flag of Revolution."*

Soon, the volunteers and the police begin to wrestle each other. Some have brought gas cylinders, sickles and lathis to fight the police. "... Violence touched all sides (places, areas, et cetera) at all times, and all violence was equal, and the police and the soldiers were all equally violent, and the people were all equally victimized, but especially some of the girls"

Rachi's act of blazing the village transforms the serene hamlet into a bloody pandemonium. Leaving their birth place the fortunate ones flee and settle in Kashipura. Fanon would trace the root cause for the failure of this



struggle in the lack of proper guidance and adept organization –something native cultures are not adept in traditionally. The procession is only an inchoate affair executed in a hasty manner. When the British government intensifies its iron hand measures like confiscating their land, their spirit is dampen. Weary of the long drawn hardships they are dubious about the efficacy of Moorthy and his Gandhian ideology.

When they are finally driven out of their household, the only means is a violent retort.

Towards the end of the novel, Moorthy expresses his disapproval of Gandhism and steps towards Nehruvian socialism in his letter to Ratna. Thus, Fanon's words, "Non-violence is an attempt to settle the colonial system around a green baize table, before any regrettable act has been performed or irreparably gesture made, before any blood has been shed" holds true for the Kanthapura crusade also. The destruction and anarchy that disturbs Moorthy is a necessary part of the decolonization process. For decolonization in its attempt to re-territorialize the colonial cartography "is obviously a programme of complete disorder". However, it is only out of such disorder that a kind of new order can emerge, an order that is based on the formation of a new nation.

Decolonization and the emergence of nation are simultaneous processes. Chapter three of *The Wretched of the Earth* titled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" describes the imminent dangers of independence in nascent nation states. All the parochial considerations began to reappear and eclipse the national consciousness. "The nation is passed over for the race and the tribe is preferred to the state". The spiritual penury of the native bourgeoisie accounts for this catastrophe. The new Kashipura will have to face the challenges and learn the necessities of egalitarian politics itself. A new state post decolonization must be born out of the dreams aspirations and efforts of its people. This is why the novel leaves Kashipura in state of evolution far from Moorthy's ideal conception of a village.

### **Women in Kanthapura**

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) is a subtle record of the immense changes that the Gandhian movement of the thirties brought into the life of the Indian woman and yet didn't let her cross the conventional *feminine* boundaries. The novel traces the material and psychological revolution that accompanied the emergence of the woman from within the twin incarnations of the *devi* and the *dasi* that has reigned the imagination of the patriarchy since ages. From the polar images of the all-pervading and all-powerful goddess Kenchamma and the Pariah Rachanna's wife who would spin only if her husband tells her to, emerge the new women who defy conventions and lead the war of independence — Rangamma and Ratna.

Political mass movements in any country, as Ania Loomba suggests, have dubious attitudes to the question of female agency and women's rights. It appears as if, much like patriarchal culture, political movements demand a particular role from the women and force her to change, adapt and perform in the name of ideals that on the surface may appear highly desirable but end up confining women in newer and different ways. Throughout Latin America, argues Loomba, *machismo* posed a real problem for the women in political struggle. Given the idealization of the *machismo* cult it was difficult if not impossible to visualize how a woman's contribution could be significant.

Some critics suggest that Gandhi's Non-cooperation movement was *feminist* in nature—it mobilized an unprecedented number of women and also, it adopted attributes such as passivity, and activities such as spinning, traditionally considered to be *feminine* in nature. This is debatable as the movement in its essence remained deeply conservative. It is true that the Gandhian movement had a considerable role to play in bringing the woman out of *purdah*. Women made up a significant part of the *satyagrahis* and many assumed the role of leaders in the movement. Thus we find the Gandhi of Kanthapura, Moorthy, selecting Rangamma as one of the members of the Congress Panchayat Committee, saying "We need a woman for the Committee for the Congress is for the weak and the lowly".

But Gandhi's movement confined the women's public roles to being merely an extension of their domestic selves in concurrence with the patriarchal conceptions of the family and society. Despite the references to Rani Laxmibai in *Kanthapura*, the ideal woman is projected in the figure of the ever-obedient and eternally suffering Sita. As Loomba puts it, the woman's state was simply a transition "from a traditional child bride into the nationalist ideal of the wife as help-mate and companion".

We get a glimpse of this painful evolution in the autobiography of Ramabai Ranade, who was married at the age of eleven to the well-known scholar and jurist Mahadev Govind Ranade. Torn between her husband's persistence for her to be educated and the taunts of her mother-in-law and other female relatives, she decides on one occasion to be absent from a function at the temple where she had to choose between sitting with orthodox or reformist women. Her husband punished her by refusing to speak to her even when she performed the traditional rubbing of his feet with ghee, without even telling her what her fault was. The matter was only resolved when she went up to him and apologized. His response was:

"Who would like it if his own one didn't behave according to his will? Once you know the direction of my thoughts, you should always try to follow the same path so that neither of us suffers. Don't ever do such things again."

We meet with similar resistance to the Sevika Sangha from the men in *Kanthapura*. As long as the male privileges and rights are not jeopardized, men in Kanthapura do not have any problems with their women being radicalized into politics. But the moment any of these men are asked to compromise on any of these rights or privileges the situation turns against the women:

“And when our men heard of this, they said: was there nothing left for our women but to vagabond about like soldiers? And every time the milk curdled or a dhoti was not dry, they would say, ‘And this is all because of this Sevi business’.”

A woman is beaten as a consequence of being a part of this Sangha although she is seven months pregnant. Post office Satamma’s husband forbids her to go to Rangamma’s house and when accosted by the latter says, ‘I am a Gandhi’s man, aunt. But if I cannot have my meals as before, I am not a man to starve’. Rangamma in accordance to the Gandhian ideals tells Satamma not to fail in her timely services to her husband or home.

Another point of dubious credibility relates to the education of women. Women’s education has always been a sore point with the Indian patriarchy. Arguments for women’s education in metropolitan as well as colonial contexts, according to Loomba, rely on the logic that educated women would make better wives and mothers. At the same time, they have to be taught to *remain in their places*. This idea is as current now as it was eighty years back. The widening up of one’s world as a result of education fails to keep the woman shackled within the four walls of her home and it is precisely this spectre of the truly independent woman that haunts patriarchy.

The women leaders in *Kanthapura* are both educated widows, Rangamma and Ratna. Rangamma acts as a source of information, knowledge and inspiration to the village women. Apart from telling them about other galaxies on the one hand and the equal rights that women share with the men in a far-away country on the other, Rangamma is a regular subscriber to newspapers from the city. These papers supply the villagers with the latest developments in the revolutionary struggle in the other parts of the country and later as to the trial and judgment of Moorthy and his fellow *satyagrahis*. Rangamma is the one who tells the women about Laxmi Bai and trains them to resist the *lathi* blows of the police passively. She modulates the deep core religious zeal in the women and adds a nationalist dimension to it, ‘...we shall fight the police for Kenchamma’s sake, and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as a silken thread, and you will hymn out the name of the Mahatma.’

On the other end there is Ratna. Initially, she is detested by the village women along with the evil Bhatta, for walking about the streets like a boy,

wearing her hair to the left “like a concubine”, and wearing her jewellery — and all this being a widow. Ratna’s retort when accosted for this is remarkable,

“...when she was asked why she behaved as though she hadn’t lost her husband, she said that that was nobody’s business, and that if these sniffing old country hens thought that seeing a man for a day, and this when one is ten years of age, could be called a marriage, they had better eat mud and drown themselves in the river.”

We find innumerable examples of similarly suffering women in Bengali literature as well, but none perhaps daring to voice so vehement a protest. Her mother reacts to her attitude in the conventional fashion, calling her a wicked tongued creature and significantly, that she *ought never to have been sent to school*. Later, in the absence of Moorthy and Rangamma, it is Ratna who leads the women against the police as the latter launch a violent assault against the village.

Another great leap towards liberation is achieved by the women in the novel by their deciding to read and comment on the vedantic texts when Ramakrishnayya dies. The women choose Ratna to read the texts and Rangamma to comment on them, a remarkable decision when one considers the contemporary furore over whether a woman at all has the right to read the Vedas or not!

Rao’s selection of an old grandmother as the narrator in *Kanthapura* is one of the finest stylistic devices of the novel. We witness the immense change that is gradually brought about in the psyche of the narrow-minded, prejudiced and uneducated widow as she mingles facts with fantasy to describe how the world changed for her and her companions under the influence of Moorthy’s preaching and Rangamma’s Sevika Sangha. This is one of the rare instances where history is looked at from a woman’s point of view as opposed to its analytical, power-structured male version that inevitably leaves the women folk out.

### **Check Your Progress-5**

1. What was the outcome of Moorthy’s three-day fast which he does as penance?
2. What is the significance of Skeffington coffee estate in Kanthapura?

### **3.7 Let Us Sum Up**

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- Raja Rao is known to be one of the most respected and honoured Indian writer of English language novels and short stories. All his works are characterized by Hinduism. His novel *The Serpent and*

*the Rope* (1960) established Raja Rao as one of the finest Indian stylists. *The Serpent and the Rope* is a semi-autobiographical novel which refers to the seeking of spiritual consciousness in Europe and India.

- In 1988, he received the prestigious International Neustadt Prize for Literature. *The Serpent and the Rope* was written after a long silence during which Rao returned to India. The work dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. The serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope to reality. *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) was a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels.
- The protagonist of the novel is a young Brahmin boy, named Moorthy. Moorthy was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Although he had never met Gandhi personally, he had read enough of his ideas and heard about his speeches to be influenced by his ideas and had even seen him once in a vision. What appealed to him in Gandhi's ideas was the quest for the realization of equality among all and based on this, the need to resist British occupation through non-violent protest.
- Moorthy lives with the Rangamma, a childless widow of the village. Rangamma was an educated lady and was a supporter of Moorthy, the freedom fighter. Moorthy was now on the religious, moral and political periphery of his society and it is from this periphery that he began his political struggle decisively.
- The Skeffington coffee estate was spread over a vast sprawling expanse in the neighbourhood of Kanthapura. The owner of the Estate, an Englishman, ruled the coolies with an iron hand, using their physical labour in an unrestricted way and freely using their womenfolk for sexual ends. It was a veritable slavery under a lone slave master and his system.
- Moorthy is conceived as a force of change. As a Gandhian, he is responsible for doing two things in the story. First, to make people conscious of the age old inequalities that they are mired in and link these inequalities to colonial oppression. His second role is to liberate the people from these inequalities so that they are automatically harnessed to the cause of the freedom struggle. He is characterized as the force that will cause both these changes.
- Rao was facing a problem while writing *Kanthapura* which tried to present a uniquely Indian reality in a foreign language, i.e., English. In the preface he observes: "the telling has not been easy". He had to "convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own".

- Gandhism however encounters a crisis at the end of the novel. Police atrocities, seizure of land and a survival crisis force the Gandhians of Kanthapura out and they ultimately find refuge in Kashipura. Gandhi's ideals may be very appealing but they are found impractical as they do not address issues of hunger, thirst, security and brute survival until the time when Gandhian politics has overturned the exploitative system.
- But Gandhi's movement confined the women's public roles to being merely an extension of their domestic selves in concurrence with the patriarchal conceptions of the family and society. Despite the references to Rani Laxmibai in *Kanthapura*, the ideal woman is projected in the figure of the ever-obedient and eternally suffering Sita. As Loomba puts it, the woman's state was simply a transition "from a traditional child bride into the nationalist ideal of the wife as help-mate and companion".
- Rao's selection of an old grandmother as the narrator in *Kanthapura* is one of the finest stylistic devices of the novel. We witness the immense change that is gradually brought about in the psyche of the narrow-minded, prejudiced and uneducated widow as she mingles facts with fantasy to describe how the world changed for her and her companions under the influence of Moorthy's preaching and Rangamma's Sevika Sangha. This is one of the rare instances where history is looked at from a woman's point of view as opposed to its analytical, power-structured male version that inevitably leaves the women folk out.

### 3.8 Key Words

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- **Anthology:** A published collection of poems or other pieces of writing
- **Corollary:** Forming a proposition that follows from one already proved
- **Gandhism:** A body of ideas and principles that describes the inspiration, vision and the life work of Mahatma Gandhi. It is particularly associated with his contributions to the idea of nonviolent resistance, sometimes also called civil resistance.
- **Swaraj:** Self-government or independence for India.
- **Untouchability:** A direct product of the caste system. It is not merely the inability to touch a human being of a certain caste or sub-caste.
- **Puranas:** Any of a class of Sanskrit sacred writings on Hindu mythology and folklore of varying date and origin, the most ancient of which dates from the 4th century AD.
- **Satyagraha:** A policy of passive political resistance, especially that advocated by Mahatma Gandhi against British rule in India.

### 3.9 Terminal Questions

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1. Assess the characterization of Moorthy in *Kanthapura*?
2. What are views and uses of religion by the character Moorthy in *Kanthapura* and Gandhi, as expressed in *Hind Swaraj* and *My Experiments with Truth*?
3. Who is the owner of Skeffington Coffee Estate?
4. Identify the major themes in Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*.
5. Discuss major women characters in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*.
6. Can Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* be considered as a post-colonial novel?

### 3.10 Suggested Readings

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- Rao, Raja. (1996). *Kanthapura*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks.
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- Sharma, Kaushal. (2005). *Raja Rao: A Study of His Themes and Technique*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.
- Dayal, P. (1986). *Raja Rao*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distri.
- Prasad, Amar Nath. (2001). *Studies in Indian English Fiction*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.
- Dodiya, Jaydipsinh (2006). *Perspectives on Indian English Fiction*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.

### 3.11 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

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#### Check Your Progress-1

1. In 1988, he received the prestigious International Neustadt Prize for Literature. *The Serpent and the Rope* was written after a long silence during which Rao returned to India. The work dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. The serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope to reality.
2. Raja Rao lost his mother at a very young age. This left a lasting impression on the author, which may also be the reason why orphanhood is a recurring theme in his novels.

#### Check Your Progress-2

1. Raja Rao describes the people of Kanthapura to be poor, illiterate and backward. The village is ridden with three major ills: caste, class

and toddy. Different quarters in it house people of different castes—the highest caste being Brahmins, the lowest, the Pariahs. But despite the ills, people from different castes and classes manage to live harmoniously accommodating peacefully the demands one makes on the other. People are also extremely religious-minded and at least among the lower classes Goddess Kenchamma is the presiding deity enshrined in the village temple.

2. At the end of the satyagraha, the people looked upon Gandhi as Lord Ram who would slay Ravana, the British and free Sita, their motherland.

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. Moorthy is conceived as a force of change. As a Gandhian, he is responsible for doing two things in the story. First, to make people conscious of the age old inequalities that they are mired in and link these inequalities to colonial oppression. His second role is to liberate the people from these inequalities so that they are automatically harnessed to the cause of the freedom struggle. He is characterized as the force that will cause both these changes.
2. Kamalamma is Rangamma's traditionalist sister. A strict adherent to the Vedic caste system, she rejects Rangamma's conversion to Gandhi's teachings and her own daughter Ratna's modern behaviour and attitude. Kamalamma embodies the larger conflict within the village through her divisive stance within the family, being far more concerned with Ratna's eligibility for remarriage than with her daughter's role in the swaraj movement.

### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. Narrative Technique means the methods involved in telling a story.
2. Rao was facing a problem while writing this novel which tried to present a uniquely Indian reality in a foreign language, i.e., English. In the preface he observes: "the telling has not been easy". He had to "convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own".

### **Check Your Progress-5**

1. Moorthy's three-day penance fast has multiple benefits. Not only did it bring change in Moorthy but it also changed the outlook of the villagers. This period of self-contemplation reveals him metaphysical truths. He emerges as more tolerant and loving. He forgives Venkamma's jibes. He learns to control his desires and emotions. He is ashamed when he recollects his earlier feelings for Rachna. More and more people came to see him and revere him as it was an



incredible feat. Moorthy's fast induces guilt in others and they decide to cast out violence from their lives too. Their devotion for him is shown at his arrest. It is a dramatic scene where people of all caste are assembled standing next to each other to prevent his arrest. They peacefully resist and don't hit back. They court arrests and face police brutalities but stay non-violent. They later stage various marches and picketing of liquor shops in a non-violent way.

2. Skeffington coffee estate is a centre of exploitation of the native coolies. Not only are they paid less after exacting hours of work they are treated inhumanly. The new master forced them to submit their women to his lust. He was accused of murdering a Brahmin who refused to yield his woman but walked out free. Moorthy is invited to the estate to teach them. Fearing his reputation and popularity among the masses Bade Khan doesn't let him enter the estate. It triggers pent up humiliation and anger in coolies who despite Moorthy's pleas to shun violence beat up the policeman. This compels Moorthy to do a three-day penance fast which also brings a change in the minds of the people who decide cast out violence from their lives too.

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**BLOCK-C: NON-FICTION**

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# UNIT - 1

## NEHRU: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

### Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Nehru: A Brief Biographical Note
- 1.3 A Note on the Author's Preface
- 1.4 An Introduction to the Political Ideas of Jawaharlal Nehru
- 1.5 Critical Summary of Nehru's *An Autobiography*
  - 1.5.1 Chapter 1: Descent from Kashmir
  - 1.5.2 Chapter 3: Theosophy
  - 1.5.3 Chapter 4: Harrow and Cambridge
  - 1.5.4 Chapter 19: Communalism Rampant
  - 1.5.5 Chapter 51: The Liberal Outlook
  - 1.5.6 Chapter 53: India Old and New
- 1.6 Autobiography as a Genre
- 1.7 Nehru as a Thinker and Visionary
- 1.8 Continental Influences on Nehru
- 1.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.10 Key Words
- 1.11 Terminal Questions
- 1.12 Suggested Readings
- 1.13 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

### 1.0 Objectives

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

- Describe the importance of Jawaharlal Nehru in the context of Indian history
- Interpret the political ideas of Jawaharlal Nehru
- Critically analyse Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography
- Identify autobiography as a genre of literature
- Evaluate Nehru's role as a thinker and visionary
- Examine continental influences on Nehru

### 1.1 Introduction

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Autobiography can be understood as a genre of literature which is a metaphor of the self and its journey on the part of the autobiographer from the known to the unknown. James Olney describes autobiography as, 'a monument of

the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition.' The first generation of Indian English Autobiographers belongs to the Independence era. Many of our top leaders and freedom fighters like Gandhi, Nehru, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad wrote their autobiographies during that period. In fact, Nehru's *An Autobiography* is the best book in that genre in our country. Jawaharlal Nehru was the first prime minister of India and was considered to be a central figure in Indian politics for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under the fine tutelage of Mahatma Gandhi, he emerged as the paramount leader of the Indian Independence Movement. In this unit, we will discuss certain chapters of Nehru's biography. We will also study Nehru's political ideas and the continental influences which shaped his ideology. Autobiography as a genre of literature will also be explained.

## 1.2 Nehru: A Brief Biographical Note

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Born in Allahabad, India, on November 14, 1889, Jawaharlal Nehru was eventually elected as independent India's first prime minister.

B.R.Nanda quotes a Hindu Mahasabha leader as saying that Nehru was 'English by Education, Muslim by culture and Hindu by an accident of birth'. Nehru has acknowledged his debt to England. The impact of the Muslim culture has been traditionally paramount among Kashmiris. Study of Urdu and Persian was found not only among men but also women. He had many Muslim friends. Though he imbibed the Hindu wisdom of the ages and read Gita, he was not a Hindu in the traditional sense. He glorified India's magnificent past, history, its mountains and rivers, which he considered as the first gods of the Aryans, who settled in the Gangetic Plain. He was a true citizen of the world, despite being patriotic. He was a secularist in the sense that he transcended parochial considerations and looked from a broad human angle. His secularism was founded in India's extraordinary variegated culture which was a product of unbroken history.

The story of Nehru's involvement with politics goes back to a time when he was barely 20. In 1919, while traveling on a train, Nehru overheard British Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer gloating over the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in which 379 people were killed and at least 1,200 wounded when the British military stationed there continuously fired for ten minutes on a crowd of unarmed Indians. The incident changed the course of his life and he vowed to fight the British.

Nehru joined the Indian National Congress, one of India's two major political parties and was deeply influenced by the party's leader, Mahatma Gandhi. It was Gandhi's insistence on action to bring about social change and greater autonomy from the British that sparked Nehru's interest the

most. His autobiography records this phase of his life and the subsequent struggles with the British government.

In 1921, the Congress Party's central leaders and workers were banned from operating in some provinces. Nehru went to prison for the first time as the ban took effect; over the next 24 years he was to serve a total of nine sentences, adding up to more than nine years in jail. Always leaning to the left politically, Nehru studied Marxism while imprisoned but hated the Communists. Though he found himself interested in the Marxist philosophy he was repelled by some of its absolutist ideas and Nehru worked to adjust Marxism to Indian conditions.

By 1947, simmering animosity had reached a fever pitch between the Congress Party and the Muslim League, who had always wanted more power in a free India. The last British viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, was charged with finalizing the British roadmap for withdrawal with a plan for a unified India. Despite his reservations, Nehru acquiesced to Mountbatten and the Muslim League's plan to divide India, and in August 1947, Pakistan was created. The British withdrew and Nehru became independent India's first prime minister.

To understand the importance of Jawaharlal Nehru in the context of Indian history one has to begin with the acknowledgement that the nationalist movement, which he led in many crucial senses, unified the various states and principalities on the Indian sub-continent into a nation. He imparted modern values and thought, stressed secularism, insisted upon the basic unity of India, and, in the face of ethnic and religious diversity, carried India into the modern age of scientific innovation and technological progress. He also prompted social concern for the marginalized and poor and respect for democratic values.

Nehru was especially proud to reform the antiquated Hindu civil code. Finally Hindu widows could enjoy equality with men in matters of inheritance and property. Nehru also changed Hindu law to criminalize caste discrimination.

Nehru's administration established many Indian institutions of higher learning, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Indian Institutes of Technology, and the National Institutes of Technology, and guaranteed in his five-year plans free and compulsory primary education to all of India's children.

### **1.3 A Note on the Author's Preface**

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This book was written entirely in prison, except for the postscript and certain minor changes, from June, 1934, to February, 1935.

The primary object in writing these pages was to occupy myself with a definite task, so necessary in the long solitudes of jail life, as well as to review past events in India with which I had been connected to enable myself to think clearly about them. I began the task in a mood of self-questioning and, to a large extent, this persisted throughout, I was not writing deliberately for an audience, but, if I thought of an audience, it was one of my own countrymen and countrywomen.

This is how Nehru begins the Preface to his Autobiography. The prison as the location of its creation is clearly aimed at highlighting a few things. First is the political incarceration that frames the circumstances of the creation. It is clear that the imperial system is functioning as a dominant other in his thought, another powerful enough to imprison him and provide him a perspective from where he can define his self-identity and the meaning of his life.

Although Nehru says he wanted to review, think carefully, perhaps objectively and in a mood of self-questioning it is doubtful if his present physical location and the cause of being there will let him do that completely. The other against which Nehru defines himself and the meaning of his life is too dominant to permit him anything more than a sham of objectivity.

This necessitates the purely political nature of the book. It is not that personal or familial issues are not brought into the work; it is rather that even these issues are presented in a way that helps us understand the political orientation of the individual or the family. This is definitely not to say that all personal details, at least the ones that are required in an autobiography are present here. This is, put more aptly, the life of Nehru the political figure and a better title to it should have been *My Political Life/Struggles. An Autobiography*. This is perhaps what the American edition of the autobiography does when it redoes the title as *Towards Freedom*. Nehru goes on to highlight the personal and political focus of the text in the next section, disclaiming his text as non-historical and definitely partial.

The reader will, I hope, remember that the book was written during a particularly distressful period of my existence. It bears obvious traces of this. If the writing had been done under more normal conditions, it would have been different and perhaps occasionally more restrained. Yet I have decided to leave it as it is, for it may have some interest for others in so far as it represents what I felt at the time of writing. My attempt was to trace, as far as I could, my own mental development, and not to write a survey of recent Indian history... Those who want to make a proper study of our recent past will have to go to other sources. It may be, however, that this and other personal narratives will help them to fill the gaps and to provide a background for the study of hard fact.

Nehru is now highlighting the possibility that personal hurt, complaints, biases and prejudices may have influenced his writing in ways that may have gone counter to his interest of being self-questioning and objective. In other words, it is precisely this element of personal hurt and bias that will differentiate his autobiography from a history book. The personal element influences Nehru's event selection, analysis and critique.

However, if there is an idea or movement that appears central to the text, it is not opposition to the British but the Indian freedom movement building up. There is a subtle yet definite difference between the two. Nehru's political life was devoted to the cause of India's freedom and not to the cause of resisting the British. It is in this context that individuals and movements are assessed.

I have discussed frankly some of my colleagues with whom I have been privileged to work for many years and for whom I have the greatest regard and affection; I have also criticized groups and individuals, sometimes perhaps rather severely. That criticism does not take away from my respect for many of them. But I have felt that those who meddle in public affairs must be frank with each other and with the public they claim to serve. A superficial courtesy and an avoidance of embarrassing and sometimes distressing questions do not help in bringing about a true understanding of each other or of the problems that face us. Real cooperation must be based on an appreciation of differences as well as common points, and a facing of facts, however inconvenient they might be. I trust, however, that nothing that I have written bears a trace of malice or ill will against any individual.

This is the winning aspect of Nehru's writing. Although he critiques individuals, sometimes rather drastically, he is always clear of the perspective in which the critique originates. This is perhaps the product of Nehru's self-questioning. It was important to be honest and clear in one's critique of other Indians because superficial courtesy meant a compromise on certain basic political values like impartiality, objectivity, equality and freedom to speak against the high and the mighty. It is therefore important that Nehru clarifies that nothing has been written out of ill will and malice, as a sentimental outcry or an act of revenge.

This is what prevents Nehru from recording and commenting on post 1930 events. Perhaps, these events have not been properly thought over and are thus not ready to be presented.

I have purposely avoided discussing the issues in India today, except vaguely and indirectly. I was not in a position to go into them with any thoroughness in prison, or even to decide in my own mind what should be done. Even after my release I did not think it worthwhile to add anything on this subject. It did not seem to fit in with what I had already written. And



so this 'autobiographical narrative' remains a sketchy, personal, and incomplete account of the past, verging on the present, but cautiously avoiding contact with it.

### **Check Your Progress-1**

1. How has Nehru been described by a Hindu Mahasabha leader?
2. What was Nehru's contribution to the Indian society?
3. What is the significance of prison as the location for his writing his autobiography?

## **1.4 An Introduction to the Political Ideas of Jawaharlal Nehru**

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Nehru is regarded by many as one of the greatest democrats of the world. 'Not Churchill, not Roosevelt, not Chiang Kai-shek, in a sense not even Gandhi, stands as firm as Nehru does for government by the consent of the people and for the integrity of the individual.' says Richard Walsh the American editor of this autobiography. Politically, Nehru was open to participation in one of the budding political models of the western world – democracy. The reasons why Nehru espoused democracy were dual. First, there were no better models of governance available in contemporary history, second because he found a clear similarity between the ideals of the Indian freedom movement and democracy. In fact, he saw India's freedom movement guided by the ideals of democracy as none of the other models were worth emulating. He scorned Nazism and fascism. He was not a communist 'chiefly because I resist the communist tendency to treat communism as holy doctrine. I feel also that too much violence is associated with communist methods.' The goal of India, as he states it, is 'a united, free, democratic country, closely associated in a world federation with other free nations.'

The esteem in which Nehru and his programme was held by liberals in England is shown by the proposal soon after the war began in Europe, that he be made Premier of India 'in fact if not in name,' as it was put in the *New Statesman* of London. Nehru thought as a global citizen. He also looked beyond to the world order, he thinks of mankind as a whole, In an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, he wrote; 'India is far from America, but more and more our thoughts go to this great democratic country, which seems, almost alone, to keep the torch of democratic freedom alight in a world given over to imperialism and fascism, violence and aggression, and opportunism of the worst type.' America, England, India, China . . . 'Round the four seas, said Confucius, 'all men are brothers'; and such is Nehru's concept.

Dr. Anup Singh, who wrote the brief biography, *Nehru: Rising Star of India*, when asked ‘What is the one salient thing to say about Nehru?’ He replied that ‘There has been too much talk of the traditional conflict of East and West, and belief that they can never meet, Nehru is proof that they have already met. He is the synthesis of East and West. In him the best of both cultures are fused into the coming world type, the man of the future’.

In India, it has been said, the unexpected always happens, but the inevitable never occurs. When World War II broke out it was unexpected that the British should so mistake the temper of India as to deny the last appeal for freedom and to put Nehru into jail yet again. After his release from prison in 1935, he went to Europe, where his wife died early the next year. Returning by plane by way of Rome, he had the greatest difficulty in avoiding the importunities of the Fascists, who tried for their own purposes to get him to meet Mussolini, which he knew he must not do because the occasion would be turned to the uses of fascist propaganda.

So, after the betrayal at Munich, Nehru said without delay, ‘All our sympathies are with Czechoslovakia. India resents British foreign policy and will be no party to it’. When the European war broke out, he was in the capital of free China, where he received one of the greatest receptions ever given to a foreign visitor. He flew back to India declaring that India's position was not one of refusing to fight on England's side. ‘But we want to be free to make our own choice’ he said. ‘Right now we are in a situation in which we would be asked to fight for democracy when we do not have democracy ourselves’. Nehru worked in complete harmony with Gandhi. Neither of them put any obstacle in the way of Britain's war effort or the contribution of India to it ‘The British are a brave and proud people’ said Gandhi, ‘The greatest gesture of the Congress is that it refrains from creating trouble in India’. And Nehru said that to launch civil disobedience merely because Britain was in peril would be ‘an act derogatory to India's honour.’ But both Gandhi and Nehru felt that the British rulers were forcing the issue upon India and inviting civil disobedience, ‘If the war is really a war for democracy and freedom said Nehru, ‘then imperialism must end and the independence and self-determination of India must be acknowledged’; with that done, he said, ‘India would throw her full weight into the struggle.’

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. Due to what reasons did Nehru support democracy?
2. On his way back from Europe in 1935, why did Nehru choose to avoid the Fascists in Rome?

## 1.5 Critical Summary of Nehru's *An Autobiography*

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### 1.5.1 Chapter 1: Descent from Kashmir

Nehru begins this book with the admission that he began life as a spoilt child.

An only son of prosperous parents is apt to be spoiled, especially so in India. And, when that son happens to have been an only child for the first eleven years of his existence, there is little hope for him to escape this spoiling.

His two sisters were very much younger than him. Although Nehru belonged to a joint Hindu family with a lot of cousins growing up around him, none of them were his age. As a result, he spent a lonely childhood that turned him into a lone dreamer — characteristics that were to remain with him much later into his life.

His ancestors, notably one his great grandfathers Raj Kaul, came down from the mountains of Kashmir in the eighteenth century to seek fame and fortune in the rich plains below. He attracted the notice of the Emperor probably because of his wisdom and scholarship, probably at his instance, the family migrated to Delhi, the imperial capital, about the year 1716. A *jagir* with a house situated on the banks of a canal was granted to Raj Kaul, and, from the fact of this residence, 'Nehru' (from nahar, a canal) came to be attached to his name. Kaul had been the family name; in later years, this dropped out and we became simply Nehrus.

What is interesting in the changing of this name is that the Nehrus got their title not by virtue of their religion or region but from their scholarship and capabilities. This is almost the rebirth of the family on the plains – a new profession, a new position and a new corresponding identity. Jawaharlal comes out of this reborn family, not from the Kashmiri clan that came down.

The Revolt of 1857 put an end to all of the Nehru family's possession which joined the numerous fugitives who were leaving the old imperial city and went to Agra. For some years the family lived in Agra, and it was in Agra on the sixth of May, 1861, that Motilal Nehru was born.

Nehru's uncle attached himself to the newly established High Court, and, when this court moved to Allahabad from Agra, the family moved with it. His uncle gradually developed an extensive practice and became one of the leaders of the High Court Bar. Motilal began with a spark of brilliance as a young scholar of Persian and some Arabic but messed up his graduation by taking the first paper fairly well and not appearing for the other papers which ended his university career. He could never graduate.

Later, he appeared for the High Court vakils' examination and not only passed it but topped the list and got a gold medal for it. He had found

the subject after his own heart, or, rather, he was intent on success in the profession of his choice. He started practice in the district courts of Cawnpore and after three years moved to the Allahabad High Court. Not long after this his brother, Pandit Nand Lai, suddenly died. That was a terrible blow for him which made him plunge into his work. Bent on success, he for many months cut himself off from everything else. Nearly all of Nandi Lal's briefs came to him, and, the professional success that he so ardently desired soon came his way and brought him both additional work and money.

The National Congress was attracting the attention of the English-knowing middle classes, and he visited some of its early sessions and gave it a theoretical allegiance. However, politics was unfamiliar to him, and his mind was full of the hard work that his profession involved. He was, of course, a nationalist in a vague sense of the word, but he admired Englishmen and their ways. He had a feeling that his own countrymen had fallen low and almost deserved what they had got. And there was just a trace of contempt in his mind for the politicians who talked and talked without doing anything, though he had no idea at all as to what else they could do. Also there was the thought, born in the pride of his own success, that many—certainly not all—of those who took to politics had been failures in life.

An ever-increasing income brought many changes in the family's life, for an increasing income meant increasing expenditure. And gradually the Nehru family became more and more Westernized.

### **1.5.2 Chapter 3: Theosophy**

When Nehru was ten years old, the family shifted to a bigger house called 'Anand Bhawan.' This house had a big garden and a swimming pool where Nehru learnt to swim. It was a novelty, and the electric light that had been installed there and in the house was an innovation for Allahabad in those days. The house along with the pool became a socialization venue for his father's friends. What I want to read in the new house complete with the swimming pool is the relative affluence of the Nehru family during this time. The destabilization of the Nehru family after 1857 had made them totter through Agra and Allahabad until they found their footing in the latter city once again. It is in this position of relative comfort that Nehru learnt his political ideals and lessons. It is this that he gave up to embrace repeated imprisonment and a life of constant struggle during the Freedom movement.

The next section records the break from tradition and an assertive entry into modernity by the, Nehru family. Food, dress, travel and lifestyle, everything reflected this assertive break. Motilal travelled to Europe mainly for professional reasons without having any qualms about it. What is to be noted here is that crossing the seven seas was supposed to pollute a Brahmin and all Brahmins who did it under some compulsion were either thrown out

of the community (which meant that other Brahmins would not socialize with him) or they had to perform some penance. Motilal, deliberately went to Europe, did not perform any *prayaschit* on return and scorned the community for their indifference. Among the Brahmin community at large and within the Nehru family in particular, *purdah* had almost completely disappeared both in the public and in the private space. Food restrictions had almost entirely gone, except in the case of a handful of orthodox people, chiefly old ladies, and inter-dining with non-Kashmiris, Moslems, and non-Indians became common.

The last push to this drive towards modernity was given by the political upheaval of 1930. Intermarriage with other communities started occurring. Both the Nehru sisters married non-Kashmiris, and a young member of the family married a Hungarian girl.

It is in the next section that Nehru comes to the title – theosophy.

When I was about eleven, a new resident tutor, Ferdinand T. Brooks, came and took charge of me. He was partly Irish (on his father's side), and his mother had been a Frenchwoman or a Belgian. He was a keen theosophist who had been recommended to my father by Mrs. Annie Besant.

Earlier efforts at Sanskrit education had failed. F. T. Brooks developed in him a taste for reading and Nehru read almost the entire canon of English literature open to a young mind. Brooks also initiated him into the mysteries of science and a little later initiated him into theosophy.

Brooks used to have weekly meetings of theosophists in his rooms, and Nehru attended them and gradually imbibed theosophical phraseology and ideas. There were metaphysical arguments, and discussions about reincarnation and the astral and other supernatural bodies, and auras, and the doctrine of karma, and references not only to big books by Madame Blavatsky and other theosophists but to the Hindu scriptures, the Buddhist Dhammapada, Pythagoras, Apollonius Tyanaeus, and various philosophers and mystics.

Mrs. Annie Besant visited Allahabad in those days and delivered several addresses on theosophical subjects. Nehru was deeply moved by her oratory and returned from her speeches dazed and as in a dream and decided to join the Theosophical Society at thirteen. Mrs. Besant herself performed the ceremony of initiation, which consisted of good advice and instruction in some mysterious signs, probably a relic of freemasonry. However, soon after Brooks left Nehru, he lost touch with theosophy, and in a remarkably short time theosophy disappeared from his life completely.

The next important event was the Russo-Japanese War. Japanese victories stirred up his enthusiasm, and he waited eagerly for the papers for fresh news daily. Nationalistic ideas filled up his mind as he mused of Indian

freedom and Asiatic freedom from European rule. At fourteen, he dreamed of brave deeds, of how, sword in hand, he would fight for India and help in freeing her.

### 1.5.3 Chapter 4: Harrow and Cambridge

At the end of the previous chapter Nehru speaks of travelling to England along with his family. In this chapter he tells us that one of the main reasons for this trip was to settle the question of his education. He considered himself little fortunate in finding a vacancy at Harrow, for he was slightly above the usual age for entry, being fifteen. His family went to the Continent, and after some months they returned to India, leaving a homesick Nehru behind. He was never an exact fit and always had the feeling that he was not one of them, spending most of the time by himself.

Politics had always interested Nehru, even as a child so he was greatly interested in the General Election, which took place at the end of 1905 which ended in a great Liberal victory. Early in 1906 when his form master asked the class about the new Government, he was the only boy in his form who could give him much information on the subject.

Given Nehru's early upbringing in India this was natural. The air was thick and heavy with nationalist politics at the turn of the century and Nehru seemed to have breathed too much of this air. It is this that explains the broadly political curiosity and orientation of the growing Nehru's mind.

There were a few Jews in Nehru's house and in the other school houses. They got on fairly well but there was always a background of anti-Semitic feeling. They were the 'damned Jews,' and soon, almost unconsciously, Nehru began to think that it was the proper thing to have this feeling. He never really felt anti-Semitic in the least, and, in later years, he had many good friends among the Jews.

It is to be noted that the influence of continental anti-Semitism on the growing Nehru without the presence of any event or experience that could have led to it. He was breathing it as a part of the prevailing European climate in the pre-war years. That is why he could be friends with Jews in his class without really questioning his overt attraction to the anti-Semitic wave. Nehru was growing up as a European youngster would grow, complete with their prejudices and pre-conceptions.

Although Nehru had got used to Harrow and liked the place, he somehow felt that he was outgrowing it. The university attracted him. Right through the years of 1906 and 1907 news from India had been agitating him. He got meager accounts from the English papers; but even that little showed that big events were happening at home. There were deportations, and Bengal seemed to be in an uproar, and Tilak's name was often flashed from Poona, and there was Swadeshi and boycott. All this stirred him

tremendously; but there was not a soul in Harrow to whom he could talk about it.

Reactions like these reassert the fundamentally political and egalitarian nature of Nehru's character. England could not keep him away from the ongoing political turmoil of his country that Nehru intuitively sympathized with. He did not get these political values from his family as his father was not a staunch nationalist. He had imbibed it through his western education, western tutors and teachers and the ongoing political struggles in India. He found examples of this struggle in other countries and cultures both in the contemporary and the historical world and that had validated his dream of freedom from the British.

Nehru left Harrow and joined Trinity College, Cambridge in the beginning of October 1907, just when he was approaching eighteen. He felt elated at being an undergraduate with a great deal of freedom, compared to school, to do what he chose.

For the next three years Nehru was at Cambridge, three quiet years with little of disturbance in them. They were pleasant years, with many friends and some work and some play and a gradual widening of the intellectual horizon. Nehru opted for the natural sciences tripos, the subjects being chemistry, geology, and botany, but his interests were not confined to these.

My general attitude to life at the time was a vague kind of cyrenaicism, partly natural to youth, partly the influence of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. Apart from Wild and Pater, Nehru continued to read the entire canon of western humanist literature.

Like all budding thinkers exercising their minds, Nehru and his friends played with the problems of human life in a mock-serious way, for they had not become real problems for them as yet, and they had not been caught in the coils of the world's affairs. Being on the threshold of modern life in Europe, Nehru and his friends were experiencing the lull before the storm of the two wars. Soon this world was to die, yielding place to another, full of death and destruction and anguish and heart-sickness for the world's youth. But the veil of the future hid this, and the youth saw around them an assured and advancing order of things, and this was pleasant for those who could afford it.

Life in India was far from being quiet and optimistic. From 1907 onward for several years India was seething with unrest and trouble. For the first time since the Revolt of 1857, India was showing fight and not submitting tamely to foreign rule. News of Tilak's activities and his conviction, of Aurobindo Ghosh and the way the masses of Bengal were taking the Swadeshi and boycott pledge stirred all Indians in England. The Indian turmoil was touching the liberal intelligentsia in Europe in a number of different ways.

The white population could still think that a religion of humanity could be practiced in India even under imperialist rule but for the natives there was no solution except a war cry. Almost without an exception the youth were Tilakites or Extremists, as the new party was called in India.

As the political scene warmed up the Indian polity was polarized into the moderates and the extremists. Motilal Nehru got dragged into the political situation actively. He had, naturally enough, joined the Moderates, whom he knew and many of whom were his colleagues in his profession. A man of strong feelings, strong passions, tremendous pride, and great strength of will, he was very far from the moderate type. And yet in 1907 and 1908 and for some years afterward, he was undoubtedly a moderate of Moderates, and he was bitter against the Extremists, though I believe he admired Tilak.

Why was this so? It was natural for him with his grounding in law and constitutionalism to take a lawyer's and a constitutional view of politics. His clear thinking led him to see that hard and extreme words lead nowhere unless they are followed by action appropriate to the language. He saw no effective action in prospect. The Swadeshi and boycott movements did not seem to him to carry matters far. Being a seasoned legalist practicing in British courts, Motilal's vision could be understandably skewed from the point of view of law rather than the ideal of freedom. The extremists, Gandhi and the other nationalist leaders must have come under his critical scanner because they had scant regard for following the law.

During the later part of his stay at Cambridge the question had arisen as to what career Nehru should take up. For a little while the Indian Civil Service was contemplated but a number of hurdles were noticed. Nehru would have to wait for at least three years before taking the examination at 22. Besides, both his father and mother wanted him near them after his long absence. So the die was cast in favor of the paternal profession, the Bar, and Nehru joined the Inner Temple at London.

It is curious that, in spite of my growing extremism in politics, I did not then view with any strong disfavor the idea of joining the Indian Civil Service and thus becoming a cog in the British Government's administrative machine in India. Such an idea in later years would have been repellent to me.

Nehru's indifference to a political career in the beginning is something that the later he finds curious, given the fact that his later life in India was devoted to it. The commitment to devote his life to the cause of nationalist politics was something that was yet to build up in him and that process would be completed in India under the influence of senior leaders of the freedom movement. So, in the summer of 1912 Nehru was called to the Bar, and in the autumn of that year he returned to India finally after a stay of over seven years in England. Twice, in between, he had gone home



during the holidays. But now he returned for good, so when he landed at Bombay, he was a bit of a prig with little to commend him.

#### **1.5.4 Chapter 19: Communalism Rampant**

This Chapter deals with the rise of communalism as a part of the nationalist politics in pre-independence India. Although communalism manifested mainly in Hindu-Muslim relations, other religions like Sikhism and Buddhism also came into the fray. Nehru however discusses only the Hindu-Muslim tensions and their causes. What is interesting in this analysis is that Nehru detects the roots of communalism in social, political and economic causes rather than religion. The causes that trigger the tension are merely surface ones and are motivated by deeper political and economic factors.

Deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relations, especially in the bigger cities of North India led to riots that were brutal and callous in the extreme, suggesting the latent and deep seated animosities between the two communities that they manifested. The atmosphere of distrust and anger bred new causes of dispute. Among the chief causes that triggered these riots were the question of cow sacrifice, especially on the Bakr-Id day, clashing Hindu and Moslem festival dates and the ever present, ever recurring question of music before mosques. Objection was taken by the Moslems to music or any noise which interfered with their prayers in their mosques. In every city there were many mosques where believe offered prayers five times every day so there was no lack of noises and processions (including marriage and funeral processions). So the chances of friction were always present. In particular, objection was taken to processions and noises at the time of the sunset prayer in the mosques – also the time when evening *arti* takes place in the Hindu temples, and gongs are sounded and the temple bells ring. *Arti-namaz* disputes assumed major proportions.

What Nehru found amazing was that a question which could be settled with mutual consideration for each other's feelings and a little adjustment should give rise to great bitterness and rioting. But, people were not ready to listen to reason or consideration or adjustments, and there was always a third party ready to play off one group against another. The significance of these riots in a few northern cities had an exaggerated effect and disturbed the rural masses. They however did not turn violent as easily as the city masses.

Simmering communal tension was pushed on by the communal leaders at the top, and it was reflected in the stiffening-up of the political communal demands. Because of the communal tension, Moslem political reactionaries, who had taken a back seat during all these years of non co-operation and *swaraj* became prominent, helped in the process by the British Government. From day to day new and more far-reaching communal demands appeared

on their behalf, striking at the very root of national unity and Indian freedom. On the Hindu side also political reactionaries were among the principal communal leaders, and, in the name of guarding Hindu interests, they played definitely into the hands of the Government.

The Congress was in a quandary. Many a Congressman was a communalist under his national cloak. But the Congress leadership stood firm and, on the whole, refused to side with either communal party, or rather with any communal group, for now the Sikhs and other smaller minorities were also loudly voicing their particular demands. Inevitably this led to denunciation from both the extremes.

At this point, Nehru analyses Gandhi's position in relation to the communal movement. According to him[Gandhi], it could only be solved by goodwill and the generosity of the majority group, and so he was prepared to agree to everything that the Moslems might demand. He wanted to win them over, not to bargain with them. With foresight and a true sense of values he grasped at the reality that was worthwhile; but others, who thought they knew the market price of everything and were ignorant of the true value of anything, stuck to the methods of the market place. They saw the cost of purchase with painful clearness, but they had no appreciation of the worth of the article they might have bought.

The lack of unified and clear ideals and objectives in the struggle for freedom undoubtedly helped the spread of communalism. Short-sighted leaders often compromised with the British for petty personal and regional gains. The masses saw no clear connection between their day-to-day sufferings and the fight for Swaraj. They fought well enough at times by instinct, but that was a feeble weapon which could be easily blunted or even turned aside for other purposes. There was no reason behind it, and in periods of reaction it was not difficult for the communalists to play upon this feeling and exploit it in the name of religion. It is nevertheless extraordinary how the bourgeois classes, both among the Hindus and the Moslems, succeeded, in the sacred name of religion, in getting a measure of mass sympathy and support for programs and demands which had absolutely nothing to do with the masses, or even the lower middle class.

Nehru here goes into the economic roots that sustain communalism and how pre-independence India was clearly class ridden. As a result economic questions transformed into political and religious questions, communalism being one of them.

Every one of the communal demands put forward by any communal group is, in the final analysis, a demand for jobs, and these jobs could only go to a handful of the upper middle class. There is also, of course, the demand for special and additional seats in the legislatures, as symbolizing political power, but this too is looked upon chiefly as the power to exercise

patronage. These narrow political demands, benefiting at the most a small number of the upper middle classes, and often creating barriers in the way of national unity and progress, were cleverly made to appear the demands of the masses of that particular religious group. Religious passion was hitched on to them in order to hide their barrenness.

Political reactionaries thus came back to the political field in the guise of communal leaders, and the real explanation of the various steps they took was not so much their communal bias as their desire to obstruct political advance. Both Hindu and Muslim communal leaders agreed in condemning socialistic and suchlike 'subversive' movements.

Nehru now laments the various losses that the absence of communal harmony resulted in. The Delhi Unity Conference of 1924 was hardly over when a Hindu-Moslem riot broke out in Allahabad. It was not a big riot, as such riots go, in so far as casualties were concerned; but it was a sore point in Hindu-Muslim relations. That year, or perhaps later, there was also some trouble over the Ram Lila celebrations at Allahabad. Probably because of restrictions about music before mosques, these celebrations were abandoned as a protest. For about eight years now the Ram Lila has not been held in Allahabad, and the greatest festival of the year for hundreds of thousands in the Allahabad district has almost vanished. Ramlila was an open-air affair, and Moslems also swelled the crowds, and there was joy and lightheartedness everywhere. Trade flourished. It was carnival time for all. And now, for eight or nine years, the children of Allahabad, not to mention the grown-ups, had no chance of seeing this show and having a bright day of joyful excitement in the dull routine of their lives.

### **1.5.5 Chapter 51: The Liberal Outlook**

During his visit to Poona to see Gandhiji, Nehru visited the Servants of India Society's home with Gandhiji where Gandhiji's was asked questions about his request for an interview with the Viceroy and the Viceroy's refusal. For Nehru, this preoccupation with a turned down request was a surprising manifestation of the narrowness of the liberal leaders' minds. Was this the only important subject they could think of in a world full of problems, and when their own country was carrying on a hard struggle for freedom and hundreds of organizations were outlawed? There was the agrarian crisis and the industrial depression causing widespread unemployment. There were the dreadful happenings in Bengal and the Frontier and in other parts of India; the suppression of freedom of thought and speech and writing and assembly; and so many other national and international problems. But the questions were limited to unimportant happenings, and the possible reactions of the Viceroy and the Government of India to an approach by Gandhiji.

I had a strong feeling as if I had entered a monastery, the inhabitants of which had long been cut off from effective contact with the outside world. And yet our friends were active politicians, able men with long records of public service and sacrifice. They formed, with a few others, the real backbone of the Liberal party. The rest of the party was a vague, amorphous lot of people who wanted occasionally to have the sensation of being connected with political activities. Some of these, especially in Bombay and Madras, were indistinguishable from Government officials.

Nehru now moves on to comment on the state of the masses by deriving inferences from the behavior of the leaders. The questions that were put to Gandhiji that day in the Servants of India Society's home mirrored the strange mental state of a large section the Indian masses and of the Liberal party. They seemed to have no political or economic principles, no wide outlook, and their politics seemed to be of the parlor or court variety—what high officials would do or would not do.

In distinguishing the key traits of the Indian Liberals, Nehru is puzzled for they had no firm positive basis of ideas and, though small in numbers, differed significantly from one another. They were strong only in negation. They saw error everywhere and attempted to avoid it, and hoped that in doing so they would find the truth. Truth for them, indeed, always lay between two extremes. By criticizing everything they considered extreme, they experienced the feeling of being virtuous and moderate and good. This method helped them avoid painful and difficult processes of thought and in having to put forward constructive ideas.

Nehru's psychological analysis of the Liberal bent delves further to discover indifference, insensitivity, lack of concern for the poor, tacit support to the British and a debilitating centering on the self. We are all moderates or extremists in varying degrees, and for various objects, he says. If we care enough for anything, we are likely to feel strongly about it, to be extremist about it. Otherwise we can afford a gracious tolerance, a philosophical moderation, which really hides to some extent our indifference. The Liberals for him represent to some extent the prosperous and well-to-do. They can afford to wait for Swaraj and need not excite themselves about it. But any proposal for radical social change disturbs them greatly, and they are no longer moderate or sweetly reasonable about it. Thus their moderation is really confined to their attitude toward the British Government, and they nurse the hope that if they are sufficiently respectful and compromising perhaps, as a reward for this behavior, they might be listened to.

At this point, Nehru quotes lines from William Blake and Greek literature and attacks the Liberal citadel of thought to argue that the sublime and the great are not only visible in nature and personal relations but also in the political deprivation and struggles of a people.

... though we may not see the sublime in nature as we used to, we have sought to find it in the glory and tragedy of humanity, in its mighty dreams and inner tempests, its pangs and failures, its conflicts and misery, and, over all this, its faith in a great destiny and a realization of those dreams. That has been some recompense for us for all the heartbreaks that such a search involves, and often we have been raised above the pettiness of life. But many have not undertaken this search and, having cut themselves adrift from the ancient ways, find no road to follow in the present. They neither dream nor do they act. They have no understanding of human convulsions like the great French Revolution or the Russian Revolution. The complex, swift, and cruel eruptions of human desires, long suppressed, frighten them. For them the Bastille has not yet fallen.

Lest someone confuse Nehru's critique as a Congress position, he clarifies that 'patriotism is not a monopoly of Congressmen.' He refutes that it is a Congress monopoly, and would be glad to make a present of it to anyone who desired it. Sham patriotism is often enough the refuge of the opportunist and the careerist and there were so many varieties of it to suit all tastes, all interests, all classes.

The restraint and moderation paraded by Liberals next comes under Nehru's scrutiny and is laughed at. Restraint is good and is a measure of Indian culture, but behind that restraint there must be something to restrain and hold back.

It has been, and is, man's destiny to control the elements, to ride the thunderbolt, to bring the raging fire and the rushing and tumbling waters to his use, but most difficult of all for him has been to restrain and hold in check the passions that consume him. So long as he will not master them, he cannot enter fully into his human heritage. But are we to restrain the legs that move not and the hands that are palsied?

As the Congress became more and more representative of the rural masses, the gulf that separated it from the Liberals widened, and it became almost impossible for the Liberal to understand or appreciate the Congress viewpoint. This was primarily because the Liberals represented a political stance comfortable for the upper-class drawing room and not the humble cottage or the mud hut. Yet, in spite of these differences, both the ideologies were nationalist and bourgeois; the variation was one of degree, not of kind. In the Congress many people remained to the last who would have been quite at home in the Liberal group.

Liberalism had fostered a particular blindness to deeper and more significant political and economic questions both on the continent and in India. The imperialist and colonialist British on the other hand had created a system both at home and in the colonies designed to perpetuate the

power of the haves over the have-nots. The Liberals offered no real opposition to this.

For many generations the British treated India as a kind of enormous country house (after the old English fashion) that they owned. They were the gentry owning the house and occupying the desirable parts of it, while the Indians were consigned to the servants' hall, the pantry, and the kitchen. As in every proper country house, there was a fixed hierarchy in those lower regions—butler, housekeeper, cook, valet, maid, footman, etc.—and strict precedence was observed among them. But between the upper and lower regions of the house there was, socially and politically, an impassable barrier.

The fact that the British Government should have imposed this arrangement upon us was not surprising; but what does seem surprising is that we, or most of us, accepted it as the natural and inevitable ordering of our lives and destiny. We developed the mentality of a good country-house servant. Sometimes we were treated to a rare honor—we were given a cup of tea in the drawing room. The height of our ambition was to become respectable and to be promoted individually to the upper regions. Greater than any victory of arms or diplomacy was this psychological triumph of the British in India. The slave began to think as a slave, as the wisemen of old had said.

The Liberals, therefore do not offer any challenge to the feudal country house mentality. They admire its architecture and the whole edifice, but look forward to replacing the owners, one by one, by themselves. They call this Indianization. For them the problem was one of changing the color of the administration, or at most having a new administration. They never thought in terms of a new State.

The Congress political vision was different. It envisaged a new state and not just a different administration. What that new State was going to be was not quite clear to the average Congressman, and opinions differed. But it was common ground in the Congress that the then current conditions and methods could not and must not continue, and basic changes were essential. This according to Nehru was the crucial difference between Dominion status and independence. The former envisages the same old structure, with many bonds visible and invisible tying us to the British economic system; the latter gives us, or ought to give us, freedom to erect a new structure to suit our circumstances.

Nehru now moves on to analyse his feeling for the common Englishman. It would be natural enough if there were bad blood between India and England after what had happened. 'The clumsiness of power spoils the key and uses the pickax,' says Tagore; the key to Indian hearts was destroyed long ago, and the abundant use of the pickax on them had made Indians hostile to the British. That made Nehru dislike British imperialism, and

resent its impositions on India. He disliked the capitalist system and the way India was exploited by the ruling classes of Britain. But Nehru did not hold England or the English people as a whole responsible for this.

It is their rule, their domination, to which we object, and with which we cannot compromise willingly—not the English people. Let us by all means have the closest contacts with the English and other foreign peoples. We want fresh air in India, fresh and vital ideas, healthy cooperation; we have grown too musty with age. But, if the English come in the role of a tiger they can expect no friendship or co-operation. To the tiger of imperialism there will be only the fiercest opposition, and today our country has to deal with that ferocious animal. It may be possible to tame the wild tiger of the forest and to charm away his native ferocity, but there is no such possibility of taming capitalism and imperialism when they combine and swoop down on an unhappy land.

Nehru therefore finds the call for Indian freedom and British imperialism two incompatibles, and neither martial law nor all the sugar coating in the world can make them compatible or bring them together. The incompatibility is with the imperial system, not the British people. Therefore, it is only with the elimination of British imperialism from India that conditions can be created which permit of real Indo-British co-operation. Nehru ends this chapter with a political vision not driven by concerned only with India's freedom but ideals that are conducive to the creation of an egalitarian world order and therefore relevant for the world.

I do not know what India will be like or what she will do when she is politically free. But I do know that those of her people who stand for national independence today stand also for the widest internationalism. For a socialist, nationalism can have no meaning; but even many of the non-socialists in the advanced ranks of the Congress are confirmed internationalists. If we claim independence today, it is with no desire for isolation. On the contrary, we are perfectly willing to surrender part of that independence, in common with other countries, to a real international order. Any imperial system, by whatever high-sounding name it may be called, is an enemy of such an order, and it is not through such a system that world cooperation or world peace can be reached.

### **1.5.6 Chapter 53: India Old and New**

This chapter repeats at least one argument made in the previous one we discussed, the critique of the Liberal position. Nehru then moves on to discuss the grandeur of ancient India, compares it with Italy and finally positions the new identity in which the nation should be reborn.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a large section of the Indian intelligentsia accepted, consciously or unconsciously, the British ideology of empire. They built their own arguments on this, and only ventured to criticize

some of its outward manifestations. Initially it was understandable as there were other facts, histories or arguments that Indians had been exposed to. However, in the face of this mighty body of knowledge and achievement, Indians sought relief in religious nationalism, in the thought that at least in the sphere of religion and philosophy they were second to no other people. Vivekananda and others, as well as the interest of Western scholars in our old philosophies, gave us a measure of self-respect again and roused our dormant pride in our past.

It was perhaps this that helped us suspect and examine critically British statements about our past and present conditions even while we thought and worked within the framework of British ideology. But a sizeable body of critical material was collecting against the British hegemony and the collection of this critical material of British rule in India, in spite of the moderate outlook of the authors, gave a political and economic foundation to our nationalism. Dadabhai Naoroji's *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, and books by Romesh Dutt and William Digby and others, played a revolutionary role in the development of our nationalist thought. Further researches in ancient Indian history revealed brilliant and highly civilized periods in the remote past, and Indians read these with great satisfaction.

Historical research revealed that the British record in India was very different from what their history books said. The challenge to the British version of history, economics, and administration in India has grown. However, what was surprising is that some people continued to suffer that delusion even after the stirring events and changes of the twentieth century. It is in this context that Nehru attacks the Liberals yet again.

Nehru now gives us the historical conditions that made the germination of Imperialism as an ideology possible and manifested in its formulation as the white man's burden. In the nineteenth century the British ruling classes were the aristocrats of the world, with a long record of wealth and success and power behind them. This long record and training gave them some of the virtues as well as failings of aristocracy. They began to think of themselves—as so many races and nations have done—the chosen of God, and their Empire an earthly Kingdom of Heaven. If their special position was acknowledged and their superiority not challenged, they were gracious and obliging, provided that this did them no harm. But opposition to them became opposition to the divine order, and as such was a deadly sin which must be suppressed.

There was something fascinating about the British approach to the Indian problem, which Rudyard Kipling articulated as the white man's burden and which Nehru found singularly irritating. The calm assurance of always being in the right and of having borne a great burden worthily, faith in their racial destiny and their own brand of imperialism, contempt and anger at the



unbelievers and sinners who challenged the foundations of their true faith—there was something of the religious temper about this attitude. Like the Inquisitors of old, they were bent on saving Indians regardless of the Indians' desires in the matter.

Nehru now goes on to refer to India's glorious past of syncretic learning and wisdom even as it has been politically conquered, occupied and exploited relentlessly.

Through long ages she had traveled and gathered much wisdom on the way, and trafficked with strangers and added them to her own big family, and witnessed days of glory and of decay, and suffered humiliation and terrible sorrow, and seen many a strange sight; but throughout her long journey she had clung to her immemorial culture, drawn strength and vitality from it, and shared it with other lands. Like a pendulum she had swung up and down; she had ventured with the daring of her thought to reach up to the heavens and unravel their mystery, and she had also had bitter experience of the pit of hell. Despite the woeful accumulations of superstition and degrading custom that had clung to her and borne her down, she had never wholly forgotten the inspiration that some of the wisest of her children, at the dawn of history, had given her in the Upanishads. Their keen minds, ever restless and ever striving and exploring, had not sought refuge in blind dogma or grown complacent in the routine observance of dead forms of ritual and creed. They had demanded not a personal relief from suffering in the present or a place in a paradise to come, but light and understanding: 'Lead me from the unreal to the real, lead me from darkness to light, lead me from death to immortality.' Though often broken up politically, her spirit always guarded a common heritage, and in her.

Nehru now moves on to compare India with the ancient Roman civilization as it flourished in Italy. Both were ancient countries with long traditions of culture behind them, both were split up politically, and yet the conception of Italia, like that of India, never died, and in all their diversity the unity was predominant. In Italy the unity was largely a Roman unity, for that great city had dominated the country and been the fount and symbol of unity. In India there was no such single center or dominant city, although Benares might well be called the Eternal City of the East, not only for India but also for Eastern Asia. But, unlike Rome, Benares never dabbled in empire or thought of temporal power. Indian culture was so widespread all over India that no part of the country could be called the heart of that culture.

Nehru now comments on the tendency to give an anthropomorphic form to India as Bharat Mata, Or Mother India, a beautiful lady, very old but ever youthful in appearance, sad-eyed and forlorn, cruelly treated by aliens and outsiders, and calling upon her children to protect her. Some such

picture rouses the emotions of hundreds of thousands and drives them to action and sacrifice.

And yet India is in the main the peasant and the worker, not beautiful to look at, for poverty is not beautiful. Does the beautiful lady of our imaginations represent the bare bodied and bent workers in the fields and factories? Or the small group of those who have from ages past crushed the masses and exploited them, imposed cruel customs on them and made many of them even untouchable? We seek to cover truth by the creatures of our imaginations and endeavor to escape from reality to a world of dreams.

What is it that unifies or has unified India into a nation remains something of an enigma. What constitutes the strength of this bond according to Nehru is not merely the passive strength and weight of inertia and tradition. There was an active sustaining principle, for it resisted successfully powerful outside influences and absorbed internal forces that rose to combat it. Nehru struggles to define some elements of this cultural ethos and barely succeeds.

India with all its strength it could not preserve political freedom or endeavor to bring about political unity. These latter do not appear to have been considered worth much trouble; their importance was very foolishly ignored, and the country suffered for this neglect. Right through history the old Indian ideal did not glorify political and military triumph, and it looked down upon money and the professional money-making class. Honour and wealth did not go together, and honor was meant to go, at least in theory, to the men who served the community with little in the shape of financial reward.

This old culture of performance devoid of any desire for money and power managed to live through many a fierce storm and tempest, but, though it kept its outer form, it lost its real content. During the imperial phase it was fighting silently and desperately against a new and all powerful opponent—the Bania civilization of the capitalist West. Although this enemy is powerful all is not lost and through the enemy Nehru could see the gleams of a better future.

India will succumb to this newcomer, for the West brings science, and science brings food for the hungry millions. But the West also brings an antidote to the evils of this cut-throat civilization—the principles of socialism, of co-operation, and service to the community for the common good. This is not so unlike the old Brahman ideal of service, but it means the Brahmanization (not in the religious sense, of course) of all classes and groups and the abolition of class distinctions. It may be that when India puts on her new garment, as she must, for the old is torn and tattered, she will have it cut in this fashion, so as to make it conform both to present conditions and her old thought. The ideas she adopts must become racy to her soil.

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. What was the affect of Russo-Japanese War on Nehru's ideology?
2. What is Nehru's stand on communalism?

## **1.6 Autobiography as a Genre**

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An autobiography is a specialized biography written by the individual himself. It is not the complete story of an individual's life since it must end before the author's death occurs. Autobiographies lack total authenticity as the author pours in personal touches and reminiscences which are not conducive to an objective analysis. Perhaps that is what also constitutes its charm as no one else can relive those personal reminiscences with an intensity and from a perspective the way the person himself can.

An autobiography aims at tracing the development of a particular individual, and this subjective exposition of character is usually the result of introspection and deep psychological prompting. At the same time it may be conceded that any man must know himself best and so an ideal autobiography is indeed a real character study that will bring out individual differences as well as the common traits that link all humanity.

Nehru's autobiography has an added twist because in his case the personal and the political merge inseparably. The story of his life therefore becomes an analysis of India's freedom movement told from an intensely personal perspective.

### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. Define autobiography.
2. What is unique about Nehru's autobiography?

## **1.7 Nehru as a Thinker and Visionary**

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Any human being's ideas are a product of the ideas and events s/he is surrounded with. In Nehru's case this sphere of influence spilled well beyond the boundaries of India into the European, American and even South-east Asian countries and cultures. Tutored by European tutors and governesses, educated at Harrow and Cambridge and extensively travelled through Europe, Nehru's exposure was truly international.

He had assimilated and integrated in his personality and character all that was best in the composite Indian and western cultures and discarded all that was irrelevant to modern times. For the past of his country, he had

a healthy and undogmatic respect. He was shrewd to know its significant relation to the present and the future. As he writes:

‘The past becomes something that leads up to the present, the moment of action, the future something that flows from it; He was fascinated by the personalities of the past like Buddha, Shankaracharya, Ashoka, Akbar and Saint Kabir who were symbols of integration and unity and their philosophic contribution was made to Indian history, philosophy and culture.’

There was, however, an immediate context of ideas and events in which Nehru’s political vision took shape.

‘Leadership operates under the complex interaction of social forces - political aspirations, social relationships, economic wants, nationalism and religious beliefs. This factor explains the behavior of different leaders operating differently even in contemporary conditions. The situational factor is very important in understanding the various actions of a leader. Seeming contradictions in his behaviour can often be resolved only by unravelling the difficult knot of circumstances that ultimately contains all the contending influences in a given situation.’

If there was one factor which moulded the course of nationalist politics and the shape of a future India it was Communalism. By 1909, the British had started using communalism as a political tool to keep the Congress weak and divided. The Constitutional Act 1919 which divided India into numerous separate compartments in the legislature was according to Nehru a dangerous proposition. He said ‘I am afraid I cannot get excited over this communal issue important as it is temporary. It is after all a side issue and it can have no real importance in the larger scheme of things. I have no fear and my vision of a future India contains no communalism’. One way of understanding this beginning of nationalism was the westernized elite leaders turning towards liberalism and the conservatives to Hinduism and Islam respectively. The liberal advocates of social and political reform were uncompromising due to their disapproval of traditional culture, which they thought was a retrogressive force, submerging the masses into superstition. Nehru however did not give up negotiations and his attempts to negotiate with the Muslim League leaders. In a letter to Sir Syed Ahmed after the Allahabad riots he wrote:

‘I do not attach very much importance to political squabbles, but the communal frenzy is awful to contemplate. We seem to have been caught in a whirlpool of mutual hatred and we go round and round and down and down this abyss. For months or even a year or more we have thought that the situation was so bad that it could not become worse. But it does (grow) worse and heaven knows where it will end. ‘No country or people who are slaves to dogma....can progress, and unhappily our country and people have

become extraordinarily dogmatic and little minded... Religion as practised in India has become the old man of the sea for us and it has not only broken our backs but stultified and almost killed all originality of thought and mind.

In response to communalism Nehru offered a secular vision for independent India. Nehru's greatest contribution to India lies in the importance that he had given to science, technology and industrialization without which progress was impossible. He believed that the pre-requisite for the successful adherence to secularism in the country which was suffering from the virus of communalism was industrialization and economic development. In order to live in the modern world as an independent country, keeping intact the sovereignty, a modern outlook of life, modern techniques of economic development should be employed. Nehru's vision of modern India was: where science and not superstition, where reason and not blind faith, where humanism and not religious bigotry will reign supreme.

Nehru's understanding of secularism was a product of personal attitudes, historical circumstances and compulsions of policy. Being conventional believer in his youth, in his middle age he was transformed into a severe critic of organized institutional religion due to the influence of Bertrand Russell and Karl Marx, and the communal riots further reinforced this aversion. He described himself a pagan. He appreciated Upanishads, Gita and Buddhism. In 1958, perceiving the problems facing the world, he concluded, 'We should keep in view the old Vedantic ideal of the life-force which is the inner base of everything that exists.' He wanted people to be benefitted by the modern technical process and also says that 'the essential objective to be aimed at is the quality of the individual and the concept of dharma underlying it'. He believed like Vinoba Bhave that the day of politics and religion has been replaced by science and spirituality which are common to the great religions which lay emphasis on ethics, conduct and hardly on doctrine. 'I am not exactly a religious person, although I agree with much that religions have to say'. Nehru did possess some religious feeling and respect for the beliefs of others provided it would not intrude into their social behaviour.

In an ideal secular state there is disestablishment of all religions, where none can enjoy a privileged relationship with the state; and the Government should neither be, nor even thought to be, the agents of any type of religious revival. Nehru as a Prime Minister did not associate himself with any function that had a non-secular tinge. He stressed that the involvement of the Government of India in the 2,500th anniversary celebrations of the Buddha in 1956 was not sponsorship for the promotion of Buddhism, but recognition of Buddha as a great Indian. Nehru was certain that India would be doomed, unless this outlook changed radically. If India was to survive, the destruction of Hindu communalism and the establishment of secular state

and society were inevitable. The communalism of the majority community which had disguised as nationalism was the Indian version of fascism. Bringing religion into politics would mean to ruin both. As a Prime Minister he saw in the Telengana rebellion violent phases of communism and communalism and he perceived that Hindu political resurgence was the primary threat to the modern democratic India. In order to curtail Sikh communalism, he supported Pratap Singh Kairon, despite his weakness, and also made attempts to curb Arya Samaj from interfering in Punjab politics. In Nehru's views, revivalism among the Hindus and the feeling of insecurity among the religious minorities were the greatest danger. He thought that the Hindus should make the Muslims feel at home and not treat the Muslims as second class citizens. The mischiefs of the communal Muslims should be dealt with sternly.

For him, it was not possible to conceptualize a free and progressive India without a secular outlook.

'I am convinced that nationalism can only come out of the ideological fusion of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and other groups in India. That does not and need not mean the extinction of any real culture of any group, but it does mean a common national outlook, to which other matters are subordinated. I do not think that Hindu-Muslim or other unity will become merely by reciting it like a mantra. That it will come, I have no doubt, but it will come from below. Social and economic forces will inevitably bring other problems to the front.'

To Nehru divorce of religion from politics and public life, separation of state from all faiths, religion as a private matter for the individual without any bearing on civil rights and duties, freedom for the profession of diverse forms of religious worship provided they did not conflict with other religions were parts of civilized scientific and rational thinking. Acting other than this was barbarous and medieval to Nehru. In India the ideal attitude is the opportunist policy. In India due to religious pluralism, civil liberties and equal opportunities, only secularism can be the corner-stone of an egalitarian society and a social cement for a democratic community, which is a single channel for social and economically unqualified masses Nehru was prepared to fight a war with Pakistan on political grounds rather than communal grounds especially over the Kashmir issue. India was committed towards the path of secularism. Immediately after independence communal clashes in the post - independent era after the partition came as a shock. Due to Hindu revivalism, Nehru was undergoing a crisis of the spirit because he was aware that the implementation of the phenomenon of secularism was going to be a challenge. Nehru at times wanted to resign. He wrote sadly, 'All of us seem to be getting infected with the refugee mentality or, worse, still, the R.S.S. mentality. That is a curious finale to our careers'.

## 1.8 Continental Influences on Nehru

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The Indian freedom struggle was shaped by a number of influences, some supporting it, others acting against its interests. There was of course a native tradition of knowledge and wisdom about political conduct but the other political ideals were coming from continental influences which were plenty. Nehru begins his analysis on European events and their impact on the Indian freedom struggle with an acknowledgement of the magnitude of events that had transpired in Europe in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Europe had been reborn through a baptism of blood and sweat and had plenty to offer by way of ideas and ideals to other struggling polities.

I was going back to Europe after more than thirteen years—years of war, and revolution, and tremendous change. The old world I knew had expired in the blood and horror of the war, and a new world awaited me.

It is his wife's illness that took Nehru to Europe this time. It was spent chiefly in Switzerland, in Geneva, and in a mountain sanatorium at Montana. Because Nehru could not leave his wife for long, so he could only pay brief visits to other places. Later, when his wife was better, he travelled a little through France, England, and Germany. In Europe, he felt completely cut off from India as well as the European world. India, and Indian happenings, seemed to him especially far away. He was a distant onlooker, reading, watching, following events, gazing at the new Europe, its politics, economics, and the far freer human relationships, and trying to understand them in the interest of Indian politics.

Not yet really steeped in the freedom movement of India, Nehru was building the foundation of ideas on which the Indian identity and politics could be framed. The task that faced the nationalist leaders was to conceptualize a unified identity for the diverse people who inhabited this subcontinent and varying labour and class movements in Europe were contributing to it.

Nehru also met a number of Indian political exiles on his European tour. What these individuals reminded him was that Indians were not free to live in their own country. They did not follow or embody any political programme but were just not suited to British rule and had somehow opposed it that is why they failed to impress Nehru although he admired their sacrifice, and sympathized with their sufferings and present difficulties, which were very real. The desire to meet them and understand their position itself reflects Nehru's growing sense of opposition to the nature of political rule being exercised on India.

Apart from the Indian exiles, Nehru also met many Europeans and Americans. From Geneva he went on a pilgrimage many a times (the first

time with a letter of introduction from Gandhiji) to the Villa Olga at Villeneuve, to see Romain Holland, the first and perhaps most renowned votary of anti-imperialist politics and democracy. Another precious memory is that of Ernst Toller, the young German poet and dramatist; and of Roger Baldwin, of the Civil Liberties Union of New York. In Geneva, he also made friends with Dhan Gopal Mukerji, the author with deep roots in the Indian soil and its people.

What comes across through each of these meetings is mind struggling to understand the various forms in which opposition to imperialism existed in Europe. The politically valuable amongst them would be incorporated by Nehru in the definition of the Indian political agenda against the British. It also taught him to distinguish between a system and the people who implement it.

That is why, it is not only individuals but also events that interested Nehru and he followed them closely. Soon after his arrival in Switzerland, the General Strike broke out in England and he was vastly excited with all his sympathies all on the strikers' side. The collapse of the strike, after a few days, came almost as a personal blow to him. The miners' struggle was still on, and London lay in semidarkness at night. Nehru paid a brief visit to a mining area and saw the haggard and pinched faces of the men and women and children, and, more revealing still.

He also saw many of the strikers and their wives being tried in the local or county court. The magistrates were themselves directors or managers of the coal mines, and they tried the miners and sentenced them for trivial offenses under certain emergency regulations. One case especially angered him: three or four women, with babies in their arms, were brought up in the dock for the offense of having jeered at the blacklegs. The young mothers (and their babies) were obviously miserable and undernourished; the long struggle had told upon them and enfeebled them, and embittered them against the scabs who seemed to take the bread from their mouths.

What Nehru also noticed in his close observation of the working class struggles was the general atmosphere of fear among the strikers. They had definitely been terrorized by the police and the authorities, and they resisted very meekly with the rather offensive treatment. It is true that they were thoroughly exhausted after a long struggle, their spirit was near breaking point, their comrades of other trade-unions had long deserted them.

Nehru was doing all this with two broad ideas in mind. First he was trying to understand the system of imperialism as it operated on its own people. Derivatively, he would also be able to appreciate its effect on the colonies. Second he was trying to compare the condition of the oppressed in England with those in India. The British miners had still a powerful organization, the sympathy of a nationwide, and indeed worldwide, trade-



union movement, publicity, and resources of many kinds. All these were lacking to the Indian worker. And yet that frightened and terrorized look in the two workers' and their families' faces had a strange resemblance. It was only by studying the similarities and the differences that Nehru could respond sensitively to imperialism both as a global and an Indian citizen.

The next European event he speaks of with deep implications both in the life of Nehru and global nationalist politics was the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, which was to be held at Brussels. The idea appealed to him, and he wrote home, suggesting that the Indian National Congress might take official part in the Brussels Congress. His suggestion was approved, and he was appointed the Indian Congress representative for this purpose. This participation in nationalist politics by a virtual proxy indicates that Nehru may have been far from his country but the cause of anti-imperialist politics was never far from his mind. In a sense, Nehru's participation in Indian nationalist politics had already begun. The Brussels Congress was held early in February 1927. Berlin was at the time a center which attracted political exiles and radical elements from abroad; it was gradually catching up Paris in that respect. The communist element was also strong there. Ideas of some common action between oppressed nations inter se as well as between them and the labor left wing, were very much in the air. It was felt more and more that the struggle for freedom was a common one against the thing that was imperialism; and joint deliberation and, where possible, joint action were desirable. The colonial Powers—England, France, Italy, etc.—were naturally hostile to any such attempts being made; but Germany was, since the war, no longer a colonial Power, and the German Government viewed with a benevolent neutrality the growth of agitation in the colonies and dependencies of other Powers. This was one of the reasons which made Berlin a center for advanced and disaffected elements from abroad.

There were also present at Brussels representatives from the national organizations of Java, Indo-China, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Arabs from North Africa, and African Negroes. Then there were many left-wing labour organizations represented; and several well-known men who had played a leading part in European labor struggles for a generation, were present. Communists were there also, and they took an important part in the proceedings; they came not as communists but as representatives of trade-unions or similar organizations.

Nehru's observations on the Brussels Congress are significant. Post the defeat of the Nazis, what the world was witnessing was the realignment of political energies to all forms of totalitarian and anti-egalitarian institutions and imperialism was first on the list. It was international forums like these that would become the ideological centres around which national and regional

democratic or freedom struggles would revolve or from which it would derive.

George Lansbury was elected president, and he delivered an eloquent address. That in itself was proof that the Congress was not so rabid after all, nor was it merely hitched on to the star of Communism. But there is no doubt that the gathering was friendly toward the Communists, and, even though agreement might be lacking on some matters, there appeared to be several common grounds for action.

The League against Imperialism had, however, quite a number of distinguished persons as its patrons. Einstein was one of them, and Madame Sun Yat-sen, and I think, Romain Holland.

Many months later Einstein resigned, as he disagreed with the pro-Arab policy of the League in the Arab-Jewish quarrels in Palestine.

The Brussels Congress, as well as the subsequent Committee meetings of the League, which were held in various places from time to time, helped Nehru understand some of the problems of colonial and dependent countries. They also gave him an insight into the inner conflicts of the Western labor world, something he had read about but had no contact with at the level of the real as there had been no personal contacts.

### **Check Your Progress-5**

1. What was Nehru's vision for modern India?
2. What influenced Nehru's understanding of secularism?
3. What implications did the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, Brussels have on Nehru?

## **1.9 Let Us Sum Up**

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- B.R.Nanda quotes a Hindu Mahasabha leader as saying that Nehru was 'English by Education, Muslim by culture and Hindu by an accident of birth'. Nehru has acknowledged his debt to England. The impact of the Muslim culture has been traditionally paramount among Kashmiris.
- The story of Nehru's involvement with politics goes back to a time when he was barely 20. In 1919, while traveling on a train, Nehru overheard British Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer gloating over the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in which 379 people were killed and at least 1,200 wounded when the British military stationed there continuously fired for ten minutes on a crowd of unarmed Indians. The incident changed the course of his life and he vowed to fight the British.

- To understand the importance of Jawaharlal Nehru in the context of Indian history one has to begin with the acknowledgement that the nationalist movement, which he led in many crucial senses, unified the various states and principalities on the Indian sub-continent into a nation. He imparted modern values and thought, stressed secularism, insisted upon the basic unity of India, and, in the face of ethnic and religious diversity, carried India into the modern age of scientific innovation and technological progress. He also prompted social concern for the marginalized and poor and respect for democratic values.
- Nehru's administration established many Indian institutions of higher learning, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Indian Institutes of Technology, and the National Institutes of Technology, and guaranteed in his five-year plans free and compulsory primary education to all of India's children.
- The reasons why Nehru espoused democracy were dual. First there were no better models of governance available in contemporary history, second because he found a clear similarity between the ideals of the Indian freedom movement and democracy. In fact, he saw India's freedom movement guided by the ideals of democracy as none of the other models were worth emulating.
- Mrs. Annie Besant visited Allahabad in those days and delivered several addresses on theosophical subjects. Nehru was deeply moved by her oratory and returned from her speeches dazed and as in a dream and decided to join the Theosophical Society at thirteen. Mrs. Besant herself performed the ceremony of initiation, which consisted of good advice and instruction in some mysterious signs, probably a relic of freemasonry. However, soon after Brooks left Nehru, he lost touch with theosophy, and in a remarkably short time theosophy disappeared from his life completely.
- Nehru's indifference to a political career in the beginning is something that the later he finds curious, given the fact that his later life in India was devoted to it. The commitment to devote his life to the cause of nationalist politics was something that was yet to build up in him and that process would be completed in India under the influence of senior leaders of the freedom movement. So, in the summer of 1912 Nehru was called to the Bar, and in the autumn of that year he returned to India finally after a stay of over seven years in England. Twice, in between, he had gone home during the holidays. But now he returned for good, so when he landed at Bombay, he was a bit of a prig with little to commend him.
- Political reactionaries thus came back to the political field in the guise of communal leaders, and the real explanation of the various steps

they took was not so much their communal bias as their desire to obstruct political advance. Both Hindu and Muslim communal leaders agreed in condemning socialistic and suchlike 'subversive' movements.

- The restraint and moderation paraded by Liberals also comes under Nehru's scrutiny and is laughed at. Restraint is good and is a measure of Indian culture, but behind that restraint there must be something to restrain and hold back.
- Historical research revealed that the British record in India was very different from what their history books said. The challenge to the British version of history, economics, and administration in India has grown. However, what was surprising is that some people continued to suffer that delusion even after the stirring events and changes of the twentieth century. It is in this context that Nehru attacks the Liberals yet again.
- An autobiography is a specialized biography written by the individual himself. It is not the complete story of an individual's life since it must end before the author's death occurs. Autobiographies lack total authenticity as the author pours in personal touches and reminiscences which are not conducive to an objective analysis.
- Nehru's autobiography has an added twist because in his case the personal and the political merge inseparably. The story of his life therefore becomes an analysis of India's freedom movement told from an intensely personal perspective.
- Nehru had assimilated and integrated in his personality and character all that was best in the composite Indian and western cultures and discarded all that was irrelevant to modern times. For the past of his country, he had a healthy and undogmatic respect. He was shrewd to know its significant relation to the present and the future.
- In response to communalism Nehru offered a secular vision for independent India. Nehru's greatest contribution to India lies in the importance that he had given to science, technology and industrialization without which progress was impossible. He believed that the pre-requisite for the successful adherence to secularism in the country which was suffering from the virus of communalism was industrialization and economic development. In order to live in the modern world as an independent country, keeping intact the sovereignty, a modern outlook of life, modern techniques of economic development should be employed. Nehru's vision of modern India was: where science and not superstition, where reason and not blind faith, where humanism and not religious bigotry will reign supreme.
- The Brussels Congress, as well as the subsequent Committee meetings of the League, which were held in various places from time to time,

helped Nehru understand some of the problems of colonial and dependent countries. They also gave him an insight into the inner conflicts of the Western labor world, something he had read about but had no contact with at the level of the real as there had been no personal contacts.

### 1.10 Key Words

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- **Secularism:** The principle of the separation of government institutions and persons mandated to represent the state from religious institutions and religious dignitaries
- **Nationalism:** A belief, creed or political ideology that involves an individual identifying with, or becoming attached to, one's nation
- **Fascism:** An authoritarian and nationalistic right-wing system of government and social organization
- **Nazism:** A set of political beliefs associated with the Nazi Party of Germany. It started in the 1920s. The Party gained power in 1933, starting the Third Reich. They lasted in Germany until 1945, at the end of World War II.
- **Autobiography:** A written account of the life of a person written by that person
- **Anti-Semitism:** Hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group
- **Liberalism** is a political philosophy or worldview founded on ideas of liberty and equality
- **Syncretic:** The combination of different forms of belief or practice
- **Cyrenaics:** The doctrine states that people should ultimately aim at the pleasure of the present moment, disregarding future pain that could result from it.
- **Theosophy:** Teaching about God and the world based on mystical insight

### 1.11 Terminal Questions

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1. Write a short biographical note on Jawaharlal Nehru.
2. According to the preface of his biography, what does Nehru want the readers to understand about his life?
3. Why did Nehru support democracy? How did it influence his political ideology?
4. Evaluate Nehru's early life while growing up in Kashmir.

5. Who initiated Nehru to Theosophy? Why did Theosophy disappear from his life completely?
- 6 Analyse communalism as a part of the nationalist politics in pre-independence India.

## 1.12 Suggested Readings

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- Das, Bijay Kumar. (2003). *Postmodern Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist.
- Wolpert, Stanley. (1996). *Nehru: A Tryst with Destiny*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Shashi Tharoor. (2003). *Nehru: The Invention of India*. New York: Arcade Publishing.
- Schoettli, Jivanta. (2011). *Vision and Strategy in Indian Politics: Jawaharlal Nehru's Policy Choices and the Designing of Political Institutions*. London: Routledge.
- Dutt, Rabindra Chandra. (1981). *Socialism of Jawaharlal Nehru*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.

## 1.13 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

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### Check Your Progress-1

1. B.R.Nanda quotes a Hindu Mahasabha leader as saying that Nehru was 'English by Education, Muslim by culture and Hindu by an accident of birth'.
2. Nehru was especially proud to reform the antiquated Hindu civil code. Finally Hindu widows could enjoy equality with men in matters of inheritance and property. Nehru also changed Hindu law to criminalize caste discrimination.

Nehru's administration established many Indian institutions of higher learning, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Indian Institutes of Technology, and the National Institutes of Technology, and guaranteed in his five-year plans free and compulsory primary education to all of India's children.

3. The prison as the location of his autobiography's creation is clearly aimed at highlighting a few things. First is the political incarceration that frames the circumstances of the creation. It is clear that the imperial system is functioning as a dominant other in his thought, another powerful enough to imprison him and provide him a perspective from where he can define his self-identity and the meaning of his life.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1. The reasons why Nehru supported democracy were dual. First there were no better models of governance available in contemporary history, second because he found a clear similarity between the ideals of the Indian freedom movement and democracy. In fact, he saw India's freedom movement guided by the ideals of democracy as none of the other models were worth emulating.
2. Returning by plane by way of Rome, he had the greatest difficulty in avoiding the importunities of the Fascists, who tried for their own purposes to get him to meet Mussolini, which he knew he must not do because the occasion would be turned to the uses of fascist propaganda.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1. The next important event was the Russo-Japanese War. Japanese victories stirred up his enthusiasm, and he waited eagerly for the papers for fresh news daily. Nationalistic ideas filled up his mind as he mused of Indian freedom and Asiatic freedom from European rule.
2. Nehru discusses only the Hindu-Muslim tensions and their causes in reference to communalism. What is interesting in this analysis is that Nehru detects the roots of communalism in social, political and economic causes rather than religion. The causes that trigger the tension are merely surface ones and are motivated by deeper political and economic factors.

**Check Your Progress-4**

1. An autobiography is a specialized biography written by the individual himself.
2. Nehru's autobiography is unique because in his case the personal and the political merge inseparably. The story of his life therefore becomes an analysis of India's freedom movement told from an intensely personal perspective.

**Check Your Progress-5**

1. Nehru's vision of modern India was: where science and not superstition, where reason and not blind faith, where humanism and not religious bigotry will reign supreme.
2. Nehru's understanding of secularism was a product of personal attitudes, historical circumstances and compulsions of policy. Being conventional believer in his youth, in his middle age he was transformed into a severe critic of organized institutional religion due to the influence

of Bertrand Russell and Karl Marx, and the communal riots further reinforced this aversion.

3. The Congress of Oppressed Nationalities held in Brussels had deep implications both in the life of Nehru and global nationalist politics was the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, which was to be held at Brussels. The idea appealed to him, and he wrote home, suggesting that the Indian National Congress might take official part in the Brussels Congress. His suggestion was approved, and he was appointed the Indian Congress representative for this purpose. This participation in nationalist politics by a virtual proxy indicates that Nehru may have been far from his country but the cause of anti-imperialist politics was never far from his mind. In a sense, Nehru's participation in Indian nationalist politics had already begun.





## UNIT - 2

# NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI: A *PASSAGE* *TO ENGLAND*

### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Nirad C. Chaudhuri: A Biographical Note
- 2.3 An Introduction to Chaudhuri's Ideas
- 2.4 *A Passage to England*: A Critical Summary
- 2.5 Chaudhuri's Textual England
- 2.6 East Goes Beyond West
- 2.7 Chaudhuri as a Post Colonial Writer
- 2.8 Other Critical Perspectives
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Key Words
- 2.11 Terminal Questions
- 2.12 Suggested Readings
- 2.13 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

### 2.0 Objectives

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

- Describe Nirad C. Chaudhuri as a Bengali-English writer
- Critically summarize *A Passage to England*
- Identify Chaudhuri as a post-colonial writer
- Examine the influence of Marxism on Nirad C. Chaudhuri

### 2.1 Introduction

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Nirad C. Chaudhuri was a Bengali English writer and man of letters. He was born in 1897 in Kishoreganj, then part of Bengal in British India, now in Bangladesh. While growing up, Chaudhuri read William Shakespeare as well as Sanskrit classics. He admired Western culture as much as he did his own. His debut to the literary scene was known to be controversial. He dedicated his first book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), to the memory of the British Empire. He strongly believed that 'all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by the same British rule.' Needless to say, this sentiment was far from popular in a newly-independent nation trying to grapple with its insecurities and where

anti-colonial sentiment was rampant. Chaudhuri's book was excoriated, and he was hounded from his job as a broadcaster and a political commentator for All India Radio (AIR). Called the 'last British imperialist' and the last of the 'brown sahibs,' he was ostracized by the Indian literati. In this unit, we will discuss certain portions of *A Passage to England*.

## 2.2 Nirad C. Chaudhuri: A Biographical Note

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Nirad C. Chaudhuri (23 November 1897 – 1 August 1999) was a Bengali-English writer and cultural commentator. He was born in 1897 in Kishoreganj, which today is part of Bangladesh but at that time was part of Bengal. Chaudhuri was educated in Kishoreganj and Kolkata. For his FA (school leaving) course he attended the Ripon College in Calcutta along with the famous Bengali writer Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay. Following this, he attended the prestigious Scottish Church College, Calcutta, where he studied history as his undergraduate major. He graduated with honours in history and topped the University of Calcutta merit list. At Scottish Church College, he attended the seminars of renowned historian Professor Kalidas Nag. After graduation, he enrolled for the M.A. level course at the University of Calcutta. However, he did not take all the final exams of the M.A. programme, and therefore did not earn his M.A. degree.

He started his career as a clerk in the Accounting Department of the Indian Army. At the same time, he started contributing articles to popular magazines. His first article on Bharat Chandra (a famous Bengali poet of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) appeared in the most prestigious English magazine of the time, *Modern Review*. Chaudhuri left the job in the Accounting Department shortly after, and started a new career as a journalist and editor. During this period he was a boarder in Mirzapur Street near College Square, Kolkata, living together with the writers Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee and Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder. He was involved in the editing of the then well-known English and Bengali magazines *Modern Review*, *Prabasi* and *Sonibarar Chithi*. In addition, he also founded two short-lived but highly esteemed Bengali magazines, *Samasamayik* and *Notun Patrika*. He married Amiya Dhar, a well-known writer herself, in 1932, and the couple had three sons.

In 1938, Chaudhuri obtained a job as secretary to Sarat Chandra Bose, a political leader from the freedom movement in India. As a result he was able to interact with the political leaders of India—Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and the more famous brother of Sarat Chandra Bose—Subhas Chandra Bose, the future Netaji. This familiarity with the workings of the inner circle of Indian politics led him to be skeptical about its eventual progress, and he became progressively disillusioned about the ability of Indian political leadership.

Apart from his career as a secretary, Chaudhuri continued to contribute articles in Bengali and English to newspapers and magazines. He was also appointed as a political commentator on the Kolkata branch of the All India Radio. In 1941, he started working for the Delhi Branch of the All India Radio. Chaudhuri was a prolific writer even in the very last years of his life, publishing his last work at the age of 99. His wife Amiya Chaudhuri died in 1994 in Oxford, England. He too died in Oxford, two months short of his 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday, in 1999. He lived at 20 Lathbury Road from 1982 until his death and a blue plaque was installed by the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board in 2008.

His masterpiece, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, published in 1951, put him on the short list of great Indian writers. He courted controversy in the newly independent India due to the dedication of the book, which ran thus:

‘To the memory of the British Empire in India,  
Which conferred subjecthood upon us,  
But withheld citizenship.

To which yet every one of us threw out the challenge:

*Civis Britannicus sum*

Because all that was good and living within us  
Was made, shaped and quickened  
By the same British rule.’

This dedication, which was actually a mock-imperial rhetoric, infuriated many Indians, particularly the political and bureaucratic establishment. ‘The wogs took the bait and having read only dedication sent up howls of protest’, commented Chaudhuri’s friend, the editor, historian and novelist Khushwant Singh. Chaudhuri was hounded out of government service, deprived of his pension, blacklisted as a writer in India and forced to live a life of penury. Furthermore, he had to give up his job as a political commentator in All India Radio as the Government of India promulgated a law that prohibited employees from publishing memoirs. Chaudhuri commented later that he had been misunderstood. ‘The dedication was really a condemnation of the British rulers for not treating us as equals’, he wrote in a *Granta* article. Typically, to demonstrate what exactly he had been trying to say, he drew on a parallel with Ancient Rome. The book's dedication, he said ‘was an imitation of what Cicero said about the conduct of Verres, a Roman proconsul of Sicily who oppressed Sicilian Roman citizens, who in their desperation cried out: *Civis romanus sum*.

In 1955, the British Council and the BBC jointly made arrangements to take Chaudhuri to England for eight weeks. He was asked to contribute

lectures to the BBC. He contributed eight lectures on British life. Later these lectures were collected, modified and edited in the text we are discussing here *A Passage to England*. E. M. Forster reviewed it in *The Times Literary Supplement*. His 1965 work *The Continent of Circe* earned him the Duff Cooper Memorial Award, becoming the first and only Indian to be selected for the prize. In 1972, he was the subject of a Merchant Ivory documentary, *Adventures of a Brown Man in Search of Civilization*. He published a sequel to his autobiography entitled *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* in 1988. In 1992, he was honoured by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom with the title of Commander of Order of the British Empire (CBE). In 1997, at 100 years of age, he published his last book *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*.

Although he was highly critical of the post-independence Congress party establishment, Chaudhuri was more sympathetic to the right-wing Hindu nationalist movement in India. He refused to criticize the destruction of mosques:

Muslims do not have the slightest right to complain about the desecration of one mosque in Ayodhya. From 1000 AD every temple from Kathiawar to Bihar, from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas has been sacked and ruined. Not one temple was left standing all over northern India. They escaped destruction only where Muslim power did not gain access to them for reasons such as dense forests. Otherwise, it was a continuous spell of vandalism. No nation with any self-respect will forgive this. What happened in Ayodhya would not have happened had the Muslims acknowledged this historical argument even once.

Chaudhuri was also deeply distressed by what he saw as the deep hypocrisy in Bengali social life and in particular those that resulted from class and caste distinctions. His historical research revealed to him that the rigid Victorianesque morality of middle class Bengali women was a socially enforced construct that had less to do with religion, choice and judgment, but more to do with upbringing, social acceptance and intergenerational transference of values.

### **2.3 An Introduction to Chaudhuri's Ideas**

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One of the main thrusts in Chaudhuri's writings, especially in *A Passage to England* is to emphasize the contrast between India and England. He appears caught – caught between a native culture in which he has been steeped but now dislikes and a foreign culture which appears to him formidable and a panacea for all human ills.

His comments on Hinduism are thus dogmatic though they cannot be called absolute denigration. Anglicism on the other hand finds qualified praise. Chaudhuri appears to bring the same sharp critical stance to the British

culture but stays imprisoned in his colonized mental frame. In his adulation for the English way of life, he exaggerates all good things of English life although he does laugh over its faults. The oeuvre of the book draws from this comparison. Apart from the impropriety of comparing two dissimilar countries, he also compares the past with the present. Actually, Chaudhuri uses his impressions of England as pegs to hang his criticism of India. That is perhaps the reason why he has been misunderstood by many Indian critics who read the anti-Indian and pro-English bias of his writings with some discontent and anger.

*The Continent of Circe* is perhaps Chaudhuri's most critical work against the Indian culture that he self-professedly detests. It is a formidable attack on things Indian. Chaudhuri claims to have a full-fledged epistemology, a theory of knowledge, about India. The gist of that knowledge is that one has to be acclimatized or reconciled to the all-pervasive squalor in order to live in India. Although Chaudhuri subscribes to the theory of historical objectivity propounded by Lord Acton, he ends up exemplifying the theory of Robin Collingwood that complete objectivity is an impossibility. Hence, *The Continent* has been described as a brilliantly written thesis of an erudite student who has distorted history to suit his preconceived notions. Chaudhuri says that Hindus have a streak of insanity but that this collective insanity is feebler but more permanent than that of the Japanese and the Germans. On the British side, Chaudhuri was particularly critical of British foreign policy. One of his unpublished commentaries on the British withdrawal of Palestine and the emergence of Israel reads:

'British rule in Palestine, disguised under the name of Mandate, came to an end last night after thirty years of unsuccessful and troubled administration. . . . The greatest sufferers from their [USA and UK] policies and from the war in Palestine will be the people of Palestine. Nobody seems to be thinking of them this moment.'  
(15 May 1948)

Chaudhuri's exactitude for facts was borne out by his script on the American military action in Korea in 1950 where he had noticed that the action had preceded, not followed, a United Nations Security Council resolution to the same effect by a few hours. British reviewer Raymond Mortimer said, 'If Mr. Chaudhuri sees nothing good in his country do not imagine that he is indulgent to the English. He speaks with loathing of our superciliousness, cruelty and despotism in the days of the Raj. . .'

Chaudhuri's importance as a writer is due to his erudition, originality, defiance of conventional history and bulk of facts he places before readers. He takes a painstaking intellectual approach, endeavours to be forthright and downright in his expression of ideas while maintaining the highest standards of dignity and decorum in English prose. His books on Max Muller and Robert Clive are examples of painstaking research. However all his objectivity

and intellect put together cannot escape the confines of the history, politics and culture which had framed this unique author. As a result what we read into his objectivity is an embarrassing subservience to the colonizer's culture. What we read into his intellect is the prisoner of a thought and value system that cannot escape the epistemes of his age.

None of our doubts ever enter Chaudhuri's head. He is convinced about his own intellectual superiority or at least the legitimacy of his intellectual independence. Despite his Anglomania, his moorings in India and Hinduism remain very strong. His 'hate India' themes are grossly misunderstood. He knew that the Anglicized class was hypocritical and seldom went beyond reading blurbs and reviews of books. Therefore, his dedication was a trick to attract attention. Chaudhuri is provocative, intemperate and even fussy but never insipid or boring. He maintains a majesty and solemnity of style. His mood is bitter as he grows impatient with the conditions in independent India. He utters some plain but unpalatable truths about Indians as well as Britishers and castigates both for duplicity and intellectual degeneration.

### **Check Your Progress-1**

1. Why is Chaudhuri's masterpiece *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* considered controversial?
2. What is the major idea that runs through *A Passage to England*?

## **2.4 A Passage to England: A Critical Summary**

*A Passage to England* as you have read is a collection of lectures delivered by Chaudhuri on BBC. In 1955, Nirad Chaudhuri made his first visit outside India. An established writer, practiced in human observation and yet possessing an innately patrician sense of his own distinction, he had been trenchant when not caustic, at all times provocative and sometimes perverse when viewing the Indian society. After the journey abroad he brought the same qualities to the books he wrote about his visits. The method was to write in portrait form a series of short essays analysing what he saw and accounting for his own reactions to it.

Chaudhuri was fifty-seven when he left India for the first time for an eight-week visit to Europe, five weeks in England, two in Paris and one in Rome. In the 'Plea for the Book', as he charmingly christens the preface to *A Passage To England*, he tells us that he celebrated the three thousandth week of his life at the end of his tour.

Chaudhuri divides *A Passage to England* into four sections, 'The English Scene,' 'The English People,' 'Cultural Life' and 'State of the Nation.' Sometimes his observation is acute, as in his account of the 'traditional and

even venerable ritual 'he witnesses in the House of Commons. Sometimes he risks obscurity: 'do dark faces really reflect light less evenly than pink ones?' Occasionally he is provocative, with a kind of naughty glee: '. . . The history of love in Bengali Hindu society is fairly well established. It was introduced from the West much later than tobacco or potatoes, but has neither been acclimatized as successfully, nor has taken as deep roots, as these two plants.'

At other times he displays a patrician intellect which will never endear him to Third World radicals. 'Now, it is a good thing to do away with the caste system by birth, also by wealth, but a deadly mistake to tamper with the natural caste system of the mind' Chaudhuri can be provocative in a more searching way than any yet quoted. His view of the Welfare State, which he admires for its compassion, nevertheless raises issues to do with social anxiety and bored leisure which British society has only recently started to investigate.

Chaudhuri opens his book with a response to the 'belief in the West that we Hindus regard the world as an illusion'. Chaudhuri continues,

'We do not and indeed cannot, for the only idea of an after-life accepted by a Hindu — the unconscious assumption behind all that he does — is that he will be born again and again in the same old world and live in it virtually for eternity. . . . A people who have learnt to believe in that way are not likely to be the persons most ready to dismiss the world as insubstantial'.

Now it may be claimed that the author of *The Continent of Circe*, with its thesis that Hindus are of European origin and that their Aryanism provides them with an instinctive consciousness of being superior to other peoples, is not the best person to represent the typical Hindu metaphysic and that Naipaul's understanding of Hinduism approximates more closely to the norm.

Nirad Chaudhuri wrote only one travelogue, *A Passage to England*. The title was in imitation of *A Passage to India*, a novel by Edward Morgan Forster. Chaudhuri's book contains his impressions of England during a trip of five weeks. It turned out to be the first book by an Indian author to appear on the bestseller lists of England. One of the travelogue's anecdotes throws fresh light on Indo-British issues.

Chaudhuri does not have the racial appearance of the people he is among. When a Paris worker asks Chaudhuri if he is English he chuckles at the absurdity of the question. 'I was taken aback by his idea of the size and looks of an Englishman'. The book is about Chaudhuri's reaction to a British boy's words at the Canterbury Cathedral in Kent. The child called him an African but Chaudhuri did not suspect any racism in that remark. He corrected the boy instead, as if the latter had made only an innocent mistake:



When I came near him he began to rise slowly on his knees, and while still half kneeling raised his arm, pointed a finger at me, and cried out in his sharp treble, 'You're from Africa!' This was the moment for me to scream 'Colour prejudice!' and send a bitter letter to one of our newspapers, for there is nothing a Hindu resents more than being taken for a Negro by a white man. But I shouted back, 'No, from India!' The boy dropped on the grass and kept his eyes fixed on it.

At the heart of Chaudhuri's study of England, however, lies his sense of history.

He cannot believe in a dying England if a theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon plays *Twelfth Night* to capacity. Such an audience is in touch with its civilization. He is shocked by a party of tourists in Canterbury Cathedral who appear not to have heard of Thomas à Becket. Chaudhuri discovered in Englishmen, Frenchmen and Italians a living communion with their past such as he already had with his own past. Had he stayed longer in Europe and mixed with a wider social cross-section he might have modified this view but he would surely not have changed it thoroughly.

India was his companion on his passage to England, but so was his deep understanding of European culture, which few English people could rival. Embedded in his prose we find constant evidence of an educated sensibility, often blended with self-mockery. 'What I was seeing in England was making such an impression on me that, though neither dying nor drunk, I was incessantly babbling on green fields and suchlike'.

In all of Chaudhuri's work one comes back to the central fact of empire. He feels acutely the offensiveness of Anglo-Indian society and its most remarkable chronicler, Rudyard Kipling and his blatantly imperialistic view of the native population. Kipling's view, however brilliant, is dated and partial: 'the Indian sojourn made him incapable of loving any Indian with a mind, and led him to reserve all his affection for what could be called the human fauna of the country'.

Chaudhuri, throughout *A Passage to England* always writes within a framework of personal certainties born out of his rooting in Indian culture and western thought systems. His brand of Hinduism may not be orthodox, his suspicion of social radicalism is scarcely fashionable, and he has at times a veneration for European excellence that, if not carefully weighed against his sense of the folly and failure of their empires, can at the least embarrass one with its affection and at its worst seem monstrous in its assertion of a distinctive Aryan purity.

Chaudhuri draws upon Indian history with every breath he takes. Indeed, he makes what for him is the profound discovery that only in England have the scars of earlier colonizations been effectively eradicated.

Neither in London nor in the country was I able, by looking at the faces, figures, and clothing of the people, to guess that there had been invasions of England and spells of foreign rule for its inhabitants. In respect of India, this is one of the easiest things to do even in one street in Delhi.

Chaudhuri has seen evidence of conquest everywhere he looks in India. In England a massive fusion of cultures has taken place which results in an aesthetic and temperamental unity he has never experienced on a national scale before. But that does not make him see his own people as philistine or imitative. He could never share Naipaul's epithet, 'a sense of history, which is a sense of loss' nor really endorse his view of the inevitable obfuscation of English when handled by Indians. This, after all, is the writer who delights in noting that the English refer to Indian independence as a 'gift' whereas his own people look upon it as a 'victory'. The change of word asserts a world of national difference, with self respect enlisted on both sides. Neither word is wrong or complete. Chaudhuri relishes the verbal imprecision of both sides while being never less than precise himself.

Chaudhuri's view of England is quite receptive. From the moment he looks out of the plane to the clear landscape below he finds a three-dimensional solidity to European life which he missed at home. In India he is aware of

'a sensation of extension in space . . . I cannot remember any historic building in northern India, with the exception of the Taj at dawn, which conveys the feeling of mass. . . . Hues always seem to flow and run into the surrounding atmosphere, as dyes which are not fast do in water.'

We see India, Chaudhuri claims, in a 'rarefied' way; Europe we see in a 'concrete' way.

"Another striking effect of the light is seen in the English landscape, which seemed decidedly more stereoscopic to me than any visual reality I had been familiar with previously. I thought I was looking at everything through a pair of prismatic binoculars. In India any landscape tends to resolve into a silhouette, with a side-to-side linking of its components, in the West it becomes a composition in depth, with an into-the-picture movement, a recession, which carries the eye of the onlooker, wherever any opening is left, to the vanishing point on the horizon."

Chaudhuri converts this sense of the concreteness of European life into an aesthetic theory whereby to talk of English painting, architecture and literature. 'There is a curious solidity and into-the-space movement in them too'. Of course, when Chaudhuri talks of this density in English life as a tangible physical reality he is beginning to talk the same language as Naipaul, for whom the tragedy of colonial territories lies in their attempt to reconstruct England using flimsy materials. The difference is that Naipaul believes the

colonial imitator has a fantasy England in his mind, one that never properly existed. Chaudhuri finds evidence of its existence wherever he goes. London really is for him ‘the Great Mother of Modern Cities’ with Calcutta among her children.

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. How has Nirad C. Chaudhuri divided his book *A Passage to England*?
2. What influences can be seen in Chaudhuri's writing style in the book, *A Passage to England*?

## **2.5 Chaudhuri's Textual England**

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In Block D-Unit 3, you will study about Gauri Vishwanathan's *Masks of Conquest* which, needs to be referred here. It is advisable to read Vishwanathan before reading this part of the discussion on Chaudhuri because it has a direct bearing on the way we interpret Chaudhuri here.

As Vishwnathan's thesis shows, British colonization of Indians involved not only a political strategy but also a cultural one. English education was introduced into India (before it was done in England) as a part of this strategy. By a systematic displacement of the native language and culture, the British aimed at producing a class of Indians who would look upon England as an ideal country and help them control the masses. They could also ensure the emulation of their cultural achievements and status among the other natives.

The native's response to this strategy was dual. While there was little or no resistance to or perception of the strategy, some intelligent nationalist used this training to turn British cultural and political ideas against them. Chaudhuri went the other way. So immersed was he in that culture that it went on to frame his entire world view.

English education and the larger experience of the colonial encounter ensured that an England constructed out of the imagination became a strong and vivid construction for both the highly educated class of Indians as well as those with a smattering of English. Such constructions had a massive hold on the ideals and aspirations of almost all classes of Indians who experienced the impact of colonial rule. This idea of an idealized, imaginary England could be experienced firsthand in the literary representations of England by writers in various genres.

The civilizing mission in India had centred on ‘creating an indigenous middle class cultivated in European tastes and values’ with the purpose of achieving both economic gains and cultural hegemony for England. For

these 'Brown Englishmen' — the new class of Indians created by English higher education in British India — England became an idealized creation gleaned from texts of English literature and English/European history, encounters with the English in India, and the direct experience of England. Gauri Viswanathan has shown that the emphasis on a literary education under British rule was a strategic ploy of almost effacing 'the sordid history of colonialist appropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression'.

For the colonized Indians the English literary text functioned as a 'surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state'. The social insularity of the Britishers in India also ensured that educated Indians could never see Englishmen for who they actually were and derived their ideas about England and the English from texts rather than from direct interaction with the colonizers. In effect, not only did this create idealized images of England and the English, it also led to the discounting of the behaviour of the English in India as an aberrant version of 'true' Englishness. The 'brown Englishmen' identified so closely with that 'true' Englishness derived from texts that they felt more English than the English, and confident of teaching the English how to be English.

Chaudhuri's text depicts the experiences and responses to England by a product of English education, of a native's systematic acculturation which leads to the uncritical and unquestioning acceptance of the myth of the coloniser's cultural superiority. This leads to Chaudhuri's urge to dissociate himself from their native groups and to seek to identify completely with the 'superior group'. Chaudhuri, as you know went on to live in London.

Chaudhuri's *A Passage to England* is a post-independence Indian text written in English. The author grew up in British India and his life clearly demonstrates the impact of colonialism in shaping ideas of self and the other through education and acculturation. Chaudhuri venerates England and has complete sympathy with the British. Chaudhuri's Anglicization serves to establish his 'superiority' in culture and knowledge not only to his native group, but also to the English themselves. The text presents many pictures of the British in England and India and his subjective assessments of the English national character as well as different aspects of English national life presented with protestations of objectivity and rationality.

Chaudhuri's intense reading in British culture had helped him develop an extraordinary degree of intimacy with European art and literature. K. Raghavendra Rao writes: 'One may detest him, disagree with him, fret at his pedantry and fume over his pretentiousness, but one cannot simply ignore him, for at his worst he is brilliant and original'. The brilliance and originality in this book are truly too striking to be easily missed or dismissed. Here is a book about the first visit to England of a man with 'a learned, lively mind steeped in European culture, a vivid personality of distinct and

unaffected charm'. William Walsh finds its main interest in its being an Indian version of that sensibility of *recognition*, which one sees in Henry James's autobiographical writings. James equally if not better qualified than Chaudhuri was looking at England from the American perspective and had a host of piercing critiques of Europe in his writings on England.

Chaudhuri provides an excellent example of the success of English higher education in British India in producing a class of Indians who would be English in all but blood and colour. Shankar Mokashi-Punekar labels him a 'Macaulay of modern India' and a 'liberal freak' — a product of 'the finest liberal education of the British model...received by the most open, receptive and impressionable mind'. While Mokashi-Punekar does not use any of these adjectives in their positive sense, Walsh is clearly more appreciative of Chaudhuri for 'hacking out an area of freedom and manoeuvre from the choked jungle of inheritance, and...constructing a fresh identity which could join a questioning western mind to a temperament laced with Bengali fury.'

According to him, Chaudhuri found the concepts, principles, usages and styles for this process not in the imaginatively cramped local British population, or the restricted Anglo-Indian tradition, but in the immensely more inclusive source of the English language and its literature.

What is most striking in Chaudhuri's case is the baggage of textually-derived ideas and knowledge about England which he carries with him and against which he matches his direct experiences. In his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* he counts England, among the shaping forces of his childhood, as 'an intangible and exotic element', which 'absent and yet real' was immensely powerful because the idea (unlike other ideas) 'never struck against barriers from which it had to recoil'. The second-hand nature of his contact with England thus becomes, for Chaudhuri, cause for the greater strength of England as a shaping force. In *A Passage* one finds that the idea became so powerful that when it eventually 'struck' against reality it did not even get dented. Not only could he dismiss the samples of Englishness in India as 'inauthentic' (or aberrations of an ideal) on the strength of his textually-derived ideas of England and Englishness, he even dismissed 'real' England as less 'true'. As he puts it in *A Passage*, 'my earlier, and as I believe truer, ideas of England were all acquired from literature, history, and geography'.

Because of this great bulk of textual ideas of England, the process of 'recognition' starts for Chaudhuri even before he actually sets foot in England. On his flight over Europe and England he can recognize landmark buildings and natural features: 'my knowledge of European geography on the whole stood the test of the air journey'. Writing of his first impressions in a letter home he notes that he seemed to be 'calling up in a strange and intolerably vivid dream something I had read of in an English novel'. His literature-

derived idea of England ‘was not contradicted by anything (he) saw, it was on the contrary completed’. Despite efforts by his guides and hosts to tell him about the ‘transformations which are making England different, almost unrecognizable as Old England’, his personal opinion is that ‘today's England was very much like the England of history and perfectly consistent with it’.

His text-derived ideas appear so correct to him that he feels confident in trusting his familiarity with English literature as the best possible guide to the English scene. His claim that ‘the only ties felt in the heart that we can have with England are those created by things of the mind’, is substantiated by his strong feelings for England based on ‘things of the mind’ — things to which even direct, first-hand sensory experience can add nothing.

## 2.6 East Goes Beyond West

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Surprisingly Rudyard Kipling finds an ally in Chaudhuri who agrees that the ‘East and West shall never meet’ but then he qualifies this to apply only to the ‘average’ westerner and easterner. By this qualification Chaudhuri escapes his own formula since he is obviously not the ‘average’ Indian - in fact, as he stresses in his Autobiography, his personal development has been in no way typical of an Indian and, ‘it is certainly exceptional, and may even be unique’. And so in him, the whole book tries to show, ‘the twain can meet’.

What Chaudhuri seems to be doing, in his extreme Anglophilia is getting out of this meeting of the east and west not into his native identity of the east but towards the coloniser’s identity of the west. In fact he tries to go beyond the English and out-Englishes the English. On his first visit to England (and Europe) he continually corroborates and verifies his text-derived ideas of the country and its people, even of the English language. In France, for the first time, he understands what ‘beechen green’ means. About the weather in April he says: ‘I did not...find the season quite as Browning had described it’. Even talking of the effect of light on architecture and perception of space, he says ‘I could understand why Elizabeth Bennet ceased to look at the furniture at Pemberly, and went to a window’. On the notorious English weather he can agree with Hardy: ‘This is the weather the Cuckoo likes, And so do I’; I also would say, ‘So do I’ rather than agree with Englishmen who are ‘confirmed grumblers about the English weather’. Not only can one see here a literature-based idea of English weather (which is so solid that experience can do nothing but confirm it), but the sense of ‘loving’ England better than the English themselves. In fact, as he tries to explain logically, he can love England better than Englishmen because while their fondness is for particular spots, he can appreciate the charm of England as a whole.

As M.K. Naik points out, ‘the England Chaudhuri sees and admires is not so much modern England as an antebellum, 19th century England, of

which he has been a devoted admirer all his life'. Chaudhuri says of his first reaction to London: 'I may be a man of the past unable to accept the wholeness of London' but he quickly asserts that 'I am not so narrow as to underestimate its stupendous role and overlook its gigantic presence'. The vicarious familiarity and the process of recognition is most striking in aspects of what he calls 'timeless England'. In the English countryside he is happy to find a complete harmony between man and nature, with man's impression everywhere but man himself out of sight. In Stratford-upon-Avon he is actually thankful to the English people who, due to their habit of late-rising, 'left their country to me' early in the morning. But then, to Chaudhuri the mimic 'Englishman', it is as much *his* country as theirs. His attitude to most aspects of Englishness is suggested by what he has to say about the English weather: 'I think I have at last got a better understanding of the Englishman's grievance against his weather *than even he does*'.

Chaudhuri's assessment of the Indian situation suffers much the same faults. India and the Indian way of life are repeatedly compared to not real life England and day to day life as it is lived in England but the idealized England abstracted from literature and hearsay. The implications are serious. The real India evades Chaudhuri as if it did not exist. The India that he constructs in his analysis is designed not to measure up to this idealized construct and has to be consistently looked down upon.

For Chaudhuri the thorny issue of British rule in India and the struggle for independence which occupied most intellectuals of the time is not really relevant. He represents those cases of the completely indoctrinated educated Indian who could stand apart from nationalist ideology. It was, of course, as Grant envisioned, one of the aims of the introduction of English education in India to produce a class who would actually wish to prolong India's association with England.

When he does touch upon the English in India, it is to echo the English interpretation—that although Englishmen do become 'offensive' in India, this change in their 'usual kindness and equability in human relations' is caused by the Indian weather due to which 'their refinements wear out, and they tend to exhibit the hard core of their personality, turning sour and narrow'. In his *Autobiography* he traces the basis of this objectivity to his parents who 'inculcated a saner outlook in their children and taught them, Indian gentlemen to be, to treat Englishmen as English gentlemen, no less, no more'. This 'saner' attitude different from the hatred nurtured in other Indian homes helps him overlook the problematic of imperial domination and the questionable role played by the British crown and its representatives in it. All this happens because Chaudhuri is inspired or even imprisoned by the effects of imperial domination.

He claims that because of this parental training he stands apart from his countrymen whose prevalent attitude to English people 'was one of

irrational and ineradicable cringing and equally irrational and unconquerable hatred'. However, despite his repeated claims of objectivity, Chaudhuri does not escape bias-though his bias is of the opposite kind-the English are always seen by him as 'more' and the Indians as 'less'. In his attitude to educated Indians, evident from comments on the 'Anglicized upper middle class' whose 'chattering fidgetiness...is no worse than an attack of migraine'. Chaudhuri seems to be, yet again, echoing or mimicking the attitude of the English. The mimicry is a reflection of the internalization of the lessons of English superiority learnt as much through English education and texts as from the ideology of Empire.

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. How did the colonized Indians perceive English literary text?
2. In the context of 'East shall never meet the West' what is the author trying to suggest?

## **2.7 Chaudhuri as a Post Colonial Writer**

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Before discussing Chaudhuri as a post-colonial writer it is important to understand the term itself. For those of you who are not initiated into this field, a brief introduction is provided as follows.

Ever since and everywhere, power relations between a dominant and a subservient group have been operational, some aspect of the phenomenon today called *post colonial* has always and already been and continues to be there. Therefore, the concept should not be tagged only and solely with the historical process of colonialism. However, somewhere around the 1950s as erstwhile colonies achieved independence from the colonizing nations a new relation between the dominant and the subservient, or people purporting to speak for either, entered the academia and other cultural-political spaces in more central ways. This new relation was marked by a rigorous analysis of the various ways in which power was exercised, inscribed, naturalized or even violently imposed on the dominated and the equally various ways in which the dominated accepted, rejected, engaged or negotiated with such exercise of dominant power. These analyses usually became the basis of concerted political action in academic, public and cultural spaces.

Framing the concept like this makes it feel like 'political-studies' or 'power studies' or a study in 'power relations'. It should be acknowledged that postcolonial theory does function as a subdivision within the even more misleadingly named field of 'cultural studies': the whole body of generally leftist radical literary theory and criticism which includes Marxist, Gramscian, Foucauldian, and various feminist schools of thought, among others. What all of these schools of thought have in common is a determination to analyze



unjust power relationships (which perhaps means all power relations!) as manifested in cultural products like literature (and film, art, etc.). Practitioners generally consider themselves politically engaged and committed to some variety or other of liberation process.

It is also important to understand that not all postcolonial scholars are literary scholars. Postcolonial theory is applied to political science, to history, and to other related fields. People who call themselves postcolonial scholars generally see themselves as part of a large movement to expose and struggle against the influence of large, rich nations (mostly European, and the U.S.) on poorer nations (mostly in the southern hemisphere).

Although it is all these, some people may not be really happy to sacrifice the label *poco* for the more general ones listed above. This resistance points to a couple of things:

1. The specific nomenclature implies that some practitioners of this field see the colonial phenomenon as a politically useful/ significant rallying point around which to organize or center their 'power studies' and they would want that centering to reflect in the name. On the contrary, there are theorists and authors, seminal to this movement, who do not want to use this label along with their names and would rather go for the general terms. The fact that *poco* persists is a clear indication of which group's intent prevails in the general realm.
2. The need to center the 'colonial' as a point of reference and opposition points to the political necessity in the erstwhile colonies as well as contemporary thought to attribute the colonial phase as primarily determining their present status. This has both radical and conservative implications.

So, let's not aim for inclusiveness. Let's clear a little ground from where to start and build further. One way of beginning is to understand the term Post-colonial as the reading and writing of literature and other cultural artifacts written in previously or currently colonized countries like India. It also deals with literature written in colonizing countries like England or France which deals with colonization or colonized peoples or those pieces where these concerns can be read. Put together that means almost all the writing written in a large part of the world. That also makes *poco* an approach rather than a neatly demarcated field. It focuses on:

1. The way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority, of the colonized people.
2. Literature by colonized peoples which attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness.

3. It also deals with the ways in which literature in colonizing countries appropriates the language, images, scenes, traditions and so forth of colonized countries.
4. A rigorous analysis of the dynamics of the dominant-subservient power relations, wherever they are evident or latent.

A good point of entry into understanding Chaudhuri's position as a post-colonial writer and how other post colonial writers have read him is to contrast his assessment of racism with the Martinique psychiatrist-turned activist Frantz Fanon. Fanon researched the causes and effects of racial discrimination which black persons like him encountered in the French society. When white people on the streets of Paris pointed out at him saying 'Look, a Negro!', Fanon felt 'completely dislocated'. Similar remarks were thrown at Nirad Chaudhuri, too, when he visited West Europe in 1955 but his reactions were very different from that of Fanon. A British boy in a public place had cried out to Chaudhuri 'You're from Africa!' but the latter simply shouted back, 'No, from India!' In fact, Chaudhuri says that he did not want to feel victimized by the boy's comment and that is why his reaction was so matter-of-fact. He dismissed such incidents as cases of mistaken identity, not instances of racial humiliation. To prove the innocuous nature of these statements, he narrates an incident which happened to him in Paris. While sitting on a flight of steps beside River Seine, a French worker mistook him not for an African but for an Englishman! It convinced Chaudhuri that European comments about identity are not necessarily racist. Often they are incidental mistakes and not intentionally mischievous. Hence, not wanting to attach any socio-political importance to those remarks, Chaudhuri just corrected the Frenchman the way he had corrected the British boy earlier. One notices that neither did Chaudhuri feel elated when called a Briton, which is what one would expect him to feel because of his unabashed Anglophilia, nor had he felt dejected when called an African. Clearly, in this regard, Chaudhuri's poise is in stark contrast to Fanon's grief. In the words of Chaudhuri:

I looked up and saw a French workman perched half-way up the steps. . . Then he asked, 'Monsieur est anglais?' I was taken aback by his idea of the size and looks of an Englishman, and replied, 'Mais non, indien.' 'Ah oui, indien!' he replied and showed such readiness to open a conversation that I, having fears for my spoken French, ran away, still wondering how he could have said what he had said.

Why do differences like these arise in their respective assessments of 'racist' comments. Does Chaudhuri suffer from no sense of persecution or complex that accounts for the profound grief experienced by Fanon or his typical black character. Were the persecution and the complex a characteristic of the subject induced by the colonizer rather than induced by him? Was it

possible for a native subject of racism to not be troubled by the coloniser's persecution of the colonizer? Could the colonized devise an alternative reaction to the coloniser's exercise of cultural and political power. Chaudhuri and Fanon answer this question differently. Chaudhuri's life and writing are an instance of a reaction to colonization that turns the tables on the British and critiques their culture and acts from an entrenched position of native traditions, history and culture.

Just as Chaudhuri's point of view was unlike that of Frantz Fanon's, it was also unlike Edward Said's. Said describes Orientalism as 'a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'. In this sense, Orientalism served to strengthen the West's control of the East. However, Chaudhuri's opinion of the subject is quite different. He thinks that, as far as India is concerned, Orientalism reinvigorated the country's nationalism. Chaudhuri argues that India's memory of her pre-Mughal civilization was hazy till the time Orientalists excavated her past. British numismatist James Prinsep, who worked himself almost to death, deciphered the Brahmi script of Emperor Ashoka's rock and pillar inscriptions. British archaeologist Alexander Cunningham was the first to publish a report on the unicorn seal found at Harappa village in Punjab's Montgomery district. Thereafter, the British Viceroy set up the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1905. Fifteen years later, the ASI director John Marshall led his staff in excavating some ruins at Harappa and a mound at Mohenjo-daro, measures which finally unearthed the proto-historic Indus Valley Civilization. These and many other steps by western scholars helped in the modern reconstruction of India's national history. Hence, Chaudhuri asserts that Orientalists fostered Indian nationalism. Trying to criticize them appeared to him as an attempt to bite the hand that feeds. Chaudhuri writes:

The contribution made by the European Orientalists to Indian nationalism is now recognized by all. The Hindus had created their own brand of nationalism, a basic chauvinism so to speak, long before the coming of European influences to their country. . . . But it had no historical basis, and could not be accepted in its traditional form by the Indians who were receiving a western education. They wanted a nationalism which would be tenable historically. The Orientalists of Europe supplied the historical basis by revealing to modern Indians their past history and achievements.

One of the dominant concerns of Post-colonialism is the rise of nationalism. However, the precise origin of the idea of nationhood has been a matter of controversy among critics. Benedict Anderson says that anti-colonial nationalism used 'the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century'. Historian Partha Chatterjee, however, counters this suggestion that the concept of nationalism was originally imported from Western Europe. He asks, 'If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community

from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?'

Chaudhuri's position is on this issue is as rationalistic and unsentimental as ever. He is not convinced that modern Indian nationalism was essentially indigenous but of European origin. The inspirations behind India's nationalist movement, as identified by him, were exclusively western:

Certain modern personalities and movements contributed powerfully to our political consciousness, of which there were two clearly discernible facets. The first and rational facet was indoctrinated by Burke and Mill, but shaped in its practical expression by the liberalism of Gladstone and Lincoln. The second facet was purely emotional, and its inspiration was furnished by Rousseau and Mazzini besides the Ancients. The methods of political action were suggested by the leaders of the American Revolution, the Italian Risorgimento — particularly Garibaldi — and the Irish nationalists. The entire course, of English constitutional history and, more especially, the turmoils of the seventeenth century, together with the American, French, Italian, and Irish movements were freely drawn upon for precedents and also for operational hints.

Chaudhuri's writings participate along with a number of other discourses in assessing the exact nature and contribution of the British rule to the Indian people, their lives and the emergence of the Indian nation. Not surprisingly, all these discourses went in favour of the colonial powers. Britain's colonial discourses encouraged the thinking that Europe and the West were modern while India and the East were primitive. One of the beliefs that this system perpetuated was that British rule was essentially benevolent and only occasionally repressive. This assessment of British rule was important in order to sustain its imperialist intent. However, as Historian Bipan Chandra shows 'the British did not rule primarily by force but by a carefully organized belief system or ideology' and the impression of the rulers' benevolence was a rhetorically constructed illusion of the colonial discourse. Its real intention was to dilute the anti-colonial agitation of Indians and it succeeded in doing so at least in the case of people like Nirad Chaudhuri. Chaudhuri in one sense had fallen prey to the insidious propaganda of the colonial machine. For instance, he was led into believing that the British had established the rule of law in generally lawless India. Chaudhuri says:

Overhead there appeared to be, coinciding with the sky, an immutable sphere of justice and order, brooding sleeplessly over what was happening below, and swooping down on it when certain limits were passed. Its arm seemed to be long and all-powerful, and it passed by different names among us. The common people still called it the Company, others Queen Victoria, and the educated the Government. The feeling, thus ever present, of there being a watching and protecting Government above us vanished at

one stroke with the coming of the nationalist agitation in 1905. After that we thought of the Government, in so far as we thought of it in the abstract, as an agency of oppression and usurpation. Nonetheless, although deprived of its subjective halo, the protective power survived for many more decades.

However, Chaudhuri's text is not a simple apology for colonialism but marred by many contradictions. To understand the nature of the contradictions encountered in Chaudhuri's writing we need to evoke the term 'ambivalence' as described by Bill Ashcroft.

Ambivalence is used in a special sense in postcolonial criticism. Etymologically, the noun 'ambivalence' means 'two powers'. In psychology, the word means a simultaneous desire for opposites and in post-colonialist criticism, 'ambivalence' means a co-existence of attraction and repulsion.

In a rather simplistic way but one enough for our reading here, Ashcroft describes it as 'the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized.' It is like a lure-cum-threat between the colonizer and the colonized. Consequently, colonial ambivalence worked both for and against the colonizer, and also for and against the colonized. Many colonizers betrayed this ambivalence regarding colonialism. For instance, British politician Alfred Duff-Cooper wrote, 'The idea of an island in Europe governing against their will and Asiatic population ten times more numerous than themselves is not acceptable to the modern mind.' Not only the people of colonizing countries, even those of colonized countries suffered from colonial ambivalence. When asked how far he would cut India off from Britain, nationalist leader M. K. Gandhi was ambivalent. He said, 'From the Empire, entirely; from the British nation not at all, if I want India to gain and not to grieve.' However, the fact that both colonizers and the colonized were ambivalent towards each other does not mean that they stood on equal platforms. In reality, the former were 'more equal' than the latter.

Chaudhuri's writings also manifest signs of ambivalence. In this, he was not unlike his contemporaries. The most visible sign of Chaudhuri's ambivalent attitude was his attire — he wore Western dresses in the East and vice versa. Taking note of this curious duality, the British Broadcasting Corporation wrote, 'When he lived in New Delhi's old city, he walked to work in a western suit and bowler hat. After moving to England in the 1970s, he preferred the traditional dhoti of his native Bengal to receive guests at his home.'

Even though a split personality, he was different from the stereotype. However, Chaudhuri's colonial ambivalence was not confined to his incongruous dressing. His response to the British, for instance, was ambivalent and exposed the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that marks the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. During the wars fought

by Britain, Chaudhuri remained undecided as to which side he was on and could make up his mind only after the wars ended. If Britain won a war, he became anti-British and attributed the win to bribery. On the other hand, if she lost a war, he became pro-British and attributed the loss to misfortune. Explaining his dilemma, he writes:

The Boer War was very frequently in our thoughts and not less frequently on our lips. . . . Our reaction to the Boer War, as to every war in which England was involved, was curiously mixed. One-half of us automatically shared in the English triumph, while the other and the patriotic half wanted the enemies of England to win. When our patriotic half was in the ascendant, as it usually was after an English victory, we went so far as to believe that the victory had been one by bribing one of the opponent's generals.

Not only was his relationship with the colonizers ambivalent, Chaudhuri's reactions to the colonized were equally so. He supported their anti-colonial movement occasionally but opposed it at other times. In fact, Chaudhuri admits to being inconsistent in the matter during his green years. However, he is not able to understand why he became such a bundle of contradictions with respect to the nationalist movement. Chaudhuri's problem, though, is easily solved by two concepts of postcolonial theory. The self-contradictions which puzzled Chaudhuri were actually the manifestation of the conflict between colonial discourses and counter-discourses.

The fact that counter-discourses had been generated by colonized nations was first noticed by critic Richard Terdiman in 1985. The inevitable opposition between these counter-discourses and the colonial discourses resulted in the creation of ambivalence. In this sense, ambivalence was an inescapable part of colonialism. Chaudhuri, of course, fails to see it for what it is. He thinks that his early flip-flops regarding the colonial question were nothing but his immature fickle-mindedness. He attributes his own ambivalence to the impulsiveness of his youth, thereby committing a grievous error in judgment:

The story of my relations with Gandhian politics was not to end with my disapproval of non-co-operation. During the civil disobedience movement of 1930 I veered round to a passionate approval of Mahatma Gandhi's methods and became an almost idolatrous worshipper of his personality. In all these changes of mood and affiliations between 1921 and 1930 I was governed wholly by blind impulses. I did not understand the reasons for my moods. . . .

The problem of ambivalence is closely linked with 'hybridity'. 'Hybridity' is a term borrowed from Botany where it means crossbreeding of two species by processes such as grafting, in order to form a third species. Bhabha uses this idea to explain the formation of a 'Third Space' between the colonizer and the colonized. Hybridization entails the fusion of certain

elements on both sides of the colonial divide. A colonial hybrid reasserts the supremacy of the colonizer while encouraging, on the other hand, the insurgency of the colonized. It is best exemplified by a personality like Chaudhuri who supported British colonialism but also lent occasional support to the Indian resistance. Hybridized personalities like Chaudhuri were both suppliants and threats rolled into one.

A third term used by Bhabha to describe an aspect of the colonial situation is mimicry. Bhabha says that the colonizer was often 'mimicked' by the colonized. These mimicries, although sincere on the part of the latter, spelt discomfort for the former. The mimicries were distorted reflections seen in curved mirrors — just as such reflections are not pleasant for the subject being reflected, similarly the native mimicking the colonizer was not pleasant to him. Besides, colonial mimics were hardly loyal to the colonizers. In other words, the imitation by the colonized subjects was not always flattering. After all, the line between mimicry and mockery is thin and could be breached inadvertently, thereby discomforting the ones being imitated. In fact, mimicry is never far from mockery because it resembles and ridicules at the same time. Hence, the 'class of interpreters' which Macaulay had planned to manufacture in India turned out to be Frankenstein's monsters.

Why did the colonizer feel uncomfortable by the mimicry? At a primary level it was a question of owning the culture and refusing to share it with the native. The refusal was not only indicative of a desire to preserve the prestige tagged to the cultural identity but also a desire to maintain a distinction from the native. After all, if the native wore the same clothes, spoke the same language and thought the same way how would he be different from the colonizer? Should the difference collapse, how was the exercise of colonial power possible?

At the same time exposure to the colonized culture was necessary if hegemonic control was to be exercised. What followed was an inevitable process of cultural syncretisation which neither of the parties was in a position to control completely.

The concept of mimicry can answer the question which troubled Chaudhuri to the end of his life. He was always very disturbed to find that Englishmen did not encourage the appropriation of English customs by the Indians. Chaudhuri could never understand why the colonizers should be bothered if the colonized wished to adopt their way of life. The fact is that the local British resisted all Indian reconstruction of European culture because they were uncomfortable with their mimics. Unaware of the concept of mimicry a puzzled Chaudhuri writes:

An Englishman of this type resented our devotion to English literature as a sort of illicit attention to his wife, whom he himself was neglecting for his mistress, sport. Therefore he cast the Tenth

Commandment in our teeth, tried to cure us of our literary mindedness, and at the same time sneered at it. . . . The only ties felt in the heart that we can have with England are those created by things of the mind. The Englishmen who did their best to break those ties have lost the Indian Empire.

What for Chaudhuri was the Indian ‘devotion to English literature’ was colonial mimicry for the British. Chaudhuri found the British behaviour inexplicable and held it responsible for souring the mutual relationship between the two countries. Chaudhuri writes:

From his land and nation the Englishman brought many fine qualities for his work and business in this country, but his residence among us seemed to engender in him certain very offensive attributes which were as pronounced as the overpowering smell of our wild red dog, and which did untold harm to Britain's relations with India. These are matters of history. I refer to them only because my personal testimony would go a long way towards supporting the consensus of opinion among my countrymen regarding the Englishmen who have remained in India in the days of his power. . . . Their conduct today fills me with vicarious shame, for they are showing themselves as the same men now by their self interested and ingratiating niceness towards us as they showed themselves in the past by their arrogant and power-intoxicated snobbery.

Chaudhuri is unable to understand that the British had to resist Indian attempts at adopting European traditions because the former could not trust those attempts to be wholly sincere, the colonizers could never be sure that they were only being mimicked and not mocked. To respect the native’s commitment and dedication to their culture and literature was to obliterate a key boundary dividing them. After all, if a native could speak and think like a Britisher what would be the real difference between them? How much differentiation could one derive from the mere difference of skin and hair colour? And if there was no real or substantial difference what would provide the justification for continued rule over the natives? In reality, these were the questions that fueled the British response towards mimicry.

Chaudhuri’s inability to understand this basic political fact reflects a gap in his analysis and consciousness. If the Britishers learnt to respect the native and his fascination with British culture, equality of some sort would come to exist, for respect can exist only among equals. The relations between the two could never be imperial or colonial in that case. Chaudhuri’s lament that it is this disrespect that soured the relationship between the two countries is actually ironical. It is this disrespect that actually maintained the colonial nature of the relationship between the two.

On a slightly different plane one needs to ask the question why did the native aspire to British values and knowledge? That fascination with western values and literature was itself a colonial process built upon the



destruction of native values and culture. Chaudhuri's uncritical acceptance of the value of western knowledge and literature has to be thus understood as a colonial statement from a colonial subject completely under the influence of an alien culture. The desire to be respected for it is thus the desire of a subject to be respected as an equal who has in the first instance been subordinated.

The point about the thin line between mimicry and mockery needs to be elaborated. Despite the resemblance that the Indian imitations had with their European original, there was always a hidden possibility of ridicule. The distorted image in a curved mirror is the best example of this potential derision. As Bill Ashcroft et al explains, 'Colonial culture is always potentially and strategically insurgent procedure'. This lurking fear in the rulers made them suspect mockery when a fascinated mimicry was being conducted.

## **2.8 Other Critical Perspectives**

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The influence of Marxism on all twentieth century thought has been widely acknowledged. Chaudhuri was influenced but did not agree completely with the ideas of Karl Marx. Predictably, Chaudhuri says, 'The man who described religion as the opium of the people never tried to define what kind of dope political and economic dogmas were, because he was interested in the popularization of a particular drug of his own.' Despite such anti-Marxist utterances, there were certain similarities between Chaudhuri and India's communists. For instance, when communists decried the independence that India received in 1947 as 'false', Chaudhuri did not differ drastically. He asserted repeatedly that India's independence was merely political in nature and that it would make little difference to the teeming millions of the country. The communists believed that only a drastic socio-economic revolution could make a real difference. This conviction, too, is shared by Chaudhuri. He was well-versed with the courses of the various revolutions across the world and wished one for India as well.

Chaudhuri's writing can also be studied in the context of decolonization. The Kenyan critic Simon Gikandi was of the view that 'There is an urgent need to question the ideological foundations on which the narratives of decolonization were constructed.' There are various reasons why the nature of the decolonization project and the extent of decolonization achieved have to be questioned. To achieve decolonization one has to be first sure about what the areas in which colonization has been operative are and what have been its undesirable effects. That is where the problem begins. Certain forms of colonization cannot be easily identified - social and economic forms of colonization are not easily identifiable although the political form is. Hence, social and economic processes can remain colonized even where political decolonization has been achieved. Social colonialism survives because

of the destruction of native preferences and economic colonialism because of globalization practices.

To reverse the process of colonization, decolonization has to first be clear about the pre-colonial situation to which the colonized natives should be restored. In most native cultures, the pre-colonized situation, having been heterogeneous, evades accurate identification. In fact, the pre-colonized condition has been so diverse that some of its strands are irreconcilable. Consequently, decolonization has had to choose one or the other of those incompatible strands. These and other procedural issue made Chaudhuri dismissive of decolonization itself. However, his outright dismissal is like throwing the baby with the bathwater. Chaudhuri's position on this issue is absolutist. He fails to see the political, cultural and economic effects of this complex, incomplete and unresolved process. He is unable to realize that even if certain colonial vestiges remain in a postcolonial nation, it cannot call into question decolonization as such. He thus arrives at a candid, firm but politically disastrous conclusion that decolonization is an impossibility:

No such political phenomenon as 'decolonization' has been seen in history. Colonization of any country by a foreign people has always become permanent. The United States was created by the colonization of people of British origins in North America. It has not been nor will ever be 'decolonized'.

### **Check Your Progress-4**

1. How has the problem of ambivalence been linked with hybridity?
2. Why did Nirad C. Chaudhuri not completely agree with the ideas of Karl Marx?

## **2.9 Let Us Sum Up**

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- Nirad C. Chaudhuri (23 November 1897 – 1 August 1999) was a Bengali-English writer and cultural commentator. He was born in 1897 in Kishoreganj, which today is part of Bangladesh but at that time was part of Bengal. Chaudhuri was educated in Kishoreganj and Kolkata.
- Nirad C. Chaudhuri started his career as a clerk in the Accounting Department of the Indian Army. At the same time, he started contributing articles to popular magazines. His first article on Bharat Chandra (a famous Bengali poet of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) appeared in the most prestigious English magazine of the time, *Modern Review*. Chaudhuri left the job in the Accounting Department shortly after, and started a new career as a journalist and editor

- Chaudhuri's masterpiece, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, published in 1951, put him on the short list of great Indian writers. He courted controversy in the newly independent India due to the dedication of the book.
- In 1955, the British Council and the BBC jointly made arrangements to take Chaudhuri to England for eight weeks. He was asked to contribute lectures to the BBC. He contributed eight lectures on British life. Later these lectures were collected, modified and edited into *A Passage to England*.
- Chaudhuri was also deeply distressed by what he saw as the deep hypocrisy in Bengali social life and in particular those that resulted from class and caste distinctions. His historical research revealed to him that the rigid Victoriantesque morality of middle class Bengali women was a socially enforced construct that had less to do with religion, choice and judgment, but more to do with upbringing, social acceptance and intergenerational transference of values.
- One of the main thrusts in Chaudhuri's writings, especially in *A Passage to England* is to emphasize the contrast between India and England. He appears caught between a native culture in which he has been steeped but now dislikes and a foreign culture which appears to him formidable and a panacea for all human ills.
- Chaudhuri is convinced about his own intellectual superiority or at least the legitimacy of his intellectual independence. Despite his Anglomania, his moorings in India and Hinduism remain very strong. His 'hate India' themes are grossly misunderstood. He knew that the Anglicized class was hypocritical and seldom went beyond reading blurbs and reviews of books. Therefore, his dedication was a trick to attract attention.
- Chaudhuri is provocative, intemperate and even fussy but never insipid or boring. He maintains a majesty and solemnity of style. His mood is bitter as he grows impatient with the conditions in independent India. He utters some plain but unpalatable truths about Indians as well as Britishers and castigates both for duplicity and intellectual degeneration.
- Chaudhuri was fifty-seven when he left India for the first time for an eight-week visit to Europe, five weeks in England, two in Paris and one in Rome. In the 'Plea for the Book', as he charmingly christens the preface to *A Passage To England*, he tells us that he celebrated the three thousandth week of his life at the end of his tour.
- Nirad Chaudhuri wrote only one travelogue, *A Passage to England*. The title was in imitation of *A Passage to India*, a novel by Edward

Morgan Forster. Chaudhuri's book contains his impressions of England during a trip of five weeks. It turned out to be the first book by an Indian author to appear on the bestseller lists of England.

- Chaudhuri, throughout *A Passage to England* always writes within a framework of personal certainties born out of his rooting in Indian culture and western thought systems. His brand of Hinduism may not be orthodox, his suspicion of social radicalism is scarcely fashionable, and he has at times a veneration for European excellence that, if not carefully weighed against his sense of the folly and failure of their empires, can at the least embarrass one with its affection and at its worst seem monstrous in its assertion of a distinctive Aryan purity.
- English education and the larger experience of the colonial encounter ensured that an England constructed out of the imagination became a strong and vivid construction for both the highly educated class of Indians as well as those with a smattering of English. Such constructions had a massive hold on the ideals and aspirations of almost all classes of Indians who experienced the impact of colonial rule. This idea of an idealized, imaginary England could be experienced firsthand in the literary representations of England by writers in various genres.
- Chaudhuri's *A Passage to England* is a post-independence Indian text written in English. The author grew up in British India and his life clearly demonstrates the impact of colonialism in shaping ideas of self and the other through education and acculturation. The text presents many pictures of the British in England and India and his subjective assessments of the English national character as well as different aspects of English national life presented with protestations of objectivity and rationality.
- It is also important to understand that not all postcolonial scholars are literary scholars. Postcolonial theory is applied to political science, to history, and to other related fields. People who call themselves postcolonial scholars generally see themselves as part of a large movement to expose and struggle against the influence of large, rich nations (mostly European, and the U.S.) on poorer nations (mostly in the southern hemisphere).
- Ambivalence is used in a special sense in postcolonial criticism. Etymologically, the noun 'ambivalence' means 'two powers'. In psychology, the word means a simultaneous desire for opposites and in post-colonialist criticism, 'ambivalence' means a co-existence of attraction and repulsion.
- Chaudhuri's inability to understand this basic political fact reflects a gap in his analysis and consciousness. If the Britishers learnt to respect

the native and his fascination with British culture, equality of some sort would come to exist, for respect can exist only among equals. The relations between the two could never be imperial or colonial in that case. Chaudhuri's lament that it is this disrespect that soured the relationship between the two countries is actually ironical. It is this disrespect that actually maintained the colonial nature of the relationship between the two.

- The influence of Marxism on all twentieth century thought has been widely acknowledged. Chaudhuri was influenced but did not agree completely with the ideas of Karl Marx. Predictably, Chaudhuri says, 'The man who described religion as the opium of the people never tried to define what kind of dope political and economic dogmas were, because he was interested in the popularization of a particular drug of his own.'

## 2.10 Key Words

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- **Oeuvre:** The body of work of a painter, composer, or author.
- **Victorian morality:** A distillation of the moral views of people living at the time of Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901) and of the moral climate of the United Kingdom of the 19th century in general, which contrasted greatly with the morality of the previous Georgian period.
- **Syncretization:** To reconcile and unite (differing religious beliefs, for example), especially with partial success or a heterogeneous result.
- **Orientalists:** A term used by art historians and literary and cultural studies scholars for the imitation or depiction of aspects of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures (Eastern cultures) by writers, designers and artists from the West.
- ***Civis romanus sum:*** Literally means 'I am a Roman citizen.' It is a phrase used in Cicero's *In Verrem* as a plea for the legal rights of a Roman citizen.
- **Anglophilia:** Unusual admiration or partiality for England, English ways, or things English.

## 2.11 Terminal Questions

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1. Critically examine Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *A Passage to England*.
2. What is the role of English education in the process of British colonization?
3. 'East and West shall never meet.' Comment.
4. Critically analyse Nirad C. Choudhuri as a post-colonial writer.

5. To what extent was Nirad C. Choudhari influenced by Marxism?
6. How can the process of colonization be reversed?

## 2.12 Suggested Readings

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## 2.13 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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### Check Your Progress-1

1. Chaudhuri's masterpiece, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, published in 1951, put him on the short list of great Indian writers. He courted controversy in the newly independent India due to the dedication of the book, which ran thus:

**‘To the memory of the British Empire in India,**

**Which conferred subjecthood upon us,**

**But withheld citizenship.**

**To which yet every one of us threw out the challenge:**

*Civis Britannicus sum*

**Because all that was good and living within us**

**Was made, shaped and quickened**

**By the same British rule.’**

2. One of the major ideas in Chaudhuri's writings, especially in *A Passage to England* is to emphasize the contrast between India and England. He appears caught – caught between a native culture in which he has been steeped but now dislikes and a foreign culture which appears to him formidable and a panacea for all human ills.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. Chaudhuri divides *A Passage to England* into four sections, ‘The English Scene,’ ‘The English People,’ ‘Cultural Life’ and ‘State of the Nation.’

2. Chaudhuri, throughout *A Passage to England* always writes within a framework of personal certainties born out of his rooting in Indian culture and western thought systems. His brand of Hinduism may not be orthodox, his suspicion of social radicalism is scarcely fashionable, and he has at times a veneration for European excellence that, if not carefully weighed against his sense of the folly and failure of their empires, can at the least embarrass one with its affection and at its worst seem monstrous in its assertion of a distinctive Aryan purity.

### Check Your Progress-3

1. For the colonized Indians the English literary text functioned as a 'surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state'. The social insularity of the Britishers in India also ensured that educated Indians could never see Englishmen for who they actually were and derived their ideas about England and the English from texts rather than from direct interaction with the colonizers. In effect, not only did this create idealized images of England and the English, it also led to the discounting of the behaviour of the English in India as an aberrant version of 'true' Englishness. The 'brown Englishmen' identified so closely with that 'true' Englishness derived from texts that they felt more English than the English, and confident of teaching the English how to be English.
2. Rudyard Kipling finds an ally in Chaudhuri who agrees that the 'East and West shall never meet' but then he qualifies this to apply only to the 'average' westerner and easterner. By this qualification Chaudhuri escapes his own formula since he is obviously not the 'average' Indian - in fact, as he stresses in his Autobiography, his personal development has been in no way typical of an Indian and, 'it is certainly exceptional, and may even be unique'. And so in him, the whole book tries to show, 'the twain can meet'. What Chaudhuri seems to be doing, in his extreme Anglophilia is getting out of this meeting of the east and west not into his native identity of the east but towards the coloniser's identity of the west.

### Check Your Progress-4

1. The problem of ambivalence is closely linked with 'hybridity'. 'Hybridity' is a term borrowed from botany where it means crossbreeding of two species by processes such as grafting, in order to form a third species. Bhabha uses this idea to explain the formation of a 'Third Space' between the colonizer and the colonized. Hybridization entails the fusion of certain elements on both sides of the colonial divide. A colonial hybrid reasserts the supremacy of the colonizer while

encouraging, on the other hand, the insurgency of the colonized. It is best exemplified by a personality like Chaudhuri who supported British colonialism but also lent occasional support to the Indian resistance. Hybridized personalities like Chaudhuri were both supplants and threats rolled into one.

2. Chaudhuri was influenced by Marxism but did not agree completely with the ideas of Karl Marx. Predictably, Chaudhuri says, 'The man who described religion as the opium of the people never tried to define what kind of dope political and economic dogmas were, because he was interested in the popularization of a particular drug of his own.'





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**BLOCK-D:  
HISTORY OF INDIAN ENGLISH  
LITERATURE**

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## UNIT - 1

### IYENGER: *INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH*

#### Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar: A Brief Biography
- 1.3 Indo-Anglian Literature
  - 1.3.1 Indians Writing in English
- 1.4 The Beginnings: Rammohan Roy and the Renaissance in India
- 1.5 Toru Dutt and Romesh Chander
- 1.6 Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo
- 1.7 Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Key Words
- 1.10 Terminal Questions
- 1.11 Suggested Readings
- 1.12 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

#### 1.0 Objectives

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

- Examine why K.R.S. Iyengar uses the term Indo-Anglian rather than Anglo-Indian to describe Indian writing in English
- Discuss what Iyengar has to say about the writings of Rammohan Roy, Tagore, Aurobindo, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan
- Explain the arguments Iyengar makes to justify Indians writing in English

#### 1.1 Introduction

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K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* is a political work that is not always conscious of its politics. Published in 1958 when the relevance of works produced in English by Indians was being seriously questioned, the book makes a powerful and fairly informed case about the relevance of such works, the need to continue them and the fact that it should not be seen as a vestige of the British culture or a competitor to Hindi or even the smaller regional languages. As Iyengar writes:

'England and India had come together, or had been accidentally thrown together; and out of their intimacy – whether legitimate or illegitimate- had come this singular offspring that is Anglo-Indian literature!'

Iyengar acknowledges the fact that a process of cultural mixing has happened in the past which has made Indians write in English and Englishmen write on India. While he is not really concerned about the latter category, popularly called Anglo-Indian literature, he is concerned about carving out a new name and category for Indians writing in English, that is, Indo-Anglian literature, and differentiating that category from Anglo-Indian literature. His research involving collecting and sieving literature written in English by Indians was later acknowledged globally as fruitful and the book discussed in this unit was once and, in certain senses, remains an authoritative sourcebook for Indian writings in English under British occupation.

Since most of the book is a collection of fairly lucid survey or analyses of the different genres in which different Indians produced English literature, the unit refrains from discussing each chapter individually. Instead it discusses some of the key critical issues that have been involved in the conceptualization and execution of the book. These analyses should help you understand why and how the book was created in the first place and the way Iyengar approaches the vast corpus of English writing by Indians just after India's independence.

This unit should be read concurrently with the subsequent unit on M.K. Naik, as both of them are engaged in broadly similar projects. The unit by Gauri Vishwanathan should provide you with a critical perspective on the writings that have been collected and discussed in these two units.

## **1.2 K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar: A Brief Biography**

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Kodaganallur Ramaswami Srinivasa Iyengar, popularly known as K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar was a well-known scholar-critic who is undoubtedly one of the greatest among the pioneers of Indian-English studies. He was born on 17 April, 1908 and went on to take his D. Litt from Madras. He joined the Department of English, Andhra University, which was started in 1947. In 1966, Prof. Iyengar became the Vice-chancellor of Andhra University and remained in that position until November 29, 1968.

He delivered lectures in Indian Writing in English at the University of Leeds in 1958 that later formed the basis of the famous book, *Indian Writing in English* that is prescribed in the syllabus. In October 1972, Iyengar gave a series of six lectures on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. He was given the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Fellowship in 1985.

He rose to positions of distinction and honour — Vice-President and later Acting President of Sahitya Akademi, and Adhishtata of Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Delhi. Moreover, the Modern Languages Association of America (M.L.A) conferred on Dr. Iyengar an honorary membership, and more

recently, he was also awarded the prestigious B.C. Roy Award for eminence in literature.

Among Dr. Iyengar's important publications are *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History* and *On the Mother*. No less has been his contribution to studies relating to British and Commonwealth Literatures. Here, one should particularly mention the books, *Shakespeare: His World and His Art*, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, *Francois Mauriac*, *The Adventure of Criticism*, and *Two Cheers for the Commonwealth*.

In his latter years, Dr. Iyengar turned to creative writing and published a number of poems including *Sitayana*, which may be considered his magnum opus. *Sitayana* is a timely sequel to his earlier work, *The Epic Beautiful: a Verse Rendering of the Sundara Kanda of Valmiki Ramayana* (1983). *Sitayana, Epic of the Earth Born* is a re-telling in verse of the Ramayana as 'quintessentially Sita's story', for the work shifts its center from Rama to Sita. The shift has not been arbitrary or prompted by a desire for novelty, but the result of the conviction that in India, the 'godhead has always been identified with the Eternal Feminine' and that, it is time to make a 'conscious return to ancient verities'. It should be said that *Sitayana* with all its other merits, makes a bid to take Indian English poetry to the Aurobindonian tradition in which poetry was 'dhyamantra', a prayer and a fulfilment of one's spiritual needs. To this extent, it may be personal, but the spiritual ecstasy offered by it is something which everyone can share.

### 1.3 Indo-Anglian Literature

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Iyengar refers to Indians writing in English as Indo-Anglian rather than the conventional Anglo-Indian and defends the new term on these grounds:

'I prefer the term "Indo-Anglian" to "Anglo-Indian" or "Indo-English". The late Principal P. Seshadri included, not only Sir Edwin Arnold and Trego Webb, but also Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, in his brief survey of "Anglo-Indian Poetry"; and Mr. George Sampson, in his *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, gives a section to "Anglo-Indian Literature" and refers in it, among others, to Tagore, Manmohan Ghose and Sri Aurobindo. But I thought it desirable to distinguish between Englishmen who write on Indian themes and Indians who use English as the medium of artistic expression; and I saw no harm in applying the already current terms "Anglo-Indian" and "Indo-Anglian" to these two categories of writers.'

Iyengar's focus in the book is clearly on Indians rather than on the literature produced in or on India. That is why he changes his label from Anglo-Indian to Indo-Anglian and keeps Britishers from India or abroad writing on India out of the book. Iyengar does not claim that the term Indo-Anglian is of his coinage. He states:

'It is sometimes said that I concocted this expression, and I have accordingly been chastised for it. Actually, it was used as early as 1883 to describe a volume printed in Calcutta containing 'Specimen Compositions from Native Students'. It was later freely used (among others, by myself also) in the twenties and thirties in reviews and articles. I merely gave general currency to the name when, in 1943, I adopted it as the title of my first book on the subject, the handbook (already referred to) written for the P.E.N. All-India Centre.'

Iyengar's point is to primarily distinguish rather than to provide an accurate label. His political point lies in the need to distinguish an Indian writing in English from an Englishman writing in English, irrespective of the topic on which they are writing, but especially when it comes to writing on India. The advantage with Indo-Anglian, he writes, is that it can be used both as an adjective and as a noun. Indo-Anglian is reasonably handy and descriptive, he feels and serves our purpose well enough.

According to Iyengar there is a clear need to distinguish the terms Indo-Anglian and Anglo-Indian:

'The Englishmen who once spent long years in India and attempted creative expression through English, in other words, men like Sir William Jones, John Leyden, Sir Edwin Arnold, Meadows Taylor, F.W. Bain – were a class apart; we shall not see their like again and there should be no harm in continuing to describe them as Anglo-Indian writers. But the work of a Kipling or a Forster belongs properly to English literature, even as Pearl Buck and Louis Bromfield, even when they choose to write about India, should be classed only as American writers.

How, then, about Indians writing in English? How shall we describe Indian creative writing in English? Of course, it is Indian literature, even as the work of Thoreau or a Hemingway is American literature. But Indian literature comprises several literatures – Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Panjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, not to mention Sanskrit, for people continue to write in it through the readers are few and far between- and Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks.'

So what really is the difference between Indo-Anglian and Anglo-Indian literature? He argues for the simultaneous recognition of Indo-Anglian and English literature as related but independent streams of writing. He states:

'It is no less legitimate to look upon Indo-Anglian literature merely as a minor tributary of English literature. Does it take its riches (such as they are) to the main stream, or does it rather- like a canal- draw its continuing inspiration from the parent river? It is a nice question, and there is something to be said for both points of view. Indian writing in English (not in English alone, but *all* Indian writing) is greatly influenced by writing in England, and we have

had our own 'Romantics', 'Victorians', 'Georgians', and 'modernists'. But in its own way Indo-Anglian literature too has contributed to the common pool of world writing in English – the major partners in the Enterprise no doubt being British literature and American literature. In an article entitled 'England is Aboard', a writer in the Times Literary Supplement of 18 April 1958 pointed out that "the centre of gravity" of English literature has shifted, and "while we are busy consolidating, a brand new English literature will be appearing in Johannesburg, or Sydney or Vancouver or Madras.'

To point to the possibility of creating good Indo-Anglian literature as real, Iyengar cites Sri Aurobindo.

'It is not true in all cases that one can't write first class things in a learned language. Both in French and English people to whom the language was not native have done remarkable work, although that is rare. What about Jawaharlal's autobiography? Many English critics think it first-class in its own kind; of course he was educated in an English public school, but I suppose he was not born to that language. Some of Toru Dutt's poem's Sarojini's, Harin's have been highly placed by good English critics, and I don't think we need to be more queasy than Englishmen themselves...If first-class excludes everything inferior to Shakespeare and Milton, that is another matter. I think, as time goes on, people will become more and more polygot and these mental barriers will begin to disappear.'

### 1.3.1 Indians Writing in English

The question whether Indians should or should not write in English is one of the most fundamental political issues behind Iyengar's book. While realizing the complexities of such an endeavour by Indians, Iyengar endorses it fully. That is the reason why he undertakes the task of collecting Indian writers under the new term Indo-Anglian and starts building a new corpus of names in which the Indian origin of the authors is as prominent as the writing or literature component. Here are some extensive paraphrases of the arguments that Iyengar makes elsewhere.

According to Iyengar, in one sense anything written in English by an Indian must to some extent be artificial, as artificial as it is for a westerner writing in his own language about an Indian subject to give adequate expression to the real glamour of the East. But it is not impossible for an Indian writer to largely conquer the difficulties of writing in an alien tongue and the advantages of doing so are significant. An Indian writing in English certainly opens the doors of cultural contact between his own country and those two hundred millions, and such contact is highly necessary if India is not to remain in splendid isolation from that higher culture and scholarship which knows no geographical bounds in the midst of a civilized world.

For nearly one hundred years Indians have tried to achieve self-expression through the medium of English and they have again and again,



triumphed over its seeming intractability and produced poems, novels, essays, learned treatises, memoirs and monographs hardly distinguishable from similar productions of authentic English writers. In Professor E. E. Speight's words, the many Indians men and women who have written in English stand 'as symbols of a power of adaptation which is so much more astonishing because it comes from a people who in other ways are so conservative'.

Iyengar states that there is no need either to be very proud of our achievements in the domain of Indo-Anglian literature or to be foolishly ashamed of them. That Indians were obliged to study English was an unpleasant necessity; and Indians, let it be it said to their credit, have made a virtue of that necessity. If the study of English has weakened our love for our respective mother tongues, the fault, is not with English but in ourselves. English occupied and still occupies a dominant position in the curriculum, not because it is the language of our rulers, but because it has successfully functioned as a link between the different linguistic areas in India and between India and the rest of the civilized world. Iyengar answers the question about where Indo-Anglian literature came from in yet another way?

'It is legitimate to view Indo-Anglian literature as a curious native eruption, an expression of the practical no less than creative genius of the Indian people. Indians have written- and are writing- in English for communicating with one another and with the outside world, for achieving self-expression too artistically, using English, if necessary, or necessarily, in an Indian way. While trying to assess the value of Indo-Anglian poetry in the course of my book, *The Indian Contribution to English Literature*, I happened to remark: "The best Indo-Anglian poets have given us something which neither English poetry nor any of our regional literatures can give; in other words, they have effected a true marriage of Indian processes of poetic experience with English formulae of verse expression.'

On the other hand, our vernacular literatures have themselves greatly benefited by their living contact with English literature and this cross-fertilization has helped to usher in a new Indian renaissance. One is not a slave simply because one likes a foreign language in addition to one's own; and one may be adept in Tamil or Hindi and yet be a slave of slaves. We can easily make and we often do make a fetish of our sentimental objection to the English language and literature. As Dr. M. R. Jayakar once pointed out:

'It will be a mistake to allow your political dislike of British rule to come in the way of your studying English literature with appreciation and good will. You will never make any progress, if your attitude is one of hatred, contempt or abhorrence for the culture of the people whose literature you are studying. You have to get over your political dislikes, if any, and concentrate your mind upon the beauty of the literature you read. When in the field of literature you are not a politician and have no political or social antipathies'.

English should not compete with or displace one's mother tongue. Writers desirous should by all means cultivate their own mother tongues, enrich their own indigenous literatures, and make the rest of the world respect them and ever get intimately acquainted with them; but there is no sense in putting the clock back and banishing the English language from our midst. Thanks to the colonial process, English has struck roots that are too deep to be simply removed and any attempt to do so can only result in wastage of time effort and precious resources.

Iyengar continues that our mother tongue should become the medium of instruction even at the university stages: and when this desire is realized, as it must be sooner or later, English will automatically cease to have the importance it enjoys to-day. But it must continue to have an important place in the curriculum. In the words of Professor Atnaranatha Jha, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Allahabad:

'English should continue to be a second language. It is the international language now. It has been and can continue to be the source of delight and inspiration. It enables us to live close to some great minds. There need be no antagonism between English and our own languages. We shall develop our literatures, but we shall continue to get all the help we can to set back the frontiers of darkness, to listen and speak so that humanity may go on re-creating itself.'

Iyengar also discusses the attack on the Indo-Anglians from the enthusiastic defenders of the Hindi language and insists that Hindi cannot function as the link and common language between the culturally diverse Indians themselves as well as between India and the global community. A powerful voice to speak on this issue cited by Iyengar is C Rajgopalachari:

"I am convinced that the attempt to replace English by Hindi at the Union level, be it now or on a future date, will once again bring into being a disintegrated India. Whatever unification has been brought about as a result of history will be disrupted.....With English will go all the all-India feeling we have now got. Nuts, walls, and countries easily crack where there is a natural or innate breaking demarcation. I utter this grave warning. It is the warning of one who loves India and loves unity....."

He warned us that the bird in hand, English, is better than the synthetic bird, Hindi, proposed to be manufactured in the future, And after chasing away what he has called the many *Mayas*, or illusions with regard to the official language, he ends with this magnificent peroration:

Let English continue.

*The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.*

So the Psalmist sang: The builders had rejected it as being of curious shape, not rectangle and none of its sides square or oblong. But it became the keystone of the arch and its strange shape was its merit. Not some one of our own languages, but this strange one will keep the arch firm and all the languages together. It is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes!

Iyengar now moves on to the next argument commonly made against Indians writing in English, and instead of refuting, it tries to show the complexities of the case and how with a little redefinition of standards the argument loses its ground. Some critics, according to Iyengar, condemn the Indo-Anglians because they are supposed to be symbols of our slavery, others point out that most of the productions of the Indo-Anglians are poor in quality, and from this, jump to the conclusion that Indians should not attempt self-expression in English.

According to Iyengar, so long as human nature is what it is, second-rate and third-rate and nth rate writers, there must be in England and in America, and not only in India. Hundreds of writers are mentioned in the bibliographies of English literature, and yet how many of them are really read to-day? How many of the "masterpieces" announced today in the literary journals are likely to escape oblivion a decade hence?

Moreover, it is wrong to assume that an Indian who writes bad English verse is sure somehow to write first-rate Tamil or Bengali or Kannada poetry. True poetry springs from within; and if only darkness or chaos or mere chafing habits the writer's mind and soul, he can no more achieve glorious self-expression in his mother tongue than in an alien language. Other things remaining the same, one's own mother tongue should come more naturally to one than an alien language like English; and, as a matter of fact, in the future, as in the past, most Indians will write only in their own mother tongues. But some will still woo English, fully aware of the perils confronting their paths; it is not for us to condemn them purely on a priori grounds. Nothing succeeds like success and nothing fails like failure: this paramount law will regulate the literary activities of Indo-Anglians as well as those of other classes of Indian men of letters.

Another criticism often advanced against the Indo-Anglians is that their English is not pure enough. It is no doubt inevitable that vernacularisms should creep into the language of the Indo-Anglians. An Indo-Anglian may never be quite able to achieve perfect mastery in English idiom; in other words, Indo-Anglian English may never be wholly indistinguishable from King's English. But, then, why should it be? For one thing, Mr. Bernard Shaw says that there is no such thing as 'correct English'; for another, the Report of the Sadler Commission on the Calcutta University rightly points out:

‘We do not mean that the English of the Indian would necessarily be indistinguishable from that of the English-born citizen. But it would be by special qualities and characteristics that it would be distinguished, not by incongruities and faults.’

Professor Amaranatha Jha is also in agreement with the above and is not frightened, as are more timid professors and pundits, by the term ‘Indian English’; on the contrary, he declares boldly, ‘A little courage, some determination, a wholesome respect for our own idioms, and we shall before long have a virile, vigorous Indian English’. Be that as it may, it is strange that not English critics and scholars, but it is the Indo-Anglian purists and professors who are themselves inhabiting very vulnerable glass-houses that throw these stones at the Indo-Anglian practitioners of prose and verse! Notice how prophetically true Prof. Jha was. Writing in the 40s and the 50s, he anticipates something that would become a reality only in the 80s and the 90s as linguists documented the variety of legitimate forms in which English existed around them and the need to do away with the category of a standard English and substitute it with British English. The Oxford English dictionary had been borrowing words from different languages. It now started borrowing even more and expanding the domain of acceptable and standard English.

Therefore the advice that he gives to practicing Indo-Anglians is one of continued efforts to refine their craft, to the Indian critic to respect the phenomenon of Indo-Anglian literature, to the English creative writer and critic not to judge Anglo-Indian writing by English standards but patiently work towards defining the yardstick that could justly judge the writing. Iyengar says:

‘I would tell the Indian writer in English: Believe in what you do. They also serve who by deliberate choice follow the more difficult path. It is in a way easier to make a mark in one’s own language, and in the present fluid state the most of our modern Indian languages, the creative writer has great opportunities for striking out new paths and receiving quick rewards. It is even possible to be agreeably and fruitfully bilingual—as many have been, and many still are, But creative writing—whether in one’s own or in an adopted language—calls for a truly dedicated spirit. Easy writing can only mean an essay in futility. Airy incompetence and defiant hurry can give us only sapless chaff and shapeless verbiage.

I would tell the Indian critic: Don’t question the very base of this phenomenon of Indo-Anglian literature. Reason not the need, as Lear might have put it; judge by results. Don’t let cheap nationalist sentiment colour or warp your critical appraisals. When Rammohan Roy and Ranade, Dadabhai and Phirozeshah, Surendranath and Bepin Pal, Sankaran Nair and S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Tilak and Gokhale, Malaviya and Motilal, C. R. Das and Aurobindo—when these and a hundred other nationalists and patriots of yesterday wrote or

reasoned in English, they were making Indian history, and they were creating a new literature. It is pointless now to dissociate one action from the other. English has become ours, it is not less ours for being primarily the Englishman's or the American's and Indo-Anglian literature too is our literature, the literature which, with all its limitations, still taught us to be a new nation and a new people.

To the creative writer in England I would say: Hold out your hand in friendship and fellow-feeling to the Indian writer in English. He has a mind and a soul not very different from yours, he has like you experienced agonies and joys, he has tasted boredom and banality; and if he falters in expression, if his stutter or overemphasis takes you aback, make allowances, and try to see with the eyes of understanding and affection. Writers like Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symonds, W. B. Yeats and E. M. Forster, Graham Greene and John Hampson have done this already, and there can be no limit to this extension of sympathy, to the enlargement of the area of friendship and mutual esteem. Perhaps, if not in one way in some other way, if not today at some other time, the Indo-Anglian writer would himself be able to make a token or even a full return of what he now receives. Let him not suffer cold neglect and die for want of air.

To the critic in England I would say: English is a world language. This status carries privileges as well as responsibilities, advantages as well as dangers. To seek to preserve a norm yet permit ample variety is to walk on the razor's edge, but it can be done. Angus Wilson doesn't write like William Faulkner, and it is no wonder Mulk Raj Anand writes differently from both Wilson and Faulkner. They are all trying to be articulate each in his own fashion. Even when, for all one's trying, one is not quite articulate, the phenomenon can be a case study of the limitations of language or of the capacity of the human mind under pressure to make an impact on us even in spite of imperfect articulation through language. In an American play, *The Male Animal* by James Thurber and Elliott Nugent, a Professor of English tries to illustrate points of style and effectiveness by quoting the last letter written by condemned Vanzetti. Badly written if Grammar is alone the consideration, yet how well the letter reveals the heart-beats of the writer, his mind's agitation, his soul's travail! In other words, don't too hastily condemn what is apparently strange, uncouth, extravagant or obscure. Give it first a dog's chance at least. This is all the more necessary because critical standards in India haven't yet acquired clear definition, and the right word at the right time from an English critic has helped to stabilize the literary career of more than one Indo-Anglian writer. Your fair-mindedness and generosity of understanding can go a long way in the future, as in the past, in giving deserving Indo-Anglians that nod of recognition and smile of encouragement that he will always need and always prize.'

### Check Your Progress-1

1. What is Iyengar's poem *Sitayana* about?
2. What is the most fundamental political issue behind Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English*?
3. According to Iyengar, what are the advantages for Indians to write in English?

## 1.4 The Beginnings: Rammohan Roy and the Renaissance in India

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The first two chapters of Iyengar's work take a quick survey of the period between British arrival on the Indian subcontinent and the first indigenous literary stirrings on the subcontinent in the form of Journals, Associations, articles and features. It also discusses the significance and contribution of one of the pioneers of Indian writing in English – Rammohan Roy.

The story begins amidst a deep British slumber:

'It is a strange story. The sixteenth century was truly the seed-time of British expansion. The Britisher, who had been more or less vegetating in a remote corner of the old world, suddenly awoke one morning, incredulously rubbed his eyes, and found himself at the very centre of a brave new world. America to the west and Africa and Asia to the east these vast, unexplored regions seductively beckoned him from afar. And the adventurous countrymen of Shakespeare and Marlowe, of Drake and Hawkins, of Sidney and Raleigh, crossed the Atlantic or rounded the Cape of Good Hope, and founded little colonies far and near and all the way....

The Britisher came to India when the Mughals were still firmly in the saddle. He hoped to trade and 'get rich quick' in India - he gained a footing in two or three places, he traded with the 'natives', and he prospered. One thing led to another; the Britisher was more and more in evidence, and not alone as trader; it was clear that he would not go back.

The Britisher remained in India to govern, and by the end of the eighteenth century the incredible transformation had been all but completed. An Anglo-Saxon people ruling over a vast sub-continent, peopled by Aryans, Dravidians, Semites, and who not - a curious concatenation. But it was true; the internecine feuds were over at last; the country was at peace, albeit under the dubious shadow of foreign rule; nevertheless it was peace. The Britisher could give his attention now to the arts of peace, to Education, for instance.'

This is the pre-history, if you will, of the Indian literary Renaissance in English. What the British turned to after their military and political consolidation was cultural indoctrination, in order to extend the consolidation

well into the future. English education and culture were the most obvious tools available, and they employed it with a flourishing skill and acumen.

Warren Hastings, founded and liberally endowed the Calcutta Madrassa in 1781 while in the previous year, James Augustus Hicky had founded at Calcutta, India's first newspaper, Hicky's *Bengal Gazette*. It was, however, the arrival of Sir William Jones that ushered in a new era in the education of India. Jones was not a blatant imperialist and loved the peoples of India and their sacred literature and looked upon himself as a servant, rather than as a ruler, of the people in whose midst he had been privileged to live, move and have his being. He founded the Bengal Asiatic Society; published vigorous renderings of *Sakuntala* and *Hitopadesa*; and addressed an astonishing series of odes to various Hindu gods. He wrote a long verse tale, *The Enchanted Fruit*, based on a Mahabharata episode.

The first stirrings of an Indian literary renaissance aided and abetted by the British was clearly in evidence. But there were challenges in bringing the message of the Renaissance to the unlettered masses. The humanists were one and all compelled to face this question: Was India to adopt a wholly westernized system of education with English as the medium of instruction, or was she merely to revive the study of Sanskrit and Persian and impart general education with the various mother tongues as the medium? Opinion was sharply divided and things drifted for two or three decades. While India was in this limbo, history took an interesting turn:

‘Of a sudden three factors now emerged and, acting as a solvent of the doubts and perplexities of the situation, they defined with unmistakable clarity the course of education in India for the next one hundred years and more. These were: (1) the new intellectualism and renescent ardour among the Indians, as symbolized in Raja Rammohan Roy; (2) the perseverance of the Christian missionaries; and, above all, (3) the persuasiveness and metallic clarity of Macaulay's English prose style.’

Rammohan Roy's writings can be understood as the product of the forces that had caused this turn as well as constituting this turn. Roy and his British educated friends had tasted the fruits of western literature and culture and were persuaded that India required a western type of education with English as the medium of instruction. With the help of two Englishmen, David Hare and Hyde East, Rammohan Roy brought into existence the Calcutta Hindu College, which later developed into the Presidency College.

The second factor which determined the course of education in India was the advent and activities of the Christian missionaries whose ultimate aim was proselytization, but who also did pioneering work of in the fields of education and social service. The Serampore College was founded in 1818 by Carey, Ward and Marshman, and it is to this day a flourishing institution. Other missionary schools and colleges were started all over

India. English was generally the medium of instruction in these missionary institutions, and western curricula and methods were more or less transported wholesale to make Christian liberal education possible to the natives of India.

The third factor was Macaulay's 'Minute' urging that it was necessary and possible 'to make natives of this country good English scholars and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.' Lord William Bentinck gave official imprimatur to Macaulay's policy by resolving that 'the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and that all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone.'

The intention was by no means to educate the masses through the medium of English. The government was to organize secondary and collegiate education with the available funds; and the young men who went out of these schools and colleges were expected either to enter Government service as clerks or to go back to their villages and confer the blessings of the new education on the masses. Thus, the new culture was to filter from the higher and intellectual classes down to the parched throats in India's seven lakhs villages. An admirable arrangement on paper, only, it refused to work. The average educated Indian refused to return to his village, and became rather an absurd copy of the European in India, imitating his dress, speaking his language, and thinking his thoughts; thus, the redeemed Indian was almost a total loss to the country.

What does all this have to do with Indo-Anglian literature? Well Roy's writings provide us with some of the earliest instances of Indo-Anglian writing; besides, it is in institutions like the Presidency College and the schools and colleges funded under Macaulay's Minutes that the future breed of Indo-Anglian writers was going to be produced.

'So, the first Indo-Anglians of over a century ago had no heart-searchings and patriotic self-questionings. (Western culture was a good thing. English Literature was a very good thing indeed! Christianity, too, had its good points. Renascent India should be free to borrow from the West; the regional literatures could gain a new lease of life only by sucking inspiration from English Literature; and Hinduism itself could re-assert its greatness by eschewing some of its obscurantisms and taking over from Christianity its best features.

What was wanted was action more than meditation; science more than the humanities; language as a fit medium of vigorous expression and not as a play-ground for grammatical gymnastics; education to fit one for citizenship and a profession and not to isolate one from one's countrymen; and, above all, a burning desire to effect a



fusion of the best in two seemingly alien civilizations, the Western and the Oriental, so that the "two minds shall flow together" and effect a nobler synthesis than had been achieved ever before!

Rammohan Roy and many others like him were possessed of this faith and they laboured in the strength of this conviction. Sometimes they wrote in their mother tongues to appeal to the masses; more often, or on more weighty occasions, they wrote or spoke in English, so that their words may carry their message to the length and breadth of India or even to the ears of the powers that be in far off Britain. Indians thus became Indo-Anglians out of necessity; but, be it said to their credit, they made a virtue of this necessity. So, the first specimens of Indo-Anglian writing emerged from a ferment which was not nationalist or political but rooted in a drive to progress and reform. Understandably, the first specimens of this writing are in prose. Here is an abridged account of Roy's literary efforts as described by Iyengar.

Rammohan Roy did much pioneering work in Bengali prose and founded the journal *Sambad Kttumudi*. He was also a master of effective English prose. In 1820 appeared his *Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*. Rammohan found Hindu society decadent; many Hindu customs and practices seemed to him abhorrent. Repelled by the accretions that Hinduism had gathered during the past, Rammohan had not the patience to discriminate nicely between the soul of Hinduism and its separable trappings. On the other hand, he responded readily (as other Hindus then and later have responded) to the message of Christ and found in it what he had been too impetuous to find in Hinduism.

As he read and re-read the Gospels, he felt that Christianity alone could revitalize Hinduism; he very much desired to "evolve a form of theism out of Hinduism by eliminating from it all questionable practices and principles; and he declared that he had found "the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and better adapted for the use of rational beings," than any other that had come to his knowledge.

Rammohan was largely responsible for the re-awakening in the Hindu fold which the country witnessed during the past two or three generations and giving it a positive humanistic and rational direction. This awakening has borne fruit, negatively in reforms like the abolition of sati, widow remarriage, the Sarda Act, and the gradual removal of the disabilities of the Harijans, as also positively in the emergence of Hindu leaders like Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Dayanand Saraswati and Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and Radhakrishnan.

Among Rammohan's other writings Iyengar mentions two brochures: *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance (1822)* and *Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue*

*Systems of India, and of the General Character and Condition of its Native Inhabitants* (1832). Besides, he published several other papers and pamphlets touching upon almost every aspect of national life.

Roy's intellectual pride and confidence met the Britisher on equal terms and compelled them to recognize the fact that even a 'native' could be pre-eminent morally and intellectually. He laid New India's foundations on the reigning ideals of liberty, humanity, equality and justice after first clearing the ground of much rubbish that had accumulated in the Hindu society through the ages.

### **1.5 Toru Dutt and Romesh Chander**

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After Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the next outstanding name in the story of Indo-Anglian writing, according to Iyengar, is Toru Dutt. Toru along with her sister Aru was a poetess of the first order, though Toru has left more finished works behind than her elder sister. Of both the sisters, Iyengar feels, the historian of Indo-Anglian literature can say, in the words of Marlowe:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight  
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough.

Both Aru and Toru were born in such a cultured family, their father and mother being intimately involved with Bengali, English and other European literatures. Such being the case, it was natural for Aru and Toru to indulge in literary exercises from a very early age. They spent about four years in France, England and Italy, in the course of which the sisters acquired a 'high degree of proficiency' in both French and English, completed their education and vigorously quickened their creative pulse. Returning to Bengal towards the close of 1873, the sisters plunged, in Mr. Edmund Gosse's words, into 'a feverish dream of intellectual effort and imaginative production'. Aru broke under the strain sooner than her sister; and Toru herself, after working at high imaginative pressure for three more years, gave up the battle at last and joined Aru and the 'choir invisible' in heaven.

Toru wrote for a short but intensive period leaving behind her a body of achievement to which it will be difficult to find a parallel in the history of English literature. A novel in French, a novel in English, many magazine articles and studies, and several scores of poems: these constitute her unbelievable achievement for -a girl of twenty-one, to whom French and English were alike totally alien languages. No wonder *The Saturday Review* categorically declared:

'Had George Sand or George Eliot died at the age of twenty-one, they would certainly not have left behind them any proof of application or of originality superior to those bequeathed to us by Toru Dutt'.

Her first published volume (and the only one published during her all too brief life), *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, contained nearly two hundred verse translations from the French poets, poets mainly of the Romantic school like Victor Hugo, Soulayr and de Gramont. People who are competent to judge them as translations have pointed out that they recapture the spirit of the originals with a subtle and sure mastery. Mr. Gosse went further and declared that 'if modern French literature were entirely lost, it might not be found impossible to reconstruct a great number of poems from this Indian version.'

Toru moved on from European languages to the native Hindi and Sanskrit texts. As Iyengar writes, Toru found:

'... her vocation as well as her voice in the tales and legends of India's heroes and heroines, of Savitri and Satyavan, of Sita and Lakshman, of Dhruva and Ekalavya (Buttoo), of Dasaratha and Sindhu, of Prahlada and his father Hiranyakasipu; she that could so accurately render the heart-beats of a French poet of the sixteenth century would now interpret the great creations of Sanskrit seers and poets. Toru was steadily at work on her new enterprise since her return to her parental "home in Calcutta. She completed some of the tales, but the projected cycle could not be completed; she herself was not to see the publication of her Ballads and Legends. It was her father who, five years after her death, arranged for the publication of Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan, with an appreciative memoir by Edmund Gosse. This slim volume brought together nine 'ballads' or 'legends' as also seven occasional sonnets and poems, including the justly famous *Our Casuarina Tree*.'

By the end of the nineteenth century, renascent Bengal was seething with literary activity of all kinds. The great Bankimchandra Chatterji was producing in rapid succession his extraordinary series of Bengali novels. Of him Sri Aurobindo justly wrote, 'Among the rishis of the later age we at last have realized that we must count the name of the man who gave us the reviving mantra which is creating a new India, the mantra of *Bande Mataram*'. Although Bankim Chandra did begin a novel in English, he did not complete it. This however, does not reduce his significance for the world of Indo-Anglian writing feels Iyengar.

'... his very presence on the literary scene was an inspiration to other Indian writers, and hence the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw a phenomenal increase in the number of English and vernacular publications. Not Bengal merely, but all India, seemed to have recovered from its stupor, and renascent India was well under way. Rightly therefore Mr. Priyaranjan Sen remarks that Bankimchandra 'awakened the country to the greater world outside, and linked the two together. The East and the West met in him.'

One of the writers to be decisively effected by his influence was Romesh Chunder Dutt. A brother of Sashichandra Dutt, Romesh Chunder

gained greater renown as an administrator and as a Bengali and English writer. Romesh Chunder Dutt went to Rammohan Roy-founded Calcutta Presidency College and later successfully competed for the Indian Civil Service examination in England. After attaining the rank of Divisional Commissioner in Bengal, Romesh Dutt retired before reaching the age of fifty and devoted himself, for a time, exclusively to literary work. He was returned to the Legislative Council at Calcutta and subsequently served as revenue minister and dewan of Baroda. Iyengar summarises the highlights of Romesh's literary career thus:

'His works include Bengali novels, English renderings of Ramayana and Mahabharata, and various other publications dealing with the economic condition of India in the nineteenth century. Lays of Ancient India (1894) showed Romesh Chunder's happy facility with English numbers; his fame as an Indo-Anglian poet must, however, rest on his classic renderings of Ramayana (1900) and Mahabharata (1898)'. They are the best introductions that we have in the English language to our two great national epics and they have therefore more than earned their right for inclusion in Dent's Everyman's Library of the World's Best Books.'

Iyengar goes on to explain what distinguishes and elevates Romesh Chunder Dutt's translations over other translations by Dutt's contemporaries. The real cause he feels is Dutt's awareness of the wisdom of resolved limitation:

'He has reduced the 24,000 couplets of the Ramayana and the over 200,000 couplets of the Mahabharata to about 4000 couplets of rhymed English verse in the Locksley Hall metre. He has accomplished this feat of condensation, not by actually summarizing the original epics, but by rendering only the comparatively more important portions (more important, that is, from the story point of view) and supplying the connecting links by means of concise prose narratives. "The advantage of this arrangement", says the translator, "is that, in the passages presented to the reader, it is the poet who speaks to him, not the translator. Though vast portions of the original are skipped over, those which are presented are the portions which narrate the main incidents of the epic, and they describe those incidents as told by the poet himself. . . .Not only are the incidents narrated in the same order as in the original, but they are told in the style of the poet as far as possible. Even: the similes! and metaphors and figures of speech are all or mostly adopted from the original; the translator has not ventured either to adopt his own distinct style of narration, or to improve on the style of the original with his own decorations." The episodes, the endless discussions on ethical, philosophical and political problems, the many obvious interpolations, all these have been omitted, although the Mahabharata retains, for a specimen, the episode of Savitri and Satyavan.'

The creative editing, translations and prose rendering of sections of the epic do not interfere with the spirit of their originals, have none of the looseness and prolixity that mar the modern renditions of these ancient epics.

But Dutt was wise in not only in avoiding a full-length translation of the original epics, he was no less wise in discovering in the Locksley HM metre an ideal equivalent to the original *anushtubhs*.

‘The seeming bareness, spareness, the utter simplicity, the insinuating cadence and magic of the *anushtubhs* of Valmiki and Vyasa, unique as they are and hence as inimitable as Homer's hexameters or Dante's *terza rima*, can hardly be wholly reproduced even by such a master-craftsman as Romesh Chunder. But, such as it is, Romesh Chunder has done his very best, and the feel of his verse reproduces many of the potent spells of the originals.’

## 1.6 Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo

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Rabindranath Tagore's active literary life spans sixty five years 1875 – 1941. During this period, Tagore rarely, if ever at all, allowed a year to pass without adding something fresh and vital to the heritage of Bengali literature, and to a lesser extent, of English literature.

Rabindranath was born in the rich and noble family of the Tagores on the 6th of May, 1861. His grandfather, Dwarkanath Tagore, had been a friend and co-worker of Raja Rammohan Roy; his father, Debendranath, the Maharshi, had been a pillar of the Brahma Samaj movement. Rabindranath was thus heir to great traditions. He lost his mother when he was quite a young boy; and his father was not often at home. Young Rabindranath, therefore, lived his own life and it was essentially a lonely life. He came in time to love loneliness, even to make a religion of it. ‘There are many paradoxes in the world and one of them is this, that wherever the landscape is immense, the sky unlimited, clouds intimately dense, feelings unfathomable that is to say, where infinity is manifest its fit companion is one solitary person.’

The many-sided achievements of Tagore almost take one's breath away. Lyrics, poetic plays, plays of ideas, social plays, novels, short stories, essays in criticism, philosophical essays, autobiographical fragments, letters, addresses, educational dissertations, these have uninterruptedly flowed from his pen. He was an actor, a musician, a painter, and sculptor and a public speaker of extraordinary power. He played a conspicuous part in the activities of Brahma Samaj and was a prominent figure during the 'Partition of Bengal' agitation. He made his Visva Bharati at Shantiniketan the rallying-centre of international culture; travelled the world over, raising India's stature in the process; and the figure of the aged poet, with the flowing beard and

immaculate white clothes, soon became the visible symbol of India's antiquity, her reserves of poetry and her living philosophy. Iyengar provides a brief resume of his creative output:

'There are about two hundred items in the bibliography of his Bengali writings. He wrote nearly two thousand songs. His plays are as numerous as they are varied. Even his English translations constitute a respectable bulk. Collections like *Gitanjali*, *The Gardener*, and *The Crescent Moon* were put into their English garb by Tagore himself. In plays like *Chitra*, Tagore altered the original in many places when he produced his English version. Notwithstanding all this ceaseless activity, his work is not unequal, in the sense Wordsworth's or Coleridge's work is unequal. Rabindranath's lyrical poetry seems to suffer, when taken in mass, from a sort of sameness, but not from flatness or grotesqueness.'

His first major work in English *Gitanjali* (1912) was published in England. W. B. Yeats's well known Introduction, in the course of which he claimed to have carried the 'manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to dose it lest some stranger should see how much it moved me.' *Gitanjali* took the English world by storm. In 1937, Rabindranath was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and Iyengar feels that this was a shot in the arm for Indo-Anglian literature:

'Although the honour was really won by Bengali literature, the Indo-Anglians, not unjustifiably perhaps, wished to share the great joy and pluck from it inspiration for creative work in the future. Thus the award was a major land-mark in the history of Indo-Anglian literature.'

One should, however, carefully guard against over-estimating the importance of the Nobel award. In Mr. Nagendranath Gupta's words, 'For Rabindranath the Nobel prize has served as an introduction to the west. Otherwise the Nobel Prize has been of no more use to him than his cast off knighthood.' However, this 'Introduction' to the West was no negligible matter. It put him—and through him, Indian literature on the map of world literature. Indians realized that at last the West was paying homage to the East.

Among his great long poems is *Sea Waves*, written to commemorate the wreck of a pilgrim ship carrying passengers to Puri in 1887. The moving poem reminds one of Gerard Manley Hopkins's *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. Even in translation, the surge and the roar, 'the burl of the fountains of air', the 'buck and the flood of the wave', are reproduced.

*The Child*, written originally in English by Tagore is an impressionistic description; of men and women of all kinds to the hypothetical shrine of fulfilment. Men from the valley of the Nile, the banks of the Ganges, from Tibet and the 'dense dark tangle of savage wildernesses', all gather in one

place and start on their journey; the trials are unendurable to everyone except the Man of Faith; he is denounced by his erstwhile followers as a false prophet. None the less they reach the Journey's End; the child is discovered.

Iyengar is ecstatic in evaluating Tagore's other creations:

'And of Rabindranath's *Farewell to Heaven*, *Urvashi*, *Ahalya*, *The Stream of Being* and *The Taj Mahal*, which are among the most sustained flights of his muse, it is difficult to speak with moderation. They seem to be perfect of their kind, implicating universes of thought and feeling; they seem to be rough approximations to the traditional "music of the spheres" so inwrought are they" in forms that luxuriate into arabesque, in colours that shimmer into iridescence, in speech that kindles into imagery." And the crowning wonder of all seems to be *Urvashi*, a bursting scream of adoration at the sight of Ideal Beauty, the enchantress of Life and Love.'

As a novelist, Tagore's fame rests on *Gora*, *The Wreck*, and *The Home and the World*. *The Wreck* is an immature work, although it is interesting enough; Ramesh is a Bengali edition of Oblomov, but is scarcely convincing. And the story is full of improbabilities and coincidences that leave a distaste in the end. *The Home and the World* was greeted indifferently on account of its political implications. *Gora*, however, was a favourite from the beginning with Tagore's admirers.

As a short-story writer, Tagore has some notable triumphs to his credit. *Hungry Stones*, *Mashi*, and similar collections bespeak the range of his art. These are not stories really, but are analogous to prose lyrics in fiction. The emotional background is the main thing; the plot spins itself out effortlessly, inevitably almost. Tagore plumbs the depths of the human heart, and he has an understanding of women, their superficial wiles and their reserves of devotion and sacrifice.

Tagore's plays include *Chitra and Sacrifice*, *King and Queen* and *Post Office* proved very popular in English.

'Tagore had been writing plays during almost every period of his enormous career. Their range is therefore very wide; some are social studies reminding one of the plays of Henrik Ibsen; some are tragedies that take our minds back to the great Elizabethans; some are soaked in symbolism, recalling Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melismde* or Hauptmann's *Hannele*; there are others still, seemingly fragile and slight, that shift the action to the theatre of the soul.'

Rabindranath Tagore is a dynamic and versatile author, therefore, he has meant different things to different people. As Iyengar points out:

'Some are mainly attracted by *Sadhana* and *The Religion of Man*; some make a habit of frequently dipping into *Thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore*, culled and edited by C. F. Andrews; some read his books on *Nationalism and Personality*, his letters and his

addresses; some like his poems short, others regret he has written no poem of epic magnitude; some read the short story, *The Cabulliwallah*, again and again with tears in their eyes; some speculate on his philosophy and discourse on his symbolism.'

Tagore sought beauty and happiness through beauty. He sought beauty in children, found it, and exhibited it in books like *The Crescent Moon*. He sought beauty in boys and girls, found in them the beauty of the gradual unfolding of the human personality; he knew that as a teacher, and only as a teacher, he could come in daily and intimate contact with boys and girls, and hence arose the multifoliate edifice at Shantiniketan. He sought beauty, again, in Man in relation to other men and in relation to Nature; Love and Friendship and Natural piety.

Tagore's works stand out because he saw man as a situated being in relation to a number of constitutive and symbiotic forces. He saw man in relation to tradition, in relation to the Universe, and to God, sought the beauty of Holiness, and found it too! Tagore's life was thus one long endeavour to reach Beauty to scale one by one its heights and so, even so, to realize happiness here and now. He sought it and found it; he presently lost it, resought beauty once again, and found it once more. When the emotional adventure was in full swing, he wrote poetry, he sang his piercing songs; when the adventure was over for the time being and reflection set in, he wrote his philosophical essays and treatises. It was the same Tagore of course who wrote all his works; the emphasis varied, that was all.

### **Aurobindo Ghose**

Sri Aurobindo was a professor at Baroda, and subsequently a journalist and politician in Calcutta. Since his retirement to Pondicherry, he has in real truth become a Pilgrim of Eternity, and the Aurobindo Ashram has become one of the hallowed spots in the world. The Auroville that he founded in Pondicherry is a remarkable experiment in forming a living spiritual community.

As one of the editors of *Arya*, the philosophical review that had a short but glorious existence, Sri Aurobindo wrote serially in its columns various sequences of articles, *The Life Divine*, *Essays on the Gita*, *A Defence of Indian Culture*, *The Story of the Veda*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Psychology of Social Development*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and *The Future Poetry*. The two former sequences have been now issued in book form and constitute a monumental contribution to modern thought. Other prose publications include *Views and Reviews*, *Heraditus*, *Basics of Yoga*, *The Mother*, *Kalidasa*, *The National Value of Art*, *the Renaissance in India*, *Ideal and Progress*, *A System of National Education* and *The Riddle of this World*. Some of these are but reprints of old articles, others are collections of letters to various correspondents.



Sri Aurobindo has all along been an English poet of remarkable power and range. Two volumes of his *Collected Poems and Plays* were published to commemorate his seventy-first birthday: but the editor of the work, Mr. Nolini Kanta Gupta, stated that 'the work presented here is only a small portion of what he has actually written, the bulk of which has not yet seen the light of day. However, even the published seven hundred pages of the *Collected Poems and Plays* embody a reality of poetic infatuation and achievement which compels recognition at once. Unlike Tagore, who wrote most of his works originally in Bengali and only later translated them into English, Sri Aurobindo has all along expressed himself in English and English alone'. This circumstance, feels Iyengar gives him the right to call him the most outstanding of the Indo- Anglians.

Iyengar goes on further to discuss Aurobindo's understanding and composition of metrical verses.

His scholarly and thought- provoking 40-page essay on Quantitative Metre is a valuable addition to the comparatively meagre literature on the subject in English. In many of his more recent poems, Sri Aurobindo has tried, not unsuccessfully, to give some of the classical meters, including the fatally alluring hexameter, an English habitation and name.

However, Sri Aurobindo, authentic poet and thinker that he is, knows that poetry is not metre merely but only uses it as its fit vehicle for articulation. As he once wrote to one of his correspondents, "Poetry, if it deserves the name at all, comes always from some subtle plane through the creative vital and uses the outer mind and other external instruments for transmission only." If the inspiration is not urgent enough, or if the metrical craftsmanship is not consummate enough, we have either verse that is pleasing and faultless or poetry that just misses its name and vocation. The breeze of inspiration bloweth where and when it listeth and cannot therefore be summoned to order. Meanwhile, the poet can but wait for the unpredictable moment when inspiration will enkindle his verses into the unfading incandescence of poetry.

Sri Aurobindo held even in the 50s and 60s the rather theoretically informed contemporary view that a translation need not be a copy of the original in another language. As he wrote to Mr. Dilip Kumar Roy, 'a translator is not necessarily bound to the original he chooses; he can make his own poem out of it, if he likes, and that is what is generally done.' Literal translations may have their own dubious value as cribs for students over whom hangs the spectre of an imminent examination; but translations like Chapman's *Homer* and Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam* are poems in their own right and implicitly honour their great originals. This is what Sri Aurobindo has tried to do in his many free renderings from the original Greek, Bengali and Sanskrit literatures. Indeed, some of these so-called translations are so

good and so feast the ear and chasten the mind that they are more like transfigurations in terms of colour, sound and in-wrought imagery.

To the pre-Pondicherry period also belong the longer narrative poems, *Urvasie*, *Love and Death*, and *Baji Prabhou*, not to mention *Vidula*, a free poetic paraphrase of four chapters from the Udyog-parva of the *Mahabharata*. *Baji Prabhou* is a tale of Maratha chivalry, and is told with becoming vigour and dignity. *Urvasie* is a metrical romance in four cantos; in it the story of Pururavas and Urvasie familiar to all those who have read Kalidasa's play is narrated, in flexible blank verse, with a strange new beauty and charm. This long poem of about 1500 lines is interspersed with many admirable passages that evoke colour and sound with a sure artistry.

In one of his illuminating series of articles *On The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo declared, 'To embellish life with beauty is 'only the most outward function of art and poetry; to make life more intimately beautiful and adorable and great and full of meaning is its higher office; but its highest comes when the poet becomes the seer and reveals to man his eternal self and the godheads of its manifestation'. He also pointed out that the poets of the future would probably try to make poetic utterance approximate to the mantra.

Sri Aurobindo's later phase spent at his Ashram at Pondicherry continued his poetic outburst. Iyengar catalogues the later poems thus:

'In ... *Ahana*, *Shiva*, *The Bird of Fire*, *Jivanmukta*, *Trance of Waiting* and the rest, Sri Aurobindo, having safely come to port after going through the singular perturbations of life, has tried in the full plenitude of his vision to reveal to man 'his eternal self and the godheads of its manifestation.' The ecstasy that he would now translate into words is truly ineffable and unwordable and could only be suggested through symbolism and the downright triumph of style of an apparently effortless fusion of the dynamics of movement and the magic of sound that gives one the sense "of a rhythm which does not begin or end with the line, but has for ever been sounding in the eternal planes and began even in Time ages ago and which returns into the infinite to go sounding on for ages after.'

Sri Aurobindo's prose writings are varied and so varied in subject-matter and so colossal in bulk that it gives us the right to call him one of the supreme masters of modern English prose. *The Life Divine*, a great work of over sixteen hundred pages, when superficially considered is abstruse, bristling with technical terms and recondite differentiations. On a deeper level, however, it is a masterpiece of argumentative rhetoric and metaphysical insights. Iyengar feels that the discussions contained in it give abundant proof of a virile mental forge at work; no mere logician developed a thesis or elaborated an argument better than Sri Aurobindo does. For the student

of English literature, however, *The Life Divine* is a vast Himalayan treatise, a prose symphony, whose strains are as rich and individual as those of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*, two volumes of about one thousand pages in all, is both a philosophical commentary and a masterpiece of rhetorical prose. In intention the book is exegetical; Sri Aurobindo paraphrases the Gita verse by verse; he sifts, arranges, illustrates and expands Lord Krishna's uttered and unuttered thoughts. Seemingly repetitive, the verses are revealed in the end to be somehow endowed with a marvellous compactness and unity of its own.

Sri Aurobindo's other major prose works *The Future Poetry*, *The Psychology of Social Development*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *A Defence of Indian Culture*, and *The Secret of the Veda* are unfortunately not easily accessible; since their publication in the *Arya* between 1914 and 1921, they have not been republished in book form. But they too display the same powers of closeness of reasoning, spiritual illumination and imaginative richness and luminosity of style, that we have come to associate with Sri Aurobindo's most characteristic prose writings,

Before concluding this section one ought to refer to the great little book for which Sri Aurobindo is remembered. This is how Iyengar describes this work:

*'The Mother* reveals Sri Aurobindo's verbal suppleness at its best. In particular, the sixth section that evokes with intuitive certainty and imaginative precision the manifold "powers" and "personalities" of the Mother is surely among the very finest of his achievements as a literary artist. As one reads his description of Maheshwari or Mahakali, Mahalakshmi or Mahasaraswati, one wonders whether it is all a recording of demonstrable fact or only the subtle elaboration of a poet's fancy; in any case, one knows that these are passages that a Sir Thomas Browne or a Landor or a Walter Pater might have felt proud to have written.'

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. What do the first two chapters of Iyengar's work discuss?
2. What is the key influence seen in Rammohan Roy's idea of education?
3. Name a few novels written by Rabindranath Tagore. What kind of response did these receive from the readers?
4. What is Aurobindio Ghose's work, *The Life Divine* about?

## 1.7 Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan

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The First World War interestingly churned the Indian creative sensibilities in ways that proved productive for Anglo-Indian literature in a new way. However, before we proceed further it is important to distinguish how we intend to treat the War. Did it function as a milepost around which some significant literary developments on the Indian scene were organized? Or was the war a consequence of and led to events and forces that created the churning.

Whatever be the case, the fact remains that soon after the Great War of 1914-18, several Indian writers started attempting fiction in English. Tagore's *Short Stories* had come out in their English garb in 1915, to be soon followed by *Hungry Alone and Other Stories* (1916), *Mashi and Other Stories* (1918), *The Home and the World* (1919), *The Wreck* (1921), *Gora* (1923) and *Broken Ties and Other Stories* (1925).

Already immensely popular in Bengal, these stories and novels now acquired an international currency. We have already said that Tagore's success on the global horizon encouraged many Indian writers to experiment and perform through the novel and the short story. But Tagore's success could not have provided this trigger in a contextual vacuum. The creative churning was definitely on and the war of Tagore only provided the proverbial last push.

At the turn of the century, India had already been under many years of an alienated and alienating foreign rule. Political and social reaction against this rule had been building for about half a century now but it would take a few more years for Gandhi to arrive on the scene and radicalize the political scenario. Meanwhile creative artists were articulating a unique Indian sensibility that also included a negative assessment of the British colonial forces.

The war put Britain in a new perspective for the Indians. It was now no longer a figure of supreme authority but one of the European powers caught in a mutually conflicting relation with other European powers, often on the question of colonies, and at the present moment was on the receiving end. This must have proved liberating for the Indian psyche in a number of important ways unleashing a new assertion of consciousness towards the critique of colonial rule and self-improvement. The war may also have provided a window of opportunity to many nationalist leaders to negotiate with a Britain that was on its back foot at the moment thereby deepening the nationalist consciousness further.

It may also be added that the post-War period (or rather the period between the two wars) in India saw a considerable change in the journalistic world. Old newspapers and journals well stabilized themselves and many

fresh ones boldly made a bid for popularity. There was something of an actual demand for short stories in English and occasionally even for serial novels.

Anand can be seen as one novelist effected by the trigger. Dr. Mulk Raj Anand hailed from the extreme North-West of undivided India, his birthplace being Peshawar. He was educated at the Tahjab University and subsequently at the London and Cambridge Universities. After returning to India, Mulk Raj Anand had a particularly fruitful literary career and produced several novels and other form of writings. Along with Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, Anand constitutes a *Trimurti* or a single statue with three different figures in it.

Iyengar describes Anand's eventful literary career in a few lines:

'Anand started with an excellent book on *Curries and other Indian Dishes*; he followed it up with a book on *Indian Art* and a series of remarkable novels, *The Coolie*, *The Untouchable*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *The Village*, *Across the Black Waters*; and *Letters on India*, a plain-spoken account of the then current Indian situation. Besides these he also published a number of short stories in English and various articles of general interest; and has also been associated with the Indian Progressive Writers' Movement. He is also a member of the editorial board of *New Indian Literature*, the quarterly journal of the movement issued from Lucknow.'

Anand's sympathies are with the masses. There is a very deeply felt appreciation of the problems of the downtrodden and the poor and an equally deep commitment to the cause of their upliftment. His heart bleeds for the many underdogs in Indian social life. Hence the coolies and the untouchables are rather intensely portrayed to us in his works as proof of man's cruelty to man all over the world, and especially in the class and caste-ridden chaos of post-independence India.

In *The Untouchables*, Anand tells the story of a young sweeper, Bakha, who starts life as a latrine-cleaner at the British barracks. Bakha is happy with the Tommies (the British), for they treat him as a human being while the caste Hindus treat him almost as an animal, a mere "untouchable". He decks himself with the cast-off garments of the Tommies and saunters one day through the town. Bakha is now made disagreeably conscious of the fact that, European garments or not, he is still an 'untouchable'. The Hindu merchant, the sanctimonious and lecherous priest, the inhumanity of the 'twice-born; crowd, all of this pains him beyond his unusually high tolerance.

Bakha strongly desires and struggles to find a way out of this dismal predicament. Conversion to Christianity does not appeal to Bakha, who cannot even understand it; Gandhism too is not acceptable to him despite the fact Mahatma Gandhi gives him the name of harijan. What he cannot

accept is why society should condemn him to this profession and ostracize him for doing so? What Bakha craves for is the absence of discrimination and that is what remains elusive for him until the end.

Bakha finds hope in the words of the scientific, rationalist who extolled the advantages of water closets and an efficient drainage system, so Bakha returns to his hovel raptly meditating on 'the wonderful new machine which can remove dung without anyone having to handle it'.

The hero of *The Coolie*, Munoo is yet another prisoner of a caste-based labour system. Munoo first works as a servant to a Babu, later as a work-man in a pickle factory; the whirl of destiny shifts Munoo from one position to another, from one place to another, and he works successively as a porter, as a circus boy, as a labourer in a Bombay cotton mill, and, lastly, as a manservant of all sorts to a Mrs. Mainwaring. The point Anand is out to drive is that wherever Munoo goes, and he goes to a number of places, Munoo cannot rise from the position of a menial labourer, not because he is not fit to do other semi-skilled jobs, but because society does not permit him the mobility and the opportunity to explore those alternative positions. Of course, like in the case of Bakha, his occupation becomes the basis of perpetual discrimination against him. Exhausted in the end, he dies of tuberculosis.

*The Coolie* is a pageant but it is a pageant that humiliates us; sympathy for the suffering and the poor is an unknown thing in the upper classes and castes of our developed societies. It is the poor alone that help the poor. Why does a rich man, who was himself poor once, show such crass insensitivity to the poor around him? Anand seems to be exploring various aspects of the question and the answers are tentatively presented to us through Munoo's life.

As Iyengar observes:

'The India depicted in *The Coolie* is a dismal, superficial, terrifying India, the India that the Western impact on the Orient has laboured to evolve. The life of labourers within and without our factories, the unspeakable squalor of one-roomed tenements, the spectacle of men and women sleeping on the pavements of a Bombay street, the tragedy of Hindu-Muslim differences, something of all this is vigorously portrayed by Anand. *The Coolie* is not a happy book to read; but, then, it has only assumed the colour of its theme, and the theme is India, a segment of the real India, the India that is so sordid at one end and so human at the other!'

In *The Village*, Anand takes us to a Sikh village; and Lalu Singh, the youngest of a farmer's sons, is the hero of the novel. Like Bakha and Munoo, Lalu too is caught in a net of circumstances which seeks to entangle his spirit and destroy his life. Landlord and master, sarkar and superstition-ridden society, all seem to conspire against Lalu Singh; he at once loves and

hates his village; he is perplexed and most ill at ease. He solves his personal problem by enlisting and sailing for the war.

Lalu's departure is both a refusal and an inability to engage with the forces that continue to ruin his life and happiness every day. There are a number of reasons why this could be happening. These forces are so deeply entrenched that they are not amenable to negotiation, especially with weak individual forces like Lalu. At the same time, the surge of progressive passions in Lalu's breasts is much stronger than those in his grandfather's. Therefore, he cannot bow down to these forces unquestioningly.

*Across the Black Waters* is a continuation of *The Village*; Lalu Singh is in Europe, participating in the First World War and Lalu and Kirpu and Latchman Singh are all portrayed with candour and perfect understanding. The panacea that Lalu and others discover in Europe is of a certain equality as human beings and a policy of non-discrimination when it comes to allocation of work. The irony is that these possibilities of liberation should be available in a theatre that is destructive of human life itself.

Anand treats his characters as human beings, none the less human for being poor, superstitious, self-divided, indeed very human in spite of their daily misery and their thwarted purposings. Bakha and Munoo and Lalu, are nakedly and convincingly drawn; they belong to the real India, the India that for all her age-long aches could never die.

Iyengar sums up Anand's social and political perception thus:

'In his stories and novels, Anand tirelessly reiterates the changes that are imperceptibly altering the very fabric of Indian society and leading to a reorganization or who can tell? a wholesale disaster. Families are breaking up, villages are getting depopulated, exploitation is assuming new shapes and putting on new garments, and the poverty of the Indian masses is bottomlessly deepening.

And Anand Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, the Leftist is angry, he is very angry; but he is enough of an artist to save his excellent novels from the stigma of mere propaganda. And hence his characters at any rate, his Indian characters are almost as a rule recognizably human beings, not automata or formulae; and his portrayal of the Indian scene is distinguished, when considered as a whole, by a fundamental and disarming veracity'.

Raja Rao was one of the first to depict Indian village and city life in a rather self-conscious way. For example, he was one of the first to foreground the problems of presenting the Indian reality in a foreign language. In his explanatory Foreword to his novel, *Kanthapura*, Mr. Raja Rao confesses that the 'telling has not been easy'; to explore the social and cultural issues of post-independence India in the English language.

The whole story is put into the mouth of an old woman of the village who is supposed to tell it 'of an evening, when as the dusk falls, and through

the sudden quiet ... a grandmother might have told you, new-comer, the sad tale of her village'. The technique is thus Conradian- the grandmother here taking the place of Marlow while the theme is the response of *Kanthapura*, a village in Mysore, to the challenge of Mahatma Gandhi's militant programme of *satyagraha* and civil disobedience.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* thus has an ambitious theme and his technique is as old as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and as modern as Conrad and Joyce. The principal difficulty as pointed out earlier, however, is the problem of language. Raja Rao is the first author to pose this issue with a profundity, simplicity and prophetic that remains unmatched in critical utterances even today:

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has, to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. Muse; the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up like Sanskrit or Persian was before, but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bi-lingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

Raja Rao himself is apparently quite at home in English. *Kanthapura* is real, its inhabitants are real, and most of the episodes ring true. That is perhaps because Rao has indeed matched the domestic reality to a new variant of an alien language well. The prophecy of an Indian English well suited to the requirements of an Indian writer, as dignified as any other variant or standard forms of the language has already started coming true.

Here is Iyengar's assessment of the critical and analytical depths that Rao can reach in the English language:

*Kanthapura* is vivified as a significant microcosm that infers and contains within itself the potent currents and cross-currents that shake the vast sub-continent that is India.

The grand-mother like all grandmothers is a colourful story-teller. She narrates, she looks before and after, she sighs, she philosophizes, she waxes poetic, she wanes, and anyhow she has the ear of the audience. The story-telling, looked at close quarters, is but a disarming convention; no grandmother could have actually told *Kanthapura* all of it at one stretch to a new-comer; neither could a Marlow have told the whole of *Lord Jim* to the idlers around him nor could Lava and Kusa have recited the whole of *Ramayana* at one sitting to a court gathering. It is an old and useful convention; and Raja Rao exploits its possibilities to the full.



The hero in *Kanthapura* is Bharatavarsha; and even Rama and Bharata or Gandhi and Jawaharlal are but powers and personalities assumed by Bharatamata to make herself real and radiantly visible to the four hundred millions that live in the seven lakhs of Kanthapuras that constitute her potent and life-giving nerve-cells. It is to Raja Rao's credit that he has not made his novel mere propaganda; it is full of Gandhian politics but it remains a creative work of fiction, even a work of prose art.

Raja Rao's descriptions are sometimes poetical in their vividness and colourful particularity:

Kartik has come to Kanthapura, sisters Kartik has come with the glow of lights and the unpressed footsteps of the wandering gods; white lights from clay-trays and red lights from copper-stands, and diamond-lights that glow from the bowers of entrance-leaves; lights that glow from banana-trunk and mango twigs, yellow light behind white leaves, and green light behind yellow leaves, and white light behind green leaves; and night curls through the shadowed streets, and hissing over bellied boulders and hurrying through dallying drains, night curls through the Brahmin Street and the Paria Street and the Potters Street and the Weavers' Street and flapping through the mango grove, hangs clawed for one moment to the giant pipal, and then shooting across the broken fields, dies quietly into the river and gods walk by lighted streets, blue gods and quiet gods and bright-eyed gods, and even as they walk in transparent flesh the dust gently sinks back to the earth, and many a child in Kanthapura sits late into the night to see the crown of this god and that god, and how many a god has chariots with steeds white as foam and queens so bright that the eyes shut themselves in fear lest they be blinded.

Here is how Iyengar assesses this passage:

'Joyce and Gertrude Stein, Eliot and Llewelyn Powys, all seem to have given of their best to make the music of this Song of Kartik; and, indeed, the evocation of nightfall in Kanthapura is almost as vibrant with nervous potency, though not as unpleasantly disturbing, as is the evocation of evening in Eliot's Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.'

R. K. Narayan, the third name in our *trimurti* figure is at his best when he deals with the surface peculiarities of sophisticated urban South Indian life. The Anglicized Indian is his peculiar province.

Let me quote Iyengar's analysis of Narayan's Anglicized Indian extensively:

'An interesting and often a pathetic creature, the Anglicized Indian restlessly hovers between two worlds, "one dead, the other powerless to be born"; in Professor Radhakrishnan's words, his voice "is an echo, his life a quotation, his soul a brain and his free spirit a chaos'. He is a stranger in his own country, he is a self-divided and often a futilely anguished creature; he is a part of the tragedy of unredeemed India.

Narayan knows this interesting creature through and through and can portray him interestingly with just a delicate tinge of irony the irony, like salt, introduced merely to impart savour to the delectable dish. When, however, Narayan goes out of his range, when, for instance, he attempts to plumb the elusive and ineluctable depths of tragedy or to sound the obscure significances of the seemingly humdrum lives of the sons of the soil, then is he flat and unconvincing, his touch is unsure, and the resulting picture unpleasing or puzzling.'

Narayan's first novel *Swami and Friends*, is an Indian version of the genre popularized by Richmond Crompton's William yarns. Swami and his friends are credible young things, clever, serious, naughty, boisterous, in a word, wholly and admirably boyish reminding one of the Huck and Tom of Mark Twain's fiction. The basic strategy across all these texts is an oblique comment on adult society as seen through the eyes of these brats. The slim, slight book does make the world of Indian school-boys live agreeably and vividly. It has also been published in a Tamil version and has delighted several hundreds of juvenile and adult readers.

'Narayan's next novel, *The Bachelor of Arts*, is a more mature work and invokes a variegated chain of character and incident. Iyengar is therefore more impressed by this work.

College life in South India is sketched competently, though with a touch of caricature here and there. The European Principal, the different Professors (and especially, alas! the Professor of English), the debaters and the enthusiasts, all of them do what Narayan wants them to do and let this be readily conceded what they generally do in actual life.

When, however, our hero turns a Sadhu all of a sudden, one is incredulous and starts asking all sorts of questions. The bogus Sadhu is a fantastic bit to swallow; Narayan has ventured out of his familiar rounds and the result is not very satisfactory. But, of course, one need not make much of it, the novel is in any case quite a creditable performance, "one of those rare books", to quote Mr. Graham Greene, "one can recommend unreservedly to every class of reader".

In his third novel, *The Dark Room*, Narayan attempts to portray the cross-currents in a middle-class South Indian home. The touches are few, but they are carefully executed; and the picture itself is a little triumph as a life-likeness and also as a work of art. The domineering husband, blowing hot and cold by turns; Savitri, the devoted wife; their children, two girls and a boy; the domestic servants: these are familiar enough types. Shanta Bai, an 'ex-wife' turned insurance canvasser, is a piece of foreign matter projected into Savitri's familiar, unhurried universe. The husband is bewitched by Shanta Bai's languorous ease and glamorous dolour and neglects Savitri in consequence.

We have thus the usual triangular tangle, and inevitably there is an explosion in Savitri's home; but the man is impenitent. Savitri comes to a brave decision and leaves her home at night, rather like Nora in Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*. However, unlike Nora, but, then, Ibsen has not told us what happens to Nora afterwards! Savitri returns to her husband, having pathetically tried in vain to stand on her own feet. She accepts the new situation with resignation and her life pursues its even course with scarce a perceptible tremor!

The portraiture of Savitri's 'Doll's House' is excellent. The description of Navaratri and of the visit to the Tamil picture, *Kuchela*, are full of understanding or unmalicious satire. The Western impact and the Indian reaction to it are ever so insinuatingly suggested!; and it is this background that gives the story its peculiar flavour.

Iyengar finds Savitri in the role of an Indian Nora rather unconvincing. But Indian feminists have been infuriated by it. They have never forgiven Narayan for Savitri's character in general and specially her return to the folds of an unrepentant husband. After all, are the necessities of the Indian society and culture of modern India so powerful that they can push a resisting woman into a virtual captivity? Ask some of the feminist scholars. Why is it not possible for Savitri to turn her anger into something productive by way of her own and her childrens' future? Why can Narayan not visualize a Savitri who can create her future rather than be imprisoned in the past? These are some of the questions that continue to be posed by feminist scholars even today. To conclude this section let me quote Iyengar's assessment of Narayan as a narrative artist:

'Narayan knows how to restrain himself from saying a word too much; a simple, single idea or situation is all he cares to concentrate upon -and he writes directly and clearly. There are no fly by traps in Narayan's stories; they just come in a careless wave, and it is soon over, and the placid waters of life roll heedlessly again. The "Talkative Man" stories are rattlingly told; but even the "Talkative Man" knows the value of reticence.

Narayan is no angular Modernist; he does not delight in ciphers and complexes and conundrums; he just tells simple moving stories in a simple and convincing style. *Gandhi's Appeal*, for instance, is a very simple story: husband and wife happen to attend a public meeting; Mahatma Gandhi makes a fervent appeal for funds for the Harijan cause; the wife surrenders her jewels, the husband gives away a fifty-rupee note. But Narayan makes a beautiful story out of this by no means uncommon occurrence; and it is neither propaganda nor special pleading; it is just a sensitively rendered human story!

Narayan has his limitations; his little bit of ivory is, perhaps, more than two inches wide; but it is a little bit all the same. He is comfortable only on the familiar levels and slopes of sophisticated

life; the depths and the heights are alike not for him. Neither can he plan a novel on a big scale at any rate he has so far not done so; the human soul the favourite theme of the great Russian novelists will not yield its secrets, its fires and its perturbations and its darkling currents, to Narayan. But it is all beside the point; Narayan is a consummate artist and he is a master on his chosen ground. Why then complain that he is not something else?

### **Check Your Progress-3**

1. What do the first two chapters of Iyengar's work discuss?
2. List one factor that determined the course of English education in India.
3. How did the First World War change the attitude of Indians to Britain?

## **1.8 Let Us Sum Up**

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- K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar was a well-known scholar- critic who is undoubtedly one of the greatest among the pioneers of Indian-English studies.
- Iyengar refers to Indians writing in English as Indo-Anglian rather than the conventional Anglo-Indian.
- Iyengar's focus in the book is on Indians rather than on the literature produced in or on India. That is why he changes his label from Anglo-Indian to Indo-Anglian and keeps Britishers from India or abroad writing on India out of the book.
- The question whether Indians should or should not write in English is one of the most fundamental political issues behind this project. While realizing the complexities of such an endeavour by Indians, Iyengar endorses it fully. That is the reason why he undertakes the task of collecting Indian writers under the new term Indo-Anglian and starts building a new corpus of names in which the Indian origin of the authors is as prominent as the writing or literature component.
- Iyengar states that there is no need either to be very proud of our achievements in the domain of Indo- Anglian literature or to be foolishly ashamed of them. That Indians were obliged to study English was an unpleasant necessity; and Indians, let it be it said to their credit, have made a virtue of that necessity.
- The first two chapters of Iyengar's work take a quick survey of the period between British arrival on the Indian subcontinent and the first indigenous literary stirrings on the subcontinent in the form of Journals, Associations, articles and features.

- The first two chapters also discuss the significance and contribution of one of the pioneers of Indian writing in English – Rammohan Roy.
- After Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the next outstanding name in the story of Indo-Anglian writing, according to Iyengar, is Toru Dutt.
- Toru wrote for a short but intensive period leaving behind her a body of achievement to which it will be difficult to find a parallel in the history of English literature.
- Rabindranath Tagore's active literary life spans sixty five years 1875 – 1941. During this period, Tagore rarely, if ever at all, allowed a year to pass without adding something fresh and vital to the heritage of Bengali literature, and to a lesser extent, of English literature.
- The many-sided achievements of Tagore almost take one's breath away. Lyrics, poetic plays, plays of ideas, social plays, novels, short stories, essays in criticism, philosophical essays, autobiographical fragments, letters, addresses, educational dissertations, these have uninterruptedly flowed from his pen.
- The First World War interestingly churned the Indian creative sensibilities in ways that proved productive for Anglo-Indian literature in a new way.
- After returning to India, Mulk Raj Anand had a particularly fruitful literary career and produced several novels and other form of writings. Along with Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, Anand constitutes a *Trimurti* or a single statue with three different figures in it.

## 1.9 Key Words

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- **Vernacular:** The language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people of a country or region.
- **Proselytization:** To induce someone to convert to one's faith.
- **Ferment:** Agitation and excitement among a group of people, typically concerning major change and leading to trouble or violence.
- **Illuminating:** Giving or casting light; informative; enlightening.

## 1.10 Terminal Questions

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1. Why does Iyengar use the term Indo-Anglian rather than the conventional Anglo-Indian to describe Indian writing in English?
2. The question whether Indians should or should not write in English is one of the most fundamental political issues behind Iyengar's book. Discuss.

3. How does Iyengar negate the assertion of nationalists that Indian writing in English has come at the cost of Indian vernacular languages?
4. Discuss what Iyengar has to say about the writings of (i) Rammohan Roy; (ii) Rabindranath Tagore.
5. The First World War interestingly churned the Indian creative sensibilities in ways that proved productive for Anglo-Indian literature in a new way. Discuss.

### 1.11 Suggested Readings

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- Agrawal K.A. (editor). 2003. *Indian Writing in English: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
- Chakravarty Joya. (editor) 2003. *Indian Writing in English: Perspectives*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
- Rahman Roshan Gulrez. 2011. *Indian Writing in English: New Critical Perspectives*. Oxford: Pinnacle Technologies.
- Singh Sewak Ram and Charu Sheel Singh. 1997. *Spectrum History of Indian Literature in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

### 1.12 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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#### Check Your Progress-1

1. *Sitayana, Epic of the Earth Born* is a re-telling in verse of the Ramayana as ‘quintessentially Sita’s story’, for the work shifts its center from Rama to Sita. The shift has not been arbitrary or prompted by a desire for novelty, but the result of the conviction that in India, the ‘godhead has always been identified with the Eternal Feminine’ and that, it is time to make a ‘conscious return to ancient verities’.
2. The question whether Indians should or should not write in English is one of the most fundamental political issues behind Iyengar’s *Indian Writing in English*.
3. According to Iyengar, an Indian writing in English certainly opens the doors of cultural contact between his own country and those two hundred millions, and such contact is highly necessary if India is not to remain in splendid isolation from that higher culture and scholarship which knows no geographical bounds in the midst of a civilized world.

#### Check Your Progress-2

1. The first two chapters of Iyengar’s work take quick survey of the period between British arrival on the Indian subcontinent and the first indigenous literary stirrings on the subcontinent in the form of journals,

associations, articles and features. They also discuss the significance and contribution of one of the pioneers of Indian writing in English—Rammohan Roy.

2. Roy and his British educated friends had tasted the fruits of Western literature and culture and were persuaded that India required a Western type of education with English as a medium of instruction. With the help of two Englishmen, David Hare and Hyde East, Rammohan Roy brought into existence the Calcutta Hindu College, which later developed into the Presidency College.
3. As a novelist, Tagore's fame rests on *Gora*, *The Wreck*, and *The Home and the World*. *The Wreck* is an immature work, although it is interesting enough; Ramesh is a Bengali edition of Oblomov, but is scarcely convincing. And the story is full of improbabilities and coincidences that leave a distaste in the end. *The Home and the World* was greeted indifferently on account of political implications. *Gora*, however, was a favourite from the beginning with Tagore's admirers.
4. It is a colossal, prose writing of over 1600 pages. When considered superficially, it is abstruse, bristling with technical terms and recondite differentiations. On a deeper level, however, it is a masterpiece of argumentative rhetoric and metaphysical insights.

### Check Your Progress-3

1. The first two chapters of Iyengar's work take a quick survey of the period between British arrival on the Indian subcontinent and the first indigenous literary stirrings on the subcontinent in the form of Journals, Associations, articles and features. It also discusses the significance and contribution of one of the pioneers of Indian writing in English – Rammohan Roy.
2. The second factor which determined the course of education in India was the advent and activities of the Christian missionaries whose ultimate aim was proselytization, but who also did pioneering work of in the fields of education and social service.
3. The First World War put Britain in a new perspective for the Indians. It was now no longer a figure of supreme authority but one of the European powers caught in a mutually conflicting relation with other European powers, often on the question of colonies, and at the present moment was on the receiving end.

## UNIT - 2

# M. K. NAIK: A HISTORY OF INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Literary Landscape
- 2.3 The Problem of Naming and Defining
- 2.4 Structure and Organization
- 2.5 Beginning of English Education in India
- 2.6 Indian English Literature and the Great Revolt
- 2.7 Retrospect and Prospect
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Key Words
- 2.10 Terminal Questions
- 2.11 Suggested Readings
- 2.12 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

### 2.0 Objectives

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

- Assess the nature of the resistance Indian writers in English face from critics and authors in India and abroad
- Discuss the structure and organization of M.K. Naik's historical research
- Describe the attitude of Indian writers to Britain before and after the 1857 revolt
- Examine the similarities between M.K. Naik's and K.R.S. Iyengar's work

### 2.1 Introduction

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In the previous unit, we discussed about Iyengar's work *Indian Writing in English*; in this unit, you will learn about M. K. Naik's work *History of Indian English*.

M. K. Naik is a renowned critic, editor and historian of Indian English Literature. He is the former Professor and Chairperson of the Department of English at Karnatak University, Dharwad and spends his time between Pune, India and Melbourne, Australia. Naik stood first in his B.A. exams



and was guided by Barrister Balasaheb Khardekar to take up English Literature as a subject of specialization as opposed to Marathi Literature. That was perhaps the beginning of his initiation in English literature, an initiation that was to last a lifetime. Apart from *A History of Indian English Literature*, he has also published *Raja Rao* (1972, 1982), *Mulk Raj Anand* (1973), *The Ironic Vision: A Study of the Fiction of R.K. Narayan* (1983) and *Dimensions of Indian English Literature* (1984) and so on. Prominent among the collections edited by him are *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English* (1968, 1972, 1977), *Aspects of Indian Writing in English* (1979), *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English* (1977), *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English* (Abhinav, 1982) and *Perspectives on Indian Poetry in English* (Abhinav, 1984).

He is the author of five books of light verse under the *nom de plume* Emken. These include *Indian Clerihews*, *Indian limericks and Beowulf and All That: An Unorthodox History of English Literature in Comic Verse*. He has recently co-authored (with Shyamala A. Narayan) the widely acknowledged volume *Indian English Literature (1980-2000): A Critical Survey* (2001). His *History of Indian English Literature* (1982) has gone into seven editions and is considered vade mecum for the students of Indian writing in English.

## 2.2 The Literary Landscape

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Iyengar and Naik start on a common assumption:

Indian English Literature began as an interesting by-product of an eventful encounter in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India. As a result of this encounter, as F.W. Bain puts it, 'India, a withered trunk ..... suddenly shot out with foreign foliage'. One form this foliage took was that of original writing in English by Indians, this partially fulfilling Samuel Daniel's sixteenth century prophecy concerning the English language:

Who (in time) knows whither we may vent  
The treasures of our tongue? To what strange shores  
This gain of our best glory shall be sent  
T' enrich unknowing nations with our stores.

This stance should be read critically. It has the following crucial assumptions that may have been acceptable for critics like Naik and Iyengar, but is no longer feasible for us:

- (i) That pre-British India was 'stagnant', 'chaotic', 'a withered trunk' that was activated, put into order or 'shot out with foreign foliage'. This as Vishwanathan, Achebe and others will argue is an

assessment that springs from a colonised Indian position that was current in the immediate phase after colonisation. Both Naik and Iyengar can be understood as writing under that influence.

- (ii) Colonisation was a benign and productive influence that triggered creativity in the colonies that the colonies were not capable of by themselves. Thus, colonization, in the long run, proved beneficial to the colonies because of the rich creative ferment it produced. Chinua Achebe's whole thesis rests on the premise that pre-colonial Africa was not a land of savagery which the European powers conquered and civilized. An original and native form of order, perhaps more valuable for the colony than the one imposed by the British already existed in the colonies before the European powers came in. The colonizing Europeans destabilized this original and native order. What followed was this broken and disturbed order tediously negotiating with the new order. This is how Indian writing in English is viewed today.

The reason why the unit begins with this refutation is because it is important to understand where and how this literature, whose history you are reading here, emerged in the first place. Indian writing in English is not an imitation of English writers nor is it Indian in the pre-colonial sense of the term if pre-colonial writing can be spoken of as Indian. It emerged out of an 'eventful encounter' between two parties culturally and politically different in many ways. The fact that one because of its 'rationality' and strategizing managed to control the other and thereby ushered in a dubious 'peace' does not mean that one should be ranked superior and the other inferior. Who knows where native Indian literature would have gone in the absence of colonial intervention? It could have been for the better or the worse-or perhaps both depending upon the yardstick we use to evaluate it.

After these common starting assumptions, the next step both Iyengar and Naik take is to chart the complexity of the literary landscape. It is in this charting, however, that Naik and Iyengar part ways. There are some critical issues on which Naik disagrees with Iyengar. The subsequent section will point out some of the important issues that confront Naik while charting this landscape and the first is of course the term with which to describe the writing whose history Naik is out is writer.

### **2.3 The Problem of Naming and Defining**

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The first problem that a historian of any new area faces is to define the area that he has chosen to work on. The problem, in other words, is to find an idea or a set of ideas that can form an effective boundary of the field. Naming is just the beginning of it, and as you will see, many other important problems emerge.

While most critics agree that the area loosely labelled Indian writing in English is a discrete area of study, there is very little agreement on what it should be called. Naik poses the problem thus:

‘..this body of writing has, from time to time, been designated variously as "Indo-Anglian literature", "Indian Writing in English" and "Indo-English literature”’

Naik devotes another page in his Introduction to the issue, this time to discuss the various appellations that have been given to this area from time to time namely:

‘Indo-Anglian literature’, ‘Indian Writing in English’, ‘Indo-English literature’ and ‘Indian English literature’. The first of these terms was first used as the title of the *Specimen Compositions from Native Students*, published in Calcutta in 1883. The phrase received general currency when K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the pioneer of this discipline, used it as a title to his first book on the subject: *Indo-Anglian Literature* (1943). He, however, now agrees that "Indo-Anglian" strikes many as a not altogether happy expression. He adds, ‘I know many are allergic to the expression "Indo-Anglian", and some would prefer "Indo-English". The advantage with "Indo-Anglian" is that it can be used both as adjective and as substantive, but "Indo-Englishman" would be unthinkable. "Indo-Anglian" is reasonably handy and descriptive. But a major flaw in the term ‘Indo-Anglian’, as pointed out by Alphonso-Karkala, is that it would suggest ‘relation between two countries (India and England) rather than a country and a language’. ‘Indo-Anglian’ is thus hardly an accurate term to designate this literature. Apart from that, ‘Indo-Anglian’ also appears to be cursed with the shadow of the Anglican perpetually breathing ecclesiastically down its slender neck, and threatening to blur its identity. (In fact, Professor Iyengar has noted how, in his book, *Literature and Authorship in India*, ‘Indo-Anglian’ was changed to ‘Indo-Anglican’ by the enterprising London printer who, puzzled at so odd an expression, transformed it into something familiar. For his first comprehensive study of the subject, published in 1962, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar used the phrase, ‘Indian Writing in English’. Two pioneering collections of critical essays on this literature, both published in 1968, also followed his example: *Indian Writing in English: Critical Essays* by David McCutcheon and *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English* edited by M.K. Naik, S.K. Desai and G. S. Amur. But the term ‘Indian Writing in English’ has been accused of having rather circumlocutory air, and while ‘Indo-English literature’ possesses an admirable compactness, it has, as noted earlier, been used to denote translations by Indians from Indian literature into English. The Sahitya Akademi has recently accepted ‘Indian English Literature’ as the most suitable appellation for this body of writing. The term emphasizes two significant ideas: first that this literature constitutes one of the many streams that join the great ocean called Indian literature, which though written in different languages, has an

unmistakable unity; and secondly, that it is an inevitable product of the nativization of the English language to express the Indian sensibility.

There are numerous finer shades that need to be distinguished within the writing produced in India. The first distinction arises from the nationality of who writes and with what intent.

Strictly speaking, Indian English literature may be defined as literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. It is clear that neither 'Anglo-Indian Literature', nor literal translations by others (as distinguished from creative translations by the authors themselves) can legitimately form part of this literature. The former comprises the writings of British or Western authors concerning India. Kipling, Forster, F. W. Bain, Sir Edwin Arnold, F. A. Steel, John Masters, Paul Scott, M. M. Kaye and many others have all written about India, but their work obviously belongs to British literature. Similarly, translations from the Indian languages into English cannot also form part of Indian English literature, except when they are creative translations by the authors themselves. If Homer and Virgil, Dante and Dostoevsky translated into English do not become British authors by any stretch of the imagination, there is little reason why Tagore's novels, most of his short stories and some of his plays translated into English by others should form part of Indian English literature. The crux of the matter is distinctive literary phenomenon that emerges when an Indian sensibility tries to express itself originally in a medium of expression which is not primarily Indian.

This kind of differentiation helps Naik evolve a working concept that may sound good but is not-workable because of the rather large margin of subjectivity:

'The crux of the matter is the distinctive literary phenomenon that emerges when an Indian sensibility tries to express itself originally in a medium of expression which is not primarily Indian.'

This leaves a small class of Indian society called Anglo-Indian, i.e., people who claim to have English as their mother tongue, but are born and brought up in India like Henry Derozio, Ruskin Bond etc. However, even in their case, the Indian strain in them is bound to effect the nature of both their artistic sensibility and their way of expressions.

Naik goes on to discuss a few other cases where his working concept runs into problems. He begins with Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Coomaraswamy born out of a Sri Lankan father and English Mother, was neither an Indian citizen nor did he live in India. Yet, the entire orientation of his thought is so unmistakably Indian that it is impossible not to consider him an Indian English writer. On the other hand, are author like Naipaul whose Indian ancestry is unquestionable, but he as so much of an outsider that he cannot be considered a writer in the Indian English traditional; he must be included in the history of West Indian writing.

One can ask why is it important to find an appropriate label or appellation for an area of history? Why is it important to defend one's label and critique others? Both Naik and Iyengar are deeply caught up in these activities. The first necessity on the part of the historian is practical. If a historian does not evolve a working definition of the area he or she is out to historicize, then how does one conceptualize the historical project at all? The necessity, in other words, emerges not from the desire to label, but from the desire to write a history.

The second necessity is ideological or political. Definitions, contrary to what science would have us believe, are ideological effects. Scholars and academics arrive at a definition of an entity because it serves their ideological ends. Others disagree because it does not serve their ideological end. However, the rhetoric of their explanations indicate that the reason why they have chosen the label is because it represents the truth for them.

Let us illustrate this point by comparing the forces that frame Iyengar's 'Indo-Anglian' and Naik's 'Indian literature in English'. Recollect a paragraph that you read in the previous unit:

'I prefer the term "Indo-Anglian" to "Anglo-Indian" or "Indo-English". The late Principal P. Seshadri included, not only Sir Edwin Arnold and Trego Webb, but also Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, in his brief survey of "Anglo-Indian Poetry"; and Mr. George Sampson, in his *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, gives a section to "Anglo-Indian Literature" and refers in it, among others, to Tagore, Manmohan Ghose and Sri Aurobindo. But I thought it desirable to distinguish between Englishmen who write on Indian themes and Indians who use English as the medium of artistic expression; and I saw no harm in applying the already current terms "Anglo-Indian" and "Indo-Anglian" to these two categories of writers.'

Iyengar's point is distinction.

Writing at the end of the colonial era and at the beginning of the independence era, it was important to define everything Indian as opposed to British. Therefore, it was important to acknowledge the 'Anglo' component in terms of the language used, it was equally important to indicate that the person and sensibility writing is Indian as are the ethos and the subject matter. For him, these assertions, exclusivist and differential functions are adequately met in the term Indo-Anglian, thus he is happy with it.

However, as Iyengar himself acknowledged later, everyone was not happy with this coinage. Naik, as you have seen, is not happy with translations by non-Indians or Indians into English of Indian works as Indian English literature. Naik toes the establishment line when he agrees to use the term accepted by the Sahitya Akademi, the official academy of letters in India. The term aptly demonstrates that it is one of the many streams that flows into the ocean of Indian literature, as well as the fact that it is an inevitable

product of the nationalization of the English language to express the Indian sensibility.

It should be noted that the Akademi is interested in sustaining an image of multi-cultural India where every culture deserves and receives equal respect. Besides it, also wants to indicate that English is no longer a European language, but one that has been completely nationalized in India. This gives the country a natural and inalienable right over the Indian variant of English. Think carefully, these are not literary but political statements, and the term 'Indian English' literature serves this political end very well.

## **2.4 Structure and Organization**

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Naik's historical research has a structure and organization that is different from Iyengar's research. Although both of them have an identical subject matter and goal-to write a history of literature written in India in English between 1800s-1940s/70s, it appears that their intents are different. It is also a fact that Naik's research follows and is therefore aided and guided by the works of many scholars and researchers like Iyengar. Iyengar, on the contrary, was something of a pioneer for which he is justly acknowledged and given credit. His job was to set the ball rolling, Naik's task is to drive it forward. Both accomplish their challenges pretty well. Iyengar's volume, given the limitations of communication and technology available in the 1940s appears gigantic. Naik's works, given the tradition of which he is a part appears impressive.

The first element one notices in Naik's book is the exploration of the nature and scope of the field called Indian Literature in English. Iyengar begins similarly. Each ends with a different label for this field, one differential, the other institutional. However, by the 1970s the parameters of the debate have changed. The contesting labels have changed and the reasons why one label should be used over the other have also undergone a change. You have already read about the different reasons offered by Naik and Iyengar in one of the sections above.

Naik's more informed approach to the field also reflects in the structure of his text. He organizes the genres and the authors writing them under four broad historical eras that can be approximately classified as Pre-1857, Post-1857, Gandhian era and post independence era. While this classification can be interpreted as not much more than a way of organizing the content according to very broad and sweeping historical movements, this has also to be interpreted in opposition to the individual centered chapters of Iyengar. For Naik, individual authors are best understood as emerging from broad historical movements which define their styles and content, while in Iyengar big individual names like Rammohan Roy, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma

Gandhi are seen directing the currents of history. While Iyengar broadly understands history as determined by significant individual interventions, Naik understands the materiality of history as determining individual writings. Without being conscious of it, Naik reflects a Marxist bias.

The sections are divided into subsections on the basis of genre, mainly Prose, Poetry, Drama, Fiction and in some the Short Story. Prose is the most voluminous in all the sections because it includes all kinds of writings—articles, features, speeches, monographs, dissertations, etc. This leaves very little out of the scope of the book. Genre based subdivision has its own advantages and disadvantages. It permits grouping of works with identical themes within a given genre, and also helps study the evolution of criticism ideas through the form and content of these genres. However, it does not permit the possibility of studying comparatively a theme as it manifests through different genres.

Another interesting highlight of the Index is the emergence of the Short Story as a genre in the Gandhian era. Not one or two but about fifteen odd novelists are discussed in this section. While the genre had been prevalent in India since 1885, very few authors (four to be precise) are mentioned as beginning to use this form. Not only does it indicate the formation of a critical consciousness in the authors that can analyse the then current social and cultural milieu to produce the short stories and the longer novels, it also indicates the emergence of a relatively leisured reading class to receive such stories. The sensibility that creates a short story is not only observant and critical of its surroundings, but has also developed the analytical, organizational and presentation tools to give it the shape of a short story. It is not surprising that such abilities should be seen stirring in the Indian masses around the time Mahatma Gandhi radicalized the political environment into the anti-British campaign.

Before concluding, let us briefly state a few lines about Naik's treatment of the authors. The formula applied throughout the work, especially in the later sections, is that a critical recap of the earlier writings in that genre begins the exploration that then flows into a brief treatment of the important themes in the works. Given the number of authors he deals with here, it is scarcely possible to treat them with any more rigour in a somewhat slender history volume. If Iyengar discusses three to four major works in a given chapter, Naik goes upto ten or fifteen. This is not only because he looks at a much bigger period of history, but also because the three or four decades following the freedom movement were vigorously creative in the literary realm. Post-independence India was grappling with a number of issues that demanded intense exploration and the Indian literary and artistic sensibility was responding vigorously to it.

### **Check Your Progress-1**

1. What is the common assumption through which both Naik and Iyengar start their work?
2. What is the Sahitya Akademi interested in sustaining?
3. List one reason why Naik and Iyengar find it necessary to label the area of history or literature that they are examining?

## **2.5 Beginning of English Education in India**

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Like in the case of Iyengar, the first question that bothers Naik is to establish how, why and when English education began in India?

Let us pause for a moment to look at the significance of this event to a historian of literature. How does it matter when English was introduced into the Indian education system? What the historian should try to study is when did it flower into Indian literature in English? Neither Naik nor Iyengar seem to be interested in framing out the relevance of this original question.

One obvious advantage of asking this question is that it helps us chart who the people were who were first exposed to English education and how a literary community with certain specific interests emerged from it. It is true that the first need for educating Indians in English was felt because Englishmen could not rule a colony like India without a common language between the ruler and the ruled. Besides the imperialists within the Britishers felt that it was a potent instrument to colonize 'The lesser breeds without the law'. They also thought that the spread of English education among the nations would lead to the assimilation of western culture by the Indians and that this would make for the stability of the empire—a view strongly advocated by Charles Grant, who argued: 'To introduce the language of the conquerors seems to be an obvious means of assimilating a conquered people to them'.

The issue of English education was hotly debated between the imperialists and orientalist among the Englishmen. Some Indian intellectuals including Rammohan Roy argued and wrote extensively for the cause in the name of the advancement of the natives through the enlightening education and thought systems of England.

Without a body of advisers, administrations clerks and lower level functionaries, a few thousand Englishmen were finding it increasingly difficult to administer a huge territory and population like India.

While English education provided the administrative staff desperately required by the British, it eventually led to the emergence of many leaders and intellectuals that the British would not have been happy to own. Jawaharlal Nehru was the product of the liberal and humanistic learning which was the



product of English education. Some of Mahatma Gandhi's political ideals derived from the same ferment. Nirad C. Chaudhuri took the language and the culture in such an intensely purist spirit that he went on to educate Englishmen on English. Vishwanathan's work delves deep into the politics of this cultural appropriation through English and the ways in which it helped or obstructed the British colonial cause.

## **2.6 Indian English Literature and the Great Revolt**

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Before 1857, British rule in India was generally accepted by most Indians as a great boon divinely delivered. If you look at the ethos of pre-1857 writing by Indians it is steeped in subservience to a superior culture. Rammohan Roy worked with missionary zeal to establish an English-centered education and cultural system in India. Fired by Western liberation, he worked extremely towards establishing Western education in India and advocated cultural reforms clearly guided by European ideals and values. His fight against Sati and his writings on women's inheritance rights are good examples of his Europe-inspired concerns.

Similarly, the first notable poet of Indian English literature, Henry Vivian Louis Derozio indicate a strong influence of the British Romantic poets in theme, specifically that of Byron. Although Derozio wrote with a strong nationalistic zeal and patriotic fervour and even included a host of Indian legends and myths in his poem, he insists on writing in English and for an audience that accepted English as the preferred if not the only medium of creative expression.

India-British relations underwent a sea change after the 1857 revolt and that change reflected in the nature of Indian writing in English after 1857. Indian English literature struggled tediously in the next two decades to reject the English model and evolve an authentic artistic utterance for itself. This was primarily because all the administration measures widened the gap between the British and the Indians. As the British withdraw into their protection shell, the possibility of returning to a harmonious unprejudiced relationship became impossible.

The year 1857 effected some important changes in the nature of the British population. The East India Company personnel were replaced by British government officials who were primarily members of the English middle class opting for government employment. These officials, implementing the crown's policies had a very different relation with the country and its people compared to the Company officials who were here pursuing a business fortune and sometimes had a more involved, loving and even personal relationship with the native population. None of this was true of the administrator.

The invention of the steamship and the opening of the Suez canal reduced the travel time between England and India to thirty days. This meant that unlike the Company officials who settled in India, British administrators could hope to return to India multiple times during one's Indian tenure. Besides, it was now possible for the officers' family and children to join them in India either occasionally or permanently. This led to the rise of British colonies—a tiny white oasis in the brown desert around that effected complete segregation between the natives and the whites in their day to day lives.

British versions of 1857 had no qualms in calling it a savage uprising by mutinous sepoys and they did nothing to remove the irritation caused by their behaviour after the Revolt. The British was perceived by the native in the stereotype of a coloniser while the Indian was looked upon as a savage. A long and bitter estrangement between the two peoples thus began which remains unaddressed even today.

This deep restructuring of the British-Indian relations led to the rise of a new spirit. With 1857 in the background, the aristocracy lost all its political relations with the British. The lower classes were too meek and powerless to pose any resistance to the British. There was born from the middle stratum of society a new integrated all India class with varied background but a common foreground of knowledge ideas and values. This was the new born soul of the country and in time it was to infuse the whole of India with its spirit.

Indian English literature has a symbiotic relationship with this new-born spirit. On the one hand, it is this spirit that gave rise to the new artistic maturity of this literature; on the other hand, it was this literature which shaped which the spirit in a way such that it could lead to the assertion of a new Indian identity that would demand and achieve independence from the British.

The first stirrings of this new spirit began to be felt in religious, social and political reform movements. Many good specimens of Indian English literature were involved in the conceptualisation and program of these movements, even as the movements went on to create new literatures behind them. The Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna mission with the writings of their leading statements like Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Ramakrishna are some relevant examples of the abovesaid claim. One should not forget Syed Ahmad Khan and the reformist politics that he instituted on the Muslim community. These movements strongly covered the length and breadth of India and in one sense continue in their original forms even today.

Soon other leaders and movements, not religious, but social and with definite political implications joined the bandwagon. The British India

Association of which Surendra Nath Banerjee was a founding member was intended to be an All-India movement based on the conception of a united India. Indian literature in English is thus linked to the emergence of a nationalist consciousness and a united Indian state.

## 2.7 Retrospect and Prospect

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Having catalogued and discussed an entire body of Indian literature in English, Naik, in the last chapter, stops to discuss and assess the nature of the resistance it faces from critics and authors in India and abroad. Let us first explain the what and why of the nature of this resistance. To establish the nature and scope of this resistance, let us look at Naik's assessment of it:

There are, in fact, even today many, both in India and abroad, who believe that Indian English literature is little more than an exotic Indian dish fried in British butter, which may serve to titillate a jaded literary palate for a time by its outlandish flavour. According to this school of thought, it is, at best merely a hot-house plant, a contrived thing which may, for some time attract attention by its novelty, illustrating the logic of Dr. Johnson's well-known example of a woman's preaching being 'like a dog's walking on its hinder legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.' Such misgivings are not entirely a new phenomenon. As early as 1895, we find R. C. Dutt declaring, 'All attempts to court the Muses in a foreign tongue', must be fruitless... True genius mistakes its vocation when it struggles in a foreign tongue. More recently, we have Buddhadev Bose's outright denunciation of Indian English poetry as 'a blind alley lined with curio shops, leading nowhere. In the same year, M. Chalapati Rau improved upon this and dismissed the entire Indian English literature in equally strong terms: 'Indian Writing in English is at its best composition, and the best of it is translation. Nothing more is possible except for some one who can live the language, think the language, and write, not compose in, the language. It has also been reported that in the class-room of an American University, R.K. Narayan's fiction is being used to furnish sociological data rather than artistic material for critical assessment.

Critics of Indian English literature have attacked it from different stand-points: The simplest argument is that English is only an acquired language for most Indians. Kailaspathy and Anantha Murthy have argued that 'English with most Indians is still a language of official public affairs, of intellectual and academic debate. They do not use English for their most intimate purposes, "to think and feel, bless and curse, quarrel and kiss." It is maintained, English is the living speech of the people in countries like the United States, Australia and New Zealand, in which a new national literature was and is being forged. English is rooted in the soil there, and can therefore blossom forth, reflecting in its growth the very peculiarities

of the soil and the climate and the ethos of the people who have sprung up from and returned to that soil. In contrast with this, English is perhaps in the brain of the Indian, but not in his blood and bones.

John Wain even declares that 'Indian English, being a *lingua franca*, lacks the fineness of nuance that makes literature possible.... It is not a question of "writing English like a native," because many Indians are native English speakers, or nearly so. If English is not the language in which they lisp their first words, it is still acquired very early. The question is, a native of where?"

The list of charges against this literature continues further:

Another oft-repeated charge against Indian English literature is that its practitioners wrote with an eye on the foreign reader and hence try to provide stereo-types of both character and situation, which attract this reader. Like Benjamin Franklin's famous recipe for a New England elegy, the recipe for a successful Indian novel in English is, according to these critics, now very well patented. Take an assortment of sadhus, fakirs, maharajas, agitationists, Westernized Indian men and traditional Indian women—either pious paragons or seductive sirens according to your mood and choice—and let them perform against the background of communal riots and nationalistic uprisings; throw in a couple of tiger-hunts, rope-tricks, snakes and elephants; and a pinch of mysticism if you can carry it off successfully—and there you have your Indian English masterpiece.

Naik quotes Mr. Sachidananda Vatsyayan to frame another rather characteristic charge against this writing:

'But why can't the Indian writer write in his mother tongue? Why must he choose an alien language, 'which hardly two per cent of his own countrymen understand, and which is very soon to go the way all Englishmen went thirty years ago?' Presiding over the fifth All India Writers' Conference in 1965, Mr. Sacchindananda Vatsyayan, a noted modern Hindi writer, launched a scathing attack (in masterly English) on Indian English literature. He dubbed its practitioner 'a second-class brother' and 'a poor relation' and concluded, 'To be Indian as a writer is first and foremost to write Indian, to write in an Indian language... . To be Indian must mean giving expression to what is unique in our experience...India cannot have a literature—I mean a great literature and one in which her spirit will find expression—except in an Indian language.'

Let us understand the charges first:

1. Indian literature is an exotic dish fried in British butter. We don't appreciate its quality. We appreciate the fact that it is there at all.
2. True Indian genius can never find adequate expression in a foreign tongue - R.C. Dutt. This point finds expression in numerous other critiques that vary only in the finer details.

3. Indian English poetry is a blind alley lined with curio shops, leading nowhere - Buddhadev Bose.
4. Indian English being the *lingua-franca* lacks the fineness of the nuance that makes literature possible - John Wain.
5. Its practitioners write with an eye on the foreign reader.
6. Why can't Indians write in their mother tongue? - S. Vatsayan.

The first and third charge is too immature and callous to be even discussed. If someone discusses Toru Dutt and Rammohan Roy as dogs performing on their hind legs or as futile endeavours do not need to be engaged with in a dialogue.

The second and sixth charges are more serious and it should be read more as an invitation to an exploration rather than a refutation of legitimacy. The question it foregrounds is the link between a language and the ferment of ideas it chooses to express. It banks heavily on the assumptions that every Indian mind creates or experiences this ferment in a non-English language and therefore the native language is best suited to expressing this ferment. Therefore, the author should shun the English language and bank on his/her native language.

While the question of the mind's ferment and expressive ability's relation with language is being scientifically explored today, it is really doubtful if the ferment of ideas in cases like Toru Dutt, Rammohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore and R.K. Narayan, to mention some amongst many, existed only in the native language. Faced with a choice of which language to produce a work in, the author weighs questions related to this ferment, target readers, publisher's parameters and a host of other factors. If the author has critically and sensibly explored these issues and made a choice, critics should respect it and evaluate it, rather than denounce it in principle. Many of the Prefaces, articles and discussions mentioned in Naik's text are such explorations which show their authors engaging with some of the same questions that are voiced here. These appear to be little cognizance of those explorations in these principled denunciations.

The fifth charge is accepted in principle by Naik who joins the chorus of condemnation of people who reduce literature to a saleable commodity. In conclusion, let us look at the following quote by Naik that refutes the fourth charge discussed above.

An answer to this question will perhaps be found in the distinction made by Professor Paul Christophersen, between a foreign language and a second language. The former is: 'a language which is not one's own, though one may have a good knowledge of it; a second language is a language which is one's own, though not one's first in order of importance, nor usually, the first to be learnt. A foreign language is used for absorbing

the culture of another nation; a second language is used as an alternative way of expressing the culture of one's own.'

In the case of at least some Indians, English has always been 'a second language' in this sense and they have naturally used it for expressing themselves creatively. In fact, until recently—and this is true of many even today—the educated Indian wrote his letters in English, used English at work and play and acquired it so perfectly that it often became a verbal skin, rather than a coat. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, 'It is not true in all cases that one can't write first class things in a learnt language.' The example of Conrad, who learnt English at the age of twenty-six comes to mind immediately. He wrote, 'My faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. . . . Its very idioms, I truly believe, had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character. . . . If I had not written in English, I would not have written at all.

Vladimir Nabokov wrote eight novels in Russian, turned to English at the age of forty and wrote eight novels in this language, including *Lolita*. And in our own generation, the ambidextrous Samuel Beckett has, by this example, again shown that creative effort is possible for a writer in more languages than one. But perhaps the best argument in support of Indian English literature is the fact that the best in it has been taken seriously and subjected to minute appraisal by critics in both India and abroad. Surely, the sensibility of men like E.M. Forster and Lawrence Durrell, Graham Greene, William Walsh and Jack Lindsay in the west and Srinivasa Iyengar and V.K. Gokak in the east cannot be said to have suddenly undergone a complete critical paralysis when confronted by Indian English literature, for they have all appreciated the finer things in it. And even the most touchy Indians will have to concede that not all the Western praise is mere patronising, nor all the Indian commendation brazen salesmanship. Again, the proof of the success of Indian English literature is its success. The steady interest it has roused, in recent years, in English-speaking countries shows that it has merits other than those of sheer novelty and exoticism.

One last issue needs to be taken up before we conclude this discussion on Nayak. Why have certain well-meaning and reputed intellectuals questioned the viability of this field of writing? All of them have given reasons to support their charge. The nature of this opposition is intrinsically political. If Indian literature in English is given a free reign, three fallouts are likely:

- (i) Substandard, compromised or even market oriented Indian literature will result. This can have disastrous consequences for the quality of literature unleashed upon the masses and the reputation of Indian literature in the world.

- (ii) Given the continued assault of imperial powers through the cultural and economic domain in a complex phenomenon called neo-imperialism, it is important to resist these forces at the level of language and literature. Containing Indian English literature appears a good strategy to do it.
- (iii) Writing Indian literature in English processes, presents and transfers the Indian reality in a particular way that may be inimical to certain political interests. In a post-structuralist world of fluid realities, reality is more an entity for appropriation and policing rather than simple understanding and expression.

In all the theoretically well founded claims discussed above, one can read the struggle for the appropriation and policing of the Indian reality in a world beset with regional, fractional, economic and non-economic forces.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. Why was the first need felt by the British for educating Indians in English?
2. What was the attitude of Indian writers in English towards the British before the revolt of 1857?
2. What was the purpose of the British India Association?

## 2.8 Let Us Sum Up

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- M.K. Naik is a renowned critic, editor and historian of Indian English Literature.
- Apart from *A History of Indian English Literature*, he has also published *Raja Rao* (1972, 1982), *Mulk Raj Anand* (1973), *The Ironic Vision: A Study of the Fiction of R.K. Narayan* (1983) and *Dimensions of Indian English Literature* (1984) and so on.
- Iyengar and Naik start on a common assumption, i.e., Indian English Literature began as an interesting by-product of an eventful encounter in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India. As a result of this encounter, as F.W. Bain puts it, 'India, a withered trunk ..... suddenly shot out with foreign foliage'.
- Indian writing in English is not an imitation of English writers nor is it Indian in the pre-colonial sense of the term if pre-colonial writing can be spoken of as Indian. It emerged out of an 'eventful encounter' between two parties culturally and politically different in many ways.

- After these common starting assumptions, the next step both Iyengar and Naik take is to chart the complexity of the literary landscape. It is in this charting, however, that Naik and Iyengar part ways.
- Writing at the end of the colonial era and at the beginning of the independence era, it was important to define everything Indian as opposed to British. Therefore, it was important to acknowledge the 'Anglo' component in terms of the language used, it was equally important to indicate that the person and sensibility writing is Indian as are the ethos and the subject matter.
- Naik's historical research has a structure and organization that is different from Iyengar's research.
- Although both of them have an identical subject matter and goal-to write a history of literature written in India in English between 1800s-1940s/70s, it appears that their intents are different.
- The first element one notices in Naik's book is the exploration of the nature and scope of the field called Indian Literature in English.
- Naik organizes the genres and the authors writing them under four broad historical eras that can be approximately classified as Pre-1857, Post-1857, Gandhian era and post independence era.
- The sections are divided into subsections on the basis of genre, mainly Prose, Poetry, Drama, Fiction and in some the Short Story.
- Like in the case of Iyengar, the first question that bothers Naik is to establish how, why and when English education began in India?
- Before 1857, British rule in India was generally accepted by most Indians as a great boon divinely delivered.
- India-British relations underwent a sea change after the 1857 revolt and that change reflected in the nature of Indian writing in English after 1857.
- This deep restructuring of the British-Indian relations led to the rise of a new spirit.
- Indian English literature has a symbiotic relationship with this new-born spirit. On the one hand, it is this spirit that gave rise to the new artistic maturity of this literature; on the other hand, it was this literature which shaped which the spirit in a way such that it could lead to the assertion of a new Indian identity that would demand and achieve independence from the British.
- Having catalogued and discussed an entire body of Indian literature in English, Naik, in the last chapter, stops to discuss and assess the nature of the resistance it faces from critics and authors in India and abroad.



## 2.9 Key Words

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- **Renowned:** Known or talked about by many people; famous.
- **nom de plume:** An assumed name used by a writer instead of their real name; a pen-name.
- **vade mecum:** A handbook or guide that is kept constantly at hand for consultation.
- **Ethos:** The characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations.
- **Boon:** Something to be thankful for; blessing; benefit.

## 2.10 Terminal Questions

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1. What are the similarities between M.K. Naik's and K.R.S. Iyengar's work?
2. Why does M.K. Naik use the term 'Indian English Literature' instead of K.R.S. Iyengar's term Indo-Anglian Literature?
3. What is the structure and organization of M.K. Naik's historical research?
4. What was the attitude of Indian writers to Britain before and after the 1857 revolt?
5. Assess the nature of the resistance Indian writers in English face from critics and authors in India and abroad.

## 2.11 Suggested Readings

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- Agrawal K.A. (editor). 2003. *Indian Writing in English: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
- Chakravarty Joya. (editor) 2003. *Indian Writing in English: Perspectives*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
- Rahman Roshan Gulrez. 2011. *Indian Writing in English: New Critical Perspectives*. Oxford: Pinnacle Technologies.
- Singh Sewak Ram and Charu Sheel Singh. 1997. *Spectrum History of Indian Literature in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

## 2.12 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

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### Check Your Progress-1

1. The assumption that both Naik and Iyengar make before starting their work is that Indian English Literature began as an interesting by-

product of an eventful encounter in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India.

2. Sahitya Akademi is interested in sustaining an image of multi-cultural India where every culture deserves and receives equal respect. Besides it, also wants to indicate that English is no longer a European language, but one that has been completely nationalized in India.
3. It is important to find an appropriate label or appellation for an area of history for both Naik and Iyengar because of practical reasons. The necessity, for them, emerges not from the desire to label, but from the desire to write a history.

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. The first need for educating Indians in English was felt because Englishmen could not rule a colony like India without a common language between the ruler and the ruled.
2. Before 1857, British rule in India was generally accepted by most Indians as a great boon divinely delivered. If you look at the ethos of pre-1857 writing by Indians it is steeped in subservience to a superior culture.
3. The British India Association of which Surendra Nath Banerjee was a founding member was intended to be an All-India movement based on the conception of a united India.



# UNIT - 3

## GAURI VISHWANATHAN: *MASKS OF CONQUEST*

### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Main Arguments in *Masks of Conquest*
- 3.3 British Education System
- 3.4 The Politics of the English Language
  - 3.4.1 *Masks of Conquest* and the History of English Education in India
- 3.5 The Gramsci Connection
  - 3.5.1 Culture and Power
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Key Words
- 3.8 Terminal Questions
- 3.9 Suggested Readings
- 3.10 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

### 3.0 Objectives

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

- Examine the importance of language in maintaining hegemony
- Discuss Viswanathan's view of the introduction of the British education system in India
- Describe attitudes of the British to Indian culture, religion and literary tradition
- Summarize the main arguments that Viswanathan makes in her book

### 3.1 Introduction

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In the previous unit, you learnt about M. K. Naik's view on the history of Indian English literature. In this unit, you will learn about Viswanathan's view of Indian English Literature.

Gauri Viswanathan is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature in Columbia University, New York. She has also held various distinguished visiting professorships. Her fields of interest are education, religion and culture. She also takes an interest in the nineteenth century British and colonial cultural studies as well as the history of modern disciplines.

Viswanathan became quite famous after her first book, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989), in which she argued that the English-Literary canon in India was an imperial tool, a method by which a collaborating class was brainwashed into accepting the cultural superiority of Britain. Her recent book, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, deals with a major reinterpretation of conversion. Centering on colonial subjects in British India and on minority communities within Britain, she sees in religious conversion both a mode of resistance and an alternative epistemology. *Outside the Fold* won numerous prizes including the 1999 Harry Levin Prize awarded by the American Comparative Literature Association for best book in comparative literature, the James Russell Lowell Prize (1999) awarded by the Modern Language Association for best work of literary criticism and the Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy Book Prize (2000) awarded by the Association for Asian Studies. Viswanathan is currently the research collaborator on a major international project on globalization and autonomy based in Toronto and Hamilton, Canada. Her current work is on memory, history and modern occultism.

### **3.2 Main Arguments in *Masks of Conquests***

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*Masks of Conquest* centres around the institution, practice and ideology of English studies introduced in India under the British colonial rule. It is not a comprehensive record of the history of English, nor does it attempt to catalogue the various educational decisions, Acts and resolutions that led to the institutionalization of English. It sets out to demonstrate that English emerged as a viable discipline only in an age of colonialism. Therefore, no serious account of its growth and development can afford to ignore the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that, in the long run, served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in enormously complex ways.

Viswanathan states that she has two general aims in writing this book. The first is to study the adaptation of the content of English literary education to the administrative and political imperatives of British rule. The second is to examine the ways in which these imperatives, in turn, charged that content with a radically altered significance, enabling the humanistic ideals of enlightenment to coexist with and even support education for social and political control. The text also examines the relation between the process of curricular selection and the impulse to dominate and control. English literary study was established in India well before its institutionalization in England. It was taught in Allahabad before it was taught at Oxford or Cambridge and had its beginnings as a strategy of colonial management.

### 3.3 British Education System

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One of the first points Viswanathan makes is that the history of education in British India shows that humanistic functions traditionally associated with literature—like the shaping of character, the development of the aesthetic sense or the discipline of ethical thinking—were considered essential to the process of colonial control by the imperialists. The aim was never to turn Indians into good and civilized human beings. They perhaps wanted to prove through literature that the ones undergoing education were morally and intellectually deficient compared to their imperial masters. This complex helped them create the structures of domination that will manage the relationships between those for whom educational prescriptions are made as well as those who arrogate to themselves the status of prescriber.

Viswanathan next tries to show the different uses to which literary education was imparted in England and India, even when comparable content was taught. If the curriculum was used to subjugate in one case, it was used to teach the rationale of subjugation in the other.

Viswanathan feels that it is not enough, as D. J. Palmer, Terry Eagleton, Chris Baldick, Peter Widdowson and Brian Davies, among others, seem to believe, to provide token acknowledgment of the role of empire by linking the Indian Civil Service examinations, in which English literature was a major subject, to the promotion of English studies in British schools and universities. Important as these examinations were, they do not indicate the full extent of imperialism's involvement with literary culture. The amazingly young history of English literature, as a subject of study (it is less than a hundred and fifty years old), is frequently noted, but less appreciated. It is an irony that English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country. English as the study of culture and not simply the study of language had already found a secure place in the British Indian curriculum by the year 1825, when the classical curriculum still reigned supreme in England, despite the strenuous efforts of some concerned critics to loosen its hold. The circumstances of its ascendancy are what this book is immediately concerned with, though it also seeks simultaneously to draw attention to the subsequent institutionalization and ideological content of the discipline in England as it developed in the colonial context.

The history of education in British India shows that certain humanistic functions traditionally associated with literature like the shaping of character, the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking were considered essential to the processes of socio-political control by the guardians of the same tradition. Despite occasional murmurs to the contrary, the notion that these functions are unique to English literature still persists in modern curricular pronouncements, with a consequent blurring of the

distinction between 'English literature' and 'English studies', a blurring that Richard Poirier noted as a more general characteristic of contemporary culture. English studies, he argues in an essay that still remains timely, has been allowed to appropriate literature in ways 'not unarguably belonging to it'. The distinction proposed in Poirier's essay, *What Is English Studies, and If You Know What That Is, What Is English Literature?*, is a useful one to bear in mind in connection with British Indian educational history, insofar as it draws attention to literary education, as opposed to literature, as a major institutional support system of colonial administration. The transformation of literature from its ambivalent 'original' state into an instrument of ideology is elsewhere described by another critic, Terry Eagleton, as:

'a vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the perceptual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological formation...What is finally at stake is not literary texts but Literature — the ideological significance of that process whereby certain historical texts are severed from their social formations, defined as "literature," and bound and ranked together to constitute a series of "literary traditions" and interrogated to yield a set of ideological presupposed responses.'

Indeed, once such importance is conceded to the educational function, it is easier to see that values assigned to literature, such as the proper development of character, the shaping of critical thought or the formation of aesthetic judgment, are only problematically located there and are more obviously serviceable to the dynamics of power relations between the educator and those who are to be educated. A vital, if subtle, connection exists between a discourse in which those who are to be educated are represented as morally and intellectually deficient and the attribution of moral and intellectual values to the literary works they are assigned to read.

Viswanathan goes on to point out that in early nineteenth century, the colonizers did not introduce any Indian literary texts for study in Indian schools and colleges as they thought that these texts were tainted with immorality and impurity. She further points out that for the British, India had become a laboratory to test educational ideas that had been abandoned in England or were yet untested. Their effects needed to be observed and recorded under controlled conditions.

The relation between the educational histories of England and India is best understood as structured on the principle of complementarity. Complementarity here means a dynamic interaction of interests whose resolution is not necessarily confined to the context in which any given concern originates but extends actively to those contexts that provide the soil for such resolution. The point regarding complementarity merits explanation. As discussed earlier, English literature was being used by Imperial Britain to create both the conqueror and the conquered. The desired effect

of the discipline on one set of people actually helped complete the effect on the other set.

One of the great contradictions in early nineteenth century developments is uncovered at the level of comparison of the educational histories of England and India. With the educational context, one runs directly into the central paradox of British deliberations on the curriculum as prescribed for both England and India, while Englishmen of all ages could enjoy and appreciate exotic tales, romantic narrative, adventure stories and mythological literature for their charm and even derive instruction from them. Their colonial subjects were believed incapable of doing so as they lacked the prior mental and moral cultivation required for literature, especially their own, to have any instructive value for them. A play like Kalidas' *Shakuntala*, which delighted Europeans for its pastoral beauty and lyrical charm, and led Horace Wilson, a major nineteenth-century Sanskrit scholar, to call it the jewel of Indian literature, was disapproved of as a text for study in Indian schools and colleges. Moreover, the judgment that the more popular forms of Oriental literature are marked with the 'greatest immorality and impurity' held sway. The inability to discriminate between decency and indecency was deemed to be a fixed characteristic of the native mind, a symptom of the 'dullness of their comprehension'. Clearly, such a statement suggests that it is not the morality of literature that is at issue, but the mental capabilities of the reader. Raising Indians to the intellectual level of their Western counterparts constituted a necessary prerequisite to literary instruction, especially in texts from the native culture, and consequently, to forestalling the danger of having unfortified minds falsely seduced by the 'impurities' of the traditional literature of the East.

However, far from resulting in a markedly different curriculum from English, this view of Indian character produced almost an identical one, though qualified by stipulated prerequisites. The claim that literature can be read meaningfully only when a high degree of morality and understanding is present in the reader implied that certain controlled measures were necessary to bring the reader up to the desired level. But paradoxically, those measures took the form of instruction in that same literature for which preparation was deemed necessary. To raise the reader to a level of morality that would better prepare him to read literature effectively, the method that was adopted was instruction in Western aesthetic principles. By giving young Indians a taste for the arts and literature of England, 'we might insensibly wean their affections from the Persian muse, teach them to despise the barbarous splendour of their ancient princes, and, totally supplanting the tastes which flourished under the Mogul reign, make them look to this country with that veneration, which the youthful student feels for the classical soil of Greece.' At the same time, the self-justification of the literature curriculum—its use as both method and object of moral and intellectual study—remained the central



problematic element of British ideology, its authority necessarily requiring external support and validation to be more than merely self-confirming.

The relatedness of the two histories is no less real than their separateness; it is not useful to argue on behalf of a common pattern of development if the chief intent is to indicate simultaneity, identity of purpose and parallelism of design. The educational histories of England and India constitute a common history which invariably communicates the erroneous impression that the function of education remains constant regardless of the context. The view that a humanistic education holds the same meaning and purpose for both colonizer and colonized quickly crumbles under the weight of even the most casual scrutiny. On the other hand, tightening what appears in the above construction to be an arbitrarily conceived relation by alternatively proposing a cause-effect paradigm veers toward the other extreme, imputing an overly reductive determinism to the colonialist project and proposing equivalences between the composition of various groups, including both the rulers and the ruled, that grossly oversimplify a complex, heterogeneous formation. As tempting as it is to read, say, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and British Parliamentary Papers on Indian education as parallel cultural texts outlining a common strategy of social and political control, there are great dangers in reading the history of the education of Indians exclusively in terms of the education of the English lower classes. There are obvious differences, the two most important being a well-entrenched learned class in India that was recognized by the British themselves as continuing to exert power and influence over the people and a policy of religious neutrality that paralyzed British officials in administering a religious curriculum to the Indians comparable to the one taught in English parish schools and charity schools. Under the circumstances, the educational model of the West was inadequate to deal with the learned classes of India, possessing, like the latter, their own deeply rooted systems of learning and institutions of specialized studies in philology, theology and ancient science. In what must be described as a wryly ironic commentary on literary history, the inadequacy of the English model resulted in fresh pressure being applied to a seemingly innocuous and partially formed discipline, English literature, to perform the functions of those social institutions (such as the church) that, in England, served as the chief disseminators of value, tradition and authority. The surrogate functions that English literature acquired in India offer a powerful explanation for the more rapid institutionalization of the discipline in the Indian colony than in the country where it originated.

In a Fanonesque vein, Viswanathan also points out that the intention of the British in implementing a particular curriculum was to erase the voice of the colonized and blot out his cultural identity to some extent. In this context, she discusses the problem of introducing the Bible in Indian schools and colleges. The imposition of an alien religious tradition and body of

thought was expected to conflict with the indigenous ones and with institutional power thrown behind one, it was only a question of time that the powerful would find themselves in the position of the preachers and the powerless in the position of the preached.

Literary studies had a salutary, emancipating influence as it released Indians from false consciousness and replaced outmoded styles of thought with enlightened concepts of justice and liberty. If that enlightenment extended to an awareness of British rule as unjust, then it was a liberating idea; yet, the politics lay in the transference. As long as the British imparted this set of enlightened ideas or their culture remained the source of such ideas, it was challenging to resist the same culture in its imperial role. It would require decades for the natives to distinguish the culture from its harbingers and propagators, such that it became possible to critique the British with their own thought process.

Viswanathan, at this point indicates that 'Orientalism' formed the mainstay of British rule. On one hand, it involved a particular construction of the orient for the practitioners and implementers of imperialism. On the other, it also involved a reverse acculturation policy whose goal was to train British administrators and civil servants to fit into the culture of the ruled and assimilate them thoroughly into the native way of life. The British considered the acquisition of knowledge about those whom they governed to be of vital importance to the state for domination and control. As a result of this dual application of Orientalism, Anglicism grew as an expression of discontent with the policy of promoting the Oriental languages and literatures in native education. In its vigorous advocacy of the Western instead of the Eastern learning, it came into sharp conflict with the proponents of Orientalism, which vehemently insisted that such a move would have disastrous consequences, the most serious being the alienation of the natives from the British rule.

Orientalism and Anglicism are not polar opposites but points along a continuum of attitudes toward the manner and form of native governance, the necessity and justification for which remained by and large an issue of remarkably little disagreement.

That necessity and justification were colonial domination and control. Viswanathan shows that at crucial points, the curriculum designed for British India was quite different from what was being taught in England. She explains the cause for this:

'The religious texts that were standard fare for the lower classes in England could not legitimately be incorporated into the Indian curriculum without inviting violent reactions from the native population, particularly the learned classes. The educational experiments in social control that had been conducted on the English poor had only limited application in India. Yet the fear

lingered that without submission of the colonial subject to moral law or the authority of God, the control England was able to secure over the lower classes back home would be eluded in India.'

The British tried to discredit Hindu society and religion. They tried to attack the caste system, idol worship, polytheism and propitiatory rites of Indians. They privileged morality, monotheism and monorule. They also pointed out that in India, no single moral code is upheld to enforce positive social behaviour. They tried to establish one single moral code, 'One Power, One Mind', for governance in place of the polytheism of Hinduism. The idea of 'One Power, One Mind' had both theological and political harmony, which may fuse it with a hidden appeal for integration of religions and state avoiding polytheism. She paraphrases Charles Grant:

'The multiplicity of Gods in the Hindu pantheon blurred any sense of a single, universal cosmic law upon whose recognition Grant believed all social harmony rests. Instead of creating a vision of divine principles acting in uniform concert, the Hindu scheme fragmented cosmic unity and encouraged a system of multiple deities working at variance with each other. Barriers between worshippers of different deities are reinforced and a unitary code replaced by a relativistic one.'

Grant's idea of 'One Power, One Mind' encapsulated related ideas of cultural hegemony, ethical absolutism, centralized authority and submission to an overarching law governing all individuals, without which Western knowledge was deprived of all transformative effect.

Transferring Indians from a polytheistic to a monotheistic power structure did not mean developing the capacity for independent rational thought in them. The British expected to keep Indians at the level of children, innocent and unsuspecting of the meaning of their instruction, for once enlightened, there was no predicting how hostile they would turn toward those who were educating them.

She also talks about the British use of historical analysis as a method of teaching colonial subjects to identify their own systems of thought and, simultaneously, confirm Western principles of law, order, justice and truth. Anglicism was suspect in this sense and vulnerable to the charge of depriving Indians of familiarity with their own system of learning. She further points out the intention of the British in imparting knowledge to Indians as follows:

'The exclusiveness of a policy that favoured English and eliminated the native languages deprived it of any real political force, for by locating truth in a single cultural tradition to be apprehended solely through direct instruction in it, the Anglicist doctrine effectively suspended all confrontation with error, disabling serious, critical questioning of the native tradition. The reversal of this situation entailed a conception of truth not as a priori but as a process involving active dialectical effort. Such a conception necessarily

demanded a broadening of the content of education and the inclusion of error as an object of instruction.'

Following this line of argument, the Orientalist, John Tytler, promoted the study of indigenous language, history and culture to avoid the degradation of both the British and Indians. She states that the act of forcing meanings into the open comprised an important aspect of the British ideology of literary education, owing much to critical readings. The objective of an education on Christian principles is to raise individuals from the state of bestial nature in which they are born, toward the spiritual good that is their eternal promise.

Thus, British education was not seeking to assimilate Indians into the European model by urging them to cast aside their Indian identity. It was designed in a Platonist sense to awaken the colonial subjects to a memory of their innate character, corrupted as it had become, again in a Platonist sense, through the feudalistic character of Oriental society. The Indian Education Commission of 1882 took up the theme introduced by Murdoch of maintaining an appropriate balance between affirming British norms and preserving Indian self-respect. English education, fighting to stave off the appearance of imposing an alien culture on native society, gained subtle redefinition as an instrument of authenticity. Viswanathan points out the objectives of British instructions along with its importance:

'Objectives of British instruction have been internalized by students regardless of whether the statements themselves provide an index to personal conviction. What specifically matters is the successful transference from ruler to subject, of the view that India will not witness progress unless channels of communication are opened with the West. And the intellectual strategy that enables it is the conjoining of commercial expansion with culture and knowledge to suggest a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship.'

Viswanathan also believes that liberal education gave Indians the illusion that they could be better than they actually were and that they were being empowered to change their personal destiny and affect the course of things. She points out that the value of literary studies in preparing for a specialized society was diminished due to the British unwillingness as well as failure in supplying enough jobs for the people receiving liberal education. Therefore, the British educational policy failed to generate respect for British authority or superiors in the Indian youth. English education had made them self-sufficient and infused into their minds a kind of false independence which knew of no distinction between high or low, old or young. The British education was dedicated to the creation of a liberal educated class armed with Western knowledge, with its promise of removal of caste and religious barriers, increased social mobility as well as enlightened participation in the administration of their own country.

Furthermore, Gauri Viswanathan expresses her views on English discipline. She states that the discipline of English came into its own in an age of colonialism. She also argues that no serious account of its growth and development can afford to ignore the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that, in the long run, served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in enormously complex ways. The young history of English literature as a subject of study is frequently noted, but less appreciated is the irony that English literature appeared as subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country. She points out that English literature is, in essence, an affirmation of English identity. An Englishman's true essence is defined by the thought he produces, overriding all other aspects of his identity, personality, actions and behaviour. She further argues that the introduction of English literature marks the effacement of a sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation as well as class and race oppression behind European world dominance. The English literary text thus became a mask for economic exploitation. Literature also helped ease the tension between increasing British involvement in Indian education and the repeated enforcement through various Committee reports of the non-interference in religion. Here was a discipline that was not religious, but could actually achieve the effects of a religion.

The influence of English language and literature proved to be marginal on the Arabic and Sanskrit languages:

‘In the absence of prior steps to persuade Indians of the need for moral and intellectual improvement, European literature would continue to exert a culturally marginal influence. The Orientalists in sum urged that until such educational strategies were carefully worked out, a policy of deference be adopted to the political, cultural, and spiritual hold of the learned classes of India.’

At a particular stage of this political relationship, however, the British decided to dishonour the Madarsas and Sanskrit colleges as mere vehicles of superstition. These colleges were labelled as religious institutions where learners were forced to sink into degradation. The British tried to respect and honour only those who imparted education in their institutions through the English language:

‘By denying learned men any honour or reward or marks of distinction and achievement, British policy virtually doomed these institutions to decay. The erosion of the traditional Indian respect for learning seriously affected its status in Indian society and progressively reduced native learning to an archaic institution.’

As a result, the British outlook changed dramatically in the English Education Act (1835). The policy of attacking the native culture thrived and young men accepted the study of English as a necessary part of polite education. This Act made English the medium of instruction in Indian education. With the formal

institutionalization of English as the language of instruction, the stage was set for a new direction to Indian education.

The entry of missionaries into India precipitated a new role for English literary study—the literary text read as a form of secular knowledge. English study became a way of achieving a high degree of mental and moral cultivation among the bulk of people. Among the more respectable classes of the community, there was a growing desire for acquired knowledge of the English language even if it was solely for the purpose of securing government positions. English education turned the Indians against their own religion due to its right reason and judgment.

The general response to English studies as a secular branch of knowledge was predicted by Duff:

‘The new ideas obtained by the study of English literature will undoubtedly weaken, if not destroy, superstitious prejudices; but, on the other hand, the knowledge thus attained tends to produce a supercilious pride and skepticism unless leavened with a large amount of Christian teaching, and this, in the present state of things, it is impossible to give.’

The substitution of reason for divine will by the Indian youth led to moral decay and subversion of moral law. In the name of teaching the mechanics of the English language, the British government saw no violation of its own injunction against religious interference by providing religious instruction indirectly. The government enthusiastically supported the teaching of English literature for the purpose of Christian enlightenment. The importance of English literature for this process could not be exaggerated. It represented a convenient replacement for direct religious instruction that was forbidden by law as the source of moral values for correct behaviour and action.

The dissociation of English literature from religion seems to be a reactionary response of a cautious British administration, intent on avoiding all interference in native religions. They tried to remove gradually religion and traditional religious explanations from the Indian sphere of knowledge, setting up a secular orientation and autonomous explanatory laws, and ultimately confining religion to matters of religious faith alone. Literature's relation with Christianity is analysed by Viswanathan:

‘Literature's relation to Christianity undoubtedly stemmed from an awareness of the operational value of English literature's double stance in reinforcing the validity of the knowledge to be imparted and, by extension, of the authority of those imparting it. Further, literature's doubleness enabled the validation of Christian belief by the disciplinary techniques of European learning while at the same time deflecting attention from its self-referential, self-confirming aspects. Its power rested on the idea that European disciplines, being products of human reason, were independent of systems of belief based on pure faith.’

Here, she points out the importance of English literature as suggested by the British. They explain the characterization of English literature as intellectual production, implicating a different process of reading, requiring the exercise of reason rather than unquestioning faith. She further refers to Duff, who dismissed any comparison of the study of Indian literature with the study of Western literature on the grounds that classical literature was read in Europe, as literary production and not as divine authority, like in India.

The distinction drawn between English and Indian literature in the context of their relation to religion, culminates in a purified, even sterilized conception of literature as constituted entirely by language. Disavowal of religious influence on literature acquired its most severe form in a plan that virtually endorsed a classical approach to literary studies, establishing language rather than belief and tradition as a source of value and culture. The grafting of English literary achievements on to the cultural systems of the colony began to succeed and reflected in the linguistic habits of Indians as the educated Indians began to speak purer English than the British. They acquired it from the purest models and spoke the language of Spectator. It put into action the filtration theory of Macaulay and Mill of promoting a small elite group through education in English, leading to the linguistic stratification of the Indian society. Some Indians reaped significant profits from learning English language and literature.

Viswanathan concludes her views on importance of English education:

‘English education gains subtle redefinition as an instrument of authenticity. English literary instruction, with its pedagogical imperative of nurturing a historically minded youth, places the Indian reader in a position where he renews contact with himself, recovering his true essence and identity from the degradation to which it had become subject through native despotism. Far from alienating the reader from his own culture, background, and traditions, English literature, taught less as a branch of rhetoric than of history, sought to return him to an essential unity with himself and reinsert him into the course of development of civilized man.’

Disconnected from their native traditions and accommodating themselves to a new tradition through the pursuit of English literary study, the minds of young Indians were unduly filled with thoughts of rising above their assigned position in life. Armed with a newly acquired knowledge of English, a much larger class of Indians were now willing to cooperate with the British in the exploitation of India's resources. As per the Filtration Theory, those who had the time and the leisure to acquire knowledge of the English language and English literature in the classical manner were doing so and being rewarded for their knowledge. This phenomenon had ensured a new generation of Indians trained to a high level of excellence in the study

of English literature. However, these high attainments remained confined only to a small number of persons.

Vishwanathan states that it was impossible to educate the masses in English or even in European thought through vernacular translations due to the scarcity of qualified teachers. Wood had modified education's cultural objectives by identifying the true discussion of European knowledge with its adaptation to the native culture. To overcome this problem, Wood had suggested combining the substance of European knowledge with native forms of thought and sentiment.

Literary education in India was a different story altogether. In the name of utility, literary education had become merely a mechanical acquisition of knowledge that neither required nor encouraged any of the finer qualities of literary culture or moral discrimination. She further points out that the study of English literature had merely succeeded in creating a class of *Babus*, who were intellectually hollow and insufficiently equipped with the desirable amount of knowledge and culture. According to her, English education came to be criticized for its imitativeness, superficiality and for having produced elites who were at once apostates to their own national tradition and imperfect imitators of the West. Viswanathan demonstrates the great failure of utilitarian educational practices:

'While Christian moralists attacked utilitarianism for its neglect of the spiritual life, Utilitarian educational practice was criticized as strongly in India for not being utilitarian enough, for not steering the native mind away from mundane and useless preoccupations. Even the institutions that had matured with the spread of English education- the literary societies, public lecturers, and debating clubs- had become empty forums.'

### Check Your Progress-1

1. What is the main argument in *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*?
2. What are the two aims that Viswanathan states that she has in writing this book?
3. Why didn't the British imperialists introduce any Indian literary texts for study in Indian schools and colleges in the early nineteenth century?
4. According to Viswanathan, why did English education come to be criticized?



### 3.4 The Politics of the English Language

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Language is a key issue in all discussions relating to cultural politics. The colonizer imposes his own language on the colonized, thereby denying them the freedom to choose their medium of expression. Language is such an important instrument of control as reality is constituted, understood and ultimately controlled through it. In colonization, language was only a borrowed means of perception for the colonized. As people were forced to learn the foreign language, they learnt to construct the real only from the oppressor's point of view. The tool they were asked to acquire spoke for somebody else's culture and worldview. According to Franz Fanon, to use a language is to assume a culture. To be disconnected from one's mother tongue implies a loss of contact with the culture represented by the language. It is what Ngugi wa Thiong'o calls the 'cultural bomb', whose effect is to 'annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.'

English literature was introduced in British India as a discipline even before it appeared in England. It was introduced not simply as a language but more as a study of culture in the British Indian curriculum. Viswanathan argues that it was the policy of the empire to introduce British values without trying to convert the colonized directly. Another purpose, which the introduction of English served, was to create an educated class of elites who would mediate between the colonizers and the colonized, and were made to realize that they could benefit from the continuation of British rule in India.

However, as history indicates, language is at best a two-edged weapon. The British policy to rule through language ultimately proved fatal for them. As a consequence of promotion of English, the colonized were given access to the knowledge that helped them organize themselves politically and build a freedom movement. The initially inferior people could now be equal linguistically. The liberating effect of English ultimately led to independence movements and final independence for the colonies.

However, the going away of the foreign rulers was not the end of the language issue. The beginning of de-colonization was also a beginning of new dilemmas. The process of de-colonization was accompanied by cultural and political assertion. The immediate reaction of the formerly colonized was to desperately resurrect their own thoughts and culture. One way of doing it was to obliterate the language of the oppressors and adopt their native language and culture. However, the trouble does not stop here. To their dismay, the colonized found that the dividing lines had been blurred.

The colonial situation forces two cultures together, and despite the collision and resulting tension, an unconscious assimilation has taken place.

The change inevitably occurs whether in the form of hybridization of cultures or in the form of an inherited foreign language. Therefore, it is naïve to think that an immediate linguistic overhaul would be possible. The new language and values cannot be shed easily and completely. This leads to the most important question — Should English be rejected, accepted or perhaps subverted in order to show defiance? There are at least two responses to this question. Some felt that national literature must be written in local languages in order to be authentic representations of national aspirations. After many years of writing in English, Ngugi wa Thiong'o decided to write in his mother tongue, Gikuyu. However, for many societies, the answer does not seem to come from rejection or from assimilation into a foreign culture. The resolution has been to transform the intrusion of language into a tool and use it against the oppressor. It places them on a level equal to the colonizers. Not only has English been used to voice opinions against colonization, it has been amalgamated with indigenous cultures to assert one's particular identity.

### **3.4.1 *Masks of Conquest and the History of English Education in India***

'This book discusses the institution, practice and ideology of English studies introduced in India under the British colonial rule. It does not seek to be a comprehensive record of the history of English, nor does it even attempt to catalog, in minute historical fashion, the various educational decisions, acts and resolutions that led to the institutionalization of English.' Despite this disclaimer by Viswanathan, the text does record the inflexions in the curriculum and the policies relating to English education in a way that it can be seen as an analytical catalogue of such inflexions.

Viswanathan initiates her educational history with the 1813 renewal of the East India Company's charter, an event accompanied by the opening of India to free trade, a loosening of control on missionary activity and the English Parliament assuming a moral responsibility over the Government of India. These competing interests set the stage for her history of the disciplinary beginnings of English.

The book traces how the literary curriculum was shaped by antagonistic relations between the East India Company and English Parliament, Orientalists and Anglicists, missionaries and Utilitarians as well as the Company officials and Indian elite. Viswanathan is careful to avoid explaining the various interest groups as smooth-running cogs within a colonial machinery.

The colonial civilizing project through English education in India was guided by imperial discourse in Britain. Viswanathan describes the development of English studies as 'a complex, heterogeneous formation' in which its imperial mission abroad intersects with but is not reducible to its

social mission at home — ‘Suggesting that the educational histories of England and India constitute a common history invariably communicates the erroneous impression that the function of education remains constant regardless of context.’ By painstakingly detailing the different curriculum used at each type of school, Viswanathan reveals that Literature (as we know it) was not always a unified body of knowledge.

For most of the nineteenth century, classical studies dominated a humanist education at the elite English colleges attended by members of the ruling class. English was instituted at Oxford in 1893 and Cambridge as late as 1917. The literary curriculum at working-class schools consisted largely of religious works, the primary objective of which was to inculcate moral values and self-discipline. Since Christianizing activities were restricted in India, the use of religious texts for educational purposes was discouraged.

The Company policy of religious neutrality was the source of constant battle between civil servants and missionaries. However, the latter soon discovered that Christian values could be imparted through literary works that were replete with biblical allusions. The threat of native insubordination coupled with pressure from the missionaries resulted in an eventual move toward a more religiously oriented literary curriculum at government colleges as well. Hence, English literature was perceived as a means of exerting a moral influence over Indians much in the same way that a religious pedagogy was aimed at disciplining the English working class.

When English education was gaining prominence in Britain, a classical approach to literature was revived in India. This shift was a response to the rise of a mass reading public that threatened the integrity of English culture. India was transformed into ‘a time capsule’ for pure English language and literature at the moment of its disappearance in the home country. While in England, literary pedagogy was split between an emphasis on classical studies for the upper classes and religious doctrine for the lower. In India, English literature served as a universal standard which would measure both civilization and morality. In this manner, an English education was the sign of class privilege among Indians, just like an intimate knowledge of Greek and Latin identified members of the British ruling class.

What follows in the book is the record of difficult and tedious negotiations between the different interest groups in England over defining the Indian political situation and responding to the challenges it posed by defining a new curriculum. The entry of the missionaries and the teaching of the Bible to the masses was initially restricted until the British realized that the effect of such education would be to create a mind frame that would be conducive to the exercise of colonial power.

Viswanathan’s text inaugurates a history writing that does not end with Indian freedom from the British but continues into the post-independence

era almost uninterrupted. Indeed, cultural freedom is a long drawn process and cannot be obtained by the mere passing of an Act or statute. Therefore, the inventory to a historical process depicted by Viswanathan structures the discipline even today. Indeed, the imperial mission of literary studies is so taken for granted that the Raj appears as an 'obvious' choice for Lionel Gossman to dramatize the current state of the profession in a well-known lecture at Princeton University:

'The teaching of literature, until very recently at least, seemed as well established as the British Raj once was in India. Even now, in our time of austerities and cutbacks, departments of language and literature, graduate and undergraduate, still dot the academic landscape more thickly than Indian Army barracks were once scattered over the landscape of the subcontinent.'

Viswanathan's caveat is that literary works are not neutral objects of study but ones that have been institutionally shaped by the teaching of English literature in the colonies:

'We can no longer afford to regard the uses to which literary works were put in the service of British imperialism as extraneous to the way these texts are to be read. The involvement of colonialism with literary culture is too deep, too pervasive for the disciplinary development of English literary pedagogy to be studied with Britain as its only or primary focus.'

With the current incorporation of 'Anglophone Literature' and 'Global English' into the discipline, English education seems to have come full circle. However, a reading of Viswanathan's book will quickly reveal that the language of current curriculum revisions has not changed all that much from the discourse of the Empire through which English literature was universalized.

### **3.5 The Gramsci Connection**

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Viswanathan's work draws theoretical sustenance from the illuminating insight of Antonio Gramsci, writing on the relations of culture and power that cultural domination works by consent and can (and often does) precede conquest by force. Gramsci was an Italian Marxist theoretician who is renowned for his theory of cultural hegemony, which describes how states use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies. Power, operating concurrently at two clearly distinguishable levels, produces a situation where Gramsci writes:

'The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as "domination" and as "intellectual and moral leadership". . . It seems clear . . . that there can and indeed must be hegemonic activity even before the rise to power, and that one should not count only on the material force which power gives in order to exercise an effective leadership.'

There is an almost bland consensus in the post-Arnoldian cultural criticism that the age of ideology begins when force gives way to ideas. However, the precise mode and process by which cultural domination is ensured is less open to scrutiny. The general approach is to treat 'ideology' as a form of masking, and the license given to speculative analyses, as a result, is sometimes great enough to suspend, at least temporarily, the search for actual intentions.

It is precisely this complex grey area in the context of English education in India that Viswanathan is out to chart in its precision and comprehensiveness. The area remains grey because detailed records of self-incrimination are not routinely preserved in state archives. However, where such records do exist, the evidence is often compelling enough to suggest that the Gramscian notion is not merely a theoretical construct but an uncannily accurate description of historical process subject to the vagaries of particular circumstances.

British India's history of cultural confrontation as well as voluntary cultural assimilation illustrates, according to Viswanathan, the legitimacy of Gramsci's ideas in a context it was not designed to explain. The political choices remaining with the British are spelled out in the most chilling terms by J. Farish in a minute issued in the Bombay Presidency:

'The Natives must either be kept down by a sense of our power, or they must willingly submit from a conviction that we are more wise, more just, more humane, and more anxious to improve their condition than any other rulers they could possibly have.'

Viswanathan's attentiveness to class differences exposes the limits of a critical model that reduces colonial relations to the binary opposition of colonizer and colonized. However, upon explaining English education as an ideology, she reasserts the binarism that she rejects in her textual analyses. As the book's title suggests, Viswanathan considers English literature to be a 'rarified, more exalted image of the English man' that serves as an ideological mask for economic exploitation. A similar division of ideal actually exists in her description of 'the colonial subject [as] a construct emanating from the colonizer's head'. At moments like these, she suggests that colonial discourse misrepresents an Indian reality, the truth of which lies in native texts. Such elaborations of ideology as the distortion of a material reality is at odds with the revisionary work of Antonio Gramsci that Viswanathan invokes as a theoretical frame to her study. Gramsci developed the notions of 'hegemony' and 'historical bloc' in order to counter the tendency to reduce ideology to 'mere appearance' or the 'world view' of a particular social group. It is not simply the case that the British created the fiction of cultural superiority for themselves or even the colonized; rather, the civilizing mission performed the ideological work of producing a native desire for Western knowledge, and, by extension, the British rule. Armed with an English education and access

to the publishing business, the Bengali urban elite represented, for all intents and purposes, the 'native public opinion' in the 1830s. Moreover, the colonized who spoke the master's language did not curse like Caliban but praised Prospero for extending Europe into Asia. It is in this capacity that the class-native served as an ideological alibi. At the same time, the contradictions to maintaining the colonial subject's subordination through a discourse of self-improvement opened up the space for the eventual rejection of foreign government. Indeed, this is what Viswanathan herself concludes in her chapter on 'The Failure of English', which, contrary to what the Introduction says, does not address the colonial subject as a figment of the British imagination:

'The colonial subject's resistance to British rule occurs in the ideological space created by this contradiction, transforming education in its dual aspects of social control and social advancement into the supreme paradox of British power.'

### 3.5.1 Culture and Power

Viswanathan's work can be studied fruitfully under the broad category of the complex, contradictory and varied nature of the relationships between culture and power. Here, the target culture is of course Indian, and the people desiring to exercise power over it, the British through the agency of English literary education. *Masks of Conquest* makes a special contribution in being the first presentation of the early period of English studies in India, which clearly depicts the problems of visible authority. Malashri Lal writes:

'English studies did emerge as the most prestigious form of education but Viswanathan makes us consider how its origin, placement, and progress in India created a confusion of values throughout the nineteenth century. In free India today, one can further add that the legacy remains: values and priorities continue to remain in confusion in the absence of a clear-sighted language policy.'

A discussion of the British Raj and its imposition of English studies in India can begin with T.B. Macaulay's famous Minute on Education:

'We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.'

*Masks of Conquest* is a major addition to the ongoing discourse on colonialism and nationhood. The story of how government measures promoted English studies, as you have read above, is quite complex, competing ideologies within groups of educational thinkers. Viswanathan makes this her main point, thereby upturning the usual assumption that a strong governing class determined a culturally homogeneous curriculum.

The text is replete with a number of instances of this complex negotiation, arising both out of the complexity of the subject under discussion as well as the variety of people who participated in the debate from different positions of power. The situation becomes additionally complex when it generates an equally complex range of reactions in its target audience.

One such instance features a lively debate between the Anglicists and the Orientalists in the months preceding Macaulay's minute. Horace Wilson had translated Kalidas and the *Rig Veda*. Moreover, the Sanskrit scholarship of Henry Prinsep and Nathaniel Halhed was well-recognized. These Orientalists firmly believed that European learning should not be forced upon people through the single channel of the English language. The Anglicists, Macaulay and Alexander Duff, among others, viewed Sanskrit texts and vernacular literature as the source of 'Hindu error' and wished to replace traditional learning altogether by the propagation of Western thought in the English language.

Such fine distinctions came to be made between secular learning and theology that the debate, at a critical point, centred on notions of how Hindus read their epics. The Serampore Missionary, William Carey, declared that English trained readers tend to admire the literary merits of Homer's *Iliad* as a 'great effort of human genius' and do not worship the mythical heroes. Hindus, he said, tend to use the *Mahabharata* as the basis of religious practice. Carey felt compelled to note that the Hindu epic 'is the ground of Faith to millions of men; and as such must be held in the utmost abhorrence.' The Orientalists resisted such misreading of the Hindu mind and pointed out, rather cautiously, the problems of separating scripture and literary content in the *Bible* or in *Paradise Lost*. Nevertheless, the Anglicists prevailed.

What was happening at the level of the Indians during the reception of the texts prescribed by both the Orientalists and the Anglicists is yet another story. While the leisured landed gentry used western learning in an increasingly complex power equation with the rulers, the largely conservative Indians derided it, even while the majority of the illiterate masses looked up to both as possible role models.

Reminding historians of the circularities in British decision-making, Viswanathan gives an account of Alexander Duff, the awe-inspiring educator in Calcutta. The motto of his institution read, rather extravagantly, 'He who enters here must moralize and religionize, as well as geometricize.' He defined secularism as the handmaiden of religion and devised a formidable curriculum. *The Bible* remained the single most important text. The syllabus included major works of Plato, Bacon and Milton but also unusual books such as Young's *Night Thoughts*, Paley's *Natural Theology* and Whately's *Rhetoric*. Duff's insistence on the *Bible* derived from an uncanny personal experience. On his voyage to India, he found himself shipwrecked twice.

Off Capetown, the ship struck a sandbank. Duff lost his entire library of eight hundred books, only one survived the wreckage — the *Bible*. On the next phase of his journey, Duff's ship was caught in monsoon storms near the coast of Bengal. That he survived these disasters seemed to him a divine miracle and led to his purposeful belief that education must begin with the *Bible*.

This blind faith in the *Bible* was matched only by an equally strong blindness to any merit in Indian works. He described English literature as 'a complete course of sound knowledge free of error in every branch of inquiry, literary, scientific, and theological.' By comparison, Duff said that India could not produce 'a single volume on any one subject that is not studded with error.'

In such contexts, William Jones's admiration for Indian classics comes readily to mind. As is widely known, Jones had proclaimed Kalidas the Shakespeare of India and had undertaken the translation of *Shakuntala*. However, the voices of opposition were heard here as well. In the hands of James Mill, the virtues of the Sanskrit text, its lyricism and sentiment, were turned against it. Mill objected to the pastoralism in *Shakuntala* and saw the nuptial in the forest as 'that kind of marriage which two lovers contract from the desire of amorous embraces.' The play, according to Mill, encouraged superstition and extravagant imagination, and was yet another source of 'degradation'.

What had English literature to offer as an alternative? Viswanathan recalls how the Indian university system evolved from the strategies of 'the Filtration theory' first enunciated by Macaulay and later strengthened by John Stuart Mill. The theory operated on the principle of 'the few teaching the many by example'. Those with time, leisure and ambition were encouraged to acquire the knowledge of English literature and language. Records (both serious and humorous) show that the Bengali gentleman of the late nineteenth century quoted freely from Shakespeare, Milton and Dr. Johnson, and declared pleasure in reading Scott, Hume and Gibbon. The upper classes were lured into this form of education by the security of government jobs, which, in turn, brought fame among their kin. Viswanathan's evidence shows the actual, rather pathetic attainments of such learning. 'Young Babus undertake to reveal to the admiring world beauties in Milton which Macaulay never perceived, and archaisms in Shakespeare which Halliwell never detected', came a comment from Bombay (now Mumbai). In the 'literary mania of Calcutta', a flood of essays got written on Pope, *Paradise Lost* and Shakespeare's tragedies, said a report from Calcutta.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the British policy which had hoped to promote Western rationalism in the masses through English studies had clearly gone awry. Even Indian reformers such as Rammohan Roy, who had sided with the introduction of English, but had resisted the displacement



of Hindu scriptural texts, were disillusioned by the outcome. Viswanathan summarizes:

‘Instead of a monolithic society linked by a single set of ideas emanating from the West, as originally intended, it had produced a stratified society in which boundaries between the select few educated in English and the masses had grown so sharp as to thwart the percolation of European ideas down to the latter in any form, even through translations.’

One can further add that the ‘educated’ Indians, who had expected upward mobility, both economic and social, had to be content with middle-level bureaucratic jobs. They became distanced from their own intellectual traditions, their own social mores, but could never become ‘English’ except in superficial ways. The fundamental paradox of British imperialism thus stood exposed as the exploitation of the natives, the more reprehensible in this instance due to the moral declarations of an educational norm. Claiming high motives and ethical sanctities, the policy-makers used subterfuge to disguise their will to attain power.

Up to this point, Viswanathan's historical placing of the debates in policy-making is accurate and highly readable. Some confusion appears in the late chapter as she calls the ‘Failure of English’. If the objectives of British colonialism had ‘failed’ at the turn of the century, how are we to account for the continued prominence of English up to 1947 and four decades beyond that? Malashri Lal’s analysis of this contemporary issue reads as follows:

‘We have to acknowledge that despite attempts to the contrary by educationists in independent India, English has retained its popularity and status—indeed with a kind of arro-gant triumph. The pertinent question then is why this is so. Were the imperialist policies so utterly destructive of native traditions that even after the Raj withdrew its hegemonic hold, the indigenous systems of learning could not be revived? In another way, one may enquire if English education created a cultural elite in "free" India that continued to believe and propagate the values inherent in English culture, though, by now, twice removed from it. As a third speculation one may accept the presence of English as the link language in India and yet project new ways of reading the literature in English.’

### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. What is a key issue in all discussions relating to cultural politics?
2. Why did the British policy to rule through language ultimately proved fatal for them?
3. What is the broad category under which Viswanathan’s work can be studied?

### 3.6 Let Us Sum Up

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- Gauri Viswanathan is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature in Columbia University, New York.
- *Masks of Conquest* centres around the institution, practice and ideology of English studies introduced in India under the British colonial rule.
- The text is not a comprehensive record of the history of English, nor does it attempt to catalogue the various educational decisions, acts and resolutions that led to the institutionalization of English.
- One of the first points Viswanathan makes is that the history of education in British India shows that humanistic functions traditionally associated with literature — like the shaping of character, the development of the aesthetic sense or the discipline of ethical thinking — were considered essential to the process of colonial control by the imperialists.
- Viswanathan goes on to point out that in early nineteenth century, the colonizers did not introduce any Indian literary texts for study in Indian schools and colleges as they thought that these texts were tainted with immorality and impurity.
- The British tried to discredit Hindu society and religion. They tried to attack the caste system, idol worship, polytheism and propitiatory rites of Indians. They privileged morality, monotheism and monorule.
- Language is a key issue in all discussions relating to cultural politics. The colonizer imposes his own language on the colonized, thereby denying them the freedom to choose their medium of expression.
- The British policy to rule through language ultimately proved fatal for them. As a consequence of promotion of English, the colonized were given access to the knowledge that helped them organize themselves politically and build a freedom movement.
- Viswanathan's work draws theoretical sustenance from the illuminating insight of Antonio Gramsci, writing on the relations of culture and power that cultural domination works by consent and can (and often does) precede conquest by force.
- Viswanathan's work can be studied fruitfully under the broad category of the complex, contradictory and varied nature of the relationships between culture and power. Here, the target culture is of course Indian, and the people desiring to exercise power over it, the British through the agency of English literary education.

### 3.7 Key Words

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- **Imperialism:** A policy or practice by which a country increases its power by gaining control over other areas of the world
- **Complementarity:** A dynamic interaction of interests whose resolution is not necessarily confined to the context in which any given concern originates but extends actively to those contexts that provide the soil for such resolution
- **Orientalism:** The style, artifacts, or traits considered characteristic of the peoples and cultures of Asia
- **Anglicism:** A word, idiom or feature of the English language occurring in or borrowed by another language
- **Apostate:** A person who renounces a religious or political belief or principle
- **Pedagogy:** The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept

### 3.8 Terminal Questions

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1. What are the main arguments that Viswanathan makes in *Masks of Conquest*?
2. According to Viswanathan, why did the British introduce the English education system in India?
3. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, what was the attitude of the British to Indian literary texts?
4. Orientalism and Anglicism are not polar opposites but points along a continuum of attitudes toward the manner and form of native governance. Discuss.
5. Language is a key issue in all discussions relating to cultural politics. Discuss.
6. How does Viswanathan's work draw theoretical sustenance from theories of Antonio Gramsci?

### 3.9 Suggested Readings

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### 3.10 Model Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’

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#### Check Your Progress-1

1. In *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989) Viswanathan argued that the English-Literary canon in India was an imperial tool, a method by which a collaborating class was brainwashed into accepting the cultural superiority of Britain.
2. Viswanathan states that she has two general aims in writing this book. The first is to study the adaptation of the content of English literary education to the administrative and political imperatives of British rule. The second is to examine the ways in which these imperatives, in turn, charged that content with a radically altered significance, enabling the humanistic ideals of enlightenment to coexist with and even support education for social and political control.
3. According to Viswanathan, the British colonizers did not introduce any Indian literary texts for study in Indian schools and colleges as they thought that these texts were tainted with immorality and impurity.
4. According to Viswanathan, English education came to be criticized for its imitateness, superficiality and for having produced elites who were at once apostates to their own national tradition and imperfect imitators of the West.

#### Check Your Progress-2

1. Language is a key issue in all discussions relating to cultural politics. The colonizer imposes his own language on the colonized, thereby denying them the freedom to choose their medium of expression.
2. The British policy to rule through language ultimately proved fatal for them. As a consequence of promotion of English, the colonized were given access to the knowledge that helped them organize themselves politically and build a freedom movement.
3. Viswanathan’s work can be studied fruitfully under the broad category of the complex, contradictory and varied nature of the relationships between culture and power.



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