

PREFACE

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Bachelors Degree Programme, the opportunity to pursue Honours course in any subject introduced by this University is equally available to all learners. Instead of being guided by any presumption about ability level, it would perhaps stand to reason if receptivity of a learner is judged in the course of the learning process. That would be entirely in keeping with the objectives of open education which does not believe in artificial differentiation.

Keeping this in view, study materials of the Honours level in different subjects are being prepared on the basis of a well laid-out syllabus. The course structure combines the best elements in the approved syllabi of Central and State Universities in respective subjects. It has been so designed as to be upgradable with the addition of new information as well as results of fresh thinking and analysis.

The accepted methodology of distance education has been followed in the preparation of these study materials. Co-operation in every form of experienced scholars is indispensable for a work of this kind. We, therefore, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone whose tireless efforts went into the writing, editing and devising of proper lay-out of the materials. Practically speaking, their role amounts to an involvement in 'invisible teaching'. For, whoever makes use of these study materials would virtually derive the benefit of learning under their collective care without each being seen by the other.

The more a learner would seriously pursue these study materials, the easier it will be for him or her to reach out to larger horizons of a subject. Care has also been taken to make the language lucid and presentation attractive so that they may be rated as quality self-learning materials. If anything remains still obscure or difficult to follow, arrangements are there to come to terms with them through the counselling sessions regularly available at the network of study centres set up by the University.

Needless to add, a great deal of these efforts is still experimental—in fact, pioneering in certain areas. Naturally, there is every possibility of some lapse or deficiency here and there. However, these do admit of rectification and further improvement in due course. On the whole, therefore, these study materials are expected to evoke wider appreciation the more they receive serious attention of all concerned.

Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar
Vice-Chancellor

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BACHELORS DEGREE PROGRAMME : ENGLISH
[BDP: EEG]

New Syllabus effective from July 2015 Session

EEG : Paper - VIII

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Mohan Kumar Chattopadhyay

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From the Editorial Desk

It has been a rewarding experience coordinating the syllabus revision exercise and the induction of new Self Learning Materials (SLM) for the EEG Programme under the aegis of the School of Humanities of our University. The new syllabus and its attendant study materials are the result of concerted endeavours through workshops, repeated interactions, shared leadership and above all, protracted labour on the part of everyone who has been associated with this project.

The need for a thorough syllabus revision for BDP English was a long standing one, as the existing framework had long stood its time and needed to take a fresh look at the dynamically altered literary scenario. In framing the new syllabus, experts have been guided by the rationale of putting in place a curriculum that would effectively serve as proper foundations for a Graduation level course in English Literature, which by itself has come to be seen as a widely interdisciplinary area. The Learning Objectives envisaged in this syllabus include a periodic knowledge of History of English Literature spread across Papers that will be divided mainly in a chronology - genre pattern; acquaintance with literary texts in a similar sequence and logic; primary knowledge of relevant literary criticism/theory; essentials of History of Language and basics of pronunciation; and an introduction to the basics of Indian Writing in English which is the least that one can think of from the New Literatures arena at this level.

Being a University dedicated to Open and Distance Learning, the creation of SLM's is a corollary to the formulation of a new syllabus. This has traditionally been the mainstay of Student Support Services at NSOU and efforts have been made to produce SLM's that can be as learner friendly as possible. While the print material shall be inducted to begin with, there is in the pipeline a project for introducing multimedia learning aids for relevant portions of the syllabus, to augment SLM's at the earliest possible instant. This could include live audio-video interactions on select topics, on-screen and on-stage footage clips, readings of poetry and prose, recordings from classrooms and the like; all of it for widest possible dissemination among our learners. We would welcome suggestions on this from our BDP counsellors as well. It is hoped that since our Study Centres are now mostly ICT enabled, learners will be able to enjoy their studies with

the help of both versions of study tools. While they can look upon NSOU materials thus provided on offline and online modes as primary aids, they will however be expected to equip themselves with thorough reading of texts and references on the lines indicated in the SLM's. After all, we presume that as a student of literature by choice, one has a predilection for literary texts and has taken up this Programme to augment his/her levels of understanding, along with the necessity of acquiring a degree that shall stand in good stead in life.

On behalf of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Netaji Subhas Open University, we stand to thank the experts on the Syllabus Committee, the content writers and the Paper editors for their constant support and adherence to timelines, the valuable academic inputs they have provided, and the numerous ways in which they have embellished the final print materials, their own engagements notwithstanding. It has I'm sure, been a labour of love for all of you, and we acknowledge your support for enabling us to see through the successful implementation of the entire project.

To all our learners, dear students, we congratulate you on your choice of NSOU as the preferred institution for enhancing your academic pursuits. Here's hoping and wishing that you will make the most out of our blend of the serious acquiring of knowledge amidst flexible conditions and achieve your cherished goals in life. Let us make learning an enjoyable activity.

Dated: Kolkata
20th October 2017

Srideep Mukherjee
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Paper Editors' Introduction to Paper VIII

Dear Students,

In Paper VIII you will study non-British texts and contexts only. This paper intends to introduce you to the literary texts and historical backgrounds that define Indian Writing in English. As an undergraduate student, you must understand the significance of studying Indian literature in English, especially in a scenario when the focus has gradually shifted from English literature to literatures written in English. It is from this perspective that Indian literature in English has emerged as an important area of study. While studying this paper, your main focus needs to be on the canonical writers whose contributions have been widely recognised. You also need to understand the various trends of writings that define the 'Indianness' of the Indian writers. Keeping in mind the purpose of studying this new breed of literature at the undergraduate level, the paper has been carefully structured to initiate the students into the world of Indian Writing in English.

This paper has four modules and each module has three units. Module 1 discusses the issues that led to the emergence of Indian Writing in English. This module traces the development of India Writing in English since its inception. It also attempts to acquaint the students with the different literary genres that reflect the changing course of Indian literature in English from the colonial to the post-colonial times. Module 2 deals with the Indian Poetry in English and it provides a detailed background required for the study of this literary genre. The poems selected for study in this module are very important as they help us capture the spirit of Indian poetry from different perspectives. Module 3 focuses on the Indian novels in English. An attempt has been made here to introduce the students to the varieties and richness of this literary genre. The three novels in the module provide a framework that will help the students grasp the shifting socio-cultural content and stylistic varieties of three different periods. Module 4 introduces the students to three literary genres: Indian drama in English, Indian short story in English and Indian non-fictional prose in English. This

module intends to make the students aware of the representative features of the three different literary genres.

Like your earlier Papers, the question pattern for Assignment and Term-End examinations remain the same:

2 (out of 4) essay-type questions of 20 marks each

3 (out of 6) mid-length questions of 12 marks each

4 (out of 8) short answer type questions of 6 marks each

We wish you all the best and hope that this Paper creates an interest in you to know more about this area of study.

Kolkata,

Editors

20th October 2017

SYLLABUS

EEG 8. Indian Writing in English

Module 1–Locating our Voices

Unit 1 – Background: The Colonial and Postcolonial Scenarios

Unit 2 – The Emerging Genres

Unit 3 – In Search of a New Idiom

Module 2–Reading Poetry

Unit 1 – Derozio: *The Harp of India*; Toru Dutt: *Our Casuarina tree*

Unit 2 – Ramanujan: *A River* ; Ezekiel : *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher; Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S*

Unit 3 – Kamala Das : *An Introduction* ; Mamang Dai : *Remembrance*,
Temsula Ao : *A Tiger- Woman’s Prayer*

Module 3–Reading Fiction

Unit 1 – R. K Narayan: *The English Teacher*

Unit 2 – Anita Desai: *Fire on The Mountain*

Unit 3 – Salman Rushdie: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Module 4–Drama, Short Story and Non-Fiction

Unit 1 – Mahesh Dattani: *Tara*

Unit 2 – Meenakshi Mukherjee: *The Anxiety of Indianness*

Unit 3 – Extract from Ruskin Bond: *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills*; Raja Rao: *India- A Fable*



**NETAJI SUBHAS
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**EEG - 8
Elective Course
in English**

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Module - 1 : Locating our Voices

Unit -1 □ Background : The Colonial and Postcolonial Scenarios

1.1.0 Introduction

1.1.1 Scope of Indian Writing in English

1.1.2 The English Language: Zones of Contact and Emergence of Literature

1.1.3 Colonial Period: Background

1.1.4 Post-Colonial Period: Background

1.1.5 Summing Up

1.1.6 Comprehension Exercises

1.1.7 Suggested Reading

1.1.0 Introduction

In this Paper at large, you will study texts and contexts which are not British in content and spirit. Unlike the earlier papers in your syllabus, this one will deal with literary texts and backgrounds which are all Indian. Even a few decades ago inclusion of Indian Writing in English as a paper at the undergraduate, or even postgraduate, levels was unthinkable. But today, thanks to the changing nature of academic canons, it is quite usual for us to find Indian Writing in English as a core paper at the undergraduate and postgraduate English literature courses in Indian universities. Indian English poems, short stories, plays or novels figure as important components even in some high school syllabi. It is quite evident therefore that Indian authors writing in English are very much part of the established canon of English literature now. The focus has indeed shifted from the concept of English literature to that of literatures written in English because the language has become the medium of cultural communication in the erstwhile British

colonies. It is from this perspective that Indian literature in English has emerged as an important area of study.

In this unit, as you will see, we shall begin from the beginning. We shall give a brief description of how English as a language spread throughout India, how English literature was introduced in educational institutions of the country, and how it shaped new Indian literary sensibilities which gradually gave birth to what we know today as Indian Writing in English. You will, I am sure, find this history really fascinating. It will also be quite interesting to probe, from our own cultural locations, how Indian authors responded to the practices of colonialism, to the British cultural products, and to the aesthetic norms of their literature in particular. While this is interesting history, it has been challenging too – at least initially, for it meant, what the famous novelist Raja Rao called, the dilemma of writing about issues which are ‘ours’ in a ‘language that is not one’s own’. Definitely, this was a dilemma that had to be negotiated by the early Indian writers in the beginning, until the language itself was appropriated by ‘us’ in ‘our’ own ways. This happened not only in India but also in the other countries formerly colonised by the British. In the postcolonial globalised environment, English has been appropriated in the erstwhile colonies and the literary works from these countries have been accorded recognition worldwide. India too has its share of talented poets, short story writers, novelists and playwrights writing in English, who have been received favourably by readers spread all around the world.

As a result of the inter-cultural dialogue resulting from the colonial history of our country, fictional and non-fictional works have proliferated. The hybrid nature of the literary works has been subjected to intense critical debates right from the beginning. There were amusing descriptions of such literary products – the range of which will give you a hint of the opposed polarities of perceiving this newly born literature. Thus for instance, while George Bottomley called it “Matthew Arnold in a saree”, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar dubbed it as “Shakuntala in a mini-skirt”! You can well understand that the two descriptions above use sartorial metaphors, but Rushdie employs a direct biological one when he refers to Indian Writing in English as “the bastard child of Empire sired on India by the departing British” (Rushdie iii). There are serious academic discussions as well. Miscegenation (meaning inter-mixture here) of cultures and hybridised cultural products, however, are no longer viewed with derision. They are, on the contrary, even given prominence in the context of the postcolonial celebration of the periphery. The cultural works originating from that source are received with recognition. The changed reception patterns of hybrid literary works in the postcolonial environment are

instrumental in the introduction and popularisation of Indian Writing in English.

The birth of the miscegenated category also generated some confusion about how to call this new branch of English literature. Critics of all hues debated over the issue of the right nomenclature (i.e naming or system of naming). The changing responses to the field are reflected in the shifting nomenclatures applied to this particular field of study. You may note how the designations changed over the decades. Initially, it was called “Anglo-Indian Literature.” Edward Farley Oaten was perhaps the first one to use this denomination. It used to refer to the “writings of Englishmen in Indian [sic] on Indian themes” (Sarma). It soon gave way to the next nomenclature “Indo-Anglian Literature” which replaced the prominence of the ‘Anglo’ elements by foregrounding the ‘Indo’ elements. “Indo-Anglian Literature” was used first by James H. Cousin (1883) and later by Iyengar. V. K. Gokak was in favour of the term “Indo-English.” Mulk Raj Anand used the term “Indian-English Writing” with a hyphen in between the words ‘Indian and ‘English.’ For some time “Indian Writing in English” (without the hyphen used by Anand) was used by the Central Institute of English and Other Foreign Languages (CIEFL), now known as English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU). M.K.Naik’s term “Indian English Literature” received wide acceptance and was even recognised by the Sahitya Akademi, the national academy of letters in India. All these nomenclatures were in fact engaged over a discursive battle on how much native/foreign, colonial/postcolonial or national/international the new body of literary works are. In our course, we have decided to call it “Indian Writing in English,’ indicating the geographical origin of the literature and the national identity of the writers. One is, however, at liberty to use the M. K. Naik designated category of ‘Indian English literature’ as well.

➤ **Activity:**

- The phrases used by George Bottomley and Srinivasa Iyengar – “Matthew Arnold in a saree” and “Shakuntala in a mini-skirt” respectively – convey two different perspectives of the status of English in India. Try to reflect on the differences and note down the points.
- Note down the different nomenclatures used for the Indian Writing in English. Are you satisfied with the one we are using?

1.1.1 Scope of Indian Writing in English

The nomenclature ‘Indian Writing in English’ contains in it the concept of ‘India’ as a

geo-cultural region where English is accepted as one of the many languages of communication. Interestingly however, while India as a nation-state like other nation-states, has clearly defined borders; India as a nation is much more expansive and much more inclusive. It includes, for example, people of Indian origin scattered in **diaspora** all over the world. English as a language also cannot be confined to any particular country (more so because of the history of colonialism associated with it); it always spills over national borders. In the context of the above, we need to be aware of the complex issues that the term evokes when used in a literary-cultural context. The main question that confronts us is: How inclusive/exclusive is the term? Who are to be included in the scope of the term?

The history of Partition of India inevitably queers the pitch. The geo-political spaces now called Pakistan and Bangladesh were at one time part of the nation-state called India. Before the creation of Pakistan (and later Bangladesh) they were very much part of Indian polity, society and culture. Should an author like Ahmed Ali who wrote both before and after the Partition but who migrated to Pakistan in the post-Partition period be included within the scope of the nomenclature? Secondly, should we include the writings originally written in Indian languages and then translated into English (like many of the plays of Girish Karnad or Vijay Tendulkar) within the purview of Indian Writing in English? Thirdly, what should be the status of the Indian diasporic writers like Bharati Mukherjee or Jhumpa Lahiri who have been writing from the diasporic space on themes related to India, Indians and Indianness? Many of them may now claim themselves to be American or British writers having the citizenship of those countries and may have relegated their Indianness to the past. These are some of the questions you may ponder over. There may be similar other questions you may locate yourself and reflect on.

➤ **Activity:**

- Read the first chapter (“The Literary Landscape: The Nature and Scope of Indian English Literature”) of M. K. Naik’s book *A History of Indian English Literature* (see pp.1-6) and locate some more problems like the ones mentioned above. What would be your response to what Naik observes about Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Praver Jhabvala (3) in particular?
- In his book mentioned above M. K. Naik defines Indian English literature in the following way:

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. (2; emphasis original)

How far do you accept his view that ‘creative translations [into English] by the authors themselves’ should be included into the scope of Indian English literature? (See p. 2).

- Naik also comments in the same book: “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” (3). What does Naik mean by the term ‘Indian sensibility’? From your own temporal location how would you define it?

1.1.2 The English Language: Zones of Contact and Emergence of Literature

The birth and growth of Indian English literature may be said to be the result of inter-racial contacts and dialogues between two cultures. Vinay Dharwadker, in his article “English in India and Indian Literature in English: The Early History 1579-1834,” offers us a survey of the ‘zones’ where these inter-racial contacts took place. These zones were the sites of the early usage of the English language in India and led to the creation of a new group of individuals whose association with the East India Company led to the publication of new narratives. For instance, out of Dean Mahomed’s (1759-1851) association with the East India Company’s Bengal Army which he joined in 1769 and his experience in England, was born his narrative *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794). This is the first book written in English by an Indian. In this section we shall identify the zones of contact, briefly discuss the socio-political implications of the inter-racial interactions and their literary implications.

Dharwadker argues that the English language made its presence felt in India much before the actual colonialism took place. He mentions the following contact zones through which the English language gradually found its roots:

(a) The Zone of Employment

- (b) The Zone of Marriage and Family
- (c) The Zone of Religious Conversion
- (d) The Zone of Friendship and Social Relations

He mentions two names in particular – Father Thomas Stephens, a Roman Catholic, (96) and Ralph Fitch, a British merchant, who travelled widely in what is now India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia and published the accounts of his travel in “the expanded version of Haklyut’s *The principal navigations: voyages, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation (1599-1600)*” (Dharwadkar 98). He rightly points out that “Stephens and Fitch were also the prototypical representatives of two entire classes of historical agents—the missionary and the merchant” (98).

The first zone of contact (zone of employment) created a group of Indian *dubhashis* (literally, those who can speak two languages). In fact, they could speak not only English but also Portuguese, Dutch, French, Persian and many Indian languages. They were intermediaries in the matter of business in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. Burton Stein observes:

Indeed, the numerous clerks of the East India Company’s commercial, and later legal and political, offices learned their jobs by sitting with relatives who were employed by the Company. They learned to write and keep the records without pay until they were proficient enough to be employed themselves. English-medium schools came later, and enrolments there increased rapidly during the later nineteenth century. (qtd. in Dharwadker 103)

In the eighteenth century the task of carrying the communication was mostly executed by three “types of *dubhashis*—the clerk-interpreter, the personal manager, and the indigenous scholar—... [they were] the first Indians to become literate in English” (Dharwadker 104). He argues that

[w]ithin the first one hundred years of its existence, this zone had successfully acculturated three or four generations of Indians ‘on the job.’ The earliest Indian writers in English—Din Muhammad, C.V. Boriah, and Rammohun Roy—encountered and learned to speak English, acquired their English literacy, and adapted themselves to British and European culture in this zone, using the resources they already possessed as literate Indian multilinguals. (105)

The large domestic retinue of servants and other employees and the soldiers in the army who were anglicised to some extent picked up English from their masters and officers respectively.

British businessmen, employees and soldiers who were deprived of the company of British women either married Indian women or developed affairs with them. Out of these were born generations of children of mixed parentage. These children were mostly baptised as Christians or later converted. The British men and Indian women formed families. They, along with their children, constituted a group conversant in the English language, literature and culture. One may mention in this zone the name of Henry Derozio whose contribution to Indian Poetry in English has been etched in gold. Some of the important post-colonial writers who may be categorised in this zone are Anita Desai, Dom Moraes, Ruskin Bond, Eunice de Souza and Melanie Silgado. Religious conversion was another avenue of acculturation. Besides these zones, there were often instances of good friendship between the British individuals and their Indian counterparts which contributed to the mutual exchange of knowledge and understanding.

Two of the above zones, according to Dharwadker, are most important so far as Indian Writing in English is concerned:

the zone of conversion and the zone of interracial marriage and family together produced a high proportion of the major Indian-English writers of the nineteenth century, from Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt to Govin Chunder Dutt, his brother Girish, and his daughters Toru and Aru (the first two Indian women poets in English), and to Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (the first Indian woman prose-writer in English). The rate of conversion has decreased in the twentieth century, but this zone has continued to produce Indian-English writers, Jayanta Mahapatra and Deba Patnaik being two intriguing instances in recent times. (108-9)

➤ **Activity**

- Try to gather some information about Haklyut and his *The principal navigations: voyages, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation* (1599-1600).

1.1.3. Colonial Period: Background

It is evident from the earlier discussion that there had been an interactive process of a

linguistic and cultural dialogue between the English and the Indians at different levels. It culminated in the birth of English-educated Indians even before the formal introduction of English education through the recommendations in Macaulay's *Minutes* (1835). private and missionary educational institutes like Sherbourne Academy (where Rammohan Roy got his early education) and Drummond's Academy (where Henry Derozio was educated) provided English education. The Hindu College (later known as Presidency College) was also established in 1817.

The seeds of Indian Writing in English lie properly in the introduction of English education in India, although works in English like Cavally Venkata Boria's "Accounts of the Jains" (written in 1803 and published in 1809) and Rammohan Ray's "A Defence of Hindu Theism" had appeared before 1835. The new education created a group of Indians who knew the alien language well enough to dream of writing in English. They had the English literary figures like Shakespeare or Milton, whom they read in schools and colleges, as the model of literary excellence. So we need to know the basic facts about the beginning of English education and how it inspired a group of young students ideologically. As the English gradually began to settle down in India, they gave serious thoughts to the nature of education to be imparted to the native students. Initially they were in favour of retaining or reviving languages like Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. With this in mind, they established the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781, and the Sanskrit College in Benaras in 1792. But soon due to colonial administrative demands and well-orchestrated demands from the natives themselves, the scale tilted towards the English education. Indians felt the need for 'a liberal education.' Naik refers to a Calcutta Brahmin Baidyanath Mukhopadhyaya who told the Chief Justice of Supreme Court that "many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming establishment of education of their children in a liberal manner" (10). As a result of strong appeals for the introduction of English education on the part of the Indians, Hindu College, as we have mentioned earlier, was established in Calcutta on 20 January, 1817 for the education of "the sons of respectable Hindoos." The students of Hindu College received, according to the observations made in 1830 by the Committee on Public Instruction, "a command of the English language, and ...familiarity with its literature and science...rarely equalled by any schools in Europe" (qtd. in Mehrotra 6). It was followed by the foundation of Anglo-Hindu School in 1822. It created an enthusiasm for learning the language not only in Calcutta but also in the villages of Bengal. In his book *Recollections of My School-days* Lal Behari Dey gives a very vivid description of how English was learnt both in urban and rural Bengal before 1834. The result of this enthusiasm is evident in publications like Krishna Mohan Banerjea's *The Persecuted* (1831) or Kylas Chunder Dutt's "A

Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945” (1835) originally published in *Calcutta Literary Gazette, or Journal of Belle Lettres, Science, and the Arts* (Vol. III, New Series No. 75, 6th June 1835) edited by David Lester Richardson. Banerjee who converted to Christianity was a member of the “Young Bengal” and was the founder-editor of *The Enquirer* (1831-5). Dutt was a student of the Hindu College where Richardson was the Principal.

Raja Rammohan Roy who was an ardent supporter of English education wrote his now famous *Letter on Indian Education* (1823) to Lord Amherst. He observed that “the Sanskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness” (qtd. in Naik 11). He argues in favour of

a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing ... useful sciences, which may be accomplished by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus. (qtd. in Naik 11)

In fact the debates about the choice of the medium of education known as the Anglicist-Orientalist controversy raged for about four decades. Some important members of the East India Company initially did not want to introduce English education as it might foster an anti-colonial attitude. In fact, that such an apprehension was not baseless is established by the fact that two early works in English were anti-British in theme. The first fictional work in English by an Indian – Kylas Chunder Dutt’s “A Journal of Forty-eight Hours of the Year 1945” published in 1835 – which we have mentioned earlier was a narrative of a ‘nationalist’ rebellion led by a young man called Bhoobun Mohun who was educated at the ‘Anglo-Indian College.’ His cousin Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s *The Republic of Orissa: Annals from the Pages of Twentieth Century* (1845) was also a futuristic account of a tribal revolt against the colonial rule. Despite such an apprehension, colonial administrators gradually, particularly from the end of the eighteenth century, felt the need for educating the natives through the English language for their own convenience and benefit. The emergence of this new group of English educated natives who would be employed as ‘writers’ (clerks), interpreters and lower officials in the colonial administration also marks the beginning of a new chapter in the colonial history of India. It paved the way for the birth of the English writings by the Indians themselves. The Christian religious agenda of converting the Hindus also intensified the urgency of establishing missionary schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the South and in places like Bengal and Bombay. These

were the obvious attempts at bringing the ‘conquered people’ within the fold of the English public life, albeit on the fringes, as accessories to their purposes. It is for all these reasons that demand for the English education gained momentum. As K.K. Chatterjee informs, “The Home Office despatches from 1824 onwards went on being increasingly insistent on re-orienting Indian education to teach the useful science and literature of Europe” (qtd. in Naik 10). The Anglicist-Orientalist debate over the choice of medium of education was solved ultimately by Thomas Babington Macaulay “who combined in himself the spirit of staunch Evangelism, Messianic imperialism and Whig liberalism... He stated emphatically that it was both necessary and possible to ‘make the natives of this country good English scholars’ and that ‘to this end all our efforts ought to be directed’” (Naik 12). In his famous “Minutes on Education” (1835) the oft-quoted lines occur, “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (qtd. in Mehrotra 5). Mehrotra points out, “The class had long been in the process of formation and consisted largely of the new urban elite, the rising *bhadralok* population of Calcutta” (5). Most of the poets and fictional and non-fictional Indian English writers of the time were the products of this class. You may remember in this respect the two Dutt brothers – Kylas Chunder and Shoshi Chunder – whom we have mentioned earlier. Krishna Mohan Banerjea who wrote *The Persecuted* (1831) may also be mentioned in this context.

The Great Revolt of 1857– this coincides with the establishment of first three Indian universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras – widened the gulf between the English and the Indians. The sense of nationalism intensified. “The gradual spread of the vast railway network, the growth of the native press in the bigger cities and the acquisition of a common language – viz., English – soon brought the new Indian intelligentsia close together” (Naik 30-1). The role of the emerging middleclass intelligentsia and social reformers in bringing ‘the winds of change’ (Naik’s words) cannot be ignored.

The attempt was to bring about changes in the existing socio-religious fields and also to plant the seeds of nationalism in the Indians. Raja Rammohan Ray founded the Brahmo Samaj which sought to refashion Hinduism in the monotheist form. It was later taken forward by Prince Dwarkanath Tagore and Keshab Chunder Sen. Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj followed. The establishment in 1875 of the Anglo-Arabic College (later turned into the Aligarh Muslim University) instilled confidence in the members of the Muslim community. The infatuation of the earlier generations, ‘the first fruits of English education,’ with things British was effectively counterbalanced by the spirit and

enthusiasm generated by these socio-religious movements. All these also led to the creation of political awareness among the Indians as manifested through the foundation of the British India Association (1839), the Bengal British India Society (1843), the British Indian Association of Calcutta (1851), and the Indian National Congress (1885). Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal (1905) aroused a strong anti-British sentiment and gave rise to nationalist writings. R. C. Majumdar observes, '[S]tarting as a purely local movement, [this protest] led to and merged itself in a national struggle of All India character against the British, which never ceased till India won her independence' (qtd. in Naik 34).

The decades following the First World War was marked by the presence of a nationalist leader – Mahatma Gandhi. His presence was strongly felt in literary representations as well. His preaching of non-violence as a method of political movements which was implemented in movements like Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience, or Quit India movements fired the imagination of the people from all walks of life and made him a veritable iconic figure.

The works of K. S. Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao would not perhaps have been possible had the miracle that was Gandhi not occurred during this period. In fact, it was during this age that Indian English fiction discovered some of its most compelling themes: the ordeal of the freedom struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem and the plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the down-trodden, the economically exploited, and the oppressed. (Naik 118)

These themes in English literary representations continued to influence the authors even after the independence was won.

➤ **Activity**

- See page no. 6 of the Introduction in *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English* (edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra) which is usually available in any good library. He has quoted here from Lal Behari Day's chapter on "English Education in Calcutta before 1834" included in *Recollections of My School-days*. The extract gives us an idea of how English was learnt in the villages of Bengal. Read the extract and form your own idea about the enthusiasm the language created at that time.
- The Dutt family of Calcutta produced some very important literary figures who wrote in English. Make a list of the figures and try to make a family tree.

1.1.4. Post-colonial period

The independence of India in 1947 created a sense of euphoria in the country. It generated the picture of an imagined nation characterised by the welfare of all sections of the society. The euphoria is well represented by the 'midnight' (a word that has become a metaphor for the event and used, for example, in the titles of Salman Rushdie's fiction *Midnight's Children* and Brij V. Lal's autobiographical book *The Other Side of Midnight*) speech to the nation by Pandit Jawharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India.

This euphoria was, however, greatly disturbed by the cataclysmic event of the Partition of India. The sense of the religious divide on religious and community perspectives became evident as never before. The history of inter-communal amity and of participatory socio-cultural life that prevailed in the country for a long time came to be interrogated in the face of communal intolerance and violent riots. Thousands of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims died, thousands of women were abducted and raped during the partition. Innumerable people were displaced from the lands they inhabited for generations and knew as their own home. A visual picture of the refugees streaming towards unknown destinations and suddenly turning violent is found in a small scene in Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi*. These displaced people looked upon the newly drawn borderlines as fuzzy and shadowy. The unprecedented nature of the refugee problem landed both the nations in deep crisis. This situation gave rise to a good number of fictional works, mainly short stories and novels in both the regional languages and English. An important literary work in this area is Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961). India was further jolted by the war with China in 1962 and two more wars with Pakistan. The war with China generated a severe anti-Chinese sentiment which resulted in the incarceration (or imprisonment) of a large number of Chinese Indians. This event has given birth to some short stories included in *The Palm Leaf Fan and Other Stories* (2006) written by Kwai-yun Li, a Chinese Indian writer who later migrated to Canada. This is also at the centre of an Assamese novel *Makum* (2010) written by Rita Chaudhuri.

Pakistan, the new nation formed on the basis of homogeneous religious identity, received another jolt when a Civil War broke out and East Pakistan populated largely by Bengali speaking Muslims seceded from Pakistan and declared independence in 1971. There was a sense of *bonhomie* between the two Bengals (West Bengal, now in India and East Bengal, now Bangladesh) in particular and the two nations – India and Bangladesh – in

general. The presence of real and imagined lines between the three nations constitute the subject matter of many post-colonial literary works written both in English and regional languages.

The declaration of a state of emergency in 1975 by Smt. Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, brought a new crisis in the national life as democratic values were compromised. The right to free speech and opinion was severely hampered. Thousands of political activists, journalists and free-thinking intellectuals were imprisoned. Shashi Tharoor's novel *The Great Indian Novel*, moulded on the great Indian epic Mahabharata, is an allegory of the nation set at this juncture of national life. It is a caustic comment on how political greed of those in power can subvert the lives of citizens from all walks of life. The rise of Sikh extremism and the murder of Indira Gandhi followed by anti-Sikh riots dealt a severe blow to the nation as an integrated multicultural entity.

In the recent decades the open-door economic policies and economic globalisation, accompanied by unforeseen technological advancement and development media, including the virtual ones, have changed the overall worldview of Indians who are still caught between strong pulls of traditions and irresistible attractions to the new modes of liberalism and consumerism. There is at the same time rise of conservatism, radicalism and terrorism and equally strong assertions of individualism, liberalism, cosmopolitanism and opposition to terrorism. We are really standing at the crossroads, waiting to see how Indian Writing in English will take up the challenges to represent the time.

➤ **Activity**

- Name some important fictional works and films on the theme of Partition (other than those mentioned in the above discussion). Include in your list very well-known novelists and short story writers in Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and of course English. And also mention a novel on the theme written by Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani Parsi writer – the book has been made into a film.

1.1.5. Summing Up

In this Unit we have tried to give you an idea about how Indian Writing in English grew into a rich and well-defined area of study within the purview of English literature. In order to do this we have identified the contact zones which developed during the period of the East India Company. Through these zones of contact the English language gained its early footing in India and gradually led to the birth of early Indian writers in English. The formal introduction of the language through Macaulay's "Minutes" then paved the

way for systematic education through the medium of English in schools, colleges and universities established during the colonial period. After the independence of India, the Indian Writing in English, which had its beginning in the imitation of the British model in the early colonial period and which found its true voice after the 'Mutiny,' developed as a major site for the Indian writers to give expression to their experience in a liberated and globalised environment.

1.1.6 Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type Questions (20 marks)

1. Define Indian Writing in English as a distinctive field of studies. Critically discuss the different nomenclatures applied to it during the period of its developments.
2. Identify the zones of contact and how these helped in the development of the Indian Writing in English.
3. Explain the major political and social events and policy decisions taken by the British administrators during the colonial period that paved the way for the inception of the early writings in English by the Indian writers.
4. Explain the importance of the major political and socio-economic developments that influenced the Indian writers in English.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions (12 marks)

1. How will you define the word 'canon'? Do you consider the inclusion of Indian Writing in English to be the result of a canon shift?
2. Define the scope of Indian Writing in English.
3. Explain the importance of Macaulay's Minutes. What evidence of colonial attitude do you find in it?
4. Trace the effect of the Partition of India on the literary works of the post-colonial period.

Short questions (6 marks)

1. Who is Dean Mohamet? Why is he considered to be an important figure in the history of Indian Writing in English?
2. Which early fictional works written in English justified the apprehension of the

colonial administrators that the introduction of English education might generate anti-British sentiment? Give a brief description of the works.

3. Why did the declaration of Emergency in 1975 give rise to widespread fear? What kind of literary representation(s) of Emergency do you find?
4. Do you think that globalisation and cosmopolitanism play an important role in shaping literary sensibilities? Explain.

1.1.7. Suggested Reading

Dharwadkar, Vinay. "English in India and Indian Literature in English: The Early History, 1579-1834." *Comparative Literature Studies* 39.2 (2002): 93-119. *Project Muse*. 4 Nov, 2015.

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Unit - 2 □ The Emerging Genres

1.2.0 Introduction

1.2.1 Emergence and Development of Indian English Poetry

1.2.1A Pre-independence Indian English Poetry

1.2.1B Post-independence Indian English Poetry

1.2.2 Emergence and Development of Indian English Fiction

1.2.2A: Pre-independence Indian English Fiction

1.2.2B: Post-independence Indian English Fiction

1.2.3 Emergence and Development of Indian English Drama

1.2.3A: Pre-independence Indian English Drama

1.2.3B: Post-independence Indian English Drama

1.2.4 Summing Up

1.2.5 Comprehension Exercises

1.2.6 Suggested Reading

1.2.0. Introduction

In the first Unit of this module, an attempt has been made to introduce Indian English literature as a viable area of study. Aspects related to the changing nomenclatures of Indian Writing in English, the use of language to produce literary works in this area of study, and the scope of Indian Writing in English, have all been extensively discussed in the first Unit. An attempt has also been made thereto interpret the emergence of Indian English literature from the perspective of coloniser-colonised contact. The colonial and the post-colonial background of Indian Writing in English have also been explained.

Against these backdrops, the present Unit will now focus on the emergence of different genres of Indian Writing in English. Of these genres, Poetry is perhaps the most important, because the first representation of Indian Writing in English appeared in the form of poems written by the native intellectuals who were highly influenced by the form and content of British poetry. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Indian

English Poetry began its journey, and with it, the two other literary genres, Indian English Drama and Indian English Novel also emerged; but the major contributions of the Indian writers till the second decade of the twentieth century appeared mainly in the field of poetry. Indian English Novel gained momentum and became important as a genre during the 1930s with the appearance of three major novelists: Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand. These writers are also famous for writing excellent short stories. The genre of Indian English Short Story also developed significantly due to the contribution of these three writers. During the pre-independence period, poetry and novel flourished. However, in the post-independence era, Indian English Drama began to figure prominently in the literary map of Indian Writing in English due to the immense contribution of some important playwrights. We should not, however, assume that plays were not written during the colonial period. In fact, the first Indian English Drama was written at the beginning of nineteenth century, but, unlike Indian English Poetry, it did not flourish during the colonial period. A comparative study of the development of the different literary genres helps us understand the mood of the native authors and their responses to the national issues relevant at a particular point of time. This unit will exclusively deal with the emergence and development of these genres from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the year 1980. The next Unit in this module will make an attempt to study the different trends of literature in the post-1980s era.

➤ **Activities:**

- Make a list of the early Indian English poets. Who among them were significant poets?
- Who wrote the first Indian English drama? Name the pre-independence Indian English playwrights.
- What was the first Indian English novel?
- What may be reasons for the significant rise of Indian English poetry in the pre-independence era?

1.2.1. Emergence and Development of Indian English Poetry

As has been mentioned in the Introduction above, poetry was one of the earliest literary genres to have flourished in Indian English. To facilitate your understanding of the

development, we have divided Poetry and subsequently other genres too, into two sub-sections, taking national independence as the watershed.

1.2.1A.Pre-independence Indian English Poetry

Among the four different genres mentioned above, Indian English Poetry is the first to gain a prominent space in Indian English literature. The reason for this may be attributed to the revolutionary spirit present in the English Romantic poetry which influenced the Indian poets of the nineteenth century to articulate their nationalistic zeal in a language that reflects their acquaintance with the great English Romantic poets. During the first half of the nineteenth century, English Romantic poetry made a big impact on the minds of the budding Indian poets, who were, at that point of time, searching for an appropriate idiom to express their love for the nation. The first Indian English poet, who was highly influenced by the Byronic spirit, and who also attempted to infuse the minds of the young students with liberal views of the West, was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831). As a lecturer in the Hindu College, Calcutta, Derozio made a conscious effort to trigger “the imagination of many a student” through his “fearless spirit of inquiry, his passion for ideas, his reformistic idealism and his romantic enthusiasm” (Naik 22). His reputation as a poet rests on the two volumes of poetry that he published while teaching in the Hindu College: *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828). Along with Derozio, the two other important contemporary poets are, Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-1873) and Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873). Kashiprasad Ghose is well known for his volume of verse titled, *The Shairor Minstrel and Other Poems* (1830). In the poetry of Ghose, as Naik notes, there is peculiar blending of three distinctive traditions of English poetry: “Kashiprasad Ghose seems to intimate by turns the stylized love-lyrics of the Cavalier poets, the moralising note in neo-classical poetry and the British romantics...” (Naik 24). Michael Madhusudan Dutt, apart from writing a few sonnets, mainly wrote two long poems which explicitly reflect his indebtedness to three English poets: Scott, Byron and Milton. Dutt’s *The Captive Ladie* (1849) and *Visions of the Past* (1849) illustrate his complete mastery of the English language and poetic rhythm.

Derozio, Ghose and Dutt are three significant poets whose works define the nature of Indian English Poetry in the first half of nineteenth century. As evident in the above discussion, their poems are derivative in nature. In their attempts to follow the form and technique of English Romantic poetry, these poets however seem to have forgotten to create an indigenous mode of expression that would have enriched the vocabulary of native English tradition.

When we move to the second half of the nineteenth century, Indian English Poetry seems to overcome the difficulty of finding an appropriate Indian idiom of expressing emotions in poetry. In the post-1850s era, Toru Dutt was the first poet to emphasise authenticity by ignoring the imitative model of writing poetry. While introducing Toru Dutt as a poet, Rosinka Chaudhuri states, “Arguably the first modern Indian poet in English, she brought the personal and cultural dimensions of her experience into her writing” (Mehrotra65). The ‘modern’ aspect that Mehrotra finds in Toru Dutt’s poetry is reflected in her use of English language. Instead of imitating the language of the English poets, Dutt attempts to write in a language that shows her desire to create an individual mode of expression. In her poetry, Dutt uses ancient mythical and legendary characters like Sita, Savitri, Dhruva, Sindhu and Prehlad to rewrite the histories of these characters from different perspectives. Dutt’s *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) is a posthumously published work in which the western ballad form is used to narrate the tales of ancient legendary figures of India. Though the Western Romantic spirit is quite strong in her poetry, Dutt in her own way has attempted to create an idiom of expression that reflects her desire to produce an Indian sensibility in the field of Indian English Poetry.

Dutt’s contemporary, Manmohan Ghose was an important poetic figure. Ghose studied at Oxford University where he developed an interest in Western classical literature (Naik 44). This interest ultimately led him to write poems that define his strong connection with England. *Primavera* (1890) is a collection of poems written by Ghose. This collection, which also includes the work of Stephen Phillips, Laurence Binyon and Arthur Cripps (Naik 45), shows Ghose’s attachment with the English soil and also his admiration for the great English poets. Thus, Ghose’s poetry is ‘imitative’ in form and spirit as he tries hard to follow the English “mood of world-weariness and yearning and colourful aestheticism of the Eighteen Nineties” (Naik 45).

Unlike Manmohan Ghose, his younger brother, Aurobindo Ghose is a ‘striking contrast’ (Naik 47). Aurobindo Ghose went to Cambridge University to complete his higher studies and after returning to India, he became interested in Indian culture and philosophy. Unlike his elder brother, who could not think beyond his love for English culture, Aurobindo Ghose’s career as poet shows a considerable development. Naik finely sums up this difference in attitude of both the brothers, “Manmohan’s career is a sad story of arrested artistic development; Sri Aurobindo’s, a glorious chronicle of progress from patriot to poet, yogi and seer” (47). Sri Aurobindo wrote poems of various kinds, but his magnum opus is the poem *Savitri*. This poem is epic in theme and spirit, and it

also contains Sri Aurobindo's spiritual insights into the complex relationship between the human and the divine worlds. Sri Aurobindo's concern for the Hindu spiritual philosophy makes him an 'authentic' poet like Toru Dutt, who in her own way, had also dealt with the Hindu myths and legends. Though they both use the Western form of writing poetry – Dutt uses the English ballad form and Sri Aurobindo imitates the Miltonic epic form – yet they are original poets because they make serious attempts to foreground Hindu culture, myths and philosophy in their writings.

Another significant poet, who happens to be a contemporary of Sri Aurobindo is Sarojini Naidu. Naidu, like Sri Aurobindo and Manmohan Ghose, went to England for studying in London and Cambridge (Naik 66). When she was in England, her "poetic talent developed under the influence of the Rhymers' Club and the encouragement given by Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse" (Naik 66). In fact, Gosse advised Naidu to write about "the mountains, the gardens, the temples," so that she may become "a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan, not a clever, machine-made imitator of English classics" (qtd. in Naik 66). This advice seems to have influenced Naidu so much that she ultimately became a nature poet representing the various shades of Indian landscape. Though the English Romantic tradition strongly influenced her writings, she made attempts to study the different moods of nature from her own viewpoint, which obviously rooted her poems in the Indian culture and tradition. Like Dutt, she too tried to represent the Indian myths and legends in her poetry. Naidu wrote three volumes of poetry: *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). In her poetry, Naidu achieves a perfect balance between 'imitation' and 'authenticity.' It is true that she imitates the style of the English Romantics, but the themes of her poems are truly Indian. Sarojini Naidu is the last among the poets who wrote during the pre-independence period.

Thus, Indian English poetry during the pre-independence era mainly struggled to find an authentic mode of expression. Poets like Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu made sincere efforts to incorporate indigenous cultural idioms in their poems, which obviously foreground their tendency to produce 'authentic' poetry. However, they could not completely shed off the influence of English Romanticism, because their style shows their concern for imitating the model of the English Romantic poets. In fact, this conflict between 'authenticity' and 'imitation' is the defining phenomenon of Indian English Poetry of this phase. Apart from the three poets mentioned above, the other two poets of this period, Derozio and Manmohan Ghose, were evidently 'imitative' of the great Romantic poets of England.

1.2.1B. Post-independence Indian English Poetry (1947-1980)

The post-independence Indian English Poetry (1947-1980) can be divided into three different decades: poetry of the 1950s, poetry of the 1960s and the poetry of the 1970s. This classification is clearly mentioned by Naik in the chapter titled “The Asoka Pillar: Independence and After.” Indian English Poetry in the post-independence era turned away from the models of English Romanticism by incorporating a ‘newness’ which was derived from the English modernism: “In the fifties arose a school of poets who tried to turn their backs on the romantic tradition and write a verse more in tune with the age They tried, with varying degrees of success, to naturalize in the Indian soil the modernistic elements derived from the poetic revolution effected by T. S. Eliot and others in the twentieth century British and American poetry” (Naik 192). Thus, this shift in perspective is remarkable as most of the poets of the 1950s felt a need to experiment with poetic language and theme. This new breed of poetry is designated as the ‘new poetry’ by Naik (193). He further draws our attention to the founding of the Writers Workshop in Calcutta by P. Lal and his associates in 1958, which “became an effective forum for modernist poetry” (Naik 193). P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao edited the first modernist anthology, *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1958), which emphatically claimed to promote modernist trends in poetry by indulging in ‘experimentation,’ by emphasising the ‘need for the private voice’ and by showing faith in ‘a vital language’ (Naik 193). Hence, the spirit of English modernism influenced the poets of the post-independence era, but this did not make them slavish imitators of the English modern poets. They attempted to create their own perspectives of modernism suited to the Indian locale and lifestyle.

The first distinct poet of this ‘new’ generation is Nissim Ezekiel. In Ezekiel’s poems, the lives of the common people of India are represented. Their pains and struggles are the themes of his poetry. While making an attempt to represent the contemporary scenario of modern India, Ezekiel presents the lonely and alienated characters of urban India, who are utterly frustrated by the failures in their lives. Thus, the themes of alienation, frustration, failure and suffering are distinctively present in Ezekiel’s poetry. In fact, his poetry reflects a bleak version of modernism which lacks any positive message.

Another ‘new’ poet who became famous in the 1950s is Dom Moraes. Moraes (1938-2004), who is more English as a poet than Indian. His love for the English culture is the outcome of his long periods of stay in England which made him realise that he is a misfit in the Indian culture: “So English was my outlook, I found I could not fit in India. When eventually I came to England, I fitted in at once” (qtd in Naik 196). Moraes’s

was “influenced by Dylan Thomas and the surrealistic school” and his poetry is “highly personal” (Naik 196). Moraes’s poetry presents the theme of alienation, and there is also a note of escapism which often leads the readers to the haunted world of supernaturalism (Naik 196). Use of Christian myths and classical allusions are quite common in his poetry (Naik 196). Thus, compared to Ezekiel, Moraes’s poetry does not reflect the Indian ethos.

After Ezekiel and Moraes, the ‘new’ poets who became famous in the 1960s are: Purushottam Lal, Adil Jussawalla, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. These poets consciously represent the modern conditions of human life by using images and symbols that often are mythical in nature. In P. Lal’s poetry, the contemporary social reality is represented through the sorrowful images of city life (Naik 198). His book of poetry, *The Man of the Dharma and the Rasa of Silence* contextualises the mythical figure of Yudhisthira into the modern Indian scenario (Naik 198). Adil Jussawala’s poems contain the perspective of an exile (Naik 199). After staying in England for more than a decade, when he returned to India, his exilic experience, his awareness of the Indian roots, and his search for self-knowledge became important traits of his poetry: “The exile’s return, his recapitulation of his foreign experience, his reaction to his native scene and his continued quest for self-knowledge form the chief themes” of his poetry. (Naik 199). Like P. Lal, Jussawala also uses Indian myths, but Jussawala intends to juxtapose European myths with the Indian (Naik 199). Though remarkably different in their respective approaches to Indian myths, they both use the mythical figures to define the contemporary social reality. A. K. Ramanujan, like Jussawala is a poet who narrates his exilic experience. As a poet, Ramanujan claims to bear an ‘outer’ form which is English, and the ‘inner’ form which is Hindu (Naik 200). The confluence between two cultures is a remarkable trait of Ramanujan’s poetry. His poems often present sordid images of city life which are alien to the Indian conditions, but these images carry the burden of his Hindu heritage. Naik explains this phenomenon by referring to the poem “Christmas” in which the impossibility of knowing “leaf from parrot / Or branch from root / Nor ... that tree / From you or me” is beautifully expressed by Ramanujan (200). Like Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy also deals with the complex relationship between the English culture that he imbibed during his long stay in England and his original Tamil heritage (Naik 202). His poetry claims to foreground the reconciliation of these two dissimilar cultural idioms: “English forms a part of my intellectual, rational make-up, Tamil of my emotional, psychic make-up... The situation itself is poetry” (Naik 202-203). Thus, Parthasarathy’s poetry contains the same ‘outer’/ ‘inner’ binary that is traceable in Ramanujan’s poetry. In fact, Parthasarathy’s, *Rough*

Passage (a long poem which is divided into three sections) foregrounds the poet's effort to build a passage connecting the two cultures (English and Tamil) that define his identity. The three sections of the poem: "Exile," "Trial," and "Homecoming" deal with the experiences of his life. These sections capture the life of an artist, who, being in a state of exile, ultimately understands the importance of going back to the roots, and therefore returns to his homeland. The journey of an artist is metaphorically represented in *Rough Passage*. Naik observes that *Rough Passage* is "an evocative record of a highly sensitive Indian's personal peregrination, which is also an eventful journey within" (203).

Gieve Patel, as a representative of the Parsi community, is often considered to be an 'outsider' (Naik 203). But, his poems do not reflect his lack of knowledge of the Indian ethos. In a poem like "Naryal Purnima," Patel displays his interest in Hindu customs (Naik 204). Patel's poetry, as Naik remarks, "is mostly 'situational'" and "being a medical practitioner by profession" he looks at "pain, disease and death" from a clinically detached point of view (204). In a way, Patel's poetry captures the painful lives of the people living in modern India. His sympathy for the sufferers is revealed in his poems.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's poetic world consists of surrealistic images that define his perspective of writing poetry about universal feelings of love, hate and sex (Naik 204). Through his symbols and images, Mehrotra represents "the modern man's predicament in a world of debased values" (Naik 204).

Thus, among the poets of the 1960s, Jussawalla, Ramanujan and Parthasarathy significantly deal with the theme of exile which is closely connected with their experiences of living in abroad locations. In their poems, India is represented from a diasporic perspective. Ramanujan and Parthasarathy engage with the idea of reconciling the opposing cultural forces which ultimately help to define their locational identity. P. Lal, Gieve Patel and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra represent the contemporary modern India from three different perspectives. Lal uses myths to describe the contemporary situation of India. Patel looks at the pathetic life of the Indians who are not happy with the scenario around them. Mehrotra uses a surrealistic point of view to represent the problematic world of the modern man.

During the 1970s, five poets emerged in the field of Indian English Poetry: K.N. Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar and Kamala Das (Naik 205). K. N. Daruwalla is a former Police officer and his poems therefore capture the experiences of a person who looks at the world from a detached observer's perspective. His poems are deeply realistic containing the elements of irony and satire. Naik notes

that Daruwalla's poetry bears a distinctive trait of "modern scepticism tempered by a lively human curiosity" (206). Shiv K. Kumar has dealt with a variety of themes in his poetry. His poems are emotional and reflect the learning of the poet. Naik observes that he is a master of "both the confessional mode and ironic comment" (206). Jayanta Mahapatra is a poet who has mainly focused on the 'Orissa scene' (Naik 207). The characters in his poems are mostly in a tragic state of life. Mahapatra has a very keen eye to capture the pain, suffering, and worries of the people living in his part of India. While summing up his assessment of Mahapatra's poetic corpus, Rajeev S. Patke comments, "Mahapatra's poetic world is distinguished for the unyielding privacy of a resilient but amorphous inwardness" (Mehrotra 207). Arun Kolatkar (1932-) is a bilingual poet, writing both in English and Marathi (Naik 207). His reputation as a poet rests on his long poem, *Jejuri* (1976) for which he won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Naik 207). *Jejuri* is divided into thirty-one short sections describing "a visit to Jejuri, a famous temple near Pune" (Naik 207). This is a journey poem which contains the motif of quest (Naik 208). In fact, through this poem Kolatkar attempts to foreground the inherent conflict between 'religious tradition' and 'machine civilization,' which is a defining phenomenon of the contemporary modern Indian culture (Naik 208). Among the poets of the 1970s, Kamala Das is a distinctive women poet, who is known for her frank representation of sexuality. She is a confessional poet and her poetry captures the bitter experiences of her life. Her contribution to the field of Indian English Poetry is significant from the viewpoint of female psyche and body, which as a feature is pathbreaking. Rajeev S. Patke appreciates this stance of Das by stating: "Her poems struggle to develop a sense of self which is alternatively sustained and thwarted by her own sexuality, defined and disfigured as that is, in turn, by being trapped in the rut of social institutions" (210).

➤ **Activities:**

- Make a list of the pre-independence Indian English poets. What are the common features you find in their poetry?
- Make a list of the important post-independence Indian English poets. What are the distinctive traits you find in the poetry of this period.
- Read the poems written by Sarojini Naidu. Why do you think that she is different from the other poets of the pre-independence era?

- Read some of the poems written by Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Parthasarathy. What are the basic themes that they deal with? Do you find any difference in their attitude to modern Indian scenario?
- How is Jayanta Mahapatra as a poet different from Shiv K. Kumar?

1.2.2. Emergence and Development of Indian English Fiction

As you will see in this section, the rise and growth of the novel in Indian English was a later development compared to the beginnings of poetry. We shall here try to trace the possible factors that could be attributed to this phenomenon. Significantly, such factors include reasons that are both literary and extra-literary in nature. These mark an interesting phase of the influence of English as the coloniser's language, in the eventual growth of the same language as an adaptation in the hands of the colonised for the penning of narratives of the latter.

1.2.2A. Pre-independence Indian English Fiction

Unlike the genre of the Indian English Poetry which flourished during the 19th century, Indian English Novel could not grow till the beginning of 20th century. Indian English novel appeared as a mature genre much later than the other forms of writing (Naik 106). Though the reasons for this late emergence of Indian English Fiction are not known, one may consider certain factors which could have impeded the development of Indian English Fiction in the 19th century. During the 19th century as you have read earlier, the Indian writers were immensely influenced by the English Romanticism. This could be one reason for the dominance of Indian English Poetry in the 19th century and for the consequent neglect of other genres. In the 19th century, novels were mostly published in serialised versions in different newspapers, and this was mainly done because the Indian publishing houses, at that time, were not very confident about the reception of fiction. For instance, one may refer to the first Indian English Novel, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), which was published serially in a weekly magazine. This novel, as a complete book, was finally published only in 1935. Before the publication of this novel, two earlier stories, which Naik remarks are not 'novels proper' but 'earliest fictional efforts,' were published in journals. Kylash Chander Dutt's *A Journal of 48 hours of the Year 1945* was published in *The Calcutta Literary Gazette* on 6 June 1835 and Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *Republic of Orissa: Annals from the pages of the Twentieth Century* was published in *Saturday Evening Hurkaru* on 25 May 1845 (Naik 106). These facts clearly establish the view that Indian

publishing industry during the 19th century was highly sceptical about the reception of fiction.

However, during this period, many English journals and periodicals were published which were of interest to the English knowing reading public. Naik even mentions that some of the novels written by the writers from Bengal and Madras during the period (1860s to 1900) were not published in India, but in London (106). Shevantibai M. Nikambe's *Ratanbai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife*, Lal Behari Day's *Govinda Samanta, or The History of a Bengal Raiyat* and Ram Krishna Punt's *The Boy of Bengal* were published in London in 1895, 1874 and 1866 respectively. Thus, the journey of Indian English Novel in the 19th century was not really remarkable from the point of view of reception, despite the fact that most of the novelists wrote fiction that was socially and historically relevant. In fact, most of such fiction, as the titles indicate, are character based works. By contextualising the main characters within a particular social and historical background, such texts attempt to imitate the genre of 'bildungsroman' which became popular in the 18th and the 19th century Britain. These Indian novelists of the 19th century, as Naik observes, imitated the models of "the eighteenth and the nineteenth British fiction, particularly Defoe, Fielding and Scott" (107).

With the beginning of the 20th century, Indian English novels started gaining significance. Novelists like Sarath Kumar Ghosh from Bengal, A. Madhaviah and T. Ramakrishna Pillai from Madras, and Sirdar Jogendra Singh from Punjab are some of the prominent figures (Naik 108). Sarath Kumar Ghosh wrote a fantasy fiction, *Verdict of the Gods*, which was published from New York in 1905 (Naik 108). Later, he wrote a realistic fiction, *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna*, which was published from London in 1909 (Naik 108). This fiction is based on the life of a "Rajput prince of the later nineteenth century" and it is one of the "earliest fictional attempts to deal with East-West relationship, an oft-repeated theme in the Indian English novel" (Naik 108). A. Madhaviah wrote an autobiographical novel, *Thillai Govindan*, which was published from London in 1916 (Naik 108). This novel depicts the character of a young south Indian Brahmin, who "under the impact of western education" loses his faith in his own religion, but ultimately he regains his faith after he reads *The Gita* (Naik 108). Madhaviah wrote another novel, *Clarinda*, which was published from Madras in 1915 (Naik 108). *Clarinda* "is a historical romance dealing with the career of a woman Christian convert of Tanjore (Naik 108). T. Ramakrishna Pillai wrote two historical romances, *Padmini* (1903) and *A Dive for Death* (1911). Both these novels were

published from London (Naik 108). These novels written by Pillai follow the style and manner of Walter Scott's historical novels (Naik 108). Sidar Jogendra Singh wrote four novels, *Nur Jahan*, *The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909), *Nasrin*, *An Indian Medley* (1911), *Kamla* (1925) and *Kamini* (1931). Three out of these four novels were published from London and one from Lahore (Naik 108-109). *Nur Jahan* and *Nasrin* are historical novels, whereas, *Kamala* and *Kamini* are social fictions (Naik 109). Thus, the novelists who wrote in the early decades of the 20th century enriched the field of Indian English Novel by writing fictions of various types. Historical novels, social fictions, autobiographical fictions and historical romances became prominent types of fictions in the first two decades of the 20th century. Another noteworthy fact is the dependence of the novelists of this period on the foreign press. Most of the novels were published from London which again brings to our attention the lack of interest of the native press in publishing novels.

However, the scenario in the field of Indian English Fiction changed during the period of 'Gandhian Whirlwind.' This period (1920-1947) is the most productive period in the field of early fiction. In fact, fiction emerged as a dominant genre during this period due to the contributions of three major novelists: Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. But before we go on to discuss the contribution of these three novelists, mention must be made of three other novelists who are not as popular like Anand, Narayan and Rao, and are yet major voices in this early phase of Indian English fiction.

K.S. Venkataramani, A.S.P. Ayyar and Krishnaswamy Nagarajan are contemporaries of Anand, Narayan and Rao. Venkataramani wrote two novels, *Murugan*, *The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan*, *The Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making* (1932). These novels can be considered as Gandhi novels, because Venkataramani refers to the "Gandhian economics" in his first novel, and in the second the narrative is about "the 1930s Civil Disobedience movement" (Mehrotra 169-170). Ayyar's novels, *Baladitya* (1930) and *Three Men of Destiny* (1939) explore the ancient history of India. In both the novels, he narrativises the lives of the great Indian kings of the past (Naik 154). Nagarajan's novels, *Athavar House* (1937) and *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961) are set in the South Indian background (Naik 154). Thus, in the novels of Venkataramani, Ayyar and Nagarjun, representation of the social reality is an important phenomenon. Venkataramani and Nagarajan have dealt with the socio-cultural contexts of the 1930s and after, whereas, Ayyar has gone back to the past to fictionalise the real lives of the great Indian kings.

However, as mentioned earlier, the contribution of these three novelists in the 1920s

and the 1930s, is shadowed by the immense contribution of the 'major trio' (Naik 155): Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. They were definitely concerned with the issues that became relevant during the period of "Gandhian whirlwind," and they have also attempted to represent Gandhi and his philosophy. In fact, Anand, Rao and Narayan capture the spirit of their age by representing the changing face of India during the period when the whole country was slowly preparing for a strong anti-colonial struggle. Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), and Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) are such novels where one can locate the India of the 1930s. Thus, realistic representation of the society is a distinctive feature of their novels. Anand's novels, as Leela Gandhi opines, are "experiments with social realism" and they effectively capture the "complex alliances, misalliances, transformations, and failures of the Indian national movement" (Mehrotra 178). Unlike Anand, Narayan's realism is blended with irony. He is, according to K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "a master of comedy" whose world of fiction does not simply offer a "delicately self-adjusted mechanism of ironic comedy, but rather the miracle of transcendence and the renewal of life, love, beauty, peace" (384-385). Rao's realism is of a different kind as he wrote mainly from a philosophical point of view. In fact, *Kanthapura* is the only novel that Rao wrote before the independence of India. His later novels, written after 1947, are mainly philosophical fictions which deal with religious ideas. Rao's realism is therefore derived from his intense philosophical learning, which obviously, sets him apart from Anand and Narayan. Thus, in the pre-independence phase, Anand, Rao and Narayan enriched the genre by writing such fictions which were important from the changing perspectives of the nation. Their novels not only read the nation, but also offer a critical insight into the various trends of thoughts that were relevant during the period of "Gandhian Whirlwind." Anand, Rao and Narayan influenced the novelists of the post-independence era in major ways.

1.2.2B. Post-independence Indian English Fiction (1947-1980)

As mentioned earlier, Anand, Rao and Narayan wrote fictions both before and after the independence of India. After 1947, the 'major trio' of the 1930s had become established writers, and many budding novelists attempted to follow their style and pattern of writing. Among the early fiction writers, in the post-1947 phase, who tried to write realistic fiction following the model of Anand are: Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh (Naik 213). Bhattacharya's first novel, *So Many Hungers* (1947) "was published in October 1947, soon after the transfer of power by Britain to India and Pakistan" (Iyengar 412). This novel realistically portrays the scenario of Bengal during the Quit India movement by symbolically using hunger as a trope.

The impact of the Bengal famine (which occurred in the year 1943) on the lives of the innocent people has been effectively captured by Bhattacharya in this novel. Bhattacharya's novels are Bengal-centric, and like his first novel, his later novels portray the lives of Bengali characters that are in a state of crisis. Malgonkar is a realist of a different kind. His novels, as Iyengar remarks, reveal "a sound historical sense" (434). Concern for the lives of the ancient Indian princes and a better understanding of the idea of nation are two very important features of his novels. Malgonkar's *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) are two such novels which exhibit the concerns mentioned above. *A Bend in the Ganges* is a significant novel because it is set against the backdrop of Partition. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a famous Partition fiction. In this novel, "Partition is represented as an event which the simple villagers – who have lived peaceably together regardless of religious differences – cannot fathom" (Mehrotra 220). Khuswant Singh's novels are about the Punjabis, especially the Sikhs who live in the border area of the nation.

Apart from Bhattacharya, Malgonkar and Singh, novelists like S. Menon Marath and Balachandra Rajan also wrote realist fictions. Like Bhattacharya, Marath's novels are based on regional realities. His novels, as Naik observes, are "rooted in the soil of his native Kerala" (221). Rajan, like the contemporary novelists of the 1950s and the 1960s, wrote realist fictions, but "his realism," as Naik mentions, "is less social than psychological" (221). Thus, we can see that in the first two decades after independence, the trend of writing realist fictions gained momentum. In fact, as we know, this trend became prominent in the writings of Anand, Rao and Narayan. The novelists of the post-independence era developed the tradition of realist fiction by making it more interesting from the point of view of humour, characterisation and plot construction. Also, the theme of Partition became prominent in some of the fictions written during this period. Following the trend of Narayan's Malgudi novels, writers like Bhattacharya and Menon Marath became important for projecting a particular locale in their novels. However, in the post-1947 era, some novelists deviated from the trend of writing realist fictions, and focused chiefly on producing experimental fictions. This is a significant development in the post-independence Indian English Novel. The first kind of experimental fiction was written by G.V. Desani. His *All About H. Hatterr* (1948; revised edition 1972) is "a simple exercise in modernist word-mongering, ... sort of Joycean linguistic burlesque" (Mehrotra 187). Using a very complex theme and technique, Desani's novel is remarkable for the humour and the chaos that define the narrative of a trickster named, Hatterr (Naik 226, 227 & 228). Like Desani, Sudhindra Nath Ghosh

also wrote experimental fictions. His four novels are interesting experiments in storytelling method (Naik 222). In fact, Ghosh uses the native tradition of storytelling method found in the puranas and the ancient epics to narrate the tale of the central protagonists in his novels (Naik 226).

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, the course of Indian English Fiction changed because of the contribution of some very prominent women novelists. These novelists added new dimensions in the field of fiction by writing stories which were important from the perspective of modern Indian women. Before discussing the contribution of these women novelists, mention must be made of two important novelists of the 1960s and 1970s: Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal. Arun Joshi's novels are about alienated heroes who are "intensely self-centred persons prone to self pity and escapism" (Naik 229). Another significant trait in his novels is the East-West encounter (Naik 230). Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) is a novel where both the aspects mentioned above are present. The East-West encounter is also a prominent aspect in Nahal's fictions. His novel, *Into Another Dawn* (1977) is about a character named, Ravi Sharma who experiences the typical cultural clash in his mind. Nahal's, *Azadi* (1975) is remarkable because it captures the spirit of Partition by presenting a narrative that is the "most comprehensive fictional accounts of the Partition holocaust in Indian English literature" (Naik 232).

Among the women novelists of this period, four are important: Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. These novelists primarily deal with the socio-cultural and the psychological conditions of the women living in India. In their novels, the women characters often occupy the centrestage to voice their protest against the male dominated society. Thus, feminist concerns become important in the novels written by the four women writers in particular. However, as individual writers, they are different, because they have also dealt with some other important issues which must be discussed briefly. Jhabvala wrote eight novels which can be categorised into two distinct groups: "comedies of urban middle class Indian life" and "ironic studies of the East-West encounter" (Naik 234). Her novels are interesting studies of different facets of human relationship (Naik 233). The East-West encounter is an important aspect in Markandaya's novels also, but "her strengths as a novelist lie in her depiction of human relationships" (Mehrotra 227). In fact, the rural-urban divide is very prominent in her novels, and she also attempts to show the impact of modern industrialisation on the rural community. Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) very effectively captures this aspect. Sahgal's novels are political in nature, but

her major concerns are “modern Indian woman’s search for sexual freedom and self-realization” (Naik 239). Desai’s novels are women centric and they capture the inner world of the female characters. In her fictions, women are alienated subjects who ruminate on the various ways they have been subjugated by the patriarchal society.

Therefore, we see that during the 1960s and the 1970s, the genre of Indian English Fiction incorporated many new trends and themes of writing. These new forms of writing made it more rich and dynamic. One very noteworthy feature is the rise of women fiction which started gaining momentum during this period. The Partition theme, experimental forms of writing, the East-West encounter, feminist narratives and the different facets of realism – all these features broadened the scope of Indian English Fiction to make it more acceptable and inclusive.

➤ **Activities:**

- Make a list of the pre-independence Indian English novelists. What are the common features you find in their novels?
- Make a list of the important post-independence Indian English novelists. What are the distinctive traits you find in the fictions of this period?
- Do you think that the women novelists like Anita Desai, Ruth Praver Jhabvala et al changed the course of Indian English Novel? How are they different from their male counterparts?
- Read the following novels: Anand’s *The Untouchable*, Rao’s *Kanthapura* and R.K. Narayan’s *The Guide*. Can you locate any common feature in these novels? Do you note any difference in the attitude of the writers of these three novels?
- Make a list of the novels that deal with the theme of Partition. How do these Partition novels represent the nation?

1.2.3. Emergence and Development of Indian English Drama

1.2.3A. Pre-independence Indian English Drama

The journey of Indian English Drama is quite uneven in the pre-independence phase. Unlike the other two genres discussed above, Indian English Drama did not prosper during the colonial period. This was mainly because of the absence of any “firm dramatic tradition nourished on the actual performance in a live theatre” (Naik 98). Hence, the playwrights during the colonial period, as Naik observes, wrote “mostly closet drama”

(98). The first Indian English drama was written by Krishna Mohan Banerji in the year 1831. His English play, *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes illustrated of the present state of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* is a critical overview of the contemporary situation of the Hindu society in Calcutta. This play, as Banerji opines, shows the “inconsistencies and the blackness of the influential members of the Hindoo community” (qtd in Naik 98). After Banerji, the next playwright who contributed to the genre of Indian English Drama is Sri Aurobindo. Though Aurobindo is known for his spiritual and philosophical poetry, he has also written some plays. Aurobindo wrote verse plays and these plays clearly elucidate his “abiding fascination for Elizabethan drama” (Naik 99). The influence of the Western tradition is clearly visible in the plays of Aurobindo, as he not only drew inspiration from the Elizabethan playwrights, but also “modelled his plays exclusively on the late Victorian pastiches of Shakespearean drama” (Naik 100). Another playwright from Bengal who became famous for writing verse plays is Harindranath Chattopadhyay. His *Five Plays* (1937) “contains some of his characteristic work as a playwright revealing his social consciousness, flair for realism, and the bite in his prose writing” (Iyengar 233). Thus, the three playwrights from Bengal — Banerji, Aurobindo and Chattopadhyay — are the first three major playwrights who contributed to the genre of Indian English Drama during the colonial period.

However, during the pre-independence period, apart from these playwrights, two important playwrights from South India also contributed to the genre. They are: A. S. Panchapakesa Ayyar and Thyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam. Ayyar wrote many plays during the period 1926-1941. His plays have been published in two volumes, *Sita's Choice and Other Plays* (1935) and *The Slave of Idea and Other Plays* (1941). As a playwright, Ayyar is a ‘reformist’ and his plays are loaded with moral messages (Naik 147). His plays deal with the plight of women in India and they also represent the contemporary South Indian society. Kailasam wrote both in English and Kannada. Though he has written only a few English plays, they are good in terms of his innovative representations of the ancient mythical personages (Naik 148). In this context, mention must be made of *Karna or The Brahmin's Curse* (1946), which is considered to be a masterpiece of Kailasam. This play presents the story of Karna in a new dimension as it attempts to build a narrative based on “Oedipus-fatality” (Iyengar 237). This play, as Naik opines, is “a Mahabharata in miniature,” though Kailasam has used his innovative ideas to recast the original story of the epic in a new perspective (Naik 148). Thus, we can see that during the colonial period, playwrights mainly from Bengal and South India contributed to the field of Indian English Drama. However, one particular playwright whose contribution cannot be ignored is Bharati Sarabhai. She is the first

woman playwright in the history of Indian English Drama. Being a Gujrati, she is also the first Indian playwright to reflect the impact of Gandhian thoughts in her plays (Naik 149). Her two plays, *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) show her understanding of and the love for Gandhi's ideology. *The Well of the People* is especially important because it is based "on a true story published in Gandhi's *Harijan*" (Naik 149).

The first remarkable feature that can be noted in the history of Indian Drama in this period is the dependence of the Indian playwrights on the Western traditions. The dramatic tradition of the Elizabethans and the ancient Greeks highly influence the Indian playwrights. This trait is very visible in the plays written by the three Bengali playwrights mentioned earlier. The second feature is the use of Indian mythical stories in the plays. This aspect can be located in the plays written by the South Indian playwrights in particular. The third significant aspect is the presence of Gandhi's philosophy and ideas in the plays. This is clearly traceable in the plays of Sarabhai. Thus, even though the journey of Indian English Drama is short during this period, its contributions to the Indian English literature cannot be ignored.

1.2.3B. Post-independence Indian English Drama (1947-1980)

The history of Indian English Drama in the post-independence phase is not very encouraging. In fact, like the other two major genres, Indian English Drama could not flourish during the post-independence period mainly because Indian playwrights tended to write plays in regional languages. Some playwrights obviously got the opportunity to stage their plays abroad like the US and England, but these plays written in English were not well received in India. Due to a curious lack of interest in plays written in English, the regional language theatre during this period developed significantly. While discussing the development of Indian English Drama in the post-1947 scenario, Naik mentions the above stated reasons to point out the lack of development of Indian English Drama. He describes the scenario very appropriately, "... the encouragement which drama received from several quarters immediately after Independence was monopolised by the theatre in the Indian regional languages, while Indian English drama continued to feed on crumbs fallen from its rich cousins' tables" (255). Further, Naik states that though many initiatives were taken by the India government to "encourage the performing arts as an effective means of public enlightenment," but all these initiatives ultimately led to the "growth of regional language theatre" (255).

The establishment of National School of Drama in 1959, setting up of Sahitya Natak

Akademi in 1952 and the decision to organise National Drama Festival in 1954 – all such state decisions proved to be futile in terms of the development of Indian English Drama (Naik 255). These playwrights mainly attempted to carry forward the tradition of poetic drama that was established by the dramatists of the pre-independence era. G.V. Desani, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy are the three playwrights, who, according to Naik, wrote verse plays like the playwrights of the colonial era (256). Desani's *Hali* is an allegorical verse play which presents 'everyman's quest for fulfilment' (Naik 256). As a play, *Hali* is very rich, because it is a multilayered text. It also draws heavily from the Hindu mythology (Naik 257). Lakhan Deb's three blank verse plays, *Tiger Claw* (1967), *Vivekanand* (1972) and *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976) are historical dramas (Naik 257). His plays deal with historically famous characters, and his last play deals with the murder of Mahatma Gandhi (Naik 257).

Among the playwrights of this period (1947-1980), Asif Currimbhoy's contribution to the field of Indian English Drama is noteworthy. He deviated from the convention of writing verse plays and wrote prose plays. His career as a dramatist is illustrious because he wrote almost thirty plays. Naik very pertinently points out the various themes of his plays: "History and current politics; social and economic problems; East-West encounter; psychological conflicts, and religion, philosophy and art – everything is grist to Currimbhoy's dramatic mill" (258). With such a huge range of themes, his plays assume a great significance in the canon of Indian English Drama.

The other playwrights of this period are: Pratap Sharma, Nissim Ezekiel, Gurucharan Das and Girish Karnad. Sharma's plays are Bombay-centric and his two plays, *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor Has a Warcry* (1970), effectively portray the bleak side of Bombay life. Though Ezekiel is chiefly a poet, he has written three plays, which show his "skilful use of ironical fantasy" (Naik 261). Gurucharan Das is known for his excellent representation of the colonial history of Punjab in his plays. Though he has written many plays, the only play that he wrote during the period 1947-1980 is *Larins Sahib* (1970). As a historical play, it deals with Henry Lawrence of Punjab, and it also effectively presents the colonial background of India during the time when Henry Lawrence visited India (Naik 262). Girish Karnad is an eminent Indian English playwright. Most of his plays were staged and published after 1980, but the two plays, *Tughlaq* (1972) and *Hayavadana* (1975) appeared before 1980. These two plays were translated into English by Karnad. *Tughlaq* is a historical play while *Hayavadana* is a play about complex identity formation. Karnad's plays are known for his experimental techniques and intense debates related to psychological conflicts.

Thus, we can see that in the post-independence phase two tendencies in the canon of Indian English Drama are prominent. One is the continuation of the tradition of writing verse plays and the other is the attempt made by some eminent playwrights like, Currimbhoy, Das and Karnad to infuse new themes and techniques. Despite the fact that most of the playwrights of this period modelled their plays on Western traditions of drama, some playwrights made sincere efforts to produce indigenous model of drama. This is clearly traceable in the plays of Currimbhoy, Das and Karnad. In fact, their efforts paved the way for new experimentations by future playwrights.

➤ **Activities:**

- Make a list of the pre-independence Indian English playwrights. What are the common features you find in their plays?
- Make a list of the important post-independence Indian English playwrights. What are the distinctive traits you find in the plays of this period?
- It has been mentioned in the above section that Indian English Drama did not flourish like the other two major genres. What are the possible reasons for this lack of development in the field of Indian English Drama? Apart from the reasons mentioned above, can you give some more reasons?
- Read some of the plays of Asif Currimbhoy. Do you consider him a versatile playwright? Give reasons.
- Read the following two plays: Gurucharan Das's *Larins Sahib* and Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*. How are these two plays thematically different?

1.2. 4. Summing Up

In this Unit an attempt has been made to study the history of the three major genres of Indian English Literature from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the year 1980. Our discussion related to these genres has been divided into two phases: the pre-independence and the post-independence. A comparative study of the history of the different genres discussed above reveal the dominance of Indian English Poetry and Fiction in the canon of Indian English Literature. Indian English Drama as is evident in our discussion did not get the scope to develop due to various reasons. Hence, our discussion in this Unit has prepared us to study the scope and development of these genres in the post-1980 scenario, which will be dealt with in the next unit. For the

moment, the vast corpus of translations from regional literatures into English has not been taken up in this Unit. It must however be mentioned that there remains a raging controversy as to whether translations from various Bhasha literatures into English should be treated as Indian English in the same way as works written by Indian writers directly in English are considered.

1.2.5. Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type questions (20 marks)

1. Assess the contribution of the major Indian English poets. How have these poets enriched the genre of Indian English Poetry?
2. Assess the contribution of the major Indian English novelists. How have these novelists enriched the genre of Indian English Novel?
3. Assess the contribution of the major Indian English playwrights. How have these playwrights enriched the genre of Indian English Drama?
4. Make a comparative study of the three major genres of Indian English Literature by focusing primarily on changing situation of the nation.

Mid-length Answer Type Questions (12 marks)

1. Critically analyse the poems written by Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu.
2. How did modernism influence the poets of the post-independence era? What are the distinctive modern traits in the English poetry of the post-independence period?
3. How did the contribution of Anand, Rao and R.K. Narayan change the whole scenario of Indian English Fiction? Discuss with suitable references from their novels.
4. How did the women novelists of the post-independence era contribute to the genre of Indian English Fiction? Discuss with suitable references from their novels.
5. Make a brief survey of pre-independence Indian English Drama. Why are the possible reasons for the lack of growth of this genre?
6. Discuss the various themes that Asif Currimbhoy deals with in his plays.

Short questions (6 marks)

1. Write a short note on Sri Aurobindo's poem *Savitri*.

2. Briefly comment on Nissim Ezekiel's poetry.
3. Briefly explain the significance of the experimental novels in the genre of Indian English Fiction.
4. How is Arun Joshi as a novelist different from his contemporaries?
5. How does the Western tradition of drama influence the Bengali playwrights of the pre-independence period?
6. Name the playwrights who wrote history plays. Why are history plays important in the canon of Indian English Drama?

1.2.7. Suggested Reading

Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. 5th Edition. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985.

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Walsh, William. *Commonwealth Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Unit - 3 □ In Search of a New Idiom

1.3.0: Introduction

1.3.1: In Search of a New Idiom: Colonial Period and Derivative Romanticism

1.3.2: In Search of New Idiom: Post-Colonial Period and the Post-1980 scenario

1.3.2A: Rushdie and his Children

1.3.2B: Cosmopolitanism and Diaspora Literature

1.3.2C: Geo-cultural Zones and Literature from the Northeast

1.3.2D: Women's Literature and Indian Writing in English

1.3.3: Summing Up

1.3.4: Comprehension Exercises

1.3.5: Suggested Reading

1.3.0. Introduction

In the preceding two units, dear learners, you have read the history of the birth and growth of Indian Writing in English and also how it spread its branches in luxurious growth in different directions. You must have also noted with interest the turns and twists of this growth right from the period of the East India Company. As you must have realised, it was not always a smooth journey, complicated as it was because of the compulsions of the new users and the dilemma they faced as to the ethics of using a foreign language. The mediation of cultural habits and the pull of the regional languages led to the indigenisation of the English language. As to the model to be followed by the Indian writers in English, there was some confusion. There was, in the initial phase, a strong urge to follow the British models (mainly the romantic one) but there was also the question of the reception of the Indian authors writing in English by the Indian readers and audience (in the case of staging of English plays, either in original or in translation). So despite a strong inclination to follow the British models of the time, there was always the possibility of a resistance to it. This confusion was strongly felt by the Indian translators who wanted to render canonical British texts (mainly drama) in the regional languages. Hurro Chunder

Ghosh, for example, attempted to translate William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in a faithful manner but later adapted it to the indigenous *nuttack* tradition, Indianising it in the process. This new cultural product – the translated text – was titled *Bhanumati Chittobilas* (1853). This was the first Shakespeare translation in Bengali.

If you take a look at the history of Indian Writing in English from the vantage point of the present, you will discover that it is a very dynamic branch of literature, full of life of its own, and capable of taking unexpected turns at different points of time. It has indeed been home to new voices, new idioms of expression and ever continuing shifts of tone and emphasis. The entire gamut of its history, right from its earliest colonial days, right from the narratives of Sheikh Dean Mahomet, Kylas Chunder Dutt or Shoshi Chunder Dutt to the present generation of writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Chetan Bhagat, or Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, or Nissim Ezekiel or Kamala Das, it is a story of variegated tales, of shifts of idioms and styles, of changing canons and paradigms. In the following sections we shall mainly concentrate on these trends and idioms that we come across in the whole range of its history.

➤ **Activity:**

- It may be interesting for you to know that Lawrence Venuti, an important theoretician of translation studies, refers to two modes of translation in his book *Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*: 1. “domesticating method” (“ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text,” a method which brings the foreign “author back home” to the readers of the country, e.g. India) and 2. “foreignizing method” (“ethnodeviant” method which registers clearly “the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text” and “send[s] the reader abroad”). See pp.18-20 of the book.

Try to figure out the main difference between the two methods and mention the method Hurro Chunder Ghosh adopted in his translation of the Shakespeare text mentioned above.

1.3.1. In Search of a New Idiom: Colonial Period and Derivative Romanticism

The early Indian writers writing in English, as we have seen in the opening unit, were the products of two linguistic and cultural influences. Their works were the products of intersections of both the British and Indian cultures. Gibson points out

that “[f]irst English language poets born in India, Kashiprasad Ghose and Derozio” were cosmopolitans and polyglots and they “participated in a complex web of influence[s] and acknowledgement[s]” (3). But it was also because of their exposure to dual, or multiple cultures that the practitioners of Indian Writing in English, right from the beginning, were torn between two opposing poles of attraction and resistance. While English culture, specifically works by English writers, had a great impact on the Indian English writers, there was also an acute awareness of the Indian socio-cultural situation and Indian myths and legends. While the early writers were given to imitate the style of the poets and fictional writers, there was an equally strong urge to apply the mode and style of writing to Indian themes. Of all the genres, poetry was widely read and appreciated in India. Mary Ellis Gibson observes that between 1780 and the mid-nineteenth century “poetry was not only the most prestigious but also the most dominant English language genre, as measured by texts printed in India. It remained the crucial book imports as well” (8). The generation hungry for the taste of the English poetical works from Britain grabbed the new works and tried to imitate them. There grew a strong liking for the British romantic poetry. Their works reflected this new taste and penchant for the new idiom.

Major British influence on the Indian English poets were “Burns, Moore, Byron , Keats, and L.E.L. (Letitia Landon), while Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Charlotte Smith were acknowledged but less frequently praised” (Gibson 9). Derozio himself was influenced by romantic poets like Byron and Keats. Kashiprasad Ghose was also strongly influenced by the British romantics and the ‘Shair’ in his *The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems* (1830) was “obviously Scott’s ‘minstrel’ in an Indian garb, slightly dishevelled as a result of the arduous voyage across the seas” (Naik 24). In Madhusudan Dutt’s poems one can trace the influences of Milton, Scott and Byron. The poems in *Dutt Family Album* (1870) which contain contributions of three Dutt brothers – Govin Chunder, Hur Chunder, and Greece Chunder – and their cousin Omesh Chunder Dutt also echo romantic strains of the British romantic poets like Keats or Wordsworth. Despite technical competence these poets lacked originality and their styles were basically derivative in nature. This trend continued for a long time and is evident even later in the poems of Sarojini Naidu. Despite their evocative power, the poems were clearly imitative of British romanticism. Naik observes that “Indian English literature really came of age after 1857, when India’s rediscovery of her identity became a vigorous, all-absorbing quest and when she had learnt enough from the West to progress from imitation and assimilation to creation” (35). This

background explains the transition from derivative romanticism of the early poets to a very confident phase of self-assertion.

The first poet to be free of this imitative practice, according to M. K. Naik, is Toru Dutt who is much more authentic in her use of poetic theme and style than her predecessors and contemporaries. Her use of Indian myths and legends show a surer grasp and her awareness of Indian flora and culture has been noted by critics. Naik makes the following comment on her poetic genius:

What is most impressive about Toru Dutt's poetry is its virtually total freedom from imitation (in contrast with Kashiprasad Ghose and M. M. Dutt) at an age when most writers are in their artistic swaddling clothes. She quotes from Pope and Wordsworth, but it would be difficult to cite definite examples of psittacism in her verse. This indicates that hers was an individual talent capable of growing according to the laws its own nature. (40-1)

It is also evident that a strong note of patriotism and proto/nationalism is found in the works of the early writers. In poetry, for example, pieces written by Derozio (like "To India – My Native Land," "The Harp of India" and "The Pupil of Hindu College") convey a strong emotion for the native land. Naik considers this "somewhat surprising in a Eurasian at a time when the average representative of his class was prone to repudiate his Indian blood and identify himself with the white man, for eminently practical reasons" (23). In Michael Madhusudan Dutt too we find strong traces of proto-nationalism while Sarojini Naidu who extolled "the lotus, for example, over the conventional flowers of English poetry" (Gibson 13) and Aurobindo Ghosh who replaced the 'Hellenic' muses by "the Indian goddess of poetry and learning, Sarasvati" (Gibson 13) were overtly nationalist. It is interesting to note that the first fictional writing in English – Kylas Chunder Dutt's *A Journal of Forty-five Hours* – is revolutionary in spirit as it dishes out a theme of a revolt against the British colonial power. Bhoobun Mohun, the protagonist of the fiction, leads a crowd of Indian revolutionaries to attack the well-fortified Fort in Calcutta but is ultimately defeated and hanged. The style of his address to his 'countrymen' is notable for its indebtedness to canonical British sources: "My friends and Countrymen! I have the consolation to die in my native land... I have shed my last blood in defence of my country and ...I hope you continue to persevere in the course you have so gloriously commenced" (60). Bhoobun Mohun's speech obviously reminds us of Mark Antony's speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Tickell more elaborately points out the echoes from the

works of William Shakespeare, Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine and P. B. Shelley. The narrative, he says, is “a creative dialogue with the curricular texts of the Hindu College, and echoes canonical English literary works in its set piece soliloquies and gladiatorial scenes” (Tickell 63).

The Indian English poetry truly came out of the derivative influence only when the powerful impact of modernism/modernity was felt in the poems of poets like Ezekiel. Such poetry was characterised not only by modern diction and modern idiom but by a whole range of new sensibilities. But of that we shall discuss in the next section. The Indian English novelists, like the Indian English poets, during the colonial period, depended heavily on English models. In the earlier unit, we have discussed the influence of the Western tradition of writing ‘*bildungsroman*’ on the Indian novelists of the 19th century. Scott, Fielding, Austen and Dickens were inspirational figures who guided the Indian writers to construct their fictional tales. The early Indian English novelists like Lal Behari Day, Sarath Kumar Ghosh, A. Madhaviah, T. Ramakrishna Pillai and Sirdar Jogendra Singh wrote novels that lacked innovation. These novels were mainly reflective of the imitative spirit of the writers. In fact, most of the early novelists attempted to portray the East-West cultural encounter through their fictional narratives. However, the scenario during the colonial period radically changed during the 1930s and 1940s when Rao, Anand and Narayan became famous. Their novels, while addressing the socio-cultural scenario of the periods, also captured the Indian ethos that was missing in the earlier novels. Rao, Anand and Narayan made sincere attempts to develop a new idiom in their writings by articulating the contemporary realities in their fictions. The manner in which Anand and Narayan presented the socio-cultural scenario by incorporating irony, humour and wit in their fictions reflects their tendency to formulate a new mode of expression. This is similarly notable in the philosophical novels of Rao in which he constructs a new mode of expressing profound philosophical questions that are relevant to human existence. Also, one knows how he emphasises the idea of developing a new idiom of writing in the Foreword to *Kanthapura*, “The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own” (5). This statement of Rao sums up the attitude of the novelists writing during the colonial period. They were struggling to generate a suitable medium of language to communicate with the Indian readers. Hence, the search for a new idiom was a dominant trend in the novelists of the colonial period. However, the whole scenario changed during the post-colonial period when new forms of writing emerged to enrich the field of Indian English Fiction.

Indian English Drama, as discussed in the last unit, did not make any significant progress during the colonial period. The playwrights of this period were mainly influenced by the Western tradition of drama. Plays written during this period are mostly imitative in form and content. Due to the lack of any dramatic tradition in India, playwrights like Harindranath Chattopadhyay, A. S. Panchapakesa Ayyar and Thyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam wrote plays which clearly reflect their adherence to the Western tradition of drama. Indian myths are finely represented in the plays written during this period, but even these representations were influenced by the mythical tales of the West. One such prominent example is Kailasam's *Karna or The Brahmin's Curse* (1946), in which there is a trace of the story of King Oedipus. Thus, in the field of Indian English Drama, lack of interest in developing a new idiom of expression is clearly discernible. So, unlike the other two literary genres, during the colonial period, Indian English Drama did not make any considerable effort to develop a suitable model of dramatic expression to attract the attention of Indian audience/readers.

➤ **Activities:**

- Pick up Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and read its Preface.
- What do you understand by 'derivative romanticism'?
- Consider whether you can call Indian English literature a 'hybrid product.'
- Are modernism and modernity synonymous? Find out your own answer by consulting relevant works.
- Prepare a list of British authors who had great impact on Indian poets and novelists.

1.3.2. In Search of New Idiom: Post-colonial Period and Post-1980s scenario

The post-colonial period in the history of Indian English Literature witnessed a remarkable change in the outlook of the writers. This was the period when, due to the influence of Western modernity, the writers experimented with the art of writing. In the last unit, we have discussed the poets who were highly influenced by modern Western writers like T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. Indian English poets imbibed the tradition of Western modernity to create a 'new' mode of writing and also to produce a new idiom of expression that appealed to the contemporary readers.

Poets like Ezekiel, P. Lal, Dom Moraes, R. Parthasarathy, A. K. Ramanujan and others made a considerable contribution to the area of Indian English poetry. They used many representative traits of Western modern poetry to articulate the socio-cultural milieu of India. Similarly, in the field of Indian English Fiction, there was a considerable impact of Western modernism on the novelists of the post-colonial period. As mentioned in the last unit, G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* prepared the path for the future writers to welcome modernism. This novel, which is Joycean in spirit, is a highly experimental fiction that incorporates a complex language structure to narrate the tale of H. Hatterr. In fact, the English 'stream of consciousness' novels acted as a model for some very prominent novelists of this period. Chaman Nahal, Arun Joshi and women writers like Ruth Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal show a strong urge to represent the psychology of the characters in their fictions. In the field of Indian English Drama, three playwrights in particular — Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad and Gurucharan Das — initiated the process of incorporating new themes and techniques in plays instead of slavishly imitating the Western models. These aspects have been discussed in detail in the earlier unit. Module 1, Unit 2 discusses the development of Indian English Poetry, Fiction and Drama till the year 1980. In this unit, therefore the focus will be on the post-1980 scenario. The next section in this unit will deal with the development of the Indian English Literature in the last two decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century.

➤ **Activities:**

- Why is post-1980 considered to be a watershed in the history of Indian English literature?
- Refer to the Module 1 Unit 2 and prepare a list of the poets and the novelists of the colonial period who were influenced by British Romanticism. What are the major themes that these writers deal with?
- Prepare a list of the poets and the novelists of the post-colonial period who were influenced by Western modernism.
- Why do you think that G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* is an important fiction? How did this fiction influence the future writers? Will you consider this work as a precursor of Rushdie's novels?

1.3.2A. Rushdie and his Children

The seminal work that defines the outlook of the Indian Literature in the 1980s is

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). This novel marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Indian English Literature. *Midnight's Children* is a political allegory that narrativises the Indian independence through the perspective of Saleem Sinai, who is born on the midnight of 15th August 1947. In this novel, Rushdie experiments with the narrative art to produce a story that evokes an ambience of Magic Realism. This trend of fiction set a new instance in the field of Indian English Fiction. Other contemporary novelists also made serious efforts to write Magic Realist fiction and among them two novelists are well known: Amitav Ghosh and Shashi Tharoor (Naik & Narayan 46). Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1986) and Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) are two very important examples of magic realist fiction (Naik & Narayan 47). This breed of fiction is primarily set in a realistic setting but it infuses within a realistic framework of the narrative some magical elements. In fact, this breed of fiction flourished during the 1980s as many writers found this new mode of narration very interesting. It also provided a suitable space for the writers to apply their imagination. This new trend of fiction along with some other trends marked a break with the tradition of writing purely realist fiction. Naik and Narayan addresses the 'new novelists' of the 1980s by referring to the changes that they ushered in the field of Indian fiction: "Where do the new novelists stand in relation to their chief predecessors? Curiously enough, the most outstanding of them do not seem to follow any of the 'Big Three'" (37). The "Big Three" in this context refers to Rao, Anand and Narayan whose influence faded in the post-1980s scenario. Thus, Rushdie's fictional experimentation yielded positive results and this led to the development of Indian English Fiction.

Another breed of fiction that developed during this phase is Campus novels. Though not very rich in terms of number, this new kind of fiction dealt with the academic world. These novels capture the lives of the academics who encounter the various challenges of thriving in a purely academic environment. Prema Nandakumar's *The Atom and the Serpent* (1982), D.R. Sharma's *Miracles Happen* (1985) and Ranga Rao's *The Drunk* (1994) are three good examples of campus novels. Apart from this breed of fiction, another new kind of fiction that developed in this period is Science Fiction. Robotic science, inter-planetary expeditions and interest in new scientific inventions are all important ingredients of this new breed of fiction. The pioneering figure of this genre of fiction is Jayant Narlikar. Narlikar's *The Return of Vaman* (1989) and *The Message from Aristarchus* (1992) are good examples of science fiction. The first fiction of Narlikar is about a robotic character and the second one begins with the "dropping of an infant on to the earth from a dying planet" (Naik

& Narayan 72). Naik and Narayan also consider Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) as a "science fiction novel" (73). Along with science fiction, another literature that flourished during the post-1980 scenario is Children's Literature. In the pre-1980 phase, the only significant figure of Children's Literature was Ruskin Bond. His short stories and poems became very popular during the 1960s and the 1970s. However, in the post-1980 phase, many authors including Rushdie, seriously attempted to write fictions for the children. Rushdie's novel, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), which is included in your syllabus, is a good example of Children's literature. Novelists like Farrukh Dhondy, Arup Kumar Datta and Prakash Sharma shot to fame during the 1980s and 1990s due to their contributions to the field of Children's literature. Special mention must be made of Prakash Sharma's "popular series on Dog Detective Ranjha which appeared as a cartoon strip in the children's magazine *Tinkle*" (Naik & Narayan 74). These breeds of Indian English Fiction obviously enriched the literary baggage, but one particular phenomenon which impacted on the Indian English Literature was the policy of liberalization initiated by the Government of India in the year 1991. This economic policy not only opened its door to foreign investments, but also changed the outlook of the whole nation. Adopting a global perspective, India slowly prepared for competing with other economies. Foreign investments led to the establishment of MNCs (Multinational Companies), BPOs (Business Process Outsourcing) and IT hubs (Information Technology hubs). These socio-economic changes broadened the horizon of Indian English Literature. New kinds of fictions emerged that reflected the socio-cultural matrix of a complex life in metropolitan cities. Writers of this era sought global recognition for establishing their reputation in the global literary market. Circulation of books, demands of the publishing industry, advertisements and promotional skills played major roles in promoting a particular writer/book/literature. In this context, we must refer to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* which was published in 1997. This novel, as E. Dawson Varughese argues, placed Roy and Indian Writing in English on the global frame, and this happened mainly because the novel won the Booker Prize: "The fact that the novel won the Booker Prize helped to put contemporary Indian writing in English firmly in the international writing scene and this has continued with writers like Adiga, Chandra and Bhagat" (Kindle Locations 410-411). The fame that Roy acquired as an Indian writer inspired the later writers to look for such themes for their books that may appeal to the global readers.

Among the many different breeds of fiction that emerged in the post-liberalization era, five are very prominent: Urban fiction, Chick literature, Crick literature, and Call Centers novels and Corporate novels. 'Chick literature' refers to the literature about the chicks or young urban women of India. 'Crick literature' means 'Cricket literature,' which deals with narratives that focus on cricket. E. Dawson Varughese in her book *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English* (2013) discusses all these new genres of fiction. These new fictions celebrate the youth culture of India; the young men and women who are largely responsible for investing labour and intellect in the corporate world. Urban fiction rose to prominence mainly in the first decade of 21st century when cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai assumed greater significance in the Indian economic map due to the establishment of MNCs, BPOs and IT hubs. Varughese refers to the "Metro Reads" series of fiction that was launched by Penguin India in 2010 to attract the attention of urban young commuters travelling around city. These books were slim literary pieces which could be easily read while travelling in a metro train. (Kindle Locations 642-644). *Dreams in Prussian Blue* (2010) *Love Over Coffee* (2010) *No Deadline for Love* (2011) *Losing My Virginity and Other Dumb Ideas* (2011) and *Where Girls Dare* (2010) are such fictions which belong to the series of "Metro Reads." Apart from these metro fictions, some urban-centric novels were also written by writers like Amit Chaudhuri and Arvind Adiga. Chaudhuri's city based novels are about middle class characters travelling from one city to another. Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) is about the underclass people and their struggles in urban India. Like the urban fictions, Chick literature is also about urban people. However, this particular breed of fiction will be discussed in the section titled "Gender and Indian Writing in English" because this kind of fiction is related to the representation of urban women. Though Crick literature has become very popular, it is a very recent genre of fiction. It, as Varughese opines, is a product of 'New India' (Kindle Location 1408). This idea of 'New India' is reflective of the new economic face of India that became apparent in the post-liberalisation era. In fact, all the different breeds of fiction that became popular in the post-liberalisation era are, according to Varughese, representative of the 'New India' face. While discussing the genre of Crick literature, Varughese states:

In this sense, IPL and the appetite for the 'one-day game' is a motif of New India, emerging in the late, first decade of the nineties and very much in line with the economic boom that India has been enjoying. IPL talks directly to the growing middle classes of India, their desire for 'Indian cricket' per

se, consumerism and the advertising and celebrity hype that accompanies it” (Kindle Locations 1407-1410).

The above remark vividly explains the negotiation between economics and literature in the post-liberalisation era. One cannot deny the fact that all these contemporary genres of fictions are connected with the global market economy. So, is the case with Crick literature. Anuja Chauhan’s *The Zoya Factor* (2008), Geeta Sundar’s *The Premier Murder League* (2010) and Subhasis Das’s *Bowled and Beautiful* (2009), Tushar Raheja’s *Run, Romi, Run* (2010) and Chetan Bhagat’s *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008) are good examples of Crick literature (Varughese, Kindle Location 1450-1454). These fictions usually deal with the impact of IPL and one-day cricket matches on the lives of the people. Some of these fictions also present the corrupt world that operates behind this game. If Crick literature is about young players, Call Centers and Corporate novels are about young people working in the corporate sector of India. These novels, by depicting the urban youth culture of India, capture the ethical complexities of corporate life. Chetan Bhagat is a living example of a writer who has written many novels about young men and women working in the corporate sector. Anish Trivedi’s *Call me Dan* (2010) and Bhagat’s *One Night @ The Call Centre* (2008) are two very important novels that fictionalise the lives of young people working at call centres.

Thus, the rise and development of new breeds of fiction since the publication of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* reflect the dynamic nature of Indian English fiction. With the change in the socio-economic scenario of the nation, it has evolved and adapted to the contemporary situation. In fact, no other genre of Indian English literature prospered like Indian English Fiction in the post-1980 period.

➤ **Activities:**

- Reflect on the implications of the phrase ‘Rushdie’s children’? Try to grasp the meanings of the terms ‘Magic Realism’ and ‘The Big Three’ by reading relevant materials.
- Draw a tree diagram to show the different varieties of genres and sub-genres discussed in the above section.
- Prepare a list of the novelists who became popular writers of magic realism. What are the appealing features of a magic realist fiction?
- What are the other kinds of fiction that prospered during the post-

liberalisation era? What about the graphic novels or the crime fiction?

- Prepare a list of the novels written by Chetan Bhagat. Why are the reasons for the popularity of his novels?

1.3.2B. Cosmopolitanism and Diaspora Literature

Indian Diaspora Literature emerged as a broad field of study in the post-1980 period. This particular branch of Indian English Literature needs special attention because its corpus is huge. Indian Diaspora literature is about the narratives of migration and anxieties associated with it. Homelessness, search for roots, nostalgia for homeland, alienation and marginalisation are some of the significant features of Diaspora literature. These features figure prominently in Indian Diaspora Literature. Since the time when V.S. Naipaul, M.G. Vassanji, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Parameswaran, Jhumpa Lahiri, Hanif Kureishi started contributing to the field of Indian Diaspora literature, it became evident that this new area of literature will prosper. Though the journey of Indian Diaspora literature began before the 1980s, it emerged as an important area of literature during the 1990s and the first decade of 21st century. In fact, Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer winning book *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) attracted the attention of the global readers to the Indian diaspora. This book — along with her debut novel *The Namesake* (2003) which was adapted into a popular film by the Indian diasporic director, Mira Nair – inspired the Indian diasporic writers to construct narratives about Indian diaspora and gain global recognition. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Meena Alexander, Imtiaz Dharker, Tabish Khair and Agha Shahid Ali are some of the prominent Indian diasporic writers of the present times. Lahiri's success as a diasporic writer also confirmed the impact of globalization on Indian Diasporic literature. In fact, Lahiri's fictions are cosmopolitan in outlook and this feature is one of the important aspects of globalization. The idea of being a world citizen with an emphasis on 'routes' gained currency in the field of Indian Diaspora literature in the post-liberalisation era. Contemporary Indian Diaspora literature negates the idea of 'roots' by prioritizing the notion of 'routes.' Apart from embracing the idea of cosmopolitanism, this genre of literature has also addressed some very pertinent issues like terrorism and religious fundamentalism. New categories of diaspora fiction like post-9/11 fiction amplify the significance of these literary narratives that deal with complex relationship between terrorism and Islam. Thus, Indian Diaspora literature has successfully established its roots in the history of Indian English literature.

➤ **Activities:**

- Try to define the terms ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘diaspora’. Is there any inherent connections between the two terms?
- Watch the Mira Nair’s film *The Namesake* and try to find out the concept of ‘home’ as represented in the film.
- What do you mean by the much used term ‘9/11.’ Why is it considered to be an earth-shattering event?
- Prepare a list of the contemporary diasporic writers. What are the major themes that these diasporic writers deal with in their writings?
- Why do you think that Uma Parameswaran is important as a diasporic writer?
- Prepare a list of the novels and poems that are based on terrorism. What are chief features of these emergent literary forms?

1.3.2C. Geo-cultural Zones and Literature from the Northeast

Literature from the Northeast India became prominent in the literary map of India in the 1980s especially after the setting up of different cultural zones by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. In the year 1985, the Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi divided the whole nation into seven geo-cultural zones. These geo-cultural zones were set up to encourage development of regional cultures, arts and literatures. As a matter of fact, Northeast literature developed after the formation of these geo-cultural zones. This literature refers to the literary contributions of the authors belonging to the Northeast region of India. Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Mitra Phukan, Dhruva Hazarika, Jahnabi Barua, Anjum Hasan, Siddhartha Deb and Robin S. Ngangom are some of the prominent writers from the Northeast region. These writers refer to the local myths, folktales, rituals, customs and lifestyles of local tribes in their literary works. Nature also is represented in various forms in their works. The landscape of the Northeast region also plays an important role in the creative world of these writers. As an important component of Indian English literature, the literature from the Northeast is very rich and it has the potential to form an independent area of literature.

➤ **Activities:**

- What do you mean by ‘Geo-Cultural Zones’? What is/are the basic assumption(s) behind the phrase?
- Do you find any problem with the nomenclature ‘North East Literature’? Which states are included in the nomenclature?
- Dear students, you have to study Tamsula Ao in this paper. Prepare a list of important poems written by her. What are the chief features of her poetry?
- Mitra Phukan is an important Northeast novelist. Prepare a list of the novels written by her. Read her novel *The Collector’s Wife* and try to understand the background of this novel.

1.3.2D. Women’s Literature and Indian Writing in English

The issue of gender is not new in Indian English Literature. However, when one looks at the post-1980 period, proliferation of gender based literary works draw our attention. In Module 1 Unit 2, we discussed the contributions of eminent women writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Kamala Das and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. No doubt, these writers flourished in the post-1980 period. Shashi Deshpande emerged as a figure of repute. Her novels capture the pathetic condition of the urban middle class women of India who are forced to make multiple compromises in a patriarchal society. Her novels, *If I Die Today* (1982), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *That Long Silence* (1989) are significant studies of women suffering under patriarchy. Deshpande’s works reflect a strong urge to articulate gender-centric oppression in India. The post-liberalisation era saw the emergence a new kind of literature, i.e., Chick literature. This new breed of literature attempted to portray Indian women in a radically different way. Referring to this particular aspect, Varughese states, “The analysis of the new chick lit fiction contrasts the narratives of Deshpande, Desai and others against the post-millennial chick lit narratives of Kala, Chauhan, Jain and Vadya (Kindle Locations 1020-1021). Kala, Chauhan, Jain and Vadya are the Chick lit writers of our times, and they foreground the image of a woman who is able to take her own decisions. The women characters in their fictions are career-oriented and they are at the centre of decision-making processes (Varughese, Kindle Location 1027). Advaita Kala’s *Almost Single* (2007)

is a good example of Chick literature. Thus, this new genre of Chick literature attempts to change the way women are portrayed in Indian English fiction.

➤ **Activities:**

- Read Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and then read Advaita Kala's *Almost Single*. What are the contrasting features you find in these two fictions?
- Prepare a list of the novels written by Chauhan, Jain and Vadya. How are women characters portrayed in these novels?
- Why did the genre of Chick literature flourish in the post-liberalisation era?

1.3.3. Summing Up

The post-1980s period was mainly dominated by Indian English fiction. A search for new idiom urged the post-Rushdie novelists to find suitable modes of expression to articulate specific socio-cultural conditions. However, this should make us feel that Indian English Poetry and Drama did not develop in this phase. The development in these fields may not be considerable like that of Indian English Fiction, but there are some prominent types of poetry and drama that emerged during this period. Urban culture, which influenced the narratives of many Indian English novels, also influenced Indian English poetry. A new group of "Bombay poets," following the tradition of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry, came into existence in the post-1980 period (Naik & Narayan 167). These poets attempted to capture the multiple shades of the city of Bombay in their poems. Saleem Peeradina, Santan Rodrigues, Manohar Shetty and Ranjit Hoskote were important members of this group (Naik & Narayan 167). Tabish Khair, an important poet cum novelist, developed a new form of poetry which is termed 'light verse.' This genre of poetry appeared in the last decade of 20th century (Naik & Narayan 180). Naik and Narayan defines this new poetry by referring to the verses written by Khair: "Khair writes in a crisp style, punctuated by an occasional, unusual image, like, an evening 'heavy as wet clothes on a line,' hills 'wearing a halo of eagles' and 'the semen smell of rain'" (Naik & Narayan 180). Another poet, Dwarakanath H. Kabadi "invented a new few of comic verse which he calls a 'Glimmerick'" (Naik & Narayan 181). This new form of poetry is well exemplified

in Kabadi's poetic volume, *Glimmericks* (1994). This new poetic form contains six lines, with an aa, bb, cc rhyme structure, and it incorporates faulty rhymes and bad grammar to emphasise the comic potential of the scene described in the poem (Naik & Narayan 181). In the field of Indian English Drama, Mahesh Dattani carried on the legacy of Girish Karnad in the post-1980 period. Though Karnad wrote plays in this period, his plays like those in the pre-1980 phase, dealt with the myth and epics of India. Dattani infused new themes in the field of drama by writing plays about homosexuality and 'the women question' (Naik & Narayan 207). When seen from this perspective, Dattani's *A Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* are interesting additions to the canon of Indian English drama. Uma Parameswaran's play *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Tress* draws our attention to the problems of the immigrants in Canada (Naik & Narayan 212). This play initiates us into the world of diaspora and the complex lives of Indian diasporic people. Manjula Padmanabhan play *Harvest* is an interesting narrative about the lower middle people in Mumbai. Padmanabhan in this play shows the pernicious impact of globalisation on the characters who are ready to sell their organs for leading a financially secure life. Political plays, history plays and plays dealing with "the victimization of women in Indian society" were written during this era (Naik & Narayan 213). Special mention must be made of three women-centric plays: Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*, Dina Mehta's *Getting Away with Murder* and Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam* (Naik & Narayan 213). Thus, Indian English Poetry and Drama in the post-1980 era evolved, though not assignificantly as Indian English Fiction, to incorporate new forms and themes that defined the socio-cultural ethos of the post-1980 generation.

1.3.4. Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type questions (20 marks)

1. Critically analyse the developments in the field of Indian English Fiction during the post-1980 period.
2. Discuss the major themes of post-millennial Indian English fiction.
3. The Indian English writers of the pre-1980 phase were different from the post-1980 period. Discuss by giving suitable textual references.
4. Show how the Indian English poets moved out from the 'derivative' impact of

the British poets and emerged as distinctly 'Indian' poets writing in English.

Mid-length Answer Type Questions (12 marks)

1. How was Rushdie successful in creating a new wave in Indian English Literature?
2. Distinguish Chick Literature from the Women's literature of the post-colonial period.
3. How did Indian Diaspora Literature develop in the post-liberalization era?
4. Explain the factors behind the emergence of Indian science fiction and children's literature? Discuss one example each from the two.

Short questions (6 marks)

1. Write a brief note on Science fiction.
2. Define Call Centre and Corporate novels.
3. Write a brief note on Crick literature.
4. Briefly analyse the term 'Bombay Poets.'

1.3.5. Suggested Reading:

Dutt, Kylas Chunder. *A Journal of Forty-eight Hours of the Year 1945*. Ed. Somdatta Mandal. Sodepur, Kolkata: Shambhabi, 2014.

Gibson, Mary Ellis, ed. *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913: A Critical Anthology*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2011. Google Book 14 December 2015.

Mund, Subhendu. "KylasChunderDutt: The First Writer of Indian English Fiction." 1-15. <www.academia.edu> Web. 5 October 2014.

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

—, Shyamala A. Narayan. *Indian English Literature 1980-2000: A Critical Survey*. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2001.

Rao, Raja. *Kanthapura*. Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1970.

Tickell, Alex. *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature, 1830-1947*. New York: Routledge, 2012. *Google Book Search*. Web. 30 Sept. 2014.

Varughese, Dawson Emma. *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. *Kindle Book*.

Venuti, Lawrence. *Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Module - 2 : Reading Poetry

Unit - 1 □ Henry Derozio: The Harp of India Toru Dutt: Our Casuarina Tree

2.1.0 Introduction

2.1.1 Historicising Early Indian Poetry in English

2.1.2 Derozio's Life and his Works

2.1.3 "The Harp of India" (Text)

2.1.4 Critical Understanding of the Text

2.1.5 Dutt's Life and her Works

2.1.6 "Our Casuarina Tree" (Text)

2.1.7 Critical Understanding of the Text

2.1.8 Summing Up

2.1.9 Comprehension Exercises

2.1.10 Suggested Reading

2.1.0. Introduction

This Unit will acquaint you to in terms of history, with the recorded beginnings of Indian poetry in English – whether in original, or in translation; and in terms of texts, with two of the earliest celebrated examples of such poetry. Reading these texts in the present context might seem somewhat archaic, but in terms of historiography you are to remember that poems by these poets mark the very important early phase of Indian English poetry. Once you come to the end of this Module on poetry, you can take up the interesting task of writing an account of the developments in theme and style in Indian poetry in English.

2.1.1. Historicising Early Indian Poetry in English

Literary writings in English by Indians, as we have seen in Module 1 began in earnest

from the initial decades of the 19th century. These received a colonial impetus with the introduction of the language as part of the curriculum through the auspices of Lord Macaulay's *Minutes on Education* in 1835. However, the history of Indian English poetry dates further back in time. Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami's English translation in 1825 of "Viswagunadarsana," a Sanskrit poem written by Arasinapala Venkatadhvarin in the early 17th century, is probably the first book of verse in English by an Indian, though it is not quite considered a part of Indian English literature owing to its vernacular roots. That honour is generally reserved for Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31), despite his mixed ancestry. Even though his poetic career was brief due to the tragic fact of his untimely death, its impact was long-lasting. His shorter lyrics were widely read, and inspired both his pupils as well as future poets. Derozio was soon to be followed by Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-73), the first English poet of pure Indian blood. His *The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems* published in 1830 has been termed as an attempt to imitate Walter Scott's 'minstrel'. His use of local materials like Hindu festivals in his lyrics (e.g. "The Boatman's Song to Ganga") indicates a sincere attempt to employ a native diction.

The next name that occupies an important place in the history of Indian English poetry is Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73), although he became more famous later as a writer in Bengali. In addition to some sonnets and shorter pieces, he wrote two long poems in English: *The Captive Ladie* (1849) narrates the story of the Rajput king Prithviraj Chauhan, his Lochinvar-like abduction of the Kanouj king's daughter Sanyukta, and his unsuccessful battle with the Muslim invader Mohammad Ghori that resulted in his death. In *Visions of the Past* (1849), a poem in Miltonic blank verse, complete with weighty abstract diction and Latin inversions, Dutt handles the Christian theme of the temptation, fall and subsequent redemption of Man. Other poets of the mid-nineteenth century include Rajnarain Dutt who wrote a verse narrative in heroic couplets titled *Osmyn: An Arabian Tale* in 1841, as well as the members of the wealthy and respected Dutt family of Calcutta. They were descendants of Rasomoy Dutt, who had been an associate of Rammohun Roy, and was also the secretary of the managing committees of both the Hindu College and the Sanskrit College. Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *Miscellaneous Poems* saw the light of day in 1848, while Hur Chunder Dutt's *Fugitive Pieces* came three years later. *The Dutt Family Album* published from London almost two decades later in 1870 marked the next phase in the growth and development of Indian poetry in English. This collection, the only instance of a family anthology in Indian English poetry, is comprised of 187 poems by three Dutt brothers – Govin Chunder, Hur Chunder and Greece [*sic*, an Anglicisation of Girish] Chunder as well as their cousin Omesh Chunder.

Most of their poems manifested the chief characteristic feature of the Dutts, of writing in a Western persona, so that it was quite difficult to fix the identity of the poet as anything other than European or English. However, some did exhibit an abstract nationalism, common in English poetry by Indians in the 19th century, that contrasted India's 'glorious past' with its present degeneration [incidentally, it was the theme of Derozio's "The Harp of India" as well, to be discussed in detail in the next section]. Govin's daughter Toru Dutt was later to become the most famous of the entire clan, due largely to her memorable poems "Our Casuarina Tree" and "Baugmaree".

Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), a cousin of Toru, continued the family's poetic tradition, though all his original creative work was in Bengali. He is better remembered today for his translations. *Lays of Ancient India* (1894) is a verse-collection rendered from Sanskrit and Prakrit classics including the *Rigveda*, the *Upanishads*, Kalidasa and Bharavi, and Buddhist scriptures like the *Dhammapada*. He also took up the ambitious task of producing a condensed version of the *Mahabharata* (1895) and the *Ramayana* (1899), where he employed the Tennysonian 'Locksley Hall' metre as the closest equivalent of the *Anustubh* or *sloka* of his originals. Nobo Kissen Ghosh (1837-1918) who used the pseudonym of Ram Sharma was another versatile poet showing glimpses of a certain authenticity in his verses, namely *Willow Drops* (1873-74), *The Last Day: A Poem* (1886) and *Shiva Ratri, Bhagaboti Gita* and *Miscellaneous Poems* (1903). He marked a welcome change from many of his contemporaries whose works were, more often than not, derivative in nature.

Turning from Calcutta [modern-day Kolkata] to Bombay, we find Behramji Merwanji Malabari (1853-1912) whose *The Indian Muse in English Garb*, comprising 32 poems, was published the same year as Toru Dutt's first collection. Cowasji Nowrosi Vesuvala, a fellow-Parsi, brought out *Courting the Muse* in 1879. There was a group of minor voices as well that included M. M. Kunte (*The Risi*, 1879) and Nagesh Wishwanath Pai (*The Angel of Misfortune: A Fairy Tale*, 1904). Nonetheless, Bengal remained the principal seat of literary activity even in the succeeding decades. Manmohan Ghose, who is today better remembered as the elder brother of Aurobindo Ghose (better known as Sri Aurobindo), spent a number of years in England and published his early poems in *Primavera* (1890) that also included the work of Stephen Phillips, Laurence Binyon and Arthur Cripps. His *Love Songs and Elegies* (1898), *Songs of Love and Death* (1926), *Orphic Mysteries* and *Immortal Eve* (both published in 1947 as part of his collected works) are now only of historical interest. Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) accompanied his brother to England at the age of seven, and started writing poetry soon after. His

early *Short Poems* (1890-1900) are mostly minor verse characteristic of this period of the 'romantic twilight,' but *The Short Poems 1895-1908*, written after his return to India, shows signs of his later mysticism. In *Short Poems, 1902-1930* and *Short Poems, 1930-1950*, he introduces a reflective and symbolic style. However, his *magnum opus* to which he devoted the major portion of his last years is *Savitri*. It is a narrative poem of 24,000 lines that recounts the *Mahabharata* tale of Satyavan and his wife Savitri who saved her husband's life from the clutches of Death. In this tri-partite, twelve-book epic, he attempted to 'catch something of the Upanishadic movement so far as that is possible in English' (Parthasarathy 2), even though the work has been subsequently criticised for being devoid of much substance.

An illustrious contemporary of Sri Aurobindo is Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who played the multiple roles of poet, dramatist, novelist, short story writer, composer, painter, thinker, educationist, nationalist and internationalist with ease. He primarily wrote in Bengali, but started translating some of his poems into English from 1912 when the first collection titled *Gitanjali* came out. The book was hailed by William Rothenstein and W. B. Yeats, and it also won him the Nobel Prize for literature the next year. His other poetical works in English include *The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Fruit-Gathering* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), *Lover's Gift and Crossing* (1918), *The Fugitive* (1921), *Fireflies* (1928) and the posthumously published *Poems* (1942).

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was younger to both Tagore and Aurobindo, but she gained recognition abroad much earlier. She studied in London and Cambridge for three years; her poetic talent developed under the influence of the Rhymers' Club. In her creative efforts she was encouraged by Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse. Her first volume of poetry, *The Golden Threshold* (1905) was followed by *The Birds of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). Her collected poems appeared in *The Sceptred Flute* (1946), while *Feather of the Dawn*, a lyric anthology written in 1927, was published posthumously in 1961. She had 'perhaps the finest ear among Indian poets for the sound of English' (Parthasarathy 2). Harindranath Chattopadhyay (1898-1990), her younger brother, also wrote poetry in the romantic mould. He was more prolific than his sister and produced numerous volumes of verse, including *The Feast of Youth* (1918), *The Magic Tree* (1922), *Poems and Plays* (1927), *Spring in Winter* (1955) and *Virgins and Vineyards* (1967).

2.1.2 Derozio's Life and his Works

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born in Calcutta on 18 April, 1809 of an Indian mother and a Portuguese father. He was appointed a teacher at Hindu College [later to become Presidency College, and subsequently Presidency University] in 1826, and taught poetry. He inspired his pupils to explore the reaches of not just literature and philosophy but also free thought and nationalism, although this was not taken too kindly by either the orthodox Hindu founders of the college or the colonial establishment. He was eventually compelled to resign in 1831. He was at the forefront of the 'Young Bengal' movement and tried to apply his secular Western notions of behaviour, but they were deemed as too radical, posing a threat to the existing conservative views in India. He was undoubtedly influenced by the English Romantics, particularly Byron, Scott, Shelley and Keats. In his brief writing career, he published two volumes of poetry: *Poems* in 1827, and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* the following year. *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale* is a narrative poem which tells the tragic story of the Brahmin widow Nuleeni who was rescued by a 'bandit-fakeer' from being burnt on the funeral pyre, and whose love she returns. Her relatives, however, resent this and in the ensuing conflict, the lover is killed and is finally united in death with the heart-broken Nuleeni. The narrative is comprised of rich descriptions replete with the sights, sounds and fragrances of the region around Bhagalpur where Derozio had spent a short period while working for his uncle before returning to Calcutta. This, along with Derozio's satirical verses like "Don Juanics", clearly indicates his special affinity with Byron, and gives evidence of energy and vigour as in the lines: 'That sponging is the best of all resources/ For all who have no money in their purses' (qtd. in Naik 24). He had a number of sonnets and short lyrics to his credit, manifesting a strong influence of English romantic poets in theme and some traces of neo-classicism in sentiment, imagery and diction, for example "Sonnet: To The Moon"; "The Golden Vase" and "Sonnet: Death, My Best Friend." In the last named one he calls Death his 'best friend' and proclaims his victory over fate: 'O tyrant fate! thus shall I vanquish thee/ for out of suffering shall I gather pleasure' (qtd. in Ramamurti 75). Unfortunately, these lines turned out to be too prophetic, for Derozio died from cholera on 26 December 1831 at the age of only twenty-one.

2.1.3 “The Harp of India” (Text)

Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain;
Thy music once was sweet – who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plain:
O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,
And many a wreath for them did Fame entwine
Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave:
Those hands are cold – but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

The text of the poem is taken from Makarand Paranjape's edited volume *Indian Poetry in English*, (pg 28) published by Macmillan in 1993.

A Harp is a musical instrument consisting of a triangular frame formed by a soundbox, a pillar, and a curved neck. Closely resembling the Greek lyre, it has strings stretched between the soundbox and the neck that are plucked with the fingers to play and produce musical tunes.

2.1.4 Critical Understanding of the Text

“The Harp of India” is one of Derozio's best known sonnets. It is reminiscent of the Irish poet Thomas Moore's ‘Harp of Erin’. His dear India which he has apostrophised in another sonnet “To India–My Native Land” as a deity worshipped by everyone, is presented here in the metaphor of a harp. This harp now lies lonely and abandoned, bound by silence for want of talent. The poet is pained at the fact that this harp which had, at one point of time, created such mellifluous music is currently lying unused, in a state of waste. In a series of images, the harp is pictured as one whose music had been brought out by many worthy hands in its hey-days. Those who had plucked its strings in the past had won many laurels but they are no more. If poor mortal hands such as the

poet's own can awaken the divine music which lies dormant in it, he would indeed be happy to strike the chords. The poet's prayer in this concluding couplet could put him in the same category as those who were instrumental in putting India back on the cultural map – that is, renowned Orientalists like William Jones, H. H. Wilson, Thomas Munro and F. Max Muller who attempted to showcase the country's opulent traditional heritage to the West.

The harp as a literary symbol has its origins in Classical Greece but was also used by the Romantics as an icon of bardic song. Through it, Derozio invokes the magnificent heritage of India, the great country whose riches and potentialities lie inert and undiscovered under a foreign rule. It could also refer to India's poetic or artistic genius which, after centuries of splendid manifestation, is at present marked by sterility. Derozio's approach to the country's glorious past is imbued with a blend of patriotism and Byronic melancholy. This sonnet has an unconventional rhyme-scheme of *ababbab-cdcdbb*. It marks a variation from both the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean format. The poet's use of such words and phrases as 'ruined monument', 'hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough' and 'grave' to mark his lamentation at the pitiable condition of contemporary India is reminiscent of Shakespeare's famous *Sonnet LXXIII*, "That time of year thou mayst in me behold" with its echoes of 'bare ruined choirs', 'yellow leaves ...do hang/ Upon those boughs' and 'deathbed'.

The introduction of English literary studies into the school and college curriculum in colonial India, beginning with its erstwhile capital Calcutta, led to the creation of a new class of natives who would faithfully serve the Imperial administration in the years to come. At the same time, it also had, perhaps even paradoxically, the not so intended effect of releasing a new understanding and sensibility among the educated Indians. This, in the long run, gave rise to a strong feeling of nationalism culminating in the country's independence more than a century later. As already mentioned in an earlier section, the patriotic fervour in "The Harp of India" was later reiterated in Hur Chunder Dutt's "Sonnet: India", which is part of *The Dutt Family Album*. A noteworthy feature of Derozio's poetry is this burning nationalistic passion, somewhat surprising in a Eurasian, considering that most members of his community would have rather sided with the British to further their social status. Poems like "The Harp of India", "To India – My Native Land", "The Golden Vase" and "To the Pupils of Hindu College" have an unmistakable authenticity of patriotic utterances which stamps Derozio as an Indian English poet who is truly a *son of the soil*. Derozio is also a pioneer in the use of Indian myth and legend, imagery and diction (we have examples like 'Highest Himalay' in

“Poetry”, ‘Gunga’s roll’ in “Song of the Indian Girl”, ‘Chandra’s beams” in “The Eclipse” and ‘Sweet Sitar’ in “Song of the Hindoostani Minstrel”) despite the otherwise overt influence of British literary traditions.

➤ **Activity**

- Try to locate Thomas Moore’s poem and find out how far it resembles “The Harp of India.”
- Make a list of the adjectives used in the poem and classify them. Are they applied keeping the time period in mind?
- “Thou hands are cold” – What image does it evoke?
- Make a list of words used in the poem that suggest sound/soundlessness.
- What are the characteristic features of a ‘harp?’ Can this be applied to a country?
- What is the importance of the human touch in the context of harp/country?

2.1.5 Dutt’s Life and her Works

Toru [Torulata] Dutt was born on 4 March 1856 in Calcutta, the youngest of three children of Govin Chunder Dutt. The Dutt family was distinguished, with many of its members being noted historians and poets. Apart from his contribution to *The Dutt Family Album*, her father who was a poet and linguist also published *The Loyal Hours* (1876) and *Cherry Stones* (1881). Thus Toru had the dual advantage of a wealthy parentage and an intellectual and cultural inheritance of a high order. She was taught by English tutors at home, and later on gained wide exposure to Western languages and cultures by virtue of her long stays in Europe and England. The Dutt family and their children Abju, Aru and Toru were baptized and converted to Christianity in 1862. However, under the influence of her mother Kshetramoni who remained a pious Hindu, Toru learnt about Indian legends and *puranas*, as well the Hindu religion and culture. She put the emphasis back on India and was the first Indian woman to reveal the spirit and essence of her homeland to the West, although her verse would also glow with sparks of English romanticism.

The Dutt family was ravaged by personal losses from early on. In 1865, Govin’s eldest child and Toru’s only brother Abju died when he was just a boy of fourteen. They left for Europe in 1869. Govin Chunder had once even thought of settling down there – a

move that could be construed as an attempt to leave behind the bereavements of their past home and go for a change of scenery. Toru and her elder sister Aru joined a French school at Nice. The education they received enabled them to improve their mastery over the local language to a great extent. The sisters used to regularly translate French lyrics to English. These were to be eventually published in 1876 as *A Sheaf Glean'd in French Fields*. This contained poems translated of about a hundred French poets. The books found much favour both in England and India, and went into three editions within a short span. Toru was a linguistic prodigy; as such, her translations were not slavish imitations of the original. These show ingenuity and of the 165 pieces, eight were written by Aru [although the title page did not mention her name] and the rest by Toru; she had also added notes on the French poets included in the collection. The family shifted to Cambridge in England in 1871. There the two sisters attended 'Higher Lectures for Women'. They returned to Calcutta two years later and divided their time between their two houses at Rambagan and Baumaree. Tragedy struck once more when Toru too passed away from consumption like her elder sister Aru at the tender age of twenty-one on 30 August 1877, leaving her parents forlorn and devastated.

After her death, Govin Chunder Dutt looked through her belongings and chanced upon the manuscripts of a French novel called *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*. It is the first French fiction written and published by an Indian, published in 1879 to much critical acclaim. He also found an unfinished romance in English titled *Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden* [published serially in 1878]. There were also her lyrics, compiled together in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* and published in 1882. It is this book on which Toru's literary reputation primarily rests in the present day. The father also provided the missing links wherever necessary. Toru was proficient in both English and French, yet she realised that her Oriental background was rich enough to offer her a source for exercising her literary skill and creativity. She rendered several Sanskrit anecdotes and legends into English verse from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *puranas*. Two of the ballads are centred on the archetypes of Indian womanhood—Sita and Savitri [later to be taken up by Sri Aurobindo in his own epic]; four narrate the legends of youths Dhruva, Buttoo, Sindhu and Prehlad; one recounts the story of the goddess Uma; Lakshman, king Bharata and Sunneetee are some of the other characters that stand out in this work. In the poem "Jogadhya Uma", Uma or Durga is described in a way that was characteristic of the tradition where the goddess is regarded as a daughter who returns to her home from her in-laws every autumn. As evident from this list, Toru Dutt was to make use of local myth and legend extensively. She also brought the personal and cultural dimensions of her experience into her writing.

2.1.6 “Our Casuarina Tree” (Text)

Like a huge python, winding round and round
 The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
 Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
 No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
 Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown
 At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
 Sometimes, and most in winter, — on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
 Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;
 And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
 The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
 Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
 For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!

Casuarina is a genus of 17 species in the family Casuarinaceae, native to Australasia, the Indian Subcontinent, southeast Asia, and islands of the western Pacific Ocean. They are evergreen shrubs and trees, and their foliage consists of slender, much-branched green to grey-green twigs bearing minute scale-leaves in whorls. The flowers are produced in small catkin-like inflorescences; the flowers are simple spikes. The generic name is derived from the Malay word for the cassowary, kasuari, alluding to the similarities between the bird's feathers and the plant's foliage, though the tree is called rhu in current standard Malay.

Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
 What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
 Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
 And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:
 And every time the music rose, — before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
 Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
 Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,
Dearer than life to me, alas, were they!
 Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
 ‘Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow’; and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh, fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

The text of the poem is taken from Makarand Paranjape's edited volume *Indian Poetry in English*, (pp 42-3) published by Macmillan in 1993.

2.1.7 Critical Understanding of the Text

This poem was part of Toru's *Miscellaneous Poems* included at the end of her *Ballads*. Often regarded as the most characteristic of her verses, it has been praised by E. G. Thomas as 'surely the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner' (qtd. in Ramamurti 83). The tree referred to here grew in the Dutt's country residence of Baumaree in north Calcutta where she lived till the age of twelve. In a letter written to her friend Mary Martin on 13 May 1876, Toru gives the following description of her surroundings: 'The night was clear ... before us stretched the long avenue bordered with high Casuarinas very like the poplars of England...' (qtd. in Das 154). The poem comprises five eleven-line stanzas with the rhyme scheme of *abba, cddc eee*. The first stanza presents an objective sketch of the tree; it is described as a giant whose trunk is scarred, denoting its age and ruggedness. A creeper climbs around it, up to the very top, and while its python-like grip would have sucked the life out of any ordinary tree, the casuarina gallantly continues to stand holding its head high among the stars. It wears this liana as a scarf on its canopy, dotted with red casuarina flowers hanging on its branches, all of which give the tree a distinct look. Birds and bees frequent the tree at all hours, and the sweet song of one of these birds during night-time fills the ambience with melodious music. The word 'darkling' here instantly reminds the reader of its use in a similar context in Keats' famous "Ode to a Nightingale."

The second stanza describes the narrator's enjoyment of the sight of the tree at different times of the day. When her 'casement' is opened in the morning, the very first scene that meets her eyes is this casuarina tree. The line is once again very Keatsian in diction, reminiscent of his 'magic casements' in the same ode. Usually in winters, a gray baboon would often sit at the tree's crest and watch the sunrise while its young one jumped from branch to branch and played around. The advent of morning would also be announced by the cries of the 'kokilas', and this would mark the beginning the day's activities, starting with the cows wending to the green pastures to graze on. The use of such images as baboon and kokilas brands the poem with an unmistakable Indian stamp. The casuarina casts its shadow on the nearby tank which is covered with water-lilies. These white flowers in their full bloom give the appearance of snow and make for a beautiful view.

The third stanza changes the mood of the poem from the descriptive to the reflective, thereby offering a clue to the inner soul of the narrator. She recalls the many tender memories of her past, especially the days spent playing with her childhood companions

under the tree's shade. This is actually an allusion to Toru's elder brother Abju and sister Aru, both of whom had sadly passed away in their teens. The use of 'our' in the poem's title emphasises the close bond she shared with them, made all the more poignant by these remembrances. One can surely notice the influence of the Romantics here, for Toru's case offers a striking parallel to Keats as the death of his younger brother Tom had intensified both Keats' pain and poetic fervour that eventually found expression in "Ode to a Nightingale." Her other poem "Sita" draws upon a similar childhood memory of three siblings listening to their mother's songs. Grand and charming as it is, the casuarina is all the more dear to the poetess for the innumerable associations that it springs in her mind. These associations eventually, and understandably, make her eyes blind with tears. She even hears a 'dirge-like murmur' which is likened to the sound of the sea breaking on a shingle beach. Dutt here echoes Matthew Arnold in his similarly contemplative poem "Dover beach." The poet deems this 'eerie speech' to be the tree's unique elegy on the loss of the two children who are now inhabitants of an unknown land. Thus we see that even as she wielded her knowledge of English literature with consummate skill, she could simultaneously translate her personal experience of pain into her verse which was tinged with the sense of loss and nostalgia that arose from the early bereavements in her life.

This lamentation sent forth by the tree is universal, as demonstrated in the fourth stanza. The narrator lets us know that she has heard this wail even when she was living in distant lands, far removed from her Calcutta home. It is a reference to Toru Dutt's stay abroad, as she herself makes it clear in the subsequent lines while mentioning the foreign shores of France and Italy [while the Dutts did live in France for about a year before proceeding to England, we are not sure if they travelled to Italy as well]. There is a slight shift in the way the casuarina is presented in the poem at this juncture; it no longer remains the physical tree so objectively described in the initial two stanzas but takes on a sublime form and becomes a symbol of timeless eternity. It is in this shape that it appears to the poet henceforth, visible only to her 'inner vision'. The tree is inextricably linked with all the happy memories of her past, and acts as a trigger for her acute sense of nostalgia.

The last stanza is a tribute to the immortality of the tree, and has a faint thematic link with Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn". The narrator dedicates the poem to honour it, for it was cherished not only by her but also those who now lie in everlasting sleep. She wishes for it to remain ageless, even as her own days are numbered. One cannot miss the irony in these ominous lines, for Toru Dutt was soon to follow her siblings into the

realm of death. Her mention of the boughs of Borrowdale with its Wordsworthian import [the Borrowdale valley is situated in the Lake Districts of Cumbria in England], and lines from the poet's 1803 poem "Yew Tree" once again harks back to the memories of the English chapter in her brief life. The concluding section unfolds her desire for the immortality of the tree, to be conferred upon by her verses. Although her verse is feeble, it is hoped that her immense love towards the casuarina can defend it from the ravages of time. The poem begins with recollections of the past, but ultimately culminates in a higher plane of sublime reflection. The motif of bestowing immortality through poetry was Greek in its origins, though later appropriated by others as well. The most prominent name that comes to our mind in this respect is the Bard himself who reiterated the theme in a number of his sonnets.

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (*Sonnet XVIII*)

The poem is invested with the glamour of an Indian childhood, and laced with reminiscences of English literature and life. Staying abroad increased her awareness of the India she was familiar with, which was duly reflected in her poetical works. The success of the poem lies in the concretization of something as amorphous as nostalgia which is a common enough experience for all exiles. In a way, it also reminds the reader of Wordsworth's other famous poem "Tintern Abbey" where the poet proclaimed that the pastoral landscape of the river Wye was prized to him both for its natural beauty as well as the solace offered on account of the felicitous memories of his past visit there with his sister Dorothy. The poem is, thus, one of the earliest instances of the effective use of memory in Indian poetry in English. It is representative of the manner in which Toru Dutt managed to transcend the literary style of her predecessors and contemporaries, evolving a distinct identity which enabled her poetic vision to radiate beyond the boundaries within which most of the 19th century Indian poetry in English remained confined.

➤ **Activities**

- Make a list of the flora and the fauna mentioned in the poem. How do they contribute to the overall effect the poem creates?
- Make a list of personal pronouns used in the poem. What do they suggest?
- Make a list of words/phrases that denote the cry of sorrow.
- Make a list of places/countries that you come across in the poem.

- Note down the points to show that memory/nostalgia play an important role in the poem.
- Note down the words beginning with capital letters. Why are they used with capital initials? (Do not consider the first words of each line)

2.1.8 Summing Up

As has been stated at the outset, the poets discussed in the above sections belong to the first wave of Indian English poetry. ‘Modern’ Indian poetry that came in the post-Independence era has changed its track substantially over the years both in terms of content and style. It must be cited here that many critics and commentators, Western and Indian alike, have come down heavily on these early poets. Theodore Douglas Dunn, Inspector of Schools, Presidency Division, Bengal and also editor of the first anthology of Indian Poetry in English titled *India in Song: Eastern Themes in English Verse by British and Indian Poets* wrote: ‘It is not generally known that during this century [beginning about the year 1817] much good English verse was produced by Indians...’ (qtd. in Parthasarathy 1). They were criticised for the supposed ersatz (something that is copied) sentiments evident in their writings that belie a meek imitation of Romantic and Victorian features. The common refrain seems to be that their poems were marred by the swelling euphoria of the late romantic tradition, and this style of writing was dated in the present era. Keki N. Daruwalla characterised pre-Independence poetry as ‘pseudo-spiritual, pseudo-philosophical’, ‘brimming with sonorous Miltonicisms’ – possibly an allusion to Aurobindo’s influence (qtd. in King *Three* 9). Their successors championed the ‘Indian’ element in their poems, as a result of which they found favour with the later literary ‘pundits’. Bruce King stated that ‘most Indian poetry before Ezekiel was old-fashioned, Victorian, amateur, either public political declamations or spiritual guidance, more a hobby than an art’ (King *Three* 3). Thus we see that their writings have been viewed with either historical concessions or condescension. However, in defence of these earlier poets, K. S. Ramamurti argues that if pure poetry is something that ‘induces in the well-tuned mind a condition akin to that of the silent mystical contemplation which is the supreme form of prayer,’ it can certainly be found in the works of Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo (70). As such, instead of pronouncing quick judgements on these poets, it is perhaps sensible to leave it to posterity to decide on their respective merits as practitioners of poetry.

2.1.9 Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type Questions (20 marks)

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of “The Harp of India”.
2. “Our Casuarina Tree” is a tribute to not only the tree but also the early and late Romantic poetic tradition – Comment.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions (12 marks)

1. How does Derozio eulogize the hoary past of India?
2. Would you agree to the view that Dutt successfully fuses her Indian and Western experience in “Our Casuarina Tree”? Justify.

Short Questions (6 marks)

1. Comment on Derozio’s use of the harp metaphor in his sonnet.
2. Write a note on the imagery used by Dutt in “Our Casuarina Tree”.

2.1.10 Suggested Reading

Agrawal, K. A. *Toru Dutt: The Pioneer Spirit of Indian English Poetry*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2009.

Das, Harihar. *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. London: OUP, 1921.

King, Bruce. *Three Indian Poets: Ezekiel, Moraes, and Ramanujan*. 2nd ed. New Delhi: OUP, 2005.

Paranjape, Makarand, ed. *Indian Poetry in English*. Madras: Macmillan, 1993.

Parthasarathy, R., ed. *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets*. 1976. New Delhi: OUP, 2009.

Ramamurti, K. S., ed. *Twenty-five Indian Poets in English*. 1995. New Delhi: Macmillan, 2008.

Unit -2 □ A. K. Ramanujan: A River

Nissim Ezekiel: Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher

Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.

- 2.2.0 Introduction**
- 2.2.1 Indian English Poetry of the post-Independence Period**
- 2.2.2 Ramanujan’s Life and his Works**
- 2.2.3 “A River” (Text)**
- 2.2.4 Critical Understanding of the Text**
- 2.2.5 Ezekiel’s Life and his Works**
- 2.2.6 “Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher” (Text)**
- 2.2.7 Critical Understanding of the Text**
- 2.2.8 “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.” (Text)**
- 2.2.9 Critical Understanding of the Text**
- 2.2.10 Summing Up**
- 2.2.11 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.2.12 Suggested Reading**

2.2.0. Introduction

While in Unit 1.2.1B you have already been acquainted with the historiography of Indian English poetry of the post-independence period, the previous Unit has given you a glimpse of the early beginnings of such poetry in the pre-independence era as well. Continuing on that, this Unit is for your readings from two of the earliest modernist practitioners of Indian English poetry. As you go through this Unit, you should be able to decipher the new trends in this poetry as compared to the kind you have come across in the previous Unit. You should also try and understand how vocabulary is shaping up in the postcolonial context. It would be interesting if you try to match these poets with their contemporary core British poets whom you have read in earlier papers – that will enhance your comprehension of the various parallel waves of modernity in English

literature, which itself defies any straitjacketed geo-political definitions!

2.2.1. Indian English Poetry of the post-Independence Period

The post-Independence period in the history of Indian English literature is generally considered as the modern period, though not all poets could be termed 'modern.' Coming to the mid-20th century, we find that majority of the Indian poets writing in English eschewed the excesses of the romanticism associated with their predecessors. The British colonial rulers had left the subcontinent, and the political freedom that was ushered in brought in its wake a sense of intellectual liberation as well. This 'new' brand of poetry began with Nissim Ezekiel and the poets of the Writers Workshop group led by P. Lal. These writers were extolled as 'Progressives' and 'Proletarians,' and sought to make a clean break with past poetic traditions. They were deeply beleaguered by the question of national identity, and no longer felt the imperative to imitate the earlier practitioners.

On the contrary, they started producing a literature of protest, disenchanted as they were with romanticism and Victorianism. They turned more satirical, cynical and ironic with passing years. Poets like Dom Moraes, A. K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Rajagopal Parthasarathy, Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki N. Daruwalla were keenly aware of their Indian environment, which found ample reflection in their poetic output. Moraes focussed on sex and death as his main poetical themes; his self-imposed exile in England and eventual return to India made him a precursor to the figures of the globalized Indian. All these duly coloured his works. Mahapatra's poetry may be regarded as experiments with theme, form and modes of communication. His emphasis is more on subjective memory and inner self than on the external world or actual events. Daruwalla's poems, on the other hand, maintain a balance between the inner world of consciousness and the outer realm of landscape. It is often characterised by a note of anger at incompetence and corruption, simultaneously showing an ethical and moral consciousness expressed in satirical outbursts. Shiv K. Kumar similarly expresses anger and frustration, this time in a confessional mode. R. Parthasarathy's expatriate experience while staying in England left him thoroughly disillusioned, to the extent that he felt quite trapped in a lag between his native and adopted languages. He admired Ramanujan's considerable success in integrating his bi-cultural and tri-lingual situation, and tried to establish a relationship between his Indian English poetry and Tamil roots. Disappointment is his chief theme, and his famous utterance 'My tongue in English chains' in the opening lines of "Homecoming" (80-84) is perhaps symptomatic of what other diasporic poets like Adil Jussawalla (England) and Dilip Chitre (USA) felt and expressed in their poetry.

While Jussawalla sought a unity of being by identifying himself with a revolutionary process in his later poems, Chitre, who also wrote in Marathi, gave voice to his sense of isolation and frantic search for moorings in his long poem “Travelling in a Cage.” Arun Kolatkar, a fellow-Marathi bilingual poet, is famous for his experimental style in his first book *Jejuri* as well as in *The Boatride*, both of which exhibit surrealist elements. Likewise, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra too uses surrealist techniques of automatic writing, and later gives them a finished look. His poems generally take the form of sensory impressions, making their impact on the reader through associative reverberation of images.

2.2.2 Ramanujan’s Life and his Works

Attipatt [also spelled as Attipat/Attipate] Krishnaswami Ramanujan was born in Mysore on 16 March 1929, into a Brahmin Iyengar family, and educated at Maharaja’s College, Mysore. He was a fellow of Deccan College, Poona in 1958-59 and a Fulbright Scholar at Indiana University, USA in 1960-62. He started his academic career as a Lecturer in English Literature in Madurai, Quilon, Belgaum and then Baroda, teaching for eight years. In 1962, he joined the University of Chicago and later became Professor of Dravidian Studies in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, Department of Linguistics, and the Committee on Social Thought; he continued there till his death on 13 July 1993. His first book of poems *The Striders*, a Poetry Society Recommendation, was published in 1966. Other poetical works in English include *Relations* (1971), *Selected Poems* (1976) and *Second Sight* (1986) – the latter quite different from his earlier poems both in content and form. This could be probably explained by the later Ramanujan’s Buddhist acceptance of change as the only continuity. His talent was multi-faceted; along with being a poet, he was also a folklorist, critic, translator and cultural historian. He had recreated some of the *Vachans* from Kannada and some of the love lyrics from *Kuruthohai* in *Fifteen Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1965). His *The Interior Landscape* (1969) is a translation of the great Tamil classic *Kuruntokai*, winning him a gold medal from the Tamil Writers’ Association. *Speaking of Siva* (1972), another work of translation, won the National Book Award in 1974. His *Samskara* (1976), a translation of U.R. Anantha Murthy’s Kannada novel of the same title, is equally celebrated. Other well-known translations of his are *Hokkulalli Huvilla* [Kannada, ‘No Lotus in the Navel’ (1969)], *Mattultara Padyagalu* [Kannada, ‘And Other Poems’ (1977)], *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Visnu by Nammalvar* (1981) and *Poems of Love and War* (1985). He has contributed to *The Atlantic Monthly*,

London Magazine, Poetry (Chicago), *Quest* and *The Penguin Book of Love Poems*. Ramanujan was awarded the prestigious Padma Shri in 1976 by the Government of India for his contributions to Indian literature and linguistics. He won the MacArthur Prize Fellowship in 1983, and was also elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Ramanujan's poems have figured in several anthologies of Indian English poetry and Commonwealth poetry, while his other literary works (including essays like the controversial "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translations") have been widely discussed in academic circles both at home and abroad.

2.2.3 A River (Text)

In Madurai,
city of temples and poets
who sang of cities and temples:

every summer
a river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
baring the sand-ribs,
straw and women's hair
clogging the watergates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them,
the wet stones glistening like sleepy
crocodiles, the dry ones
shaven water-buffalos lounging in the sun.

The poets sang only of the floods.

He was there for a day
when they had the floods.
People everywhere talked
of the inches rising,
of the precise number of cobbled steps

The river referred to in the poem is Vaigai/ Vaikai –a 258 km. long river in Madurai in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. This capital of the erstwhile Pandya dynasty and a major seat of Tamil culture for more than two thousand years also figures in Ramanujan's other poem "Elements of Composition".

run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda, as usual.

The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

He said:
the river has water enough
to be poetic
about only once a year
and then
it carries away
in the first half-hour
three village houses,
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins
with no moles on their bodies,
with different-coloured diapers

to tell them apart.

The text of the poem is taken from Makarand Paranjape's edited volume *Indian Poetry in English*, (pp 151-52) published by Macmillan in 1993.

2.2.4 Critical Understanding of the Text

The poem from *The Striders*, divided into three long and two short irregular stanzas marked by hemistichs, is a sketch of the river Vaigai flowing through Madurai, a ‘city of temples and poets’, who in turn ‘sang of cities and temples.’ The hint of tautology not only points to the characteristic features of the place but also indicates the nature of poetry typically written by its practitioners. Ramanujan then launches into a description of the eponymous river in summertime when it dries down, exposing its sand-beds. This is an annual phenomenon, reducing the surge to a mere trickle. Straw and hair get tangled at the sluice gates, obstructing the free flow of water even further. The bridge across the river shows signs of wear and tear, and tell-tale patches of repair work done at various places. Summertime exposes the ramshackle condition of both the river and the man-made bridge; by corollary, the poet seems to be hinting at the ugly underbelly of the city.

Soon though, the monsoons reveal an entirely dissimilar picture. Incessant rains in the areas adjoining the river always results in widespread floods. On one particular occasion, the waters had inundated the two banks, carrying with them ‘three village houses/ one pregnant woman/ and a couple of cows/ named Gopi and Brinda.’ Ramanujan ends the stanza with ‘as usual’ – a phrase pithy and incisive in equal measure. There is implicit criticism of the fact that these incidents kept on happening year after year, leading to the death of both humans and animals. Yet there was no attempt on the part of the poets, be it old or young, who sang so loftily about the city with its glorious heritage to reflect in their poetry this tragedy, this waste of precious lives. The new poets imitated their predecessors in their paeans to the city, praising its renowned temples [the most famous being the Meenakshi temple], but such panegyrics appeared rather shallow, if not totally hollow, in the face of natural calamities like floods or droughts which went on every year with unfailing regularity. Ramanujan is here able to de-romanticize an ancient city like Madurai with its hoary historical and cultural associations. He makes a ‘realistic debunking of the romanticization of traditional Tamil culture’ (King, *Modern* 201). The poem is thus ‘about truth, the reality of the river and kinds of relations between the present and the past’; it offers ‘an ironic contrast to the glorious way in which the poets have sung the praise of the city, the temple, and the river’ (Ramamurti 45). The poet-persona’s report after visiting Madurai provides a realistic account, but Bruce King states that this visualization of the ill-fated woman, with perhaps identical twins in her womb, who must have gone down kicking and shrieking in a futile struggle to hold

onto her life, adds a mocking, perhaps even self-mocking touch to this realism (*Three* 83). Jayanta Mahapatra, a fellow-poet who writes in both English and Oriya, had described his native place thus: ‘A kind of struggle floats in the air and laps the hearts of men: the struggle just to live, against drought and floods, storm and fever. Nothing more’ (qtd. in Parthasarathy 6). It bears a striking resemblance to Ramanujan’s *Madurai*, and is perhaps true of rest of the country as well.

It must be mentioned here that most of Ramanujan’s poems are pen pictures with inherent comments on people and situations, and this poem is no exception. He has an observant eye for the specific physiognomy of his object, in this case the river, which he then reveals with telling detail. This becomes all the more evident from the manner in which he envisages the unborn children of the dead pregnant woman who would have ‘no moles on their bodies,/ with different-coloured diapers/ to tell them apart’. A similar trait is also manifest in the poetic works of Arun Kolatkar, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Shiv K. Kumar where image forms the primary basis of their poetry. It is perhaps a testament to the fact that poetry is becoming increasingly compact with passing time. It is essentially moving away from comparison, towards metaphor. However, as already pointed out above, Ramanujan’s poem is not limited to mere images; it also subtly points to the indifferent attitude of most poets to the realities of their surroundings and raises perturbing questions about the artist’s commitment to society. R. Parthasarathy, himself a renowned poet, comments that ‘[A]s an evocation of a river the poem succeeds admirably. At the same time, the river becomes a point of departure for ironically contrasting the relative attitudes of the old and new Tamil poets, both of whom are exposed for their callousness to suffering, when it is so obvious, as a result of the floods’ (95).

Many of Ramanujan’s poems are moored in the matrix of his Hindu faith; they reflect the traditional Hindu upbringing that he had, duly tempered by the experiences that he encountered in a Western culture. To cite him from his poem “Conventions of Despair”, ‘I must seek and find/ my particular hell only in the Hindu mind’ (qtd. in Mehrotra 36). “A River” is a firm testimony to this strong bond with his roots; as such, even though he wrote all his poetry while staying abroad, his life there has seldom impinged on his writings. India and America tend to exist separately, and come together only at a time of personal crisis explored, for instance, in “Still Another View of Grace”. For a more comprehensive understanding of his poetry, one may go through his famed poems like “Small Scale Reflections on a Great House,” “Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy

Day,” “Prayers to Lord Murugan,” “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing” and “Love Poem for a Wife.”

➤ **Activities:**

- Explain the line: “The poets sang only of the floods.”
- Why does Ramanujan use the phrase “as usual?”
- Does this poem critique the indifference of the new and the old poets to human sufferings?
- Why is the suffering of the pregnant woman not considered suitable as a subject of poetry?
- Does this poem make an appeal for a change of perspective? Ramanujan desires that the poets must not lose sight of the human tragedy while representing the varied images of river in verse.

2.2.5 Ezekiel’s Life and his Works

Nissim Ezekiel was born on 16 December 1924 in Bombay (modern-day Mumbai) of Jewish (Bene-Israeli) parents. He was educated at Antonio D’Souza High School and Wilson College, Bombay, and later studied at Birkbeck College, London. Though he had originally gone to England to study philosophy under C. E. M. Joad, he showed equal interest in the theatre and the visual arts as also in poetry. His initial career as a clerk in the High Commissioner’s office in London had not in any way made him slacken his interest either in his intellectual pursuits or in his creative efforts. After working in journalism, advertising and broadcasting, he took up a teaching job in 1961 at Mithibai College, Bombay. He later became a faculty member of the University of Bombay, teaching American Literature, and retired as Professor of English. Like A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy and Shiv K. Kumar, he too was, thus, an academic poet. In 1964, he was a Visiting Professor at Leeds University; an invitee of the U.S. government under its International Visitors Program in 1974; and in 1975, a Cultural Award Visitor to Australia. For a period he was also the Director of Theatre Unit, Bombay. His early verse was collected in *A Time to Change* (1951), *Sixty Poems* (1953) and *The Third* (1958). His poems in *An Unfinished Man* (1960) are some of his most impressive ones while those in *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) and *Collected Poems* (1989) are satirical, confessional and also contemplative. *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982), which are replies to the Old Testament psalms and show his increased interest in his

Jewish heritage, was selected for the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1983, the highest literary honour of the country. His other works include *Three Plays* (1969) and *Snakeskin and Other Poems* (1974) – translations from the Marathi of Indira Sant. He has had poems published in *Encounter*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *London Magazine* and *The Spectator*. Apart from being a poet, he was also an art critic and reviewer. He edited periodicals like *Quest*, *Imprint*, *Poetry India*, *The Indian P.E.N.* and the poetry page of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. He also helped and promoted other poets, and in the year 1988, this man of letters was presented with the Padma Shri for his manifold contributions to the Indian literary arena. He passed away on 9 January 2004.

Ezekiel's poems focus on a variety of themes such as love, sex, death, loneliness and prayer. They show a consistent preoccupation with the banality as well as the complexity of present day civilization as he perceived it in the Indian scene. One also finds in his poems the imprint of a keen, analytical mind trying to explore and communicate on a personal level his innermost feelings. He was a quietly explorative poet with a strain of religious philosophy flowing through his verse. The fact that he was a Jew by faith living in a predominantly Hindu country made his case singular. As he said of himself, 'I am not a Hindu, and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India' (qtd. in Parthasarathy 28). In the poem "Background, Casually" he expresses his thoughts on this issue unambiguously, underscoring the resultant sense of alienation. Not surprisingly, his birth and upbringing coupled with his 'Indian' world-view developed into a personality that found reflection in his oeuvre. The espousal of the self in his work is perhaps one consequence of the realization that he needed to create a poetic sphere of his own. Ezekiel cultivated a direct and often conversational tone to convey his moods and thoughts in his poetry. Writing in "A Different Way," towards the end of *Collected Poems*, he describes himself as

...a drug-addict
whose drugs are work, sensuality,
poetry, and the dance of the self...(272)

It should be noted that while the early poems of Ezekiel were in free verse, the poems of *The Unfinished Man* show purposeful, stylized, high regularity. From the mid-1960s, however, his poems were written for oral delivery. We find in them the poetry of the spoken voice more than that of the printed page. According to R. Parthasarathy most Indian poets who write in English, with the exception of Nissim Ezekiel, have little or no use for traditional English prosody. Their emphasis is almost entirely on the visual as opposed to the aural element in verse. It was only Ezekiel who handled both metre and rhyme as well as free verse with skill (10).

2.2.6 Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher (Text)

To force the pace and never to be still
Is not the way of those who study birds
Or women. The best poets wait for words.
The hunt is not an exercise of will
But patient love relaxing on a hill
To note the movement of a timid wing;
Until the one who knows that she is loved
No longer waits but risks surrendering –
In this the poet finds his moral proved,
Who never spoke before his spirit moved.

The slow movement seems, somehow, to say much more.

To watch the rarer birds, you have to go
Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow
In silence near the source, or by a shore
Remote and thorny like the heart's dark floor.
And there the women slowly turn around,
Not only flesh and bone but myths of light
With darkness at the core, and sense is found
By poets lost in crooked, restless flight,
The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight. (Paranjape 111-112)

The title is reminiscent of William Shakespeare's famous 'the lunatic, the lover and the poet' analogy in his comedy A Midsummer Night's Dream. The inherent theme has affinities with the sonnet "Loving in Truth" by the Elizabethan Sir Philip Sidney where the poet is admonished for not looking into his heart while penning his lines, for it alone can bring about a happy rendering of his thoughts and emotions into poetry.

2.2.7 Critical Understanding of the Text

This poem, included in the volume *The Exact Name*, is one of the best and most beautiful of Ezekiel's poems. It shows how far the poet had moved away from the romantic idealism of his initial years, eulogized in *A Time to Change*. The poem is written in iambic pentameter in two stanzas of ten lines each, rhymed *abbaacdcd*. Ezekiel here draws a subtle comparison between the poet, the lover, and the birdwatcher [who could be either an ornithologist or someone who takes a casual interest in the subject] where both the poet and the lover are put on the same level as the birdwatcher. Ezekiel finds a common denominator in his group, namely that they are all given to patient, silent waiting. The importance of patience is emphasized in all the three cases, citing its

multiple uses in the long run. The diverse acts of watching birds in the wild, writing poems and pursuing the beloved, here a woman, are meant to be carried out in a leisurely, unhurried manner. Ezekiel opines that all these are various examples of 'hunt', but not in the conventional sense of the term. Instead, they entail a certain care combined with caution to ensure success of the mission. The birdwatcher has to keep still and avoid all forms of sudden movement so as not to ruffle the bird(s) that he intends to observe. It is almost a labour of love; a delicate process marked by gentle tending until one inches towards the ultimate goal.

According to Ezekiel, a man ought to seek the love of a woman with utmost mildness. She would first need to feel secure and confident in his love for her to be finally able to reciprocate his feelings. It is only when he has won her trust that she would reply to his romantic overtures in the affirmative. This especially applies to all those distinguished women who, being endowed with refined sensibilities, would respond to only the very sincerest of male advances. Such a union would usher in a state of felicity characterized by an all-pervasive glow. The slow curving movements of the woman have a sensual appeal, John Thieme in his Introduction to Ezekiel's *Collected Poems* thus equates poetry to 'a form of erotics, a kind of lovemaking that quietly waits for the Muse to make the first move' (xxiii). The poet sees in these feminine gestures the promise of an apocalypse; they are 'myths of light' whose essential darkness or mystery remains at the centre of the creation itself (Ramamurti 129). Similarly, if the birdwatcher desires to catch a sight of the rarer birds, he will have to step beyond the regular domain of urban areas and venture into spaces close to nature. He has to travel to zones of silence viz. uninhabited places, along river-banks or sea-shores, and such other remote spots to find a glimpse of these uncommon specimens. Inder Nath Kher concurs that 'in order to possess the vision of the rarer birds of his psyche the poet has to go through the 'deserted lanes' of his solitary private life; he has to walk along the primal rivers of his consciousness in silence or travel to a far off shore which is 'like the heart's dark floor' (qtd. in Ramamurti 129). The same is true of a poetic piece that has been written after due deliberation by the poet. R. Parthasarathy in his introductory notes to the poem writes:

In "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher", the search for love and the word is presented in the person of a birdwatcher. The image is appropriate in the context, where it helps to control a 'potentially explosive situation'. Both love and words visit the poet without his knowledge. There is no pursuit, only waiting. In fact, the waiting itself becomes a form of

pursuit, a strategy. It is only then that the revelation occurs. The analogies, separately explored, now come together, and the metaphor used to suggest this fusion is light...“Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher” epitomizes Ezekiel’s search for a poetics which would help him redeem himself in his eyes and in the eyes of God. (28-29)

Ezekiel’s concept of the act of poetic creation in fact comes very close to the traditional Indian view which believes that the poet has to wait, wait for the ‘descent of the divine’ (Ramamurti 38). For Ezekiel, the art of composing a poem is not an easy one, nor can it be accomplished in haste. It is time-consuming, involving periods of long wait until the right inspiration hits the poet, which in turn is akin to the triumph associated with the appearance of a woman who knows that she is loved and hence surrenders at the opportune moment. One notices a somewhat similar reflection of anguish and frustration involved in the vocation of a poet towards the middle of Ezekiel’s other famous poem “Background, Casually” where he writes:

The later dreams were all of words.
I did not know that words betray
But let the poems come,... (181)

Ezekiel’s poetic dictum insists on a careful choice of apposite expressions to be used in course of writing the poem. Their sound and meaning would then merge in the white light of creativity and attain literary fruition, resulting in a piece of art that has the power to enable everyone, even those deprived of hearing and sight, to appreciate its exquisite brilliance. As Anisur Rahman remarks, the artist who is ‘subjected to the rigours of experience goes about making steady observations about life and waits for the right moment of utterance....Pursued with sincerity and devotion, art or poetry is elevated to such remedial heights where the deaf can hear, the blind recover sight’ (qtd. in Ramamurti 129). Thus, Ezekiel seems to suggest that highest poetry is remedial in its action. The poet has skilfully worked out a set of images moving on three interpenetrating levels, and the following comments by Inder Nath Kher with regard to the intricate imagery of the poem offer further illumination:

In this complex symbolic construct, several of Ezekiel’s themes and concerns blend into one another. The poem reveals the nature of the poetic perception through the network of a highly fecund metaphor in which the images merge into each other like lovers in the act of love. The poet

or the birdwatcher begins by defining the mood in which all those who study birds or women must place themselves – birds or women symbolize freedom, imagination, love and creativity. (qtd. in Ramamurti 128)

Ezekiel's postulations on the subject can also be traced in his 1975 essay titled "Poetry as Knowledge" where he tells us that 'What the poet knows makes the poem what it is, if the poet's knowledge is alive and his art fully extended while he writes the poem' (qtd. in Parthasarathy 29). It may be mentioned here that the creative art has been an oft-discussed theme in Indian English poetry; Shankar Mokashi Punekar's "Birth of a Poem" is a case in point; another pertinent example would be "A Small Whisper" by Dom Moraes:

I have spent several years fighting with words
And they fight back with words that perplex. (qtd. in
Ramamurti 42)

• **Activities:**

- What is that one particular trait that connects the poet, the lover, and the birdwatcher?
- Explain the phrase: "myth of light."
- Does the poem make an attempt to explain the art of poetic creation? How is the act of 'waiting' important in the creative process?
- Try to study the other poems written by Ezekiel where he expresses the pangs of poetic creation.

2.2.8 Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. (Text)

Friends,
Our dear sister
is departing for foreign
in two three days,
and
we are meeting today
to wish her bon voyage.

You are all knowing, friends,
What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.

I don't mean only external sweetness
but internal sweetness.

Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
even for no reason
but simply because she is feeling.

Miss Pushpa is coming
from very high family.

Her father was renowned advocate
in Bulsar or Surat,

I am not remembering now which place.

Surat? Ah, yes,
once only I stayed in Surat
with family members
of my uncle's very old friend,
his wife was cooking nicely...
that was long time ago.

Coming back to Miss Pushpa
she is most popular lady
with men also and ladies also.

Whenever I asked her to do anything,
she was saying, 'Just now only

I will do it.' That is showing
good spirit. I am always
appreciating the good spirit.

Miss Pushpa is never saying no.

Whatever I or anybody is asking
she is always saying yes,
and today she is going
to improve her prospect,
and we are wishing her bon voyage.

Now I ask other speakers to speak,
and afterwards Miss Pushpa
will do summing up. (Ezekiel 190-91)

One of the first poets who had succeeded in applying pidgin or bazaar English in India was Joseph Furtado (1872-1947) who wrote some poems, notably "The Fortune-teller" and "Lakshmi", in this strain. However, Furtado himself, like many of his successors, applied these idiomatic and idiolectic qualities only to limited use, primarily for humour (in comparison to what poets from Africa or the Caribbean have shown possible in dialect, patois, pidgin and creole).

2.2.9 Critical Understanding of the Text

This is one of the poems of Ezekiel which illustrate a major characteristic of the later phase of his poetic career, namely his preoccupation with Indian themes. Included in his *Hymns in Darkness*, it is one of the eight poems which appeared in the 1970s under the group *Very Indian Poems in Indian English*. This 42-line poem is divided into seven irregular stanzas, each having its distinct structure. It is written in the form of a valedictory speech given to mark the ‘departing’ of one Miss Pushpa T.S. for ‘foreign’ shores within the next ‘two three days.’ There are examples of various Indianisms that are part of the common parlance, especially the last phrase which is a literal translation of a corresponding vernacular expression [*‘do teen din’*]. The practice of putting initials after her given name in ‘Pushpa T.S.’ could suggest that her origins lie in southern India, though the fact that her father was a ‘renowned advocate in Bulsar [modern-day Valsad] or Surat’ implies that they must have moved far from their native place and settled in Gujarat. Not surprisingly, Pushpa too has now decided to relocate to foreign shores to ‘improve her prospects’, attesting to the enterprising attitude that she has possibly inherited from her ‘very high family.’ This allusion to Surat, the famous industrial hub in Gujarat, sets off a departure in the otherwise smooth movement of the speech. The speaker is suddenly reminded of a stay in the city many years ago with family friends, and culinary skills of the hostess – a testament to the digressive nature of the human mind. It also is a tribute to the closely-knit fibre of Indian society where one can easily thrust oneself as a guest on almost anyone, however distant the relative or acquaintance may be. Though the speaker is left unnamed, one can safely assume that it is the head of an institution – a school/college or an office. The speaking voice addresses Pushpa as a ‘dear sister’, an epithet whose use indicates that they were not just colleagues but also shared a good rapport with each other. It could also be a transliteration of the Gujarati honorific ‘ben/behn’.

The speaker further adds that Miss Pushpa is an exemplary employee, always prepared to take up assignments in a ‘good spirit.’ It is perhaps Pushpa’s diligence that has egged her on to greater heights in her professional career. All job-related requests are met with a smiling nod, for she is ever-ready to undertake whatever task she is asked of. As it happens, this show of enthusiasm is appreciated by one and all, and she is a ‘most popular lady/ with men also and ladies also.’ It is another instance of an unusual collocation, which while adding to the strong local flavour of the verse, may also be read as Ezekiel’s sensitive reaction to the appalling English spoken by some sections of Indians. Moving on, the speaker ends the adulatory speech with a call to the other

employees who have assembled there to say a few words appropriate to the occasion, after which Miss Pushpa herself would be asked to do the 'summing up' i.e. respond to the felicitations offered to her in course of the farewell.

Ezekiel here portrays a picture of life in postcolonial India as it tries to negotiate with the remnants of its colonial hangover. Most of the phrases and sentences are characteristic of the conversational English that is usually spoken in many parts of the country. This colloquial tone is evident right from the title of the poem, which uses the word 'goodbye' instead of 'farewell.' The note of informality is continued throughout the entire length of the poem, heightened by the Indian predilection for the use of the progressive in place of simple present tense. This results in such odd sounding expressions, viz. 'you are all knowing', 'smiling and smiling', 'what sweetness is in Miss Pushpa', etc. which greatly contribute to the provincial quality of the poem. However, at times this goes to such great lengths that it almost borders on the comic. The lines 'Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling/even for no reason/but simply because she is feeling' best illustrate this aspect, for an image of the protagonist as somewhat inane creeps into the reader's mind. Thus, we are never certain of the poet's true intentions, for even as he apparently narrates a rather innocuous 'goodbye party,' there is always this niggling doubt if it carries some other implications, particularly in the lines 'Pushpa Miss is never saying no./ Whatever I or anybody is asking/ she is always saying yes,' which are laden with, perhaps unconscious, double meaning. On closer inspection, one surely cannot miss Ezekiel's droll humour, wielded to create a certain parodic effect on his readers by caricaturizing not just the protagonist Miss Pushpa but also the speaker in his social context as it is a satiric self-revelation of the speaker. As such, this poem is often described as a parody of or a humorous reconstruction of a particular variety of Indian English illustrating distinct idiolectal features. Regarding the poem, Bruce King in his book *Modern Indian Poetry in English* adds that '[L]anguage reveals the speaker's mind and social context; clichés, triteness, unintended puns are among the devices used to imply hypocrisy, pretence, limited opportunities and confusion' (qtd. in Ramamurti 126).

The local flavour of the poem is characteristic of Ezekiel's poetry, for he had once stated: 'India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India' (qtd. in Parthasarathy 5). His other poems which display many of the features of this broken English coupled with ironic infusion include "A Very Indian Poem in English", "The Professor" and "The Railway Clerk." The following lines from "The Railway Clerk" offer an interesting insight into such colloquialisms: 'My wife is always

asking for more money,/ Money, money where to get money?/ My job is such, no one is giving bribe,/ while other clerks are in fortunate position,/ And no promotion even because I am not graduate' (qtd. in Ramamurti 127). Another illustration typical of this style appears in the concluding lines of "The Professor": 'If you are coming again this side by chance,/ Visit please my humble residence also./ I am living just on opposite house's backside' (Ezekiel 239). Coolness, distaste, objectivity, firm precision – these are the marks of his stricter notions of Indian life, which amply complement his dry and detached literary personality. As William Walsh remarks, Ezekiel is himself like a 'poetic birdwatcher', and his observation is so 'alert, fresh, so intent and honest, that it becomes a creative art' (134).

➤ **Activities:**

- Identify the words in the poem which are used in informal conversation. Why does Ezekiel use such words?
- 'Pushpa Miss is never saying no./ Whatever I or anybody is asking/ she is always saying yes,' Does this expression really appreciate the good qualities of Miss Pushpa? Do you think that there is a satiric intent in this expression?
- Who is the speaker in the poem? How is the speaker related to Miss Pushpa?

2.2.10 Summing Up

A common charge put forth against some of these 'modern' Indian English poets is that being of middle-class, with an urban or metropolitan and often academic background as also with experience of living in the West, they have become strangers to their indigenous culture. As such, their poetry does rarely reflect rural India; their 'modernity' derives much from the influence of their Western counterparts, especially T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and W. H. Auden, by way of echoes, resonances and reverberations. In their defence, however, it may be said that these writers were intensely aware of the unenviable situation in which they functioned. Poets like Ramanujan, Moraes, Kumar, Jussawalla and Chitre, while living abroad, exploited the situation to their advantage and delineated the dichotomy of the diasporic experience. In doing so, they, as also their resident Indian compatriots, strove to find an adequate and, more importantly, a personal language to express themselves even as they wrote in a foreign tongue. Ramanujan spoke of himself as 'hybrid', even joking that he was the 'hyphen' in 'Indian-American'. Ezekiel showed how contemporary poetry in English could use traditional forms of verse and metrics. The work of these poets, thus, exemplified both the problems and the specific achievements of Indian verse in English.

2.2.11 Comprehension Exercises

Ezekiel, Nissim. *Collected Poems*. Introduction by John Thieme. 1989. New Delhi: OUP, 2009

King, Bruce. *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2001.

—. *Three Indian Poets: Ezekiel, Moraes, and Ramanujan*. 2nded. New Delhi: OUP, 2005.

Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna, ed. *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*. 1992. New Delhi: OUP, 2011.

Parthasarathy, R., ed. *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets*. 1976. New Delhi: OUP, 2009.

Ramamurti, K. S., ed. *Twenty-five Indian Poets in English*. 1995. New Delhi: Macmillan, 2008.

Ramanujan, A. K. *The Collected Poems of A. K. Ramanujan*. Delhi: OUP, 1995.

Walsh, William. *Indian Literature in English*. London & New York: Longman, 1990.

2.2.12 Suggested Reading

Essay-type questions (20 marks)

1. “A River” is deceptively simple as a poem. Comment.
2. Discuss the symbolic overtones in Ramanujan’s poetry with special reference to the syllabised text.
3. Analyse the use of imagery in “Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher.”
4. Show how “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.” displays typical features of ‘Indian English’.

Mid-length Answer type questions (12 marks)

1. How does Ramanujan portray contrasting pictures of the river in different seasons?
2. Comment on the present state of decadence evident in the city of Madurai, as highlighted in “A River.”

3. Would you agree that “Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher” is essentially a poem concerning the poetics of Ezekiel? Justify.
4. What devices does the poet employ to make “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.” humorous?

Short questions (6 marks)

1. What is Ramanujan’s primary objection to the ‘new’ as well as the ‘old’ poets of Madurai?
2. Why is patience deemed to be of utmost importance in the pursuit of word, bird and beloved?
3. List two prominent literary influences evident in “Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher”.
4. Why do you think the speaker in “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.” has been left unnamed?

Unit - 3 □ Kamala Das: “An Introduction”

Mamang Dai: Remembrance

TemsulaAo: A Tiger-Woman’s Prayer

- 2.3.0. Introduction**
- 2.3.1. Kamala Das’s Life and Her Works**
- 2.3.2. An Introduction (Text)**
- 2.3.3. Critical Understanding of the Text**
- 2.3.4. Mamang Dai’s Life and Her Works**
- 2.3.5. Remembrance (Text)**
- 2.3.6. Critical Understanding of the Text**
- 2.3.7. Temsula Ao’s Life and Her Works**
- 2.3.8. A Tiger-Woman’s Prayer (Text)**
- 2.3.9. Critical Understanding of the Text**
- 2.3.10. Summing Up**
- 2.3.11. Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.3.12. Suggested Reading**

2.3.0. Introduction

From the very title of this Unit, you must have noticed dear learner, that this is devoted entirely to contemporary women poets writing in English. Women writers have held a distinct place in Indian English literature throughout its history. We have already acquainted ourselves with the names of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu in Unit 1 of this Module; other female writers of note in the 19th century, across genres, include Swarnakumari Devi, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Their appearance on the literary arena was important, as it signalled a new era of emancipation for the Indian woman. It was made possible through the spread of education and liberal thinking. Opportunities of self-determination facilitated these early writers to express themselves freely; as a result, a strong presence of subjective

elements may be discerned in their writings, be it fiction or poetry. Post-independence, this tendency gained further momentum, and Kamala Das (1934-2009) is regarded as the most assertively individualistic among the new group of poets. Eunice de Souza (1940-) shares certain similarities with Das, and her poems are characterised by the same self-revelation. Her collections of verses are *Fix* (1979), *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988), and *Ways of Belonging: New and Selected Poems* (1990) which was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. Her poetic diction keeps the flavour of natural English idiom without sounding stiff. This may be ascribed to the fact that speaking in English is a norm, and not an exception or embellishment, in her Goan Catholic community. She explores personal relationships in an unsentimental way, and can be quite vitriolic at times. Irony, both grim and humorous, is her forte, especially in poems like “Feeding the Poor at Christmas” and “Varca, 1942” which satirise the hypocrisy of her own community. Her dispassionate manner of writing, combined with her sharpness and clinical precision, may be best seen in “Forgive me, Mother” while her “Mrs Hermione Gonsalvez” proves her ability to write light verses. Melanie Silgado (1956-), a fellow-Goan poet, is introspective and writes about herself and her past like de Souza who, incidentally, was her teacher. Gauri Deshpande (1942-2013) is a bilingual poet who also wrote in her mother-tongue Marathi. Mamta Kalia (1940-) exhibits her rebellious, non-conformist attitude vis-à-vis patriarchy in *Tribute to Papa* (1970) and *Poems* (1978) though she could be said to be more gay and witty compared to Das or de Souza. Other noteworthy names in this illustrious line-up of female poets include Charmayne D’ Souza (1955-), Sujata Bhatt (1956-), Smita Agarwal (1958-) and Meena Kandasami (1984-). At the same time, we find the emergence of a number of poets writing in English from the north-east of India. They offer fresh perspectives of lived experience and new kinds of poetic language and style. New ethos and worldviews find expression in their poems. Mamang Dai and Tamsula Ao are two important poets from this region. They have won wide recognition. We shall discuss their poems in this unit.

2.3.1. Das’s Life and her Works

Kamala Das, daughter of the well-known Malayalam poetess Balamani Amma, was born at Punnayurkulam in southern Malabar on 31st March 1934. Her father V. M. Nair, an executive in Calcutta, later became the editor of the daily *Mathrubhumi*. Kamala had her early education in Calcutta, Punnayurkulam and Trichur. In February 1949 she was married to Madhava Das, and lived mostly in Bombay. Along with being an eminent practitioner of English poetry, she was also a reputed poet and novelist in her mother

tongue Malayalam and has published eleven books in the language, writing under the pen-name of Madhavikutty. Her major works are *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *Collected Poems Vol. 1* (1984), as well as her famous autobiography *My Story* (1975). She was given the Poetry Award of *The Asian PEN Anthology* (1964), the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969 for *Thanuppu (The Cold)*—a collection of short stories in Malayalam, and the Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry in 1985. Das is extremely frank in her poetry right from the inception of her literary career, an attribute that is unprecedented for a woman in the then social context of India. She unabashedly expresses her need for love, and the overpowering sense of urgency almost boils over in many of her poetical works like “The Old Playhouse,” “The Looking-glass” and “The Freaks”. On the other hand, her recollections of girlhood in Nalapat House, her grandmother’s home in Kerala, are coloured with acute nostalgia; the memories come to the fore in “A Hot Noon in Malabar,” “My Grandmother’s House,” “Composition,” “Blood” and “Elegy.” Her feminist vision is articulated in many of the poems in *The Descendants* as well as in “Of Calcutta,” “A Widow’s Lament” and “The Stone Age.” Kamala Das’s decision to convert to Islam in 1999 and be known as Kamala Surayya generated as much controversy as her writings. She passed away on 31st May 2009 in Pune.

2.3.2. An Introduction (Text)

I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with
Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my

Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
 Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
 Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
 Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
 Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
 Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
 Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
 Funeral pyre.

I was child, and later they
 Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
 Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When
 I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
 For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
 Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
 But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
 The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank
 Pitifully. Then ... I wore a shirt and my
 Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
 My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
 Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
 Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
 Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
 On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.
 Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
 Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
 Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
 Don't play at schizophrenia or be a
 Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
 Jilted in love ...

I met a man, loved him. Call
 Him not by any name, he is every man
 Who wants a woman, just as I am every
 Woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste
 Of rivers, in me . . . the oceans' tireless

*For the umpteen
 autobiographical
 elements in her
 poetry, Kamala
 Das invites
 comparison not
 only with women
 writers like Anne
 Sexton, Sylvia
 Plath, Denise
 Levertov and
 Judith
 Wright, but also
 male
 confessional
 poets like Shiv
 K. Kumar, John
 Berryman, W. D.
 Snoggrass,
 Theodore
 Roethke and
 Robert Lowell –
 for all of whom
 their experiences
 acted as the
 spring-board of
 literary
 outpourings.*

Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
I; in this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

(from Sarkar 42-44)

➤ **Activities:**

- The poem is a first-person narrative. What does the poem gain being so? (Clues: autobiographical force, authenticity of experience, force of articulation, unfolding of personal, gender experience.)
- Try to figure out the difference Kamala Das makes between ‘politics’ and knowing the ‘the names / Of those in power’? Consider whether the following have anything to do with the issue: national history as described in text books; manipulation of power; exercise of authority.
- What statements regarding the use of language do you come across here? Do they reflect issues like Indianness / non-Indianness; pan-Indian / regional use of language; purity / hybridity and insiderness / outsidersness, so on. Does Kamala Das try to collapse the binaries?
- Comment on what the narrator says about her idiosyncratic use of the English language. Mention the similes used in this context.
- Why does Kamala Das posit opponents? Does it identify the debate? (Clues: a debate, strong articulation, contestation, postcolonial resistance to pseudo-nationalism and regionalism, assertion of individualism and spontaneity of expression, gender freedom, hybridism, gender equality)
- Note the autobiographical elements in the poem.

- Note down the stages of Kamala Das's growing up and experiences that she encounters.
- Explain the expression 'Fit in.' Why is it in the form of an imperative sentence? (Clues: deviation from norms, assertion of individualism, attempt to break down the binaries etc.)
- Note down the medical terms used in the poem. Consult a good dictionary to find out their meanings. Why are they used here?
- Identify the water bodies mentioned in the poem. Why are they used in contrastive terms?
- Identify the verbs of action and contrastive nouns at the end of the poem. Why are they significant?
- ink, on your own, of all the issues raised above, and only then proceed to read the following section.]

2.3.3. Critical Understanding of the Text

This poem was initially published in *Summer in Calcutta* and then in *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*. True to its title, it offers an overview of the poetry of Kamala Das. It engages with most of the themes that have assumed prominence in her poetical oeuvre through the years. Das begins with a wry reference to politics and politicians, and the way most of our countrymen view these issues in their daily lives. It bears a parallel to the manner in which we commonly treat history i.e. remember the name of rulers and dates without bothering to comprehend the way their policies have shaped our country and society over centuries. She begins with Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, and then rattles off a list of 'those in power,' albeit with the disclaimer that she doesn't 'know politics'. After this opening gambit, Das launches into the specifics of her background, referring to her complexion ('very brown'), geographical origins ('Indian,' 'born in Malabar'), and linguistic aptitude. She states that she can 'speak three languages, write in/ Two, dream in one'—perhaps not without a small bit of pride. The subsequent lines reveal that she was most comfortable writing in English, even though it was not exactly the Queen's English but merely a 'half English, half/ Indian.' This hybrid English, or what Salman Rushdie later called 'chutneyfied' English is 'funny perhaps', but Das is quick to point out that its 'distortions'

and 'queernesses' were her alone, bearing the distinct stamp of her individuality. It also comes across as 'honest' and 'human', laying bare her 'joys', 'longings', 'hopes' without the slightest trace of pretension. Many demurred her choice of writing in English, including her 'critics, friends, visiting cousins' on the ground that it was not her 'mother-tongue.' Das, however, dismisses their objections as trifling and claims that the language comes as instinctively to her as 'cawing/ Is to crows or roaring to the lions'. She asserts that 'it/ Is human speech,' and enables her to express her mind freely without any inhibitions. She thus engages in a debate with the accusing Other, proclaiming that English comes quite naturally to her, and does not undermine her loyalty to her country in any way. She utilizes the language to subvert the cavils of her petty relatives and acquaintances while simultaneously moulding it according to her own needs, thereby exhibiting her unique brand of postcoloniality.

The second stanza offers more information about the personal life of the poetess. She relates her harried passage from girlhood and adolescence to womanhood—a process that was signalled by increase in her height, swelling of 'limbs' and sprouting of hair at 'one or two places.' Kamala Das, thus, broaches the issue of puberty by a casual reference to the subject. This is followed by her experience as a bride who had little say in the matter of either her marriage or choice of partner. She hoped and longed for love from her husband, who instead regarded her as merely a means to fulfil his carnal desires. Das eschews too many details, in fact leaves the rest unsaid, though it is not difficult to guess the shock she must have felt during these initial days of marriage. She is more forthcoming, though, in her autobiography *My Story* where she narrates many incidents that openly indicated both his heterosexual and homosexual tendencies. She is quick to mention that her husband did not 'beat' her, even as her 'sad woman-body felt so beaten.' She adds that the 'weight' of her 'breasts and womb' crushed her, making her shrink 'pitifully'. This is perhaps symptomatic of the situation of many Indian women, since our society thrusts the role of a wife on them upon reaching puberty without any preamble, in the process leaving them weighed down both physically and emotionally. Kamala Das complains that she was expected to make a smooth transition from a girl to a woman and subsequently a mother. All the while she was denied any choice in these deeply private matters.

It was in reaction to this total lack of control over her own body that the poetess rebels. She decides to bring about certain radical changes in her life and lifestyle. She cuts her hair

short and starts wearing men's clothing, both designed not only to ignore her 'womanliness' but also make a statement against the dictates of our patriarchal society. Not surprisingly, this unconventional behaviour on her part was castigated by the various spokespersons of traditionalism. They decreed that she should obediently play the dutiful 'girl' or 'woman'. They prescribe that she should dress in sarees, engage herself in embroidery, cooking and even occasionally quarrelling with the servants. Das aptly christens such voices of orthodoxy as 'categorizers.' They mechanically create categories based on class, caste and gender considerations. They cannot think outside the norms and the structure of broad social categories and are quite incapable of conceptualising individuality or personal distinctiveness. The words 'fit in' and 'belong' are their mottos. In fact, they ask her to be 'Amy,' 'Kamala' or 'Madhavikutty' (the pseudonym that Das used in Malayalam)—actions that are directed at choosing 'a name, a role' and sticking to it. As such, they are deeply critical of her actions like sitting on walls or peeping in through lace-draped windows. These are considered as unbecoming for a lady, according to them, who, must not pay attention to objects and activities outside the domestic space. They also object to her *avant-garde* lifestyle and forbid her to 'play pretending games,' behave like a schizophrenic or 'nympho,' or even shed tears 'embarrassingly when jilted in love.' All her attempts at expressing her free-spirited self or registering her protest are silenced or proscribed in order to maintain conformity.

The third and final stanza of the poem delves further into the life of the poetic persona. There is some ambiguity about the identity of the 'man' Kamala Das refers to ("I met a man, loved him"). It may be her husband or a lover. This problem of identification can also be found in her poem "The Old Playhouse." Devindra Kohli, for instance, assumes that in the 'autobiographical' poem the 'you' ("You called me wife") refers to the husband: "in the light of what Kamala Das says about her own relationship with her husband" (qtd. in Nabar 63-64). Brinda Nabar, however, thinks that the 'effectiveness' of the poem "lies in the fact that it is obviously a poem about an extramarital relationship" (64). In "An Introduction" also it may be interpreted that Kamala Das in fact sheds light on an extramarital affair. But the man may also be her / the speaker's husband. What is important in the context of the poem is that the identity of the man does not matter much as the individual man (whether the husband or a lover) merges into 'every man' who is seen as embodied masculine lust. The particular individual thus merges

into a type. It is because of this Kamala Das uses the generic term 'man' instead of a term that denotes relationship (for example 'husband' or 'lover'). Unhappy in her marriage due to the insensitivity of her husband and desperately craving for love, she gets involved in an extramarital affair. She showered all her love on him, for he was 'every man who wants a woman,' just as she was 'every woman who seeks love,' thus identifying herself with all the women in the world who yearn for the same. Das here employs metaphoric language to signify the couple. The male is described as 'the hungry haste of rivers,' a metaphor that reveals his intense desire for a female body. The female on the other hand, is embodied 'the oceans' tireless waiting.' The metaphor of the ocean suggests the limitlessness of women's patience, the prolonged, futile desire for fulfilment of love. She loved that man with all her heart. But he turned out to be as the epitome of masculinity: 'he is tightly packed like the sword in its sheath.' The Man, every man, is imagined as a concealed sword. When the sheath, the facade or appearance, is taken off, the sword emerges with all its ferocity – it cuts, it hurts, it penetrates the female body. There is an overt erotic suggestion in the metaphor. However, even though she had poured her body and soul into this relationship, it too did not quite succeed in quenching her thirst for meaningful love.

The fallout of this episode was that she grew frustrated and started drowning her loneliness in drinks at random hours and places: 'twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns.' Such a bohemian lifestyle got her mired in a vicious cycle of affairs followed by an acute sense of shame. Kamala Das juxtaposes contrary terms to describe her unenviable situation at this stage—she is both the 'sinner' and the 'saint', the 'beloved' and the 'betrayed'. The concluding lines of the poem end in her emphatic declaration that 'I too call myself I.' This is an assertion that attests to her coming to a fuller understanding of her own self accompanied by a growing sense of confidence. This self-confidence prompts her to fulfil her potential as an individual. She does not heed to any of the restrictions imposed by an unfeeling society. In this last stanza, the earlier singular voice multiplies itself into myriad selves eventually coalescing into one self-assured entity.

2.3.4. Mamang Dai's Life and her Works

Mamang Dai (1957-), one of the well-known women writers from the North-East, belongs to the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh. She was selected for the prestigious Indian Administrative Service, but left her job during the training period and decided to devote her time to writing. She has to her credit a collection of poems titled *River Poems* (2004) and a work of fiction titled *The Legends of Pensam* (2006). Although written in the format of a novel, *The Legends of Pensam* contains multiple stories in a plethora of voices which are complete by themselves. Dai has stated that the traditional belief of the Adi community to which she belongs is full of respect for nature. Everything has life. Rocks, stones, trees, rivers, hills, and all life is sacred. This is called *Donyi-Polo*, literally meaning *Donyi* (Sun) and *Polo* (Moon) as the physical manifestation of a supreme deity, or what she calls 'world spirit.' She is the recipient of the state's first Annual Verrier Elwin Awards, 2003 for the book *Arunachal Pradesh – The Hidden Land* (2002). She received the Padma Shri Award from the Government of India in the year 2011 for her contribution in the fields of literature and education.

Activities:

- Try to list the states which form the 'North-East.' What is the implication of the term 'Seven Sisters'?
- Try to make a list of important poets from the region. Mention their important works.
- Search for the anthologies exclusively containing the works of poets / writers from the North-east.

English poetry in the North-East received a huge fillip in the mid-1980s with the formation of the Shillong Poetry Society with Robin S Ngangom, Desmond L Kharmawplang and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih being its founding members. Popularly known as the Shillong Poets, the group later included Anjum Hasan, Ananya S Guha, Almond D Syiem, Indari Syiem Warjri, Esther Syiem and Donboklang Rynthathiang.

2.3.5. Remembrance (Text)

Why did we think it was trivial
that it would rain every summer,
that nights would be still with sleep
and that the green fern would uncurl
ceaselessly, by the roadside.

Why did we think survival was simple,
That river and field would stand forever
invulnerable, even to the dreams of strangers,
for we knew where the sun lay resting
in the folded silence of the hills.

This summer it rains more than ever.
The footfall of soldiers is drowned and scattered.
In the hidden exchange of news we hear
that weapons are multiplying in the forest.

The jungle is a big eater,
hiding terror in carnivorous green.

Why did we think gods would survive
deathless in memory,
in trees and stones and the sleep of babies;
now, when we close our eyes
and cease to believe, god dies.

For as long as remembrance
men stared at fire and water.

We dwell in the mountains and do not know
what the world hears about us.
Foragers for a destiny,
all the days of our lives
we stare at the outline of the hills,
lifting our eyes to the invincible sky. (*River Poems*)

➤ **Activities:**

- Jot down the points that would justify the title of the poem. (Clues: personal memory or community memory? Memory of landscape – river, forests, mountains etc. Memory of culturescape? Ancestral / Community memory? Any imminent change?)
- Why do three stanzas of the poem begin with the wh-question ‘Why’ but does not end with notes of interrogations? (Clues: An important question but also a statement; question about why the changes take place, unproductive and unnecessary changes. Also a statement about the reality of changes, loss of pristine beauty and equilibrium in Nature)
- Consult the dictionary to find the meaning of the word ‘carnivorous’? How does the word go with the word ‘green’?
- What elements of traditional belief-system do you come across in the poem?
- Consult the dictionary to find out the meaning of ‘dwell’? Do words like ‘live’ and ‘reside’ have different connotations?
- What evidence do you find in the poem to suggest that Mamang Dai speaks of an indigenous space alive with an indigenous people / culture? What intrusive elements do you find?

2.3.6. Critical Understanding of the Text

Mamang Dai’s poet-persona speaks from the perspective of a community rather than that of an individual. This is indicated in the poem by the use of ‘we’ instead of the usual ‘I’. She contrasts the past normalcy of her native place with the present unrest that has become a scourge for her people. Their abode, dotted with ‘green fern’ by the roadside, was earlier the very picture of bliss. The rains poured in each year with unflinching regularity during the summer and not only irrigated the ‘fields’ but also provided a steady flow of water to the ‘river.’ This had led the locals to presume that life would go on in the same languid pace even in future. The poet rues that her people had taken their tranquil everyday lives for granted and had thought that the ‘nights would be still with sleep’ forever. They were perhaps also a bit complacent about their relatively uncomplicated lifestyle without too much struggle; being easily satisfied in the simple gifts of nature like the ‘sun’ and ‘rains, they believed that nothing could disrupt the unhurried rhythm of their lives.

This apparent assurance in their permanent destiny proved to be unfounded in later times owing to certain radical activities in the region. Dai attributes this to the ‘the dreams of strangers,’ thereby hinting at the arrival of outsiders which set in motion the consequent chain of events. She mulls over the fact that it was naive on the part of her people to assume that the place would escape the eye of developers, and that its natural resources would remain ‘invulnerable.’ The advent of these promoters and businessmen from other parts of the country was not taken kindly by the locals who felt that they were being exploited and marginalised in the bargain. This inevitably led to a conflict between the two parties which eventually culminated in insurgency, thereby necessitating the intervention of the army. Incidentally, this is an oft-repeated concern in the poetry of the region. MonalisaChangkija (1960-), a Naga poetess, says:

Yes, I have seen our rice fields
Turn into factories and hills
Reduced to barren brown
Our rivers have dried
And our once sparkling fish
Lie dead on sandy banks. (qtd. in Satpathy, n.p.)

The next two stanzas of the poem repeat in part the imagery of the earlier ones, albeit with stark deviations to underscore the drastic changes that have come to plague the lives of these people. Dai mentions that ‘[T]his summer it rains more than ever’, but it brings with it no happy associations of fecundity of the past. The calm of the hills has already been shattered by the footsteps of soldiers marching across its folds. The ordinary people are caught in the crossfire, not knowing whom to side with in the ensuing clashes. Scraps of information leak out, adding to the tensed environment of the region. The news of weapons ‘multiplying in the forest’ is a grim reminder of the rise of militancy in these areas. The situation has become so grave that the ‘jungle’ that was earlier characterised by verdant ‘green fern’ is now termed a ‘big eater’ which hides within itself ‘terror in carnivorous green’—the green here denoting the fatigue worn by both the army as well as the rebels. It is as if the benevolent implications of the images in the first and second stanzas of the poem have been turned on their heads and currently allude only to terror marked by predatory, dreadful metaphors. Dai’s apprehension is not a one-off case; Temsula Ao, a fellow-writer originally from Nagaland, mirrors similar sentiments in her poem “My Hills” included in her collection *Songs of Many Moods*

published in 1995:

I no longer know my hills,
The birdsong is gone,
Replaced by staccato
Of sophisticated weaponry. (49)

This unfortunate disturbance in their lives has had all-pervading repercussions on the people of the area. Most of the residents belonging to the many indigenous tribes used to believe in the existence of pagangods, whose divine power was manifest in various totems like 'trees and stones and the sleep of babies.' With tensions escalating in the region, peace has been the first and foremost casualty. The stillness of the night of the first stanza which ensured uninterrupted sleep of the old and young is a thing of the past; at present, the anxiety of living amidst a terror-stricken land has robbed them of both sleep as well as faith in god. Dai even goes to the extent of portending that if such a situation continues unabated, the very survival of these gods in the memory of the natives would be threatened.

The ominous nature of the forecast regarding the erosion of faith makes the poet ponder about the future of her people. She traces the history of her community through remembrance, reflecting on its earliest origins and subsequent evolution over time. Dwelling in mountainous terrains, these people have had to negotiate rigorous circumstances for survival. Dai calls them 'foragers for a destiny', and they are heavily dependent on the forces of nature including 'fire and water' for their sustenance. Cut-off from the mainstream population and living under inhospitable conditions, they are quite unaware of how the rest of the country perceives them; perhaps, this is the underlying cause of the cultural disconnect that has sadly resulted in a feeling of distrust. Harpreet Vohra in her essay "Symbolism of the Mountains: A Study of Selected Poems of Mamang Dai" explains that much like the lofty mountains of Arunachal which remain hidden in mystery from the so called mainland, there is a corresponding invisibility of the north-eastern states from the national radar. The insularity of the north-eastern states is related to the terrain in which hills and mountains constitute a formidable barrier. Thus, 'mainland versus hinterland' debate follows from the 'so called distance' in terms of miles and milestones. Owing to the remoteness and historical isolation of this 'forgotten land,' there is little dissemination of information about the goings on in the state (Vohra 48-51).

Until now, the poem had a tone of self-interrogation tinged. It contains a sense of regret as well as the customary rumination of the glorious past of the land. It has a thin elegiac

vein that grieves the ravages caused by both the insurgency and counter-terrorism operations. The lingering sense of anguish arising out of the loss of pristine natural environs surely cannot be missed. The concluding lines, though, infuse a hint of optimism amidst the otherwise bleak mood of the poem. The poetess and her people lift their eyes ‘to the invincible sky’ in the hope of divine grace to alleviate their problem-ridden lives. In an online interview with G. S. P. Rao, Dai explains that “[T]he remembrance of a society is quite different from the data in survey records and research books. I hope I can convey this while trying to place on record what I understand of the state’s history, the old way of life, oral traditions and their value” (n.p.). A quest for a distinct community-identity thus prefigures in this last stanza.

2.3.7. Tensula Ao’s Life and Her Works

Tensula Ao was born in October 1945 at Jorhat, Assam. She received her secondary education from Ridgeway Girls’ High School (Assam) and completed her graduation and post-graduation from Fazl Ali College (Nagaland) and Gauhati University respectively. She is a member of the Ao subgroup of Nagaland, and has retired from North Eastern Hill University where she was a Professor at the Department of English. She served as the Director of North East Zone Cultural Centre (Dimapur) on deputation from NEHU from 1992-97. She was also a Fulbright Fellow to University of Minnesota during 1985-86. She received the Padma Shri Award in 2007, and the Governor’s Gold Medal from the Government of Meghalaya in 2009. Along with Mamang Dai, she is widely respected as one of the major literary voices in English to emerge from Northeast India. Her poetic works include *Songs that Tell* (1988), *Songs that Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003), and *Songs From the Other Life* (2007). She has published two short story collections as well: *These Hills Called Home: Stories from the War Zone* (2006) about the militancy in her native Nagaland, and *Laburnum for my Head* (2009) which has both mythical as well as modern overtones. The latter also won her the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013.

2.3.8. A Tiger-Woman’s Prayer (Text)

O you powers of the earth and sky,
Who gave me this destiny
Tell me what is happening

Because I hear a new cadence
In the familiar steps
That always stalk.

Reminding me of my varied selves
Whether they be spirit,
Human or beast.

O you capricious powers
Who fraught me thus
Why do you remain un-moved?

Can't you hear the urgency
In the tracking steps
And the sudden fear in my heart?

Which cautions me
My time is running out
Whether I be spirit, human or tiger.
Tell me what to do,
Should I increase my pace,
Run, skip or fly?

But my legs are leaden
With this un-shake-able burden
And the mounting fear

That even if I try
The stalking pairs will out-pace me
And will not relent

Until I reach the shore
Beyond the region
Of the setting sun.

O you powers above

*According to the
Ao-Naga belief, the
tiger which
embodies the man
or woman's spirit is
no different in
appearance from
other tigers in the
forest except that
the particular
animal has a strong
sense of affinity and
attachment to the
person whose soul
or spirit he is
supposed to
embody. This
affinity is either
inherited from an
ancestor, or
acquired through
application to one
who is reputed to be
in possession of
such power. If the
applicant's prayer is
to be granted, he
will be offered a cup
of wine or pipe of
smoke by the person
to whom he has
appealed.*

All-knowing, all-seeing,
Pity my human plight

And enable me, just this once
To renounce these
Other selves

Straddling my troubled spirit
Since grandfather's tiger-soul
Came un-bidden to take control

And entangled my woman-self
In an un-seemly mesh
Of spirit, human and beast.

So I implore,
Grant me this last prayer
So that when I cross over

To the region
Beyond the sun
Like all others of my kind

The iridescent fumes
Of the last sunset
Will dissolve my several selves

Be they spirit, woman or tiger
And raise a rainbow there
Against our composite tears.

(Songs From The Other Life, 19-21)

➤ **Activities:**

- Try to interpret the term 'tiger-woman' and investigate whether it has anything to do with the Ao-Naga myth.

- Consult a dictionary to find out the meanings of the word ‘cadence.’ Gloss the right word applicable to the context of the poem. How does the glossed meaning go with the word ‘stalk?’
- Trace the words in the poem that suggest ‘movement’ – particularly tigerly movement.
- Consult any book on Rhetoric and Prosody and find out the term that refers to the poetic form of address (usually to absent persons and things). List the instances of such address used in the poem.
- Identify the words or lines which suggest ‘death.’ How is death of a person envisaged? Is there any territorial reference?

2.3.9. Critical Understanding of the Text

In the poem taken up for discussion here, the speaking voice is that of an unnamed woman who senses that she is being stalked by the spirit of a tiger. Divided into eighteen stanzas of three lines each, the poem begins with an epilogue—probably keeping in mind those readers who are not acquainted with the relevant folklore of the region. It informs us that ‘[A]ccording to an Ao-Naga myth certain individuals, men or women, possess familiar or companion spirits in the form of tigers.’ The first stanza is in the form of an apostrophe addressed to the ‘powers of the earth and sky’ that control all facets of her community life. Lately this woman has been hearing a ‘new cadence in the familiar steps that always stalk’ her—a development that fills her mind with an ominous feeling. Though destiny is often said to be set in stone, she pleads with the powers that be to spare her the yoke that has befallen her fate.

The fourth stanza again has her break into a vocative exclamation directed towards the ‘capricious powers’ who have decided to ‘fraught’ her with this obligation. Her perceptive faculties now greatly heightened, she can clearly ‘hear the urgency in the tracking steps’ that fill her heart with ‘sudden fear.’ This feeling of trepidation makes her wonder aloud why these powers have remained ‘un-moved’ despite witnessing her misery. Even as the sense of panic grows, the warning that her ‘time is running out’ looms large, irrespective of whether she is a ‘spirit, human or tiger.’ Being a member of her tribe does bestow her with some knowledge about the mythical nature of this experience, yet she is unable to comprehend its full import. As a result, she appeals to these powers to show her a way out of this predicament—whether she should increase her ‘pace,/

Run, skip or fly' in order to outstrip her pursuer. This show of boldness is, however, only momentary; in the very next stanza she is already in a resigned mood, conceding that her 'legs are laden/ With this un-shake-able burden.' Her lack of stamina, though, is not the only reason for this submissive attitude; there is an equally strong psychological angle to it. She admits that 'the mounting fear' of the 'stalking pairs' out-pacing her despite her valiant attempt weighs heavily on her mind as well. She is almost sure that they 'will not relent' until she is driven to 'the shore/ Beyond the region/ Of the setting sun', i.e. the end of her normal human existence.

Once more, the woman beseeches the 'all-knowing, all-seeing' powers that reside above to have pity on her 'human plight' and enable her to 'renounce these/ Other selves'. She realises that it is her 'grandfather's tiger-soul' that has come 'un-bidden to take control' of her 'woman-self.' In the process it has entangled her own self in an 'un-seemly mesh/ Of spirit, human and beast.' Towards the end of the poem, she implores these omniscient powers to grant her 'this last prayer' – when she like all others of her 'kind' crosses over to the region beyond the sun, the 'iridescent fumes/ Of the last sunset' would dissolve her several selves—be they spirit, woman or tiger. If allowed this last appeal, the rays of the setting sun would refract through the 'composite tears' shed at the culmination of her human existence and would create an ethereal rainbow. These concluding lines project a picture of sublime beauty. This is a welcome change from the consternation and perplexity of the earlier stanzas. Temsula Ao thus rounds off the poem on a relatively positive note with a prayer on the lips of her female protagonist. This simultaneously has a reassuring effect on her readers.

Right since the beginning of her writing career in the 1980s, Ao has utilized many images and themes from Naga folk culture in her works. She has drawn extensively on the native myth, rituals, and customary behaviour which persist despite the heavy inroads of Christianity and decades of restive discord after 1947 due to claims of Naga sovereignty. Her book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* records the tribal belief of the tiger-souls (67). In an interpretation of several of these myths espoused in the essay "Folklore, Folk Ideas and Gender among the Nagas," Anungla Aier suggests that '[T]he creation stories of the various tribes contain various elements that embrace the idea of women as the caregiver or nurturer equating them with the mother earth while men are equated with the qualities of bravery and strength usually represented by various characters from the animal kingdom, especially the Tiger' (qtd. in Bender 112). The figure of the tiger also figures in the poem "The Man and the Tiger" by Yumlam Tana (1976-) which speaks about the Arunachalee concept of Man-Tiger brotherhood. Tales

about tiger-man are aplenty in the folklores of the Lushais, the Bodos and the Garos as well.

2.3.10. Summing Up

The three poets discussed in this third and final Unit of Module 2 may be strung together along two distinct threads—their use of English as poetic medium, and expressing their feminine selves. For Kamala Das, it was mostly a matter of choice that she decided to write primarily in English even though she was equally well-versed in her mother-tongue and had even written in Malayalam from time to time. The case of Dai and Ao, however, is vastly different, for although rich in oral tradition, their vernaculars were devoid of a script of their own, like most of the dialects of the North-East. No doubt, the pidgin languages (called Nagamese in Nagaland and Nefamese in Arunachal Pradesh) have served as the link languages in some of the multilingual hill states, yet they cannot quite substitute a full-fledged language with the potential to support a literature of its own. Tilottoma Misra informs us in her introduction to *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from The North East India* that before the advent of identity politics amongst the various ethnic groups in the region, the writers from different communities used the Assamese language as the medium for creative writing. The situation has changed in recent years, and English has slowly but steadily become the *lingua franca* in the entire region. As she states, '[A]t present, however, the new generation has accepted the prime position of English in the intellectual sphere of the country and would rather write in that universally powerful language than in their mother tongue or any of the Indian languages' (xx). In her essay "Crossing Linguistic Boundaries" Misra adds that such "works can claim a double parentage and are 'twice-born' ... in the true sense of the term because they belong both to the tradition" of their respective vernacular literature as well as to English which their writers have chosen to as vehicles of their thoughts(216).

Coupled with this politics of language is the issue of self-articulation. Kamala Das has been very vocal, perhaps even blunt, in her writings. She exposes the unenviable condition of a majority of Indian women caught in the grind in our patriarchal society. Dai and Ao are comparatively tempered in putting across their views. Instead of giving vent to their personal beliefs in an assertive manner, they have decided to opt for the lyrical mode of composition to express the female poetic conscience in their poems. This is particularly true in the case of Dai who is renowned for her nature poetry, and through which she channelizes the diverse socio-romantic nuances of her milieu. There is also another distinction between these women poets. The latter two, in accordance with the

general practice of most writers of their region, have chosen to foreground the community over the individual in their works. The North-East with its chequered history and varied geography provides a wellspring of issues that engage their literary talent, ranging from the picturesque to the contentious. As such, their poems may be said to be aptly representative of the challenges that their environs offer and thereby expand the scope of Indian poetry in English.

2.3.11. Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type questions (20 marks)

1. Analyse the autobiographical nature of Kamala Das's poem "An Introduction."
2. "An Introduction" can be read as the personal credo of its poetess – Comment.
3. Would you consider "An Introduction" as a feminist poem? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Would you classify "Remembrance" as a lyrical or political poem? Give reasons.
5. Consider "Remembrance" as a memory poem.
6. "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer" is representative of Tamsula Ao's poetic oeuvre – Justify.
7. Consider "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer" as a poem rich in mythical resonances and community ethos.

Mid-length Answer Type questions (12 marks)

1. Show how a deep sense of hurt and frustration lies beneath the aggressive facade in "An Introduction".
2. Discuss the postcolonial features evident in "An Introduction."
3. How does Dai contrast past serenity with present disorder?
4. What perceptions of nature do you find in the poem? Do you find any apocalyptic vision here?
5. The female protagonist in Ao's poem is bestowed with a special status which, though, becomes a liability for her – Elaborate.
6. Explain the significance of the title of TamsulaAo's poem "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer."

Short questions (6 marks)

1. Analyse the speaker's attitude towards her family members and acquaintances in Kamala Das's poem "An Introduction."
2. How does the narrator in Kamala Das's poem overcome her personal setbacks and emerge true to her feminine self towards the end of "An Introduction"?
3. Write a note on the use of images in Mammang Dai's poem "Remembrance."
4. Explain the line in Mamang Dai's poem: "The jungle is a big eater."
5. The laconic stanza-formation in Ao's poem is in tune with the hurried pace of its speaking voice – Analyse.
6. What picture of the speaker does emerge in Tamsula Ao's poem?

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Module - 3 : Reading Fiction

Unit - I □ R. K. Narayan: *The English Teacher*

3.1.0: Introduction

3.1.1: R. K. Narayan: Life and Works

3.1.2: Section-wise Summary

3.1.3: Critical Understanding of the Text

3.1.3A. The Role of Family

3.1.3B. Title of the Novel

3.1.3C. Narayan's Representation of the Education System

3.1.3D. Representation of the Spiritual World

3.1.3E: Malgudi in *The English Teacher*

3.1.3F. Humour and Irony

3.1.4. Summing Up

3.1.5. Comprehension Exercises

3.1.6: Suggested Reading

3.1.0: Introduction

Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Narayan (1906-2001) is one of the most celebrated Indian English novelists, short story writers and essayists. He is one of the 'major trio' (the other two being Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao) who appeared 'on the scene' of the Indian English fiction writing in the 1930s (Naik 155). These three writers, as you know, dominated the Indian English literary scene for decades. You also know that Narayan's fame, like that of his two peers, transcended the national boundary. His works were widely accepted and appreciated by readers across the globe. Many of his creative works have been translated in Indian and foreign languages. Some of his works (e.g. *The Guide*, the short story collection *Malgudi Days*) have also been adapted into films and television series. His contribution to literature has been acknowledged both in India and abroad. In India he won the Sahitya Akademi Award (1960), Padma Bhusan

(1964), and the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship (1996). He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha for a term. Outside India, the British Royal Society conferred on him A.C. Benson Medal; he was awarded in the USA the English Speaking Union Book Award and was made a Fellow of American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1982).

Speaking of Narayan, Graham Greene, in his Introduction to *Bachelor of Arts*, comments that “he has offered me a second home.” Greene contrasted Narayan’s representation of India with those of Kipling and E.M. Forster and feels that “[n]o one could find a second home in Kipling’s India or Forster’s India” as their representations do not appear convincing. Narayan’s novels and short stories offer ‘homely’ comfort not only to the foreign readers but also to the Indian readers who might find their images and their values reflected in his works. For a foreign reader like Greene who encouraged and supported the young Indian writer, Narayan is an ‘insider,’ with an insider’s knowledge of the country and its cultures. And Narayan, unlike Forster, never thought of India as a “muddle” or confusion, neither in material nor in spiritual terms. We need to examine how Narayan presents India and the Indians (as well as foreigner/s) in *The English Teacher* which is in your syllabus.

3.1.1: R. K. Narayan: Life and Works

Son of a school teacher, Narayan belonged to a middle class Tamil Brahmin family. His name – Rashipuram Krishnaswamy Narayan – was given in accordance with Tamil cultural tradition. Ranga Rao’s explanation helps us understand the custom: “Until recently the Tamil Brahmin names were three-in-ones. First the village, then the father’s name, followed by the given name of the individual” (11). ‘Rashipuram’ is the name of Narayan’s ancestral village in Tamilnadu while ‘Krishnaswamy’ was derived from his father’s name: Krishnaswamy Iyer. ‘Narayan’ is the name given to him.

Narayan’s family, like many other families of his social background, was caught between contrary cultural pulls: invasive British culture and traditional Indian culture(s). The attraction of the European ‘modernity’ was paramount. The English education system and the English language had great appeal for members of this emerging class. Narayan’s father himself was “a member of the new class, the rising English-educated middle-class of India,” one who moved away from the ancestral roots to the princely state of Mysore (Rao 12). Yet he retained his passion for native cultural traditions. He was a “lover of Karnataka music and offered hospitality to visiting maestros” (Rao 11). Narayan may have received his love of the English language and literature from his father. His

maternal grandfather, an Anglicised government official, and his maternal uncles had their influence on him. Narayan was raised by his maternal grandmother who imbibed in him the sense of humanism and benevolence, of commitment and discipline.

His early education began at a rather “severe missionary school in Madras” where he “encountered the English language” at the age of five. He was made to recognise in the school the letters of the English alphabet from a glossy primer imported from England: “A was an Apple Pie. B bit it. C cut it” (Mishra 193). For an uninitiated Indian child the lesson generated confusion. As Mishra observes, “Narayan could see what B and C had been up to; but the identity of A eluded him. He had never seen an apple before, not to mention a pie. The teacher, who hadn’t seen an apple either, wondered if it wasn’t like *idli* – the South Indian rice-cake” (193). At the age of sixteen Narayan left Madras and came to Mysore to live with his family. He pursued his education in Mysore University but was not very successful. He even failed in his B.A. examination once. He ultimately graduated in 1930.

Narayan was a product of mixed cultures. Despite having an exposure to British influences, he, however, retained his rootedness in Indian values, and spiritual and mystical traditions. You will find enough evidence of this in *The English Teacher*. His translations of Tamil *Ramayana* (1972) and *Mahabharata* (1978) provide further proofs. Narayan grew up reading literary works of well-known Western (mainly British) authors. He read Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, Pope, Marlowe, Tolstoy, Wordsworth, Byron, Hardy, Browning, Dickens, Rider Haggard, Marie Corelli, Moliere, besides trying Carlyle, Ruskin and Walter Pater as well. He came across English magazines like *Little Folks*, *Nineteenth Century and After*, *Cornhill*, *Boys’ Own Paper*, *Strand*, *Mercury* and *The Spectator*.

Narayan took a teaching job for a brief period but felt that he should opt for a more independent, although uncertain, profession of a writer, and hence left the job. Initially, his works were repeatedly rejected by publishers. Graham Greene played an important role in the publication of *Swami and His Friends*. After the initial setbacks, Narayan became quite successful in his writing career. Primarily known as a novelist, he tried his hand at several genres. Given below is a list of his selected works with details of their publications and multiple issues:

✓ **Novels:**

Swami and Friends. 1935. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 2002; *The Bachelor of Arts*. 1937. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1985; *The Dark Room*. 1938.

Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 2000; *The English Teacher*. 1946. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1989; *Mr. Sampath: The Printer of Malgudi*. 1949. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1974; *Waiting for the Mahatma*. 1955. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1999; *The Guide*. 1958. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1991; *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. 1962. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983; *The Vendor of Sweets*. 1967. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 2001; *A Tiger for Malgudi*. 1983. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1983; *The World of Nagaraj*. 1990. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1990;

✓ **Short Stories:**

Malgudi Days. 1943. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1944 and *Lawley Road and Other Stories*. 1956. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1956.

✓ **Essays:**

A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays: 1958-1988. 1988. New Delhi: Penguin, 1988.

➤ **Activities:**

- Which works by Kipling and Forster are mentioned by Graham Greene? Consult your history of English literature book to find out the theme of the works, and then state why Greene mentions them in relation to Narayan's works.
- The list of Narayan's works is not exhaustive. Make a list of the works not mentioned above. What works did he write in other genres?
- Gather some basic information about Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao who are the two other members of the 'major trio'?

3.1.2: Section-wise Summary of *The English Teacher*

The English Teacher (1946) was published in the United States of America as *Grateful to Life and Death*. It is third of a trilogy (the other two being *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*) and is largely autobiographical. It has reflections on how Narayan himself felt after his wife Rajam's death. Narayan records the protagonist Krishna's coming to terms with his wife Susila's death and his realization of the need for an individual's spiritual understanding of life and death. The novel also offers vivid details of Krishna's disenchantment with the education system under the British rule.

The novel has eight chapters. Given below is the substance of the chapters. This will help you understand the development of the plot of the novel and growth of the characters.

But remember that this is in no way a substitute to the reading of the novel between the lines.

❖ Chapter One

Krishna, the protagonist of the novel, is the 'English teacher' at Albert Mission College. The first chapter of the book offers us a scintillating picture of his life at the college hostel and his experience of teaching at the college. He compares his uneventful life with that of a "cow" (10) – eating, teaching, walking, doing all the usual works but with "a sense of something missing" (1). He has to go through the daily rigmarole of reading Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare, examining students' composition papers, 'admonishing, cajoling and browbeating' students to 'mug up' important authors and be successful in examinations (2). He earns one hundred rupees for performing these duties. He is also a poet and this perhaps explains his disenchantment with such a boring life. He is married and his wife Susila has been living in her father's house with her new born daughter Leela. He receives a letter from his father informing him that he should settle down to a proper family life now. His father also informs him that 'the tenth of the next month' was the 'most auspicious day' for the arrival of his wife and daughter. He is now caught between the free, unencumbered life of one living in a hostel and the prospect of a domestic life, full of responsibilities. He feels really shaken. He, however, manages to rent a house at Sarayu Street. Shortly thereafter, he shifts to this newly rented house.

❖ Chapter Two

Krishna has been busy in properly arranging the rooms in his new house. His mother arrives from the village to help him. She has her own 'house-keeping philosophy' and practices. Krishna is, however, afraid of how she will measure his wife according to the norms of this philosophy. On the appointed day he waits at the station with great anxiety for his wife and baby to arrive. Although he has engaged a coolie promising the latter three times of the usual wages, he has the apprehension that the huge number of luggage cannot be unloaded from the train within the stipulated time. However, everything is managed properly. Susila, his wife, and Leela, his child, are welcomed home with proper rites and rituals. After helping her son's family settle down, Krishna's mother leaves for her village home. Krishna gets immersed in the family life with all its weal and woe. They have their hours of joy as well as hours of discords over trifles, but they make a happy family. The arrival of an old lady sent by Krishna's mother for helping the family relieves them of much responsibility.

❖ Chapter Three

Krishna's father wants to provide him money for buying or building a house in Malgudi. Both Krishna and Susila decide to visit Lawley Extension 'to choose a house or site' for the purpose (74). On their way, they have lunch at a restaurant called Bombay Ananda Bhavan. They walk along the river happily and dream of going on tours to different places in India and Europe. At last they take a *jutka* and arrive at their destination. They choose a house with a lush green field of corn around. Here Susila is traumatised after visiting an unhygienic lavatory. She contracts typhoid and becomes seriously ill. All efforts to cure her go in vain and she dies. Henceforth, life becomes meaningless to Krishna.

❖ Chapter Four

His wife's death has made Krishna disinterested in life. His daughter is his only solace. He looks after the child and rejects the suggestion of his parents or parents-in-law taking care of the child. Krishna observes, "I cared for little else. I felt a thrill of pride whenever I had to work and look after the child. It seemed a noble and exciting occupation" (151). The child is not informed of her mother's death lest it affects her life. Taking care of the child becomes the be-all-and-end-all of Krishna's life.

❖ Chapter Five

Krishna finds his academic duties very boring. His behaviour with his students borders on aggression. In the midst of such a hopeless situation, he receives a letter from a stranger who informs him that he has communication from the spirit of Susila — she wants to interact with Krishna. Krishna rushes to meet the stranger who lives in a village situated not far from the town. His house appears to be a 'green haven.' This stranger acts as a medium and Krishna interacts with the spirit of his wife. She says that she is very happy in her new place. She also refers to the old days and mentions that there are fourteen undestroyed letters in a sandalwood casket in the house which he should search. In the meantime, Leela's nanny informs Krishna that the child has developed interest in a school in the neighbourhood. The little girl starts going to school where everybody learns while playing. The headmaster appears to be an unusual person.

❖ Chapter Six

The school is open on Sundays even. Krishna visits the school with her daughter. The headmaster suffers from sleeplessness and devotes the time devising stories for the school children. Krishna feels proud to learn that his daughter has left her mark through

her creative activities. The headmaster believes in simplicity and hates luxury. He feels that the “main business of an education institution is to shape the mind and character” of the students (203). Krishna sees how much interested the students are in listening to the stories. The headmaster dines with them at Krishna’s house and Krishna finds him a very fascinating person, although a bit idiosyncratic. After having food and rest, all of them go to the headmaster’s house. His children are wild and his wife is rude. Later he informs him that she is disgusted with him as he had left his parents’ luxurious house and property and started teaching children. He now believes that he knows the exact time of his death as per an astrologer’s prediction

❖ Chapter Seven

As his friend, the medium, has been out of the town for quite some time, Krishna misses the seance (interactions of a spiritualist nature to receive certain kinds of other-worldly communication) sessions. Consequently, his foul mood returns. His friend writes to him, requesting Krishna to try to communicate with Susila through him in absentia. The experiment is successful. She also advises him to try to communicate with her independently. His initial attempts to do so fails but is successful after some time.

One night, at an unusual hour, the headmaster appears at Krishna’s house. He has been in an extremely agitated state. He requests the latter to take charge of his school, or at least keep an eye on it, as he strongly feels that this is the last day in his life. Early next morning Krishna visits his house but does not find him. He then tells the headmaster’s wife about the astrologer’s prediction. She breaks down at the information. Then they find him at the school, hale and hearty. The headmaster is glad that the prediction has not come true. All persuasion from his wife to return home proves futile as he decides to stay at the school. A new life of *sanyasa* begins for him.

A new cheerfulness begins in Krishna’s life following successful communion with Susila. His mother in the meantime visits him. Leela’s future is now ensured because her grandparents on both sides have set aside adequate money for her. Leela leaves with Krishna’s mother to the village home. This makes Krishna lonely. She starts writing to him in her child’s handwriting. Krishna visits his village and finds Leela very happy there. Returning to his place, Krishna finds solace in his involvement in the school and in the headmaster’s company.

❖ Chapter Eight

Krishna is now in search of a ‘harmonious existence’ (369). He decides that “everything that disturbed that harmony was to be rigorously excluded, even my college work”

(269). He has to snap all ‘familiar roots’(269). Initially he thinks of sending his resignation letter to Mr. Brown. But then he writes a short formal letter of resignation and meets the Principal. Despite the latter’s persuasion, he sticks to his decision, asserting that his ‘work’ as an ‘English teacher’ does not please his ‘innermost self.’ The college gives him ‘a grand send-off.’ Coming home, he finds peace in the fragrance of the garland he is offered at the ceremony and calls out for his deceased wife several times and falls into drowsiness. When he wakes up, he finds Susila sitting by his side ‘with an extraordinary smile in her eyes’ (279). He offers her the garland and she is very pleased. A cock crows at the breaking of the dawn and they stand together at the window, gazing outside. “A cool breeze lapped our faces. The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy — a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death” (280). With this note of transcendence, the novel ends.

➤ **Activities:**

- What is the title of the American version of *The English Teacher*?
- Write down the names of the members of Krishna’s family, their relationships with one another, and the places where they live. Draw a family tree.
- Find page no.16 and note down the kinds of mistakes (‘the traps that the English language sets for foreigners’) mentioned there. Are you aware of these ‘traps’?
- Mention the names of Krishna’s colleagues. Has he mentioned names of some students? If so, write down their names as well.
- Make a list of all the authors, books and magazines mentioned in Chapter One. Which book on history of English literature is mentioned in Chapter One?
- Describe the journey of Krishna and Susila to Lawley Estate. In this connection, map the city and its outskirt as far as possible. Take help of all the other descriptions of the landscape in the city and the outskirts (e.g. page no. 30 and 76).
- Find for yourself whether the Headmaster and Krishna’s friend, one who acts as the medium, have been given any name. If not, why?

3.1.3. Critical Issues

Now that you have a primary acquaintance with the text, and we suppose your reading of the complete book will give you an even greater understanding of the text, let us move to a discussion of the major critical issues in the novel.

• 3.1.3 A. The Role of Family

Two distinct areas stand out in R.K. Narayan's novel *The English Teacher*: Indian family as a social unit and the education system in British India. In this section we shall analyse how Narayan presents the Indian family system while narrating the story of the protagonist Krishna.

The novel was published immediately before the independence of India. (Dear learner, check the year of publication on your own). Indian family structure was at a crucial juncture at that time. English education had by then already produced a good number of English-educated middle-class people willing to take up jobs of teachers, 'writers' (clerks) and other positions in administration. Joining these jobs meant leaving the joint families in the villages and coming to cities in great numbers. In *The English Teacher* we find Krishna, the protagonist, doing the same. Himself a product of the British education in India, Krishna's father provided his children with proper education. Hence both his children are now well-educated and employed in prestigious positions. Consequently, they leave their ancestral place and set up their nuclear families in the places of their work (Malgudi and Hyderabad).

Krishna stays in the small town of Malgudi by the side of the river Sarayu. A former student of Albert Mission College, he has left his village home to take up the job of teaching in the same college. His parents live in his ancestral village. His wife Susila lives with his parents-in-law as she has given birth to her daughter Leela. This has been a social convention in India. Although he lives separately at Malgudi, he is in close touch with his parents and parents-in-law. The network of familial relationship is very strong. His father is the ultimate decision maker and communicates his decisions through letters. He writes to Krishna that it is high time for the latter to set his own family. Krishna's father-in-law brings Susila and her daughter to Malgudi for this purpose. His mother also visits Krishna's rented house and stays with them for some time in order to set the household properly. So setting up the family is not the sole responsibility of Krishna and his wife. Both his parents and parents-in-law help in this respect because it is held to be the responsibility of the entire family. So a community spirit within a hierarchical structure is evident throughout the novel. It is best displayed during the period of Susila's illness. Everybody is anxious and tries his or her best to relieve her pain or Krishna's sufferings. The child is taken care of. When Susila breathes her last, the entire family faces the ordeal together as a unit. Krishna's parents later take the responsibility of bringing up the daughter. His father-in-law also sets apart adequate money for her future. So we get a picture of a strong filial network in operation.

His elder brother stays in Hyderabad with his own family. His wife, the daughter of a retired High Court judge, is not in the best of terms with his parents. Hence there is practically no contact between them. The role of the wives is supposed to be very crucial in keeping the family bond strong. If they refuse to conform to the household norms or prefer to defy the authority of the mother-in-law, the relationship is sure to sour. A wife must also be capable of taking charge of the household and learn the tricks of the trade from her mother-in-law. Susila is a very suitable wife from that point of view.

Once they are alone, Krishna and Susila strike excellent relationship. She takes charge of every detail of the house, including the financial one. Their daughter grows up in a healthy family environment. Krishna encourages his wife to read and write, and not just spend her entire time in the kitchen or taking care of the baby. Their love prospers until she becomes fatally ill and dies. This leaves Krishna a totally dejected person and he even thinks of suicide. The thought of his daughter keeps him alive. The responsibility of his daughter is ultimately taken by his parents, thus making him free to abdicate his material responsibilities. He now resigns from his job and moves towards a life free from narrow considerations. His union with the spirit of his wife in the last chapter of the novel elevates the conjugal relationship to a spiritual level. It “bridge[s] the gulf between life and after-life” (166) which is, as spirits said earlier, the purpose for their communication. Krishna and Susila achieves that condition at the end of the novel.

- **3.1.3B. Title of the Novel**

R. K. Narayan’s novel *The English Teacher* is, as its title indicates, about an ‘English Teacher’ — Krishna. He teaches English in Albert Mission College in Malgudi. The novel is about his life and career, his relationship with his wife, his experimentation with the spirit of his deceased wife, and his transcendence from a mundane, material existence to a spiritual one, an existence that relies on ‘psychic development’ (132) and ‘inner peace’ (277).

This development is not discussed stage-wise here as it has already been described in the chapter-wise analysis of the story. You have to collect relevant parts from there to form a clear idea about this.

We, however, need to focus on the fact that Krishna’s profession, that of an ‘English teacher’ has been foregrounded in the title. This requires a special analysis here because Krishna has described in detail the environment prevailing in his college, how he feels

frustrated by his usual day-to-day academic activities and how he criticises the education system in British India and how he seeks a way out to find a new one. So right from the beginning he is against an education policy that is essentially materialist in nature and that depends on ‘mugg[ing] up Shakespeare and Milton,’ reproducing them in examinations and ‘secur[ing] high marks’ (2). Such an education depends on the objective of securing high marks and be successful. There is no scope for the development of a student’s imaginative and creative faculties. Hence he allies with the headmaster and helps in the latter’s initiative to introduce a novel methodology of teaching. In this new system the students will learn while enjoying the process. They will get enough scope for imagination and experimentation. It will not rely on the objective of success but on the vision of being true human being with faculties for inner development. (You, dear learner, should take relevant portions from the next section for a fuller exploration of the topic).

The title thus hints only one part of the protagonist’s life and leaves out the later part. But as an ironic tool, it suggests the meaninglessness of the duties of an ‘English teacher’ (the phrase itself refers to the popular use of the practitioner of this profession). The ‘English teacher’ in question here thus finally abdicates his duty in favour of a more serious pursuit of inner peace and joy which is missing in the mainstream education system.

• 3.1.3C. Narayan’s Representation of the Education System

There is a severe criticism of the contemporary education system in *The English Teacher*. Krishna, the protagonist who is also the narrator, criticises the system right from the beginning. Since he is a teacher of English literature and language, his criticism is basically channelised through how English is taught at the college. The core of his criticism is that the education system is basically mechanical and materialist and is practised through mindless ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ exercises. Taking attendance, for example, takes up most of the time of a ‘period’ in a classroom. In the chaos prevailing in the classroom, the bored teachers often wait eagerly for the bell to ring which announces the end of the period. There is hardly any scope for exercise of imagination in the prevailing system. Students learn with dogged determination to ‘secure high marks’ sans any pleasure.

Krishna is critical of the system right from the beginning. He narrates how Mr. Brown, the Principal of the college, is shocked at the fact that a student of English Honours does not know how to spell the word — the student has dropped the vowel ‘u.’ He is

disgusted because it violates the purity of the English language. Krishna feels that “there are blacker sins in this world than a dropped vowel” (3). In the colonial system purity of the English language was given top priority and Krishna’s irritation gives vent to the idea that in a colonial situation hybridity is inevitable and mistakes like the above are not cardinal ones. By the hindsight we can even say that the boy’s ‘mistake’ is an accepted form of spelling — in the American English. This is also mentioned later in the text. Language learning is also a reciprocal exercise in a colonial situation. Krishna thus criticises Brown’s inability to express even a small sentence like “The cat chases the rat” in “any of the two hundred Indian languages” (4). The very existence of the English Department, according to him, depends on “dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s” (5).

The students hardly find any pleasure in enjoying a poem or any piece of literary writing. They read a text or listen to a lecture as part of their duty of being ‘educated.’ Hence most of the time they are unresponsive. Krishna sums up the general situation in the classroom in the following way:

the grim tolerance with which boys listen to poetry, the annotator’s desperate effort to convey a meaning, and the teacher’s doubly desperate effort to wrest a meaning out of the poet and the annotator, the essence of an experience lost in all this handling..... (9)

The materials the students have to mug up (e.g. history of literature) appear to Krishna as ‘nonsense’ and even ‘literary garbage.’ He believes “that they are being fed on literary garbage and that we are all the paid servants of the garbage department” (226). He is fed up with the rituals of the ‘false education,’ with the “dead mutton of literary analysis and theories and histories” (270). In his opinion, examinations and ‘critical notes’ have largely replaced literature. What the students really need is “lessons in the fullest use of the mind” (270). He injects a nationalist, ant-colonial stance when he asserts, “This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage” (270). He asserts that he is “up against the system, the whole method and approach of a system of education which makes us morons, cultural morons, but efficient clerks for all your business and administrative office” (270). (You may go back to Module 1, EEG 8 and reinforce your knowledge related to the introduction of English education in India). It is for this reason that he ultimately resigns. Mr. Brown, with “his western mind, classifying, labelling, departmentalizing” fails to grasp the significance of Krishna’s decision.

The character of the headmaster is juxtaposed with that of Mr. Brown in order to bring out the differences in their visions and philosophy. The latter, for example, promotes 'modernity' in education which includes agenda like promotion of games and sports as part of the overall education system. Krishna mentions how Brown supports the teams that participate in a tournament and hints at the injustice on his part when he mentions that Brown "gives no end of liberties to the tournament players and even sends them on tours" (203). He further observes, "They are even made to pass examinations! And this sort of thing is supposed to make our people modern and vigorous..." (203). This obviously involves a lot of spending for which the institutions look forward to the Government grants and other forms of support like building infrastructure of the institutions. This, according to the headmaster, amounts to "sell[ing] your soul to the Government for support" (202). He believes that schools and colleges are not gymnasia. "The main business of an educational institution," he observes, "is to shape the mind and character" (203). Games and sports have their own values which he does not deny. What he criticises is blind copying of the Western model: "It is all a curse, copying, copying, copying. We could as well have been born monkeys to justify our powers of imitation" (203). That is why he interweaves the values of sports and pleasure into his own system of education. He invents stories and illustrates them and makes the students participate in the evolution of the stories. In the process the students derive pleasure and at the same time learn. There is no coercion in the process. Teaching remains a paid 'work' unless some vision or mission is infused into it.

• 3.1.3 D. Representation of the Spiritual World

Right from the beginning Krishna has not been a materialist in outlook. He does not like the job of teaching in a college in a mechanical, and a bit coercive, environment. But he continues doing his job only for earning a livelihood. But once his wife dies, he gets frustrated with the life itself. This is the moment when he begins to move towards away from the mundane world to one of spirituality. Accidentally he comes in contact with a 'medium' through whom his wife had sent him a message of communion. A group of spirits, including that of his wife Susila, have been trying to bridge the gulf between life and after-life. Krishna responds to the call and establishes meaningful contact with his wife's spirit. It offers him hope and peace. During their interactions a picture of the lives of the other world emerges.

The spirit of Susila informs Krishna that 'time' in the worldly sense does not exist in their world. Their life is 'one of thought and experiences' and also of 'aspiration, striving

and joy' (193). Thought, she informs him, 'has solidity and power' (193). They have ample leisure and they revel in 'Divine Light' (193). Since they do not have physical bodies, they are not in any need of exercise. "Music is ever with us here, and it transports us to higher planes" (193). They are able to contact their dear ones living on earth if the latter are receptive and responsive. Underlining the main difference between the human state and their own state of existence, the spirit of Susila observes, "Between thought and fulfilment there is no interval. Thought is fulfilment, motion and everything" (195). No obstruction exists between their thoughts/longing and fulfilment. She says, "Music directly transports us" (195). Whatever they think — perfume, dress, or whatever else — they possess immediately. Krishna sometimes wonders how Susila can wear a saree which remains boxed in a trunk in the house. He finds the answer, almost Platonic in nature, in her explanation, "What you have seen is its counterpart, the real part of the thing is that which is in thought, and it can never be lost or destroyed or put away" (195). The responses of their world are "immediate and fine" and human minds can only strive for it. What is striving in the human world is already "an achievement" in the other world.

Susila can see Krishna but Krishna cannot see Susila. This realisation pains Krishna. She, however, assures him that with training he will be able to see her 'form' and hear her bangles clanging and 'feast' his eyes on her 'dress and form' (196). She maintains that she is the same person on earth but without the earthly 'ailments, ills and cares' (196). (It can be noted that at the end of the novel Krishna is able to see Susila. How would you interpret this?)

The differences between the two worlds are thus clearly brought out by the spirit of Susila.

- **3.1.3E: Malgudi in *The English Teacher***

In the novel *The English Teacher* R.K. Narayan presents Malgudi as a growing town. Development of real estate properties takes place at the outskirts of the town. It is a place surrounded by villages. The village Tayur, where the stranger who acts as a medium during the seance sessions lives, is a place full of greenery. Krishna calls it a 'haven.' Villagers from surrounding rural areas commute to the town for various reasons. On his way to Tayur, Krishna comes across a medley of sights and sounds. Rushing across various points of the town like Ellamman Street, Nallappa's Grove and the cremation ground at the end of the town, Krishna encounters "[j]ingling bullock carts, talkative villagers returning home from the town, and a miscellaneous crowd on the dusty path..."

(159). All these make the place lively. The town is given a topography with names of streets, roads, lanes, neighbourhoods and its restaurants and markets. He mentions South Extension, Fort Area, Racecourse Road, and Vinayak Mudali Street, Sarayu Street, Ellamman Street. Krishna and his wife visit restaurant called Bombay Ananda Bhavan. They also visit a temple and buys toys from shops in the market. Malgudi is a town with the river Sarayu crossing it. Krishna takes a dip into the river in the wee hours, feels re-vitalised and wonders at the bounties of nature. He feels like writing a poem. The river links him up with his early days at the village by the side of which the same river flows.

Malgudi has people with oddities and eccentricities. The landlord who ultimately rents him his house is one such character. While discussing the rent, he unnecessarily tells Krishna, “Don’t pretend you own a car” (33), but as soon as he learns that Krishna is a college teacher, he is all reverence for him and readily agrees to lend his house. Both his aggression and reverence are in excess. Some of his colleagues too have some oddities and eccentricities and have even some amount of hypocrisy. All such characters, painted with humour and irony, lend the place a sense of reality. (You may take some characters to develop the point).

Krishna castigates the elected members of the Malgudi Municipality. They are good for nothing people. They do not discharge their duties properly. They are perpetually engaged in mutual bickering and in mud-slinging exercises. They become alert only when a distinguished visitor comes to the town. The visitor is usually led to the stairs of a tower from which s/he is shown the distant Sarayu “cutting across the northern boundary of the town,” thus offering him a scope to experience the panoramic view of the place (213). Otherwise, they are utterly negligent of their duties. Anderson Lane where the headmaster lives is a completely neglected area. Narayan describes it with his usual humour and irony. Krishna comes to know this area while visiting Headmaster’s house. It is dusty, dirty and unhygienic. Krishna blames the Malgudi Municipality for its notoriety.

Malgudi in the novel has specific South Indian features, particularly the names of the characters and places indicate its South Indianness. Characters from this place also settle in some other South Indian cities (e.g. Krishna’s elder brother settles in Hyderabad) or visit them occasionally (Krishna’s medium visits Trichinopoly). Critics often point out that the broad characteristic features of Malgudi and its inhabitants can be applied to any other Indian town or city. Meenakshi Mukherjee, for example, observes, “For decades Malgudi has been perceived as a quintessential Indian town, ordinary and

uneventful” (170) and has a “metonymic relationship with India as a whole” (174). It is presented as a pan-Indian city. Narayan, she observes, emphasises its Indianness “by which is meant a good humoured inertia and a casual tolerance which any reader in the country is expected to recognise as familiar” (170-71). It does not specify, she complains, its latitude and longitude, neither does it display characters of multiple identities and backgrounds. This kind of pan-Indian characteristics are not usually found in the novels of *bhasha* literatures. Therefore she comes to the conclusion that “Malgudi is Hindu upper caste pan-India, resistant to change, eternal, immutable” (171). She is of the opinion that Narayan is obviously burdened by what she calls ‘an anxiety of Indianness.’ (The above criticism is taken from Meenakhi Mukherjee’s essay “Anxiety of Indianness” which is in your syllabus. Now that you have finished reading *The English Teacher*, you should read Mukherjee’s text to examine how far her criticism is valid).

(Read very useful discussion of Malgudi in Thieme’s book, pp. 1-4, 15-22, 191-4 and in Ramanan’s book, p. 8, pp. 13-4, 25-36. Both Thieme and Ramanan have discussed Malgudi as a heterotopic space. You will get details of the books in “Suggested Reading” section).

- **3.1.3F. Humour and Irony**

Humour and irony, often seamlessly intermeshed, constitute an important aspect of R.K.Narayan’s style. He is a keen observer and portrays characters and describes events with an unmistakable sense of humour. Whenever he locates oddities and eccentricities, he treats them with a benign irony tempered by a sense of humour. When he criticises something, his use of irony may be incisive but it is never tinged by malice. We find several such cases in *The English Teacher*.

British Indian education system, of which Krishna himself and his colleagues are an indispensable part, is the main butt of his satire. But this satire is mellowed by the humorous descriptions of situations in which the excesses and oddities come out. Krishna does not like the system but at the moment he is powerless to opt out of it. He is trapped in it. He feels like a cow (he has some reservation about using the metaphor) doing his daily chores. Fully aware of the irony of the situation, he bears it, not mutely but with a sense of humour which perhaps is the best possible way of tolerating it. His description of the Principal of his college is one such example. The first time we come across Mr. Brown, he is seen lecturing his teachers on the incompetence of an English Honours student who does not know that the word ‘Honours’ needs to be spelled with a ‘u.’ The absurdity of the situation is quite evident as the mistake is quite common among students and the irony is that Mr. Brown, in spite of spending thirty years in

India and in the educational sector, does not know this. He also seems to be oblivious to the fact that English is not an indigenous language in India. Mr. Brown himself, despite his long stay, fails to pick up a single Indian language. Narayan subtly satirises the arrogance of this representative of colonialism. What is more ironic is that Gajapathy, an Indian colleague of Krishna, looks ‘heavily concerned’ and appears to be ‘swelling with importance’ at his support of Mr. Brown’s contention while indeed he should be more familiar with the reality. His colonial mentality is evident here. The ironic situation is, however, presented mostly with humorous descriptions. Here is an example: “Our Assistant Professor, Gajapathy, scowled at us, as if it were us who had induced the boy to drop the ‘u’. Brown cleared his throat as a signal for further speech, and we watched his lips” (3). There is a subtle dig at the use of Gajapathy’s designation which suggests the existence of a hierarchy among the employed teachers, many of whom are junior lecturers. Any disagreement with him, as Krishna ruminates, might lead to “an hour of extra work every day, or [he may] compel me to teach the history of language, of which I knew nothing” (3). This is quite ironical too that a junior lecturer does not know his subject well although he is employed for the purpose. The way, however, he describes the entire episode makes the reader enjoy the situation. He also appreciates the author’s concern that the misfits occupy positions in the system which they should not have been allowed to do.

[There are many such situations where humour conceals the irony and satire which lie underneath but operate powerfully to foreground the hypocrisy, dishonesty and eccentricity of characters and oddities of situations. Dear students, you will do well to choose some other situations as well, e.g. Krishna’s encounter with his landlord (Chapter One, pp. 32-4) and include your analysis of these episodes in your answer].

3.1.4 Summing up

You must have realised by now that Narayan’s *The English Teacher* is a very rich text which offers us a picture of the time. It is placed against the placid socio-cultural background of Malgudi where no earth-shaking social or political event takes place to disturb the overall social fabric of the community. Yet subtle changes in the family structure are evident as aspiring job-seekers leave their ancestral places and their joint families to go to cities, settle there and gradually form their own nuclear families. Disenchantment with an education system that does not pay adequate attention to the development of the mind also grows in a situation charged with nationalist feelings. The novel is basically a narrative of the progress of the protagonist’s inner consciousness,

but before attaining it he goes through the usual process of attaining education, getting into a profession and forming a family. Narayan employs a first person narrative in which the protagonist (the narrator) views his world with a sense of sharp irony intermeshed with genial humour. I hope, you have, in the mean time, gone through the novel and enjoyed it thoroughly.

3.1.5. Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type Questions (20 marks)

1. Show how the Indian family system is represented in *The English Teacher*.
2. Write critically on Narayan's criticism of the mainstream education system in British India.
3. Critically analyse the character of Krishna. Show whether his character develops during the scope of the novel.
4. Critically analyse the character of the headmaster. Does his vision offer a model for Krishna to follow? Does his school offer an alternative model to that of the mainstream education? (Read pp. 60-66 from Thieme's book and critically use the points he discusses)
5. Comment critically on the ending of the novel. (Read p. 21, pp. 54-5 and pp. 65-6 from Thieme's book and critically use the points he discusses)
6. How is Malgudi represented in the novel? Do you agree with Meenakshi Mukherjee when she calls Malgudi pan-Indian?

Mid-length Answer type Questions (12 marks)

1. Will you consider *The English Teacher* as an autobiographical novel? Give reasons for your answer.

(Points: Death of Rajam, Narayan's wife, of typhoid in 1939 - Narayan's period of acute distress and depression - their daughter Hema - his refusal to marry again - his own brief career as a teacher - his own resignation - Narayan's transmutation of these autobiographical details into an artistic whole. See also Thieme's book pp. 51-3 and Ramanan's very useful discussion of autobiographical elements in *The English Teacher* in his book pp. 44- 8 and p. 114)

2. Draw a short pen-picture of Krishna's hostel life. How do you see his transition from a hostel boarder to a responsible head of a small family?
3. Describe Krishna's anxiety while waiting at the station to receive his wife and their baby. What impression do you form about his character from this episode? In which chapter does it occur?
4. Why are house-keeping and house-keeping skill given so much prominence in the novel? In this context analyse the role of the women characters in the novel.
5. Analyse the episode involving the old clock and comment on the husband-wife relationship on the basis of your reading of this episode.
4. How many times do you come across references to letters in the novel? "Letters are very exciting things for me"(19). Why does Krishna make the comment? What effects do his father's letters have on him? (See page no. 22 in particular).

Short questions (6 marks)

1. Describe Krishna's early life in his village.
2. Read the novel and try to find out the texts the students of the English Department of Albert Mission College had to study. Also note down the authors Krishna's father read during his B.A. course and Krishna's comment on his father's use of the English language.
3. What evidence of Krishna being a poet do you find in the text?
4. Write a short note on Krishna's experience of the house-hunting expedition.
5. How does Susila contract typhoid? What measures were prescribed for remission of her fever?
6. What description of the 'other world' do you get from Susila's communications to Krishna?
7. Do you notice any anti-colonialist and pro-nationalist stance in Krishna's assertions and activities?
8. Why has Jasmine flower or its odour been invoked repeatedly in the novel?

3.1.6. Suggested Reading

Greene, Graham, Introduction. *Bachelor of Arts*. http://www.e-reading.club/bookreader.php/1022392/Narayan_-_Bachelor_of_Arts.html.

Mishra, Pankaj. "R.K. Narayan." *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*. Ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 193-208.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "The Anxiety of Indianness." *The Perishable Empire*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2002. 166-186.

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

Narayan, R. K. *The English Teacher*. 1946. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1955.

Rao, Ranga. *R.K. Narayan*. Makers of Indian Literature Series. New Delhi: SahityaAkademi, 2004.

Thieme, John. *R. K. Narayan*. Contemporary World Writers Series. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2010.

Unit- 2 □ Anita Desai: *Fire on the Mountain*

3.2.0: Introduction

3.2.1: Anita Desai: Life and Works

3.2.2: Section-wise Summary

3.2.3: Characters in *Fire on the Mountain*

3.2.4: Critical Understanding of the Text

3.2.5: Summing Up

3.2.6: Comprehension Exercises

3.2.7: Suggested Reading

3.2.0: Introduction

Anita Desai (1937-) is one of the most important Indian women novelists. Along with Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Jhabvala, Nayantara Sehgal, Shanta Ramarao et al., she has carved a niche for herself in Indian English Literature. She appeared on the literary scene in the 1970s. The forte of her writing is exploration of the inner-psyche of her characters. Searching for truth is her concern that finds expression in her writing. This is quite evident from her interview with Yashodhara Dalmia where she figuratively says:

One's preoccupation can only be a perpetual search for meaning, for value. For – dare I say it – truth. I think of the world as an iceberg – the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore. Writing is an effort to discover and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things (Qtd. in Kundu 58).

Her characters are usually from the urban middle class. While exploring them, she seems to have attached less importance to the socio-political and socio-economic conditions. Even though such conditions are used, they are, in the words of Jasbir Jain, 'subtly camouflaged and subdued by dwelling on emotions and responses which are far more engrossing than the hard facts of reality' (Qtd. in Bande 12). Robin Jared Lewis makes a comment on how Desai has been distinctive in her writing: "Desai not only brought new characters to the forefront, but she also fixed her penetrating eye on the

inner lives of the expanding urban middle class, delving deeply into the realms of imagination and fantasy through a variety of techniques relatively new to Indian writing” (149). N R Gopal says, “Her novels focus on the inner climate, the climate of sensibility. Her main concern is to depict the psychic states of her protagonists at some critical juncture of their lives” (Qtd. in Kundu 10). In the process, she brings out the individuality of her characters. She writes mainly about women and with a grave concern she portrays their abjection condition. According to Paul Brians, “Passionate identification with women’s plights and sensitive description of their surroundings” strikingly characterize Desai’s fiction (96).

3.2.1: Anita Desai: Life and Works

Anita Desai was born in 1937 in Mussoori, India. Her father was D.N. Mazumdar who was of Bengali origin and her mother was Toni Nime who was of German origin. She received her education at Queen Mary’s Higher Secondary School in Delhi and later at Miranda House, Delhi University. In 1958, she married a Bengali businessman Asvin Desai. Notably, Kiran Desai, the Booker Prize winning novelist is one of their four children. She remained in India for long before coming to live and work in England since the late 1980s. It is important to mention that ‘she became famous in her homeland before she was known or published abroad” (Brians 87). However, in 1993 she joined the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a creative writing teacher. At present she has been enjoying both teaching and creative writing in the United States.

At the age of seven, Anita Desai began to write in English. She published her first story at the age of nine. Later on, she chose to write novels. She has written some short stories as well as stories for children. Her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* drew some attention when it was published in 1963. Other important novels written by her include:

Voices in the City (1965)
Bye-Bye, Blackbird (1971)
Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975)
Fire on the Mountain (1977)
Clear Light of Day (1980)
Village by the Sea (1982)

Notably enough, her novel *In Custody* (1984) was made into a film (1993) with a screenplay by Shahrukh Husain. The film, starring Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi and Om Puri, was directed by Ismail Merchant. Her works have earned her a great recognition.

She has received the National Academy of Letters Award in 1978 for the novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). For this novel, she has been awarded the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize in 1978. She has received the British Guardian Award for Children's Fiction for her *Village by the Sea*.

➤ **Activities:**

- Given the family background of Anita Desai, how would you configure her 'Indianness' and her position in Indian Writing in English?
- Some of Desai's important novels have been mentioned in Section 3.2.1. Write down the titles of her other novels.
- The merit of a novelist is often measured by the awards he/she wins. Mention some awards and honours won by Anita Desai.
- Name some of Desai's contemporary novelists.

3.2.2: Section-wise Summary of *Fire on the Mountain*

Let us sum up the story of the novel *Fire on the Mountain*. It has three sections. The first section deals with the life of Nanda Kaul whereas the second section presents the life of Raka. The third section discusses the life of Ila Das. Through these sections, the author seeks to present the commonality that all the three individuals – Nanda, Ila, and Raka become victims at the hands of patriarchy in their respective life.

In the first section titled 'Nanda Kaul at Carignano', we see Nanda Kaul, the widow of a former Vice Chancellor as the protagonist. In her old age, she has come to Carignano, a hill station bungalow in Kasauli. There she lives like a recluse. The place is in agreement with her mood and temperament. She likes to be detached from her kin, her friends, and her acquaintances. She is now afraid of contacts like letters, telephonic calls that are likely to drag her into the familial duties and responsibilities that will hamper the enjoyment of her solitary life. In fact, she finds justification for coming to Carignano as she already performed her duties at multiple levels and led a very busy life. As a mother of several children, she took much pains to bring them up. As a housewife, she took care of the household affairs. As a hostess, she attended to a large number of guests who often paid visits to her Vice Chancellor husband in their bungalow. Naturally she is now very much tired of so many duties and responsibilities. In course of time, her children settled down in their own lives. Her husband also died. She now decides to come to Carignano towards the end of her life and begins a new life of her own. Here

she enjoys the peace and solitude that she craved for all her life.

She does not want to engage with duties and responsibilities anymore. But one day a letter from her daughter Asha disrupts the serenity of her present life. Asha, the letter informs her, will send Raka, the daughter of Tara to Carignano. The child will be staying with her great grandmother. Taking it for granted that the company of Raka will relieve her mother of her loneliness, Asha sends Raka who is on her way to Carignano. Asha explains to her mother the unavoidable circumstances under which she is compelled to send Raka to her. Tara's married life is about to break down. Tara would go with her husband to Geneva where he is recently posted so that she can improve her relation with him. Raka's presence there might prove to be a stumbling block in this context. Another practical reason for not taking her is that Raka has not fully recovered from typhoid. Asha herself cannot keep her at home because she is going to Bombay. She could have taken Raka to Bombay, but the little Raka who has been very weak after her illness, will not be able to endure the heat and humidity of the place. Coming to know all this, Nanda understands the problems. So, she cannot but accept the child Raka. Now Nanda develops certain apprehensions about the impending duties and responsibilities. She thinks that she will have to feed the child, look for playmates for her, and send her to bed – duties she performed in the past but is now loath to carry out again. Moreover, Raka's presence will disturb her peace and deprive her of the privacy she has been enjoying for some time.

The second section of the novel titled 'Raka comes to Carignano' deals with the life of Raka. She comes to Carignano. Gradually, she begins to develop an attachment to the place. Quite independently she rambles here and there in the forest. In a way she becomes a child of nature. Nanda Kaul had an apprehension that the child would put her into difficulties by making various demands. But this apprehension is disproved by Raka. Her behaviour and attitude suggest that she has nothing to do with her great grandmother. Nanda Kaul realizes that Raka is unlike other children. She gradually develops an attachment to the girl. Though initially Nanda was unwilling to receive Raka, she is now unwilling to let her go away. She wants to enjoy the company of the little girl. In order to keep her very close to her, she starts telling her stories. In fact, she fabricates stories about her childhood, her father, and her married life in her husband's house. But the child does not find much interest in the stories. So, Nanda's efforts find little or no success.

The third section titled 'Ila Das leaves Carignano' tells us about the life of Ila Das, Nanda Kaul's friend since her childhood. She is now posted as a social welfare officer

in Kasauli. Coming to know that Nanda has come to Carignano in Kasauli, Ila expresses her desire to meet her. One day she pays a visit to the house of Nanda Kaul. They meet each other after a long time. If we analyse Ila's life closely, we will see how the vicissitudes of fortune have affected her life. Her father was financially well-off. He had sent his three sons abroad for higher education, but they were so prodigal that they squandered all the money their father had sent. They also borrowed a lot of money from others. Unfortunately enough, their father ultimately found himself destitute because of his sons. The life became miserable for Ila Das and her sister Rima. They suffered a lot and found it difficult to make both ends meet. Under such circumstances, her friend Nanda Kaul came forward and requested her Vice Chancellor husband to create a job for her friend. Accordingly, Ila got the job of a lecturer in the Home Science College. But after sometime she lost that job because the new Vice Chancellor had gone against her appointment. Once again she found herself in misery. Then Nanda advised her to do a course in social service. Accordingly, Ila did the course and then got the job of a social welfare officer and got her posting in the area down the hills. People there were illiterate, orthodox and superstitious. So Ila found it difficult to eliminate various kinds of social maladies. She tried to dissuade people from the practice of child marriage that was rampant in that area. While doing all this, she faced a strong opposition from the males. What made her job more difficult was the presence of a local priest who instigated people against her. Despite this opposition she was a bit successful in preventing a child marriage. But in doing so, she invited the wrath of one Preet Singh who was about to marry off his seven-year-old daughter to an old man. Eventually she was raped and murdered by the man. When Nanda Kaul received the shocking news, she found it hard to believe it. She lost all her faith in everything and the world appeared to be a big lie to her. However, ultimately she died of shock.

➤ **Activities:**

- Take a look at the novel and make a list of the members of the family and figure out their relationship. Draw a family-tree of Nanda Kaul.
- To which class do the members belong.? Make list of the features of the class as evident in the novel.
- Read the novel carefully and identify some incidents that show Raka's deep attachment to nature.
- From which incident does the novel derive its title?
- Make a list of the social ills Ila Das had to address.
- Write a note on the family as a social unit.

3.2.3: Characters in *Fire on the Mountain*

- ✓ **Nanda Kaul:** Nanda Kaul is an old woman living in Kasauli after the death of her Vice Chancellor husband and after her children became independent. She had discharged her duties properly as a mother and also as a housewife. Now towards the end of her life, she seeks to enjoy the privacy of her life in the solitude of a place like Kasauli and the privacy of her life. This is why she has come to this place and lives the life of a recluse. She wants to stay away from the members of her family. She is extremely unwilling to communicate with anyone associated with her past. But eventually she has to take the responsibility of her great granddaughter Raka who is thrust upon her by her daughter Asha.
- ✓ **Raka:** Raka is the daughter of Tara who is the granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. This little girl is the child of a broken home arising out of the marital discord of her parents. She has recently suffered from typhoid. She is sent to Nanda's house in the hill station that is likely to be conducive to the speedy recovery of her health. Her mother also does not want Raka to accompany her in her trip to Geneva to improve her strained relation with her husband. This is yet another reason why Raka is left to the care of her great grandmother. However, Raka is the child of a broken home almost. She is seen taking a strange interest in the scene of devastation like a ruined house or a burnt-tree. She has been unlike other normal children. This is all because the shaky conjugal life of her parents has ill-effects on her mind.
- ✓ **Ila Das:** Ila Das is the friend of Nanda Kaul. Though born and brought up in an affluent family, she finds her life characterized by the vicissitudes of fortune in many ways. However, towards the end of her life, she becomes a social welfare officer and gets her posting in the area of Kasauli. Whole-heartedly, she attempts at eradicating social maladies like child marriage. She is successful in thwarting a child marriage. But in the process, she enrages the father of the child. Tragically enough, she finds herself raped and killed by this man.
- ✓ **Ram Lal:** Ram Lal is the servant-cum-cook of Nanda Kaul in her Carignano house. After the little child Raka comes to Carignano, it is Ram Lal who takes greater responsibility than Nanda to take care of the child. Very soon he develops a good rapport with her. Ram Lal becomes a confidant to her. When he comes to know of Raka's secret and disappearance from the house, he warns her of the possible dangers lurking in the places she frequents. In a way, he becomes a guide to Raka. Besides, he often tells her stories, often exaggeratedly to amuse her.

3.2.4: Critical Understanding of the Text

- **Title of the novel**

The title of Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain* is suggestive and evocative in many ways. However, it is significant to know that "Fire on the Mountain" is the title of the second chapter of William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. Desai seems to have derived this phrase as the title of her novel. In Golding's novel, we see that some British school boys who were the only survivors of a plane crash, were left stranded on a coral island on the Pacific. As there were no adults with them, the boys initially enjoyed unlimited freedom. After some time, they felt the urge for being rescued from that island. They lit a fire on the mountain-top of the island. By doing this, they tried to draw the attention of some passing ships. So here for these hapless schoolboys, the fire on the mountain is the signifier of hope and possibilities. However, the fire they produced on the mountain top became so huge that it went beyond their control. Consequently, the flora and fauna of the island were burnt down to a great extent. Anita Desai seems to have been attracted by the title and context of this chapter of *Lord of the Flies*.

In the novel *Fire on the Mountain*, the frequent occurrences of forest fires on the mountain are very significant. Ram Lal, the servant, informs the inquisitive little girl Raka about them. He has witnessed some of the forest fires coming very close to the railing of Carignano, destroying many trees and houses. Nanda Kaul also tells her about the forest fires. She informs her that the forest fires break out in the Simla hills every summer particularly in June and often engulf some houses. Nanda adds that it is not easy to combat the fire because of the inadequacy of water. This is, of course, a natural fire. Raka expresses her desire to see a forest fire. One day she gets the chance to see a forest fire and gets excited about it, but at the same time, she is pained to hear the cries of the birds and animals burning in this fire. The incidences of forest fires obviously have something to do with the story of the novel at the surface level. Hence we can find some justification of the title of the novel. But we need to see beneath the surface so that we can fully bring out the appropriateness of the title. So far we have come to know about the forest fires that are natural. Towards the end of the novel, we hear of a forest fire, this fire being man-made. It is Raka who sets the forest on fire. This fire is literal but it assumes greater significance at the figurative level. The meanings it unfolds not only make some contribution to the title but also enrich the novel as a whole. This fire is a protest against the male dominated society that has done a grave injustice to Ila Das. Ila's life is marked by vicissitudes of fortune. Towards the end of her life, we see

her as a social welfare officer making efforts to eradicate various forms of superstitions and social maladies that affect the people of the hills. This commendable engagement does not earn her any reward. Shockingly enough, she becomes a victim of rape and murder by one Preet Singh who planned to marry off his minor daughter to an old widower. This is why we find the little Raka giving vent to her angry protest against the cruel male dominated world. She says, ‘Look Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani—look—the forest is on fire’ (159). This fire that Raka has caused seems to be an externalization of the fire in her heart. This act of setting fire to the forest can also be seen as a protest against her father in some way. She has witnessed her father treating her mother with violence and abuse. She realizes that her father’s brutal treatment makes her mother suffer from nervous disorder. This has produced a traumatic effect on her. A feeling of insecurity has always gripped her mind. Even the healthy growth of her mind has been stunted. She has failed to develop any feeling of attachment to her parents. Because of the hostile domestic environment, she has also failed to develop a sense of belonging to that home. It is evident in authorial description of Raka’s feelings: “I’m shipwrecked, Raka exulted, I’m shipwrecked and alone. She clung to a rock—my boat, alone in my boat on the sea... (68)”. Through this act of setting the forest on fire, she seems to protest against her grandmother Asha as well and the likes of those entertaining patriarchal values and ideologies. Asha does not hold her son-in-law responsible for the marital discord despite his glaring faults. Rather she accuses her daughter of not adjusting to her husband. In this way she indirectly contributes to the perpetuation of the patriarchal family structure. Raka’s anger against the patriarchal society seems to have accumulated since then.

By setting fire to the mountain, Raka expresses the spirit of reformation. For her the entire world has become an evil world. The fire set by Raka on the mountain seems to purge the society of the evil effects of patriarchy. It could also be said that Raka’s protest is an attempt towards making this world free of various forms of injustice being done to women by the patriarchal society. Anita Desai seems to have instilled a rebellious spirit in Raka. Even the fact that an introvert child like Raka is protesting very significantly accentuates the need of the hour. So, the title *Fire on the Mountain* is justified.

➤ **Activities**

- What intertextual element do you find in the title of the novel?
- Trace the correspondences and differences between the two titles in the two novels.

- Bring out Raka's anger against the world.
- What differences do you find between Raka's setting fire and natural fires?
- **A Feminist Reading of *Fire on the Mountain* / *Fire on the Mountain* – A Story about the Sufferings of Women**

As a political movement feminism advocates the equality of women with men in terms of rights. It critically examines how men employ various mechanisms to perpetuate their dominance over women. Largely a western phenomenon, this movement becomes dominant in the 1960s and 1970s. The spirit of feminism is also seen in the works of literature to a great extent. Anita Desai, one of the important Indian women novelists becomes greatly influenced by feminism. In her *Fire on the Mountain*, she has sensitively portrayed the predicament of some women characters in the Indian context. She has made an attempt to reveal the overt and covert ideologies that continue to oppress women like Nanda, Tara, Ila, even the little child Raka, and the minor daughter of one Preet Singh. She has also challenged the stereotypical attitudes of men to women.

Nanda Kaul who is the protagonist in the novel, becomes a victim of patriarchy in her conjugal life. Her Vice Chancellor husband seems to be guided by the ideology inherent in the patriarchal society that a woman should be a housekeeper. This patriarchal ideology has gradually affected her. She has internalised her role as a housekeeper. She believes that she is destined to play this role. We see that she performs with great care and attention all the household duties. She remains awfully engaged in the everyday drudgery. This is why she finds a lack of privacy for herself. Despite running the household efficiently, she finds herself alienated from this house because of the presence of the patriarchal environment in the family. The house for which she does all she can, never belongs to her: "Mentally she walked through the rooms of that house—his house, never hers (20)." Evidently, Nanda's husband considers her subordinate to him, giving no importance to her state of mind. However, apart from the role of a housekeeper, Nanda plays the role of a mother. She is the mother of several children. She is not happy with this because her husband has reduced her to a procreating machine. Her husband takes her for granted and therefore does not feel the need to know what she actually wants. In fact, she is left with no agency. The patriarchal attitude on the part of her husband has prevented him from thinking that the conjugal life should be based on mutual understanding. She is also fed up with the act of bringing up children. She really cannot enjoy her motherhood, the motherhood which is conventionally lauded. She really does not find any joy in childbearing and childrearing. Actually, she seeks to

get a respite from role playing that is imposed on women as part of patriarchal programming. The role playing actually perpetuates male-chauvinism. So, Nanda has developed complete aversion to the act of role playing, and this has prompted her to come to Carignano. Rightly does Robin Jared Lewis say that “the central characters seek to escape the powerful complex of social, religious, and familial obligations that hinders their search for individuality” (150-1).

As a wife Nanda Kaul does not find any sort of mental peace because of the marital infidelity on the part of her husband. We know that this kind of infidelity brings the greatest dishonour to the self of a married woman. Naturally, Nanda finds herself not only neglected but also psychologically devastated. She does not really enjoy any great social dignity in being a Vice-Chancellor’s wife. Instead, she considers it meaningless as the sacrosanct bond of marriage is defiled by her husband. Because of the domineering patriarchal influence of her husband, she cannot protest against this great marital injustice done to her. True, as a Vice-Chancellor’s wife, she has always appeared with all the trappings of material life. True, her husband has presented her like a queen before his guests. His guests often flattered her in the following: “Isn’t she splendid? Isn’t she like a queen. Really Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does... (19)”. By presenting her like this, Prof. Kaul wants to see two purposes served. One, he is ready to show before people that he is a loving husband. But this is nothing but a kind of hypocrisy on his part. Two, he has impressed upon his wife the fact that he has never deprived her of material happiness. May be that outwardly she is presented as a queen, but psychologically she is ruined. So she finds no meaning in her existence in her husband’s house. This is why after the death of her husband, she comes to Carignano in Kasauli to live in complete isolation and withdrawal from her kin. The omniscient author tells us that “... [S]he paced the house, proprietarily, feeling the feel of each stone in the paving with bare feet (33)”. Gradually she develops a sense of belonging to the Carignano house, her hill station resort. This kind of sense of belonging she could not or was not allowed to develop to her husband’s house. In other words, she creates a space for herself. As Lewis observes: “Her flight into the mountains is a defiantly feminist gesture that parodies the spiritual retreat into the Himalayas from the worldly obligations that an aging male householder undertakes in accordance with the traditional Hindu life cycle (151).”

If we consider the married life of Tara, Nanda Kaul’s granddaughter, we see that her husband tortures her both mentally and physically. In an inebriated state, he not only abuses her but also beats her. He takes it for granted that he has the right to treat his

wife violently because of his gender. As a result, Tara finds the married life unbearable. She does not know the fate of her married life even though her mother eagerly wants her to do something to resuscitate it. We see that Tara's mother persuades her to make some adjustment to her husband at the cost of her honour because of the internalization of patriarchal norms. In spite of being aware of the fact that her daughter receives a cruel treatment at the hands of her husband, she defends her son-in-law by citing her daughter's incompatibility with him. As she writes in a letter to Nanda: "[H]e's not really so bad as Tara might make you believe, she simply doesn't understand him, doesn't understand *men*, and she really is the wrong type of wife for a man like him so I can't blame him *entirely* although it is true that he does drink...(16)". This statement of her mother shows a kind of subjugation to patriarchy. She does not have the courage to raise a voice of protest. She even cannot encourage her daughter to do so against the brutal treatment at the hands of her husband. In a very indirect manner she advises her daughter to accept the ill-treatment. She suggests that the subservience of her daughter to her husband will help her save the married life. She seems to have absorbed patriarchal ideologies.

Tara's little child Raka also becomes, though indirectly, a victim in a patriarchal family structure. Several times she has witnessed her father "beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse— harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept" (78). This horrible experience of her early years had traumatized her. As a result, the normal growth of her mind has been stunted. She has been unlike other children. Her mother has been a patient of neurosis. As Raka finds herself deprived of parental love, affection, care, and company, she fails to develop any sort of attachment to her parents. This is why she likes to remain detached from her great grandmother while staying at Carignano. She is incapable of understanding the warmth and worth of relationships. Unlike other children of her age, she even cannot find any joy in a social setting like a club. Her mental-make up is so adversely affected that she cannot enjoy the beautiful sights and sounds of nature. Rather she gets interested in the bizarre objects of nature.

If we take into account the life of Ila Das and her sister Rima, we will see that they too have become victims of a grave injustice which is deliberately done by their father. They suffer a lot due to the biased outlook of their father. He divides the family property among his three sons. He gives nothing to his two daughters taking it for granted that

they do not deserve any share of it. He seems to be guided by the belief that the prerogative of enjoying the property goes to the male children only. The kind of treatment their father metes out to them is nothing but a reflection of his patriarchal mindset. Moreover, this father displays a gender bias by giving his sons higher education abroad in the reputed universities like Cambridge, Harvard, and Heidelberg. But he educates his two daughters in India. So far as his sons are concerned, they are not attentive to their studies and hence they skip lectures. They are so prodigal that they begin to squander all the money sent by their father on drinking and racecourses. They even begin to borrow money from others. In the process, they gradually run into heavy debts. It is their father who has to pay off all the debts by selling everything — his own horses, his own carriage, his house, his land. Ultimately, the three sons leave their father destitute. They are so unscrupulous that they do not come home to attend the funeral of their father. So we see that because of their father's gendered treatment and the patriarchal mind-set, Ila and Rima find themselves in great financial hardship. Eking out a living becomes a great challenge for them.

After so many ups and downs of her life, Ila ultimately becomes a social welfare officer. We find her committed to her job and trying hard to combat the social maladies like child marriage. She is trying to explain to the local people the harmful effects of child marriage. She finds some success in thwarting the marriage of one girl child whose father, one Preet Singh, is about to marry off her to a widower with six children from his previous marriage. We see how the girl child becomes a victim of great injustice at the hands of her father. Her father is not at all concerned about the well-being of her minor daughter. He takes it for granted that even a girl child can be used in the way he likes, thereby revealing his patriarchal mindset. In preventing this child marriage Ila has invited the wrath of Preet Singh. She seems to have hurt his masculine ego as a result of which he brutally rapes and kills her. In the process, he inflicts the greatest humiliation a woman can suffer. He considers the failure of the said marriage as a defeat at the hands of a female. True, Ila Das is a government social welfare officer, but in the eyes of Preet Singh she is just a woman. He considers women as mere objects. From a girl child to an elderly woman, he seeks to subjugate them. Through this act of rape and murder Preet Singh seems to consolidate and perpetuate the male domination in society. The perpetration of the violence of this kind against women in general and Ila Das in particular leaves Nanda Kaul terribly shocked. She ultimately dies of shock.

All this suggests the tragic life of women in society. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* we see that women in the Indian context, irrespective of their class and social background

suffer because of the patriarchal forces that are overtly or covertly operative. Anita Desai has also exposed and interrogated the patriarchal ideologies. Thus, we see Desai expressing a true feminist concern.

• Narrative Technique

A writer presents the theme of his/ her work by developing a story. When it comes to narrating the story of a novel, he/she uses various narrative techniques. Sometimes the success of a work depends on the techniques employed in it. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* we find the predicament of women as a theme, among many others. Anita Desai has employed some narrative techniques to present this theme. The central figure Nanda Kaul seeks a kind of relief and release from the claustrophobic environment of the big house of her Vice Chancellor husband. She wants to spend the remaining days of her life amidst the sights and sounds of nature that is far from the madding crowd. In order to express this desire of Nanda Kaul, Desai has made use of poetry as an effective tool, among many others. In the process she has displayed some novelty in narrative techniques as well. Here Desai quotes Gerard Manly Hopkins's poem "Heaven Haven". This poem seems to be in consonance with the desire of Nanda Kaul.

‘I have desired to go
Where springs not fail
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

‘And I have asked to be
Where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea’. (63-64)

This poem of Hopkins, tells Nanda, is not about any particular place. It is actually about a nun's vocation. Nanda feels that this poem has something to do with her life.

More importantly, Desai has employed the omniscient narrative method to a great extent in *Fire on the Mountain*. As an omniscient author she narrates as well as interprets the life of Nanda Kaul spending the evening days of her life in a hill-station bungalow and enjoying her solitude. Let us have a look at one authorial narration among many others: "It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life – as she realized on her first day at Carignano, with a great, cool flowering of relief – and at last she had it (3)." Not only the authorial narrations, we also find the use of

some direct speeches in the mouths of the characters. These speeches serve to add credibility to the narration made by the author herself.

In Desai's novels action is less important. Exploring the inner climate of the characters is the most important trait in her novels. This is why we see the rare occurrences of events and incidents in her novels. As Paul Brians says, "She strives to convey moods and settings more than she does to tell stories: several of her novels contain very little external action, although many of them end abruptly in a catastrophe (87)." However, against the backdrop of some social issues, she has tried to bring out the workings of the minds of her characters. As Iyenger says, "Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters (464)." In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* too, Desai has made a psychic exploration of the characters, particularly of Nanda Kaul. She has used the technique of interior monologue to describe the thoughts of Nanda Kaul flowing through her mind. While making use of this technique, Desai intersperses the present and the past very beautifully. She narrates the fact that Nanda finds no space for herself because of her busy schedule in her Vice-Chancellor husband's house. There she finds herself playing several roles – as a wife, a mother, a housekeeper etc. She is not at all happy with any of these roles. As a wife she finds the sacrosanct bond of marriage defiled because of the extramarital relationship of her husband. This brings a great dishonour to her feminine entity, thereby tormenting her psyche. As a mother, she is tired of the act of bearing and rearing several children. She really does not find any joy in motherhood. As a housekeeper she takes care of everything. The act of housekeeping leaves her utterly disgusted because it denies her the much needed respite. Moreover, despite her praiseworthy efficiency in running the household and keeping it in good stead, she is never allowed to develop a sense of belonging to that house. All these painful thoughts are still alive in her memory. Through the technique of interior monologue, Desai reveals them quite effectively. Reflecting on her past life, Nanda now realizes how all those roles made her life utterly meaningless.

Desai, to a considerable extent, uses interior monologue while narrating the traumatic experience of the child Raka. She is haunted by the scenes of her father torturing her mother brutally. This technique of interior monologue effectively reveals Raka's subconscious mind and also explains why she fails to become like other normal children of her age.

The story of the novel brings out the truth, among many others, that attachment is the

key to any meaningful human existence. True, Nanda Kaul celebrates her detachment from her relations. True also, initially she has tried to detach herself from the little child Raka. But gradually she tries to come very close to Raka and seeks to develop an affinity with her. She wants to have the company of Raka. She fabricates stories in order to attract the attention of the little girl Raka. Here we find an old narrative method i.e. story within story that Desai has employed to a great extent. She weaves stories about her father. She tells Raka that her father was an explorer, a collector and an animal lover. She tells her about her father's house. The stories that she fabricates about her father project an idealised image of a father. This becomes a kind of wish-fulfilment. The fantasy world that she weaves offers her some kind of solace to her tormented psyche. This can also be seen as an attempt to build bridges between the Nanda and Raka despite the generation gap. It is true that Raka is very much charmed by the stories, but she is very much suspicious about the authenticity of the stories.

Ila Das, Nanda's childhood friend, takes part in the story-telling sessions in order to amuse the child. She tells her a story of the house of Nanda's Vice-Chancellor husband. But the child Raka loses interest in all these kinds of storytelling. She expresses a feeling of boredom. However, by engaging Nanda and Ila in the acts of fabricating stories, Desai has given them a larger space as narrators within the narrative of the novel. In the process, she has tried to make the old technique of story within a story efficacious here. Doing so, Desai remains detached as a narrator for a while.

Ram Lal, Nanda Kaul's servant-cum-cook makes a significant contribution to the narration of the story. He seems to be a traditional oral narrator. He tries to entertain Raka with stories that are largely true but he often has imbued them with the colour of imagination. He tells her about the stories of ghosts, churails, mad dogs etc. In the act of story-telling, Ram Lal is much ahead of Nanda Kaul as he quite successfully arouses Raka's interest in and curiosity about the things he narrates whereas Nanda cannot do so.

The various narrative techniques Desai has employed cannot be seen only as the products of her formal exercises; rather they are highly effective in presenting the theme of the novel.

3.2.5: Summing Up

Anita Desai sympathetically portrays the lives of women in her fiction. In *Fire on the Mountain*, she has shown how Nanda, Ila, Tara, Raka, and Preet Singh's minor daughter

have become victims of the patriarchal forces that are operative either overtly or covertly. Her forte as a writer – the exploration of the inner psyche of her characters, particularly the women characters – reveals itself in this novel. By presenting the plight of women in the Indian context and seeking to elicit some sympathetic responses from the sensitive readers, Desai has expressed a deep feminist concern in the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

3.2.6: Comprehension Exercises

Essay Type Questions (20 marks)

1. 'Fire on the Mountain is the story of women'. Discuss.
2. Is it possible to consider *Fire on the Mountain* as a feminist novel? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Critically examine the narrative techniques employed in the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions (12 marks)

1. Critically examine the title of the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.
2. Examine Desai's use of the 'mountain' as space.
3. Critically comment on the ending of the novel.

Short Questions (6 marks)

1. Why does Raka's arrival in Carignano make Nanda Kaul uncomfortable?
2. Who is Ila Das? How is she different from Nanda Kaul?
3. Briefly explain the symbolic significance of fire in the novel.

3.2.7: Suggested Reading:

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Unit - 3 □ Salman Rushdie: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

3.3.0. Introduction

3.3.1. Salman Rushdie and His Works

3.3.2. Summary of the Novel

3.3.3. Critical Issues

3.3.4. Summing up

3.3.5. Comprehension Questions

3.3.6. Suggested Reading

3.3.0. Introduction

Dear students, as you can well guess, this unit will deal with the celebrated, and much controversial, author Salman Rushdie's multi-layered work *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990). It reads like a children's story, but when you will read it carefully, you will realise that it is more than a children's story. Underneath its fabular structure, lies the real-life experience of the author, and of many others. Indeed, it deals with serious issues like censorship, role of the agents of power in gagging voices of people, fight for free speech and so on. Hence, this fictional work is very relevant to the contemporary times. You may perhaps find some similarities with R. K. Narayan's short fictional piece "The Writer's Nightmare" in certain ways. It is included in a volume with the same title. You will do well to read this 'story' as well.

During the course of our discussion in this Unit we shall try to peel off the layers of significance contained in the narrative. But we first need to know the author who creates a wonderful, magical world like the one you are going to find in the text.

3.3.1. Salman Rushdie and His Works

Salman Rushdie was born on June 19, 1947 in Bombay. He was educated first at a school in Bombay and then at Rugby School, England. He studied History at King's College, University of Cambridge. In the 1970s he worked as an advertising copywriter. He was influenced by authors like Henry Fielding, James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges.

He was also influenced by *Arabian Nights*. The trace of the Middle Eastern romance is evident in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* which is in your syllabus.

Rushdie's debut novel *Grimus* was published in 1975. It anticipated the style he would be experimenting with in future. Here fantasy and imagination are intricately blended together. After *Grimus* came *Midnight's Children* (1981) which won the Booker Prize in 1981, the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and the Best of Bookers in 2008. A text of rare quality and flavour, *Midnight's Children*, encompasses history, culture, society, people, politics, religion and myth in an unparalleled way. Rushdie's 1983 novel *Shame* is based on the political mayhem in Pakistan modelling itself on the characters of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. Like most of his novels, Rushdie once again used the technique of magic realism in this novel. *The Satanic Verses* (1988) invited strong religious outrage and vehement protest from many members of the Muslim community and institutions. It was declared to be blasphemous. A fatwa was issued against him in 1989 and he had to go underground. Elements of magic realism are once again prominent in this novel. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is Rushdie's fifth novel published in 1995. Set in Bombay and Cochin, the novel tells the family saga of the narrator Moraes Zogoiby and the various stages in his family life and events. *The Gound Beneath Her Feet* (1999) reworks on the Orpheus/Euriydice myth. In this work rock music substitutes the lyre of Orpheus. Based in an imaginary town somewhere in Kashmir, Rushdie's 2005 novel *Shalimar the Clown* gave him more recognition as a novelist. *Fury*, his 2001 novel, deals with globalisation, contemporary New York City, isolation and escapism in life. *The Enchantrss of Florence* (2008) is a fantastic narrative of travels between continents and kinship between characters from unlikely locations.

His two important fantasy books are *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) and its sequel *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010).

Rushdie, it may be mentioned, also tried his hand at short stories — *East, West* (1994) — and non-fictional work — *The Jaguar Smile* (1987), *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (1992) and *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012).

➤ **Activities:**

- Salman Rushdie is regarded as a diasporic author. What does the word 'diaspora' mean? Why is Rushdie a diasporic author? Is there any other diasporic writer in your syllabus? Check for yourself.
- Why is Rushdie a 'controversial' author? Explain.
- Is the list of books mentioned above exhaustive? Find for yourself.

3.3.2. Summary of the Novel

A magical, entertaining and marvelous world is created in the narrative of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. The whole text is divided into twelve chapters followed by a list of names, characters and phrases elucidated by the author.

The story begins with an interesting epigraph:

Z embla, Zenda, Xanadu:
A ll our dream-worlds may come true.
F airy lands are fearsome too.
A s I wander far from view
R ead, and bring me home to you.

Dear students, you will observe that the first letter of the first word in each line is graphologically kept separate. Why is it done so? What do you get when you read the isolated letters down the lines — vertically? The name of a person? Find for yourself who the person is.

This acrostic pattern has a long tradition, specifically in the using of a ‘text’ in the dedication page of a literary work. It is a witty, innovative way employed by an author to highlight someone’s name (or a particular object). Rushdie here has done the same. The word “Xanadu” in the first line reminds us of the “Xanadu” in Coleridge’s poem ‘Kubla Khan.’ A place of mystic aura, Xanadu, along with other names beginning with the same sound (creating alliterative effect), anticipates an other-worldly environment in Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. We, the readers, begin reading the text with a trepidation that we are about to travel through a mystical, magical, charming land.

- The epigraph sets the basic intention of the author clear. It is going to be a cautionary tale. The content of the message is that the fiction will be the story of a ‘dream world.’ He, however, cautions that ‘all our dream-worlds may come true.’ In course of our journey we may come across ‘fairy lands’ and these lands have every possibility of becoming ‘fearsome.’ As the author is a master in his use of language, he makes his statement clear — that it is not a real world but has the potentiality of becoming one. Everything that we are to see in this story is ‘far from view.’ But we should not ignore the ways through which authors usually caution the readers. Allegory is a much used stylistic devise used for this purpose. Rushdie makes best use of this strategy.

● Chapter 1: The Shah of Blah

Once upon a time there was a city in a country named Alifbay. The city was very depressed by nature. It was so wretched that it even forgot its name. On its northern side there were some big factories manufacturing sadness. A happy young fellow named Haroun lived there. Haroun was the only son of the storyteller Rashid Khalifa. Rashid Khalifa was a legend for his story-telling prowess. To his admirers, Rashid was known as “Rashid the Ocean of Notions” and to his rivals he was known as “Shah of Blah.” Soraya was Rashid’s wife. Haroun was growing up, listening to the laughter of his father and the sweet voice of his mother.

Suddenly something went wrong. Haroun’s father Rashid had hardly any time for his wife Soraya. Soraya ran off with her neighbour Mr Sengupta. It was a great shock for both Rashid Khalifa and Oneeta Sengupta, the wife of Mr Sengupta. Haroun lost his power of concentration beyond the limit of eleven minutes and Rashid Khalifa had no power left for storytelling. Rashid and Haroun went to the Town of G and Rashid was about to tell a tale on stage in favour of a party just before the election. To his dismay, Rashid could hardly utter a single word except “Ark, ark, ark.” Rashid took a vow, “In the Valley of K, I will be terrifico, magnifiquo.”

● Chapter 2: The Mail Coach

Rashid and Haroun were on their way to the Valley of K. The bus depot was a pandemonium. As they were seated in a bus for the Valley of K, Haroun met Mr Butt, driver of the “Number One Super Express Mail Coach to the Valley of K.” Haroun asked Mr Butt for a front-row seat as he did not want to miss the beauty of the Valley of K. Mr Butt was driving the Mail Coach in a break-neck speed. When the Mail Coach reached the Mountains of M, Mr Butt put more speed. The passengers were all scared. They reached the tunnel of I and Rashid was really happy enjoying the beauty of the Valley of K. Here Rashid told Haroun about “Khattam-shud,” the “Arch- Enemy of all stories”(19). Khattam-shud was the Prince of Silence, Foe of Speech. Haroun already started feeling the changes coming in his father as they reached the Valley of K. Boss, the top man of the ruling party of the Valley, greeted them. The new agent of the political party of this Valley, Mr Buttoo, welcomed them. Mr Buttoo arranged a houseboat in Dull Lake for Haroun and Rashid.

● Chapter 3: The Dull Lake

Dull Lake was as unhappy as the city mentioned earlier. There was foul smell everywhere. Haroun recognized that it was the Moody Land his father had spoken of in his stories.

In Moody Land even the weather changes according to the mood of the people. Haroun's father Rashid was again in dismay and in utter frustration which created the Mist of Misery. They heard the voice of Mr Snooty Buttoo. Mr Buttoo was not only full of hot air, he also brought a boiling wind. Very soon the weather was under control and the water of Dull Lake became calm and the "malodorous mist" broke.

Mr Bhutto's luxurious houseboat was called Arabian Nights Plus One. Both Haroun and his father could not sleep well. Haroun woke up once to see an unusual figure. It had "an outsize onion for a head and outsize aubergines for legs" 26. The figure was of an old man wearing a purple turban and baggy silk pajamas. He was Iff, the water Genie from the Ocean of the Streams of Story. He was there to turn off the Story Water from the Great Story Sea because "the gentleman no longer" required the service. Iff told him that the news came to him through a "P2C2E" (Process Too Complicated To Explain). Haroun learnt that the process could be reversed if he discusses the issue with the Grand Comptroller at P2C2E House, Gup City, Kahani.

- **Chapter 4: An Iff and a Butt**

The Water Genie told Haroun to pick a bird to travel to the Gup city. The Genie pulled out a tiny, magical bird and Haroun picked up a Hoopoe, the bird that led "all other birds through many dangerous places" (32). Haroun and the Genie jumped over the Hoopoe's back and it started moving upward. Haroun found a similarity between the Hoopoe and Mr Butt of the Mail Coach. The Hoopoe started talking to Haroun telepathically. Haroun named the bird "Butt." Haroun saw a moon in the distance — it was Kahani, the Earth's second Moon.

Haroun wondered as they landed in the middle of an ocean. He drank Wishwater from the sea and prayed for the return of his father's story-telling capacity. Haroun drank also found, through the eyes of a young hero, a land full of monsters and strange things. There was a princess in a tower and Haroun watched as the hero dispensed with the monsters and began to climb the tower. Haroun was in "Princes Rescue Story Number S/1001/ZHT/420/41(r)xi" (36). Suddenly the hero fell on the ground. Haroun woke up from the trance and told his companion everything. Iff told Haroun that the Ocean got polluted by the leader of the Land of Chup, "on the Dark side of Kahani." And the leader was no other than Khattam-Shud.

- **Chapter 5: About Guppees and Chupwalas**

Haroun and Iff were moving through the Ocean of Stories on the back of Hoopoe. Haroun was trying to collect more information about Khattam-Shud from Iff. Iff told

him that most of what was known about Khattam-Shud was “gossip and flim-flam, because it’s been generations since any of us went across the Twilight Strip into the Perpetual Night.” The Land of Gup was always in Endless Sunshine. On the hand, Chup, where Khattam-Shud stayed, was always immersed in darkness of night. The Twilight Strip and the invisible Chattergy’s Wall divided the two.

They entered the busy Gup City. They saw a strange-looking weed which was in fact a “Floating Gardener.” The weed transformed itself into a person right before Haroun’s eyes. Mali, the Floating Gardener, untwisted the stories in the water. Iff explained that as the stories grew longer, they also became twisted and braided. Mali told Haroun that the pollution in the ocean was gradually worsening.

A group of Angel Fish came to the surface. They were “as big as sharks” with “literally dozens of mouths.” Butt told Haroun that those were Plentimaw Fish. These fish were always in pairs with their faithful partners for life. They were looking very sick because of the pollution. The fish swallowed the stories in the sea and then miracles happened: “a little bit of one story joins on to an idea from another...when they spew the stories out they are not old tales but new ones.” Iff told Haroun, “No story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old—it is the new combinations that make them new”(42)

Everyone in Gup City went to the Lagoon, “a beautiful expanse of multicolored waters” (43). There were gigantic buildings all around, including the P2C2E House. In the Pleasure Garden Ha Harounsawa large numbers of Pages of Gup, the city’s army. They were organized into Chapters and Volumes, all headed by a Title Page. The entire Library was headed by General Kitab, who stood on a balcony on the Palace of Gup. Next to him was the Speaker of the Chatterbox and King Chattergy, a frail looking old man. Next to them were two other gentlemen — Prince Bolo, “the fiancé of King Chattergy’s only child, his daughter the Princess Batcheat,” and Walrus, a man with a bald head. Haroun also saw the Eggheads wearing white lab coats. Prince Bolo spoke to the crowd that Princess Batcheat had been kidnapped by the people of Chup. Suddenly a ‘spy’ was detected in the twilight area. He was in fact found to be Rashid Khalifa.

- **Chapter 6: The Spy’s Story**

Rashid declared that he was only a storyteller, a subscriber to the Story Water, and not a spy. Rashid informed his captors that he had been looking for a special concoction of food that would cure his insomnia and hence went to Gup. It was because of a miscalculation that he ended up in the Twilight Strip. Bad things were happening in the

Twilight Strip. Rashid also explained that Bezaban was a giant idol made of ice. It was in Khattam-Shud's palace.

A Page called Blabbermouth escorted Haroun away from the crowd. Blabbermouth took out balls of golden silk from her pocket and began to juggle. She added more and more balls until she was juggling a dozen or more. This was, Haroun thought, the secret of storytelling. "You keep a lot of different tales in the air, and juggle them up and down, and if you're good you don't drop any."

- **Chapter 7: Into the Twilight Strip**

Blabbermouth informed him that his father had convinced the Walrus about his own innocence. Haroun found that all the Pages in the army were jostling to find out their order. Haroun thought that it would be easy, since they were numbered, but Blabbermouth told him that he should not "judge a book by its cover," (56) as there were chapters and volumes that must be taken into account. Haroun and Blabbermouth moved towards the Garden, and Haroun saw his father, disheveled and in his nightshirt, in a pavilion, standing with Iff.

Rashid, Iff and Haroun boarded on Butt, the Hoopoe. Iff gave all of them Laminations, transparent garments. Haroun noticed that there was a great commotion in the army. The army entered the Twilight Strip. Later they entered the place called "Chup." They moved to a small clearing and saw a man who looked "almost like a shadow." They realized that it was a man fighting his own shadow. Haroun realised that the fight would be between the two armed of opposite dispositions: "Gup is bright and Chup is dark. Gup is warm and Chup is freezing cold. Gup is all chattering and noise, whereas Chup is silent as a shadow...a war between Love and Death."

- **Chapter 8: Shadow Warriors**

The Shadow Warrior they had come across began to utter some unintelligible words. Rashid explained that this was not unusual because those who did not use their voices for a long time lose control over it. The Warrior repeated the phrase "Murder, Spock Obi New Year." Rashid realized that his name was Mudra and that he spoke in the ancient Gesture Language of Abhinaya, which Rashid understood.

The Warrior was second in command to Khattam-Shud. However, he was already disgusted with the war and violence. Most Chupwalas now did not follow Khattam-Shud or worship Bezaban, instead they were living in fear. If Khattam-Shud was defeated, Chupwalas would be in favour of peace. Prince Bolo suggested that Batcheat,

a captive, was to be saved first. Haroun felt that it was not too late to save the Ocean. Haroun, Mali the Gardner, Butt the Hoopoe, Iff the Water Genie, and the Pentimaw Fishes moved towards the Old Zone. Water was extremely poisonous. They reached near a forest. Haroun jumped into the overgrown brush and made their way through it. However, they were captured.

- **Chapter 9: The Dark Ship**

In his captivity, Iff was ruminating over his inability to save the ocean from being poisoned: “We are the Guardians of the Ocean, and we didn’t guard it...The oldest stories ever made...We let them rot, we abandoned them...We lost touch with our beginnings.” As they moved forward, they saw a wall of night in front of them. It was found to be the hull of a big ship. Haroun tried to describe it, but he could manage only “ark, ark.” Many of the Chupwala guards unscrewed the head of Butt the Hoopoe and took out a black circuit box.

On the deck of the ship they found cauldrons full of poison. Everything on the deck looked like shadows. Suddenly they met a character, “skinny, scrawny, measly, weaselly, snivelling clerical type” (75). It was the Cultmaster of Bezaban, Khattam-Shud. Khattam-Shud tossed Butt, the Hoopoe’s circuit box in the air. He told them that he would take it apart and then explained the Processes 2 Complicated 2 Explain. Haroun realized that Khattam-Shud looked just like Mr. Sengupta, the man who stole his mother. Khattam-Shud then changed his shape into a giant hundred-foot tall monster with a hundred heads and arms. He took them all into the ship.

- **Chapter 10: Haroun’s Wish**

The ship’s hull emitted nothing but darkness. It was filled with machines “Far Too Complicated To Describe.” The Cultmaster told them that the purpose of installing the machines was to ruin the stories of the Sea. Each story must be ruined in a different way. Haroun asked him why he hated stories since they were so fun. The Cultmaster replied, “The world...is not for Fun...the world is for Controlling.”

The Cultmaster then showed them the Plug that would bottle up the wellspring of stories at the bottom of the Sea. A generator in the middle of the hull would produce the electricity needed for all of the ship’s operations. Suddenly, a web of “bizarre rooty tendrils” entered the ship through one of the portholes. A purple flower appeared and Haroun rejoiced that Mali had avoided capture and made his way to the ship.

Haroun knew it well that it was his turn to do his part. He pulled the Bite-a-Lite from under his tongue and bit it. Bright light came out, blinding the Chupwala guards. Haroun put on a protective wet suit, grabbed Butt the Hoopoe's brain box from Khattam-Shud, and dived into the Sea. He saw the Plug being constructed. As he sank lower, he saw the Source of Stores, a giant hole in the seabed. It looked like a fountain of shining light. Haroun realized that "if he could prevent the Source from being Plugged, everything would eventually be all right again" (82).

Haroun tried to put the brain box of the Hoopoe back inside. Hoopoe started working properly. Haroun drank a vial of Wishwater that Iff had given him earlier. He wished that Kahani would once again spin on its axis in a normal way. Suddenly the moon began to spin quickly, and a great wash of sunlight poured over the land. All of the Chupwala guards began to fade away.

Haroun went back to the ship as it started to dissolve, and found Mali and Iff hung over a cauldron of poison. The rope broke and they fell in, but the poison itself had been hardened by the sunlight and they remained unharmed. They went back to Butt the Hoopoe, but his blown fuse did not allow him to take them back. Mali began to push and just as he ran out of energy, Goopy and Bagha, the Plentimaw, Fishes appeared and began to tow them towards the battle between General Kitab and the real Khattam-Shud.

- **Chapter 11: Princess Batcheat**

Everything that happened during the war was told by the narrator of the story. The soldiers were issued nosewarmers as the weather was chilly. Bright coloured helmets were worn by The Guppees. The helmets blinded their enemies. At that moment, the moon of Kahani began to spin. The ground shook and the houses and fortresses of Chup began to fall. The great statue of Bezaban fell. Khattam-Shud ran out from his hiding place and The head of the statue fell on Khattam-Shud and crushed him to death.

Peace was declared. Mudra became the leader of Chup and became an official interpreter and ambassador between the two lands. Haroun arrived with his friends and everyone was reunited. Iff was promoted to Chief Water Genie and personally turned on Rashid's story water supply. Mali was named Head Floating Gardner and the Plentimaw Fishes were given charge of cleaning up the Sea. Batcheat and Bolo were married in a large ceremony.

- **Chapter 12: Was It the Walrus?**

Everyone was waiting for a happy ending. But Walrus told him that happy ending was rare both in stories and in real life. Haroun wished his sad city should have a happy ending. Both Haroun and Rashid boarded on Butt, the Hoopoe as it was time to go back. It was a journey through time and space. They were back to Arabian Nights Plus One. Haroun found a small envelope signed by his friends inviting him to visit Kahani whenever he wanted. A worried Haroun found his father on the stage facing the crowd with his tale of Haroun and the Sea of Stories. Rashid retold the entire story of Haroun's journey to Kahani. Rashid and Haroun later were back.

As they arrived home, Miss Oneeta greeted them with happy news. She opened the door of their apartment and Haroun found his mother standing there. She told them that she had made a mistake by going with the measly, weasly Mr Sengupta. Mr Sengupta was the "Khattam-Shud." Next morning when Haroun woke up, he found in his room new clothes and a new clock. He remembered it was his birthday. On the other side of the house, Haroun heard his mother singing.

➤ **Activities:**

- Prepare a list of the characters. Is it possible for you to arrange them under two heads: good characters and bad characters?
- Is it possible for you to map the territories mentioned in the narrative? Try to draw a map charting the journey of Haroun and his father?
- Comment on the unique names Rushdie has given to his characters.
- Will you connect the theme of gagging the story-telling mouth with any real life incident in Rushdie's life?
- What elements of 'fable' do you find in the story of the novel? What strategies of de-familiarising places and people have been adopted in the narrative? List these strategies and discuss them while analysing Rushdie's style.
- Critically analyse the epigraph, giving importance to important words and phrases.
- Elaborate the points that will help you answering questions on the title of the novel.

(Hints: Who is Haroun and what is his functional role? What is 'the sea of stories'? How is this connected with Haroun? What happens to the 'sea of stories'? How is the crisis solved? What is the importance of the restoration of the order?)

3.3.3. Critical Issues

Now that you have the summary of the text, you need to read through the complete work and then try to understand the key critical issues in Rushdie's work. The following are some of the areas that we have identified and discussed for you:

✓ *Haroun and the Sea of Stories as a children's story*

One who reads *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* for first time might identify the novel as belonging to the genre of children's literature. On a closer reading, however, one might come across enough evidence to suggest that it is a narrative meant for the grown-ups as well.

Yes, it reads like a children's story, but it is more than a children's story. Underneath its fabular structure, lies the real-life experience of the author himself. It raises issues related to censorship, role of power, fight for free speech and so on. Hence, all these issues are very much relevant now and hence we should explore how Rushdie represents these under the garb of a novel meant for children.

This novel, as we know, was written for his son Zafar. Rushdie planned to create a world of fantasy where the child protagonist will encounter bad guys in an 'evil' land to recover the a lost, much coveted, possession. This possession is the skill to weave stories. Haroun as a young protagonist leaves his country and is sucked into exciting adventures. This element of adventure is a staple component of children's stories. The young readers derive pleasure out of their engagement with the protagonist and his experience. The creation of the land of Gup and that of Chup is a very innovative device. It quietly inserts the 'good versus bad' motif into the plot. (Dear students, think of the descriptions of the two lands, their inhabitants and the nature of their activities, the use of the ship and various machines to plug the source of the stories. Use all these here). The narrative invites the young readers to participate in the world of imaginary lands and fantastic creatures. They feel at one with Haroun and his cause.

Family as a space of love and security plays an important role in children's stories. Lack of filial love and absence of peace in the family is seriously rued. Evil elements often cause rupture in relations between members of family. Such ruptures are addressed and actions are taken against the evil-doers. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is no exception. The author underlines the family values right from the beginning. Thus it is heart-wrenching when Haroun's father is seen weeping bitterly soon after the departure

of his mother. The character of Mr. Sengupta is identified as evil and he is made synonymous with Khattam-Shud, the ultimate evil. Haroun who acts as a young hero to retain family honour and his father's precious possession develops as a fine, courageous child. This catches the imagination of young adventurous readers.

The concept of 'home' versus 'homelessness' is thus an important issue in the text and the tilt is inevitably towards the maintenance of 'homely' environment and maintenance of 'homely' values. The need for shelter, protection and creation of peace and tranquility for the practice of creativity has been foregrounded all through the text. The primary presentation of 'home' as a sweet, soothing environment gets distorted soon after the elopement of Soraya. Soraya herself has been in dilemma over whether or not to leave her home. She finds Mr Sengupta more practical and reasonable than Rashid Khalifa, her husband, a pursuer of imagination and "pleasure" in creativity. This 'homelessness' within home provokes Soraya to leave the family. A note of filial love can easily be traced in the letter left by Soraya : "Tell Haroun I love him, but I can't help it, I have to do this now." At the end of the story she comes back home. It is in fact Soraya who finds her way back home. Home, temporarily disturbed, is thus restored to Haroun and his parents. As a children's text this completion of the circular journey is necessary. Rushdie observes that the "story simply willed a happy ending" (qtd. in Teverson 245 n11). Initially he was not in favour of conforming to the conventions of children's literature for a happy ending but was 'suddenly struck' by the feeling that he "couldn't impose this modern sensibility on a story which was demanding a happy ending" (qtd. in Teverson 245-6 n11).

Interested readers should also read Rushdie's another story meant for the children — *Luka and the Fire of Life*. It was published twenty years after the publication of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. And this time it was dedicated to his younger son Milan.

✓ *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as a Subversive Text

As we have mentioned above, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is more than a children's story. The assault on the fountain of stories is in fact an assault on the creative imagination of creative writers and, by extension, of the intellectuals. These people go by their own rules and this is interpreted as an act of defiance and even as an attack on the people in power. People in positions of authority, be they political or religious leaders, are psychologically very insecure. They see threat perceptions everywhere. Even creative writers critical of establishments are considered as sources of danger as the 'pen' is viewed as mightier than the 'swords.' They are supposed to be capable of rousing

people against oppressive regimes and sensitising people to the possibilities of emergence of fascism. Hence 'censorship' comes handy as a tool for gagging voices. The people in power have thus recourse to various forms of exercise of power like overt coercion, threats to life, issue of fatwa and even legislation. Rushdie himself faced such a situation. (This has been mentioned earlier and you may use the facts here). Rushdie observes, "When intellectuals and artists withdraw from the fray, politicians feel safer... Passivity always serves the interests of the status quo, of the people already at the top of the heap" (qtd. in Teverson 14). He devises a story, apparently meant for children, which will underline the danger.

Kathryn Hume feels that a 'de-centred, culturally hybridised' writer is in a better position to write in a politically and ethically meaningful way. In respect of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, she observes that Rushdie shifts to a reader-centred approach. This approach implies that art "can have some equivalence to political action" directed towards a "defiance of the fact-choked simplicities or ideological dictates imposed by tyrants" (Teverson 213-4). This defiance of the norms of the Establishment can be transferred to the readers who can then be part of a greater alliance against the tyrants.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories is in fact a kind of allegory that represents Rushdie's own time and situation. Andrew Teverson points out that it represents "the conflict between a pluralist and tolerant society and a monolithic and intolerant political order" (166). He describes the Gupees as "a wonderfully various community of talkative creatures" who are pitted against Khatam-Shud, a "monomaniac cartoon villain" (166). Khatam-Shud obviously represents the authority bent on destroying stories. He is afraid of stories and hence tries to plug the very source of stories and strangle the voice of those who practise story-telling. There is hardly any difficulty to understand that Khatam-Shud is an allegorical representation of a real-life figure. The whole set-up in the text presents the struggle between the repressive regime and the freedom-loving members of the society. The novel is thus a response to a question that Haroun asks his father: "What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" It is a story that is both a product of imagination and simultaneously 'true.'

✓ **Style of *Haroun and a Sea of Stories***

A close reading of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* will necessarily raise the question if it can be read as a post-modernist text. It is written in a non-realist style and depends on the linguistic plays like names and places echoing their counterpart in reality. Characters and places carry a sense of excess and they appear grossly exaggerated. They have in fact de-familiarised forms. The effect is that they appear comical. Rushdie's

style often depends on echoes and is often serio-comical. The name of the country Alifbay insinuates the world of Urdu alphabets. In Urdu, the first two letters of the Urdu alphabet are 'alif' and 'be.' One catches unmistakable echoes in the name of the city. Dull Lake too, as you can recognise, refers to the famous Dal Lake in Kashmir, giving it a negative twist. Such twisting echoes the original and the same time superimposes unfamiliar qualities. Similarly, characters like Batcheat echoes its Hindi counterpart which means animated discussion. The two names Goopy and Bagha, two Plentimaw fishes, have been taken from Satyajit Ray's famous Bengali film *Gupi Gayen Bagha Bayen*. These two names are used intertextually. (Consult any dictionary of literary terms and find out what the term 'intertextuality' means).

A significant feature of the novel is indeed its use of intertextuality. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* has 'spectacularly complex webs of cross-cultural allusions' (Teverson 168). It draws upon 'a range on narrative pre-texts, including European, Middle Eastern and Indian fairy tale, pop music lyrics, English children's classics, Indian cinema, Persian poetry, political allegory and science fiction' (Teverson 168). This intertextuality gives the text a wider reach and richer effect. The echoes sound throughout the novel, lending it multilocal and multicultural dimensions.' As one reads the text, one continues to draw parallels with other situations or articulations or characters. In short, parallelism with other social texts and contexts continues.

There is a continuous blending of the magical elements and the real life experiences in the narrative of the text. Rushdie uses 'magic realism' in an effective way. (Consult a dictionary of literary terms to find out information regarding 'magic realism'). Haroun's journey to the magical world and his return home along with his father's story telling capacity is a brilliant example of magic realism in the novel. Rashid's argument that all stories come from the Ocean of stories is more magical than real. But the way the process of creation of stories is described creates a temporary sense of realism. Again in the houseboat over the Dull Lake when Haroun wakes up and finds a figure that looks like an "outsized onion for a head and outsized aubergines for legs." Rushdie's presentation of magic-realism renders the novel appealing both to the children and the grown-ups.

3.3.4. Summing Up

Creation of a make-belief world through the use of fantasy and magic-realism in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* cannot be well appreciated in a single reading. The more we read

the text, the more we come to realise the new layers of signification. Reading our discussion of the text, you must have understood how Rushdie represents the power dynamics. Apparently a children's narrative, the novel underscores the need for resistance to the show of power from tyrannic forces. Interestingly, there is hardly any space for women in the novel. The women are either snubbed or suppressed. Soraya and Mrs Sengupta are only marginal characters. Yet you may explore this aspect in the novel. Similarly, an eco-critical reading of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is also possible. Such readings will similarly be engaging and relevant in our present time. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is really a brilliant novel. It is a caricature of our time carried out in an inimitable style. We do not miss the sense of humour and satire. You will certainly enjoy reading the novel, if you have not already done so.

3.3.5. Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type questions (20 marks)

1. Discuss *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as belonging to the genre of children's literature.
2. Would you consider *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as a magic realistic text? Substantiate your view.
3. Write an essay on the Rushdie's style as evident from your reading of the text.
4. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* there is a conflict between freedom of speech and forced censorship. Discuss.
5. The eternal conflict between good and evil is the core issue in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Discuss.
6. Analyse *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as a subversive text.

Mid-length Answer Type Questions (12 marks)

1. How does the novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* end? Comment on its appropriateness.
2. Comment on the title of the novel.
3. Explain how Rushdie describes the mechanism established by Khattam-Shud to plug the source of all stories in the sea.
4. What functional role does the epigraph of the novel play? Explain.

5. Explain why Rushdie establishes affinities between Mr. Sengupta and Khattam-shud.

Short questions (6 marks)

1. What is Alifbay? Describe in brief the locale of the “sad city.”
2. Who is Soraya and what role does she play in the action of the novel?
3. Would you consider Rashid a “juggler”? Substantiate your view.
4. Who is Mr Sengupta and what role does he play in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*?
5. How does Haroun react to the news of his mother’s elopement with MrSengupta?
6. Give a brief description of the ‘Town of G.’ What happened here?
7. Who was the driver of the Mail Coach? How did he drive the mail and what happened to the passengers?
8. What were the ‘strange warnings’ Haroun encounter in the bus depot? What message did Haroun receive from those ‘warnings’?
9. How did Rashid Khalifa lose his power of storytelling? What happened to him then?
10. Who is Khattam-shud and what role does he play in the novel?
11. Make a brief description of the Dull Lake? Where did Haroun and Rashid stay as they arrived near Dull Lake?
12. Name the houseboat on the Dull Lake. What symbolic significance do you get in the name?
13. What is ‘A P2C2E’? Explain in brief.
14. What role does the hoopoe bird play in the novel? What purpose does it serve?
15. Who are the ‘Gupeees’ and the ‘Chupwalas’? What role do they play in the novel?
16. ‘You mean a Floating Garden’ – What Floating Garden is referred to in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*? What happened there?
17. Who is King Chattergy? What does he do in Gup City?

18. Who is Prince Bolo? What does he do to save Batcheat?
19. Who is the 'spy' and what does he reveal later?

3.3.7. Suggested Reading

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Module-4 : Drama, Short Story and Non-Fiction

Unit - 1 □ Mahesh Dattani: *Tara*

- 4.1.0: Introduction
- 4.1.1: Syllabising Indian Drama
- 4.1.2: Mahesh Dattani: A Bio-brief
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4.1.0. Introduction

Dear Students, you have to study *Tara*, a play written by Mahesh Dattani, who is a very important playwright of our times. Despite the fact that quite a good number of playwrights are writing in India today, Dattani cannot be clubbed together with them. This is because, first, he is a playwright who writes plays exclusively in English. Besides, his plays, and in particular, the language of his plays, resist translation to a great extent. This is because of his comfort level with English. He effortlessly handles the English of ordinary spoken conversation in Indian spaces. However, it is important to study Dattani in the context of an obscure tradition of Indian English Drama. This tradition is obscure on account of its long absence in the grand canon of Indian English writing. Let us attempt to read Mahesh Dattani's contribution to Indian English drama by interrogating that absence.

4.1.1. Syllabising Indian Drama

Till only recently, literature departments across universities in India conveniently avoided the inclusion of Indian English play-texts in the syllabi of undergraduate or postgraduate programmes on the grounds of their being not literary enough. Most of the play texts that were included were translated from regional languages such as Marathi or Bangla, either translated by the authors themselves such as Tagore, or by others. These texts were conveniently passed off as plays belonging to the grand literary canon of Indian drama. This attitude, however, was quite contrary to the treatment meted out to poetry and fiction, most of which were original compositions in English. The reasons for Indian English drama not receiving its due status were many.

The first reason was purely commercial. Western publishers were primarily interested in publishing fiction and poetry written by Indian authors. Besides, writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and G. V. Desani, in order to cater to the tastes of “dual readership”, either chose to get their novels published from abroad or got veterans such as E. M. Forster, Graham Greene or Anthony Burgess, to pen prefaces or recommendations for themselves. The same privilege was not enjoyed by drama written in English by Indian authors. The second reason for the marginality of drama in the canon of Indian writing in English perhaps lay in its reach. The first drama in the English language, *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta*, was scripted by Baboo Krishna Mohan Banerjea in 1831. Such plays were, however, branded as morose, lifeless, passive, having no entertainment value and theatricality. They were at best treated as literary fantasies by the playwrights who attempted to emulate the textual drama of British/Western authors. The language of these plays was allegedly artificial, as English was never the medium of spontaneous communication in the Indian public or private sphere.

Hence drama, the essence of which lies in its natural communicative medium, would not patronize such artificiality in its scripted dialogue. Such a dialogue aimed at emulating the language of Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama. However, the themes of such plays were inseparable from the socio-political matrix of the then India. Banerjea’s play *The Persecuted* was based on the events related to the Bengal Renaissance and Raja Rammohan Roy’s objective of rescuing India from the darkness of superstition, blind faith, religious dogmatism, and of the unprecedented political chaos of the time. Another play, written two decades later, *Is This Civilization?* by Michel Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), too, was based on the same objectives, although this play is more

known as a translated play than an original English composition. Dutt, however, has a play originally composed in English called *Rizia: Empress of Inde: A Dramatic Fragment* (1860). After this, we have the likes of Sri Aurobindo, who wrote between 1890 and 1920, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya who wrote between 1918 and 1950, A.S. Panchapakesa Aiyer who wrote between 1913 and 1942, T. P. Kailasam who wrote between 1930 and 1945, and many others. They followed the trend of writing drama in English, irrespective of their commercial prospects and production quotients. Most of the plays written by these playwrights were not plays proper; they were rather dramatized debates on the burning issues of the day and on the new ideas introduced by Western education. A catalogue of plays written originally in English by the above playwrights is available in Krishna S. Bhatta's book *Indian Drama in English* and *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English* edited by M. K. Naik.

➤ **Activities:**

- Do you think that Mahesh Dattani can be clubbed together with other playwrights writing now in English? Think of the reasons for your answer.
- Consult any authentic book on Indian English literature and make a list of early Indian English playwrights.
- Make a list of Indian English playwrights contemporary to Dattani.
- Students may read Lakshmi Chandra's introductory chapter titled The History of Indian Drama in English in *Lights On : Indian Plays in English*, Volume 1, published by Orient Black Swan.

4.1.2. Mahesh Dattani: A Bio-brief

Mahesh Dattani, in his recently published book *Me and My Plays* (2014), fondly recalls his first date with theatre as a child in Bangalore. The architecture of Town Hall in the city with its majestic columns and arches mesmerized the nine-year-old Mahesh as he gradually soaked up the atmosphere of the auditorium, and the world of the play. A willing suspension of disbelief, as you can imagine, did the trick. The child almost believed in the fiction of a gun-shot targeted at a man seated in the front row. Much later, Dattani came to know that the play he had watched that day was an acclaimed Gujrati play by Madhu Rye. *Me and My Plays* narrates similar fond memories of Mahesh Dattani and his journey towards becoming a playwright. If you read this book, you will come to know several such incidents about Dattani the man and the playwright.

Born in Bangalore in 1958 of Gujarati parents, Dattani took a keen interest in theatre right from early childhood when his parents had once taken him to watch this Gujarati play. When in college, Dattani actively engaged himself in theatrical productions, participating in workshops, and finally ending up directing a Woody Allen play called *God!* When he founded Playpen, his own theatre company, he took it up as a mission to produce Indian plays in English. The English which Dattani wished to use as his medium of theatre was the English spoken in the urban metropolis of India. This is the English he had grown up with, a hybrid language with overtones of Indianisms, a spontaneously spoken language, understood in an uninhibited way in urban India. In an interview Mahesh Dattani fondly recollects how the culture of the convent in the Indian metropolis shaped his linguistic idiosyncrasy. At the Christian institution Baldwin, the day began by the singing of hymns in the chapel during the morning assembly. As Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri notes, “[t]he medium of communication was strictly English and speaking in the vernacular in school was frowned upon” (16). Chaudhuri goes on to quote Dattani who recollects how “unpleasant distinctions were made between the ‘vernies’ and the ones who were fluent in English. Snob values were inculcated early on and you generally were made to feel privileged to belong to that school” (16).

The above biographical reference might provide vital clues in gauging the audience of the theatre that he was about to create in due course of time. This is a theatre which employs the medium of English to confront a wide range of issues such as marriage, gender and sexuality, incest and child abuse, religious tensions in post-independence India, A.I.D.S, and explores a whole range of human relationships in the matrix of urban India. However, it must be remembered that his audience has been limited. Chaudhuri clarifies this point when she observes:

Given his chosen medium of expression, the language of his plays obviously restricts a wider, more expansive, grassroots audience in India. That is not exactly the kind of audience that he is looking for, in any case, as he claims that he writes for the urban Indian upper and middle class audience and not for the working class audience. (19)

In a talk delivered in February 2001, Dattani, frankly introspecting upon a question which he had asked himself, “Why do I do theatre? What is in it for me?” (Dattani, “Contemporary Indian Theatre” 469) explains:

[i]t becomes important to do the kind of theatre that means something to you personally and also to do the kind of theatre which engages you enough for you to relate to in the way I have spoken about. Only then is there the true synergy between the artist and audience. (Dattani, “Contemporary Indian Theatre” 470)

By the playwright's own admission, it becomes very clear that he was primarily writing plays which have their roots in the urban social space. The sites of the first performances of his plays were also in the cities. His first stage play *Where There's a Will* was first performed by the playwright's own company called Playpen at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on September 23, 1988, as part of the Deccan Herald Festival. It is important to note that the site of first performance of the play happens to be Bangalore, a metropolitan city by its own right, with a fairly large number of non-native English speakers. His second play *Dance Like a Man* was similarly first performed at the same site in the following year on 22 September, as part of the same festival hosted by the same major print-media house, *The Deccan Herald*. The next play *Twinkle Tara* was first performed by the same company and at the same site on 23 October 1990. *Bravely Fought the Queen* was first performed at Sophia Bhabha Hall in Mumbai on 2 August 1991, directed by the playwright himself. *Final Solutions*, Dattani's next play was performed for the first time in Bangalore again at the Guru Nanak Bhavan on 10 July 1993. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* was performed for the first time in Mumbai again at the Tata Theatre on 23 November 1998. *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, which was initially composed as a radio play, and broadcast by the BBC Radio on 9 January 1999, was first performed on the stage on 6 August 1999, at the Museum Theatre, Chennai. The next two plays – *The Swami and Winston* and *Tale of the Mother Feeding Her Child* – were also radio plays, both broadcast by the BBC Radio in 2000. The next play *Thirty Days in September* (2001) was commissioned by an N.G.O called R.A.H.I committed to the rehabilitation of children suffering from the trauma of child abuse and incest. It was performed for the first time in Mumbai in 2001. Among his recently written plays, *Brief Candle* was first performed on 5 July 2009 at Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai, by Prime Time Theatre Company, *The Girl Who Touched the Stars*, a radio play, was first broadcast on 6 March 2007 on BBC Radio 4. Moreover, the theatre groups and institutions with which Dattani has always been associated since the beginning of his career as playwright, are all based in Bangalore, be it Playpen or the National Institute for Advanced Study, Bangalore.

➤ **Activities:**

- Gather some more information regarding Dattani's book *Me and My Plays*.
- Write a biographical profile of Dattani, including all the works he was ascribed with.
- Imagine the kind of audience attending the performances of Dattani's plays and write a few lines on them.

4.1.3. Introduction to the Text

Let us open this section with an interesting anecdote on how *Tara* initially was almost a jinxed play. It is narrated by Mahesh Dattani himself in *Me and My Plays*. Once in Mumbai when Alyque Padamsee (popularly known as God in advertising circles) and his wife Sharon invited Dattani and his production troupe of *Dance Like a Man* to dinner at their home near Sophia Auditorium, Alyque wanted to know what he was working on next.

I told him it was a play with a bizarre plot involving conjoined twins and their emotional separation over the years. He loved the concept and asked me to send him the first draft by post – this was, after all, the pre-Internet era of the late 1980s... I called the play ‘Twinkle Tara’ and did a production of my own in Bangalore for the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. It was a huge success. (Dattani, *Me and My Plays* 27-28)

When however, Alyque chose to direct it, he removed “Twinkle” from the title and called it just “Tara.” And then, as Dattani nostalgically recollects how *Tara* almost earned the jinxed tag for itself:

In the theatre, many people, especially the English, consider *Macbeth* to be a jinxed play and call it ‘the Scottish play’ lest the mention of the play bring bad luck. Many laugh it off. But with *Tara* I can aver with proof that it was indeed jinxed – or at least Alyque’s production was. The first calamity was that Alyque fell off the stage during the technical rehearsal and had to be rushed to the hospital. He had broken an arm. A car ran over producer Raell Padamsee’s foot and she ended up with a good part of her leg in a cast. If both the producer and the director with limbs in casts did not seem calamitous enough, something more tragic happened. Pratap Roy, a fine stage actor who was playing Dr Thakkar in the play, died of a heart attack soon after the third performance. It just was too scary. (28-29)

Dattani then goes on to suggest that perhaps the severed “Twinkle” from the title may have been the cause of the jinx. However, it was the Alyque Padamsee production of *Tara* which established Mahesh Dattani as a playwright with promise in the eye of the national media, as Dattani fondly recollects.

4.1.4. General Summary of the Play

By now you already know that *Tara*, a two act play, tells the story of a conjoined twin, a boy, Chandan, and a girl, Tara. They are surgically separated in an unequal manner intended to favour the boy. However, it turns out that the surgical procedure that separates Chandan and Tara was preferential to Chandan both physiologically as well as symbolically. It is revealed later in the play that on account of a consciously taken decision by Mrs Patel and her father (the twin's grandfather), a limb that originally and organically belonged to the girl child, was unethically surgically removed and 'gifted' to the male child Chandan. The decision boomerangs as the body of the child rejects the implanted limb, and it has to be ultimately amputated. Chandan suffers from a terrible guilt over Tara's disadvantaged life and early death due to kidney failure. He migrates from India, his native land, to England, where he attempts to begin life anew, repressing memories of his personal history. He changes his name to the Westernized "Dan." Dattani's play is intended to portray the struggle of an ancient Eastern civilization attempting to conform to modern, Western values. There seems to be a mismatch between the historically subordinate role of women in traditional Indian society and India's ambitions of emerging as a major global power. India has one-billion-plus population and has already achieved some technological advancement. Cultural traditions that place far lower value on female life than on that of a male become the objects of attack in *Tara*. The emotional bond that exists between Chandan and Tara refreshingly brings humour to this otherwise grave modern tragedy. Chandan notes, "The way we started in life. Two lives and one body in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out – and separated."

➤ **Activities:**

- Go through the play and decide which title – "Twinkle Tara" or "Tara" – seems to be more appropriate.
- What do you mean by a 'conjoined twin'? Do a little bit of research on the physical physiognomical and mental conditions of a conjoined twin.
- Reflect on why Dattani employs the problem of conjoined twin (a boy and a girl) at the centre of the plot of the play.

4.1.5. Act-Wise Summary with Critical Comments

● **ACT -I**

If you carefully read the first soliloquy of Dan, with which the play begins, you will discover a unique meta-theatrical scheme carefully and subtly introduced by the

playwright. You may wonder what meta-theatre means. You must have come across the word “metafiction” in studies on works of fiction such as Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* or Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. In these works, the narrators seem to be consciously aware of their acts of narration, time and again referring to the art of story-telling or narrative schemes employed in the art of making fictions. Frequently such narrators relapse into a dialogue with the intended reader and in the process break the spell of the world of fiction, the “willing suspension of disbelief.” This is what is popularly known as the metafictional tendency in fiction, a fiction about the art of making fiction. Dattani, the playwright uses a similar teaser, making Chandan or Dan, the aged protagonist of the play a playwright in the act of crafting an Indian English play called “Twinkle Tara,” “a drama in two acts by Chandan Patel.” Ironically, he seems to be aware of the sardonic snipes generally aimed at Indian English writing in the 1990s, especially in India. Hence, like most authors, he has moved abroad and is desperate to grab the attention of “the average Western intellectual”, as “back home, of course, Indo-Anglian literature isn’t worth toilet paper.”

To come back to the soliloquy, Dan confesses that he is angry, angry with the world, with his family and the social institutions that have perpetrated a raw deal to both him and his twin sister Tara. He confesses that his chief objective of writing the play is “to masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger” (Dattani, *CP Vol 1* 324). Besides, he makes an attempt through the proposed play to retrieve repressed memories and the guilt pertaining to his “separation” from his conjoined twin sister Tara. Thus, Dattani’s *Tara* is primarily a memory-play.

After the short soliloquy, the action shifts from the realistic stage level to the next level of action on the ground level of the stage. This second level is, as pointed out earlier, is the Patels’ living room. The archive of Dan’s memory which churns the action of the play forward vacillates primarily between two spaces – the living room of the Patels after the eventful surgery that separates the conjoined twins, and the clinic of Dr Thakkar, in which a ‘conspiracy’ is played out. This ‘conspiracy’ is gradually revealed in a typical ‘whodunnit’ manner as the play progresses. To remind readers once again, the Chandan-Tara relationship which you encounter in the first act is actually after the eventful surgery. The memory-narrative of this Act therefore clings on to and vacillates between two distinct time-frames, one before the surgery and the other after. Seemingly after the surgery, Chandan and Tara are shown as grown-up siblings, both walking with limps on different legs. As the lights cross-fade to their living room, they are shown playing a game of cards. It appears that they share a very close bonding. Mr Patel, the

sibling's father, insists on Chandan accompanying him to office while Chandan prefers to stay back, preferring Tara instead of himself for the job, as he feels, "She'll make a great business woman" (328). Patel however makes it quite clear that Tara is not wanted there and that it is Chandan who ought to join work. Dattani subtly hints at 'sexual politics' at work here in Patel's insistence on the suitability of the male offspring taking over the reins of work, and not the girl child. Tara, slightly hurt at her father bias, sarcastically comments, "The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave." Chandan complements her saying, "I haven't decided yet...I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle" (328). Bharati Patel, their mother, on occasions, hints at a medical impairment in Tara for which she has been losing weight drastically, as had been observed by her doctor at the clinic that morning. Patel at the same time refers to a certain clinical "progress," assessed by the doctors after the eventful surgery, that was about to be mentioned in a medical journal. It is important, dear students, to note here that both Chandan and Tara are conscious of themselves as having been subjected to, first, a clinical and, then, a surgical case study, involving the three basic units of a scientific experiment – observation, experiment and inference – in a laboratory. Chandan scripts a mock-interview in his play. This interview involving a dialogue between Dr Thakkar and Dan provides the graphic details of a surgery conducted in the past, "a most unique and complex surgery, the first of its kind in India" (333). The following extract from the text may be studied closely:

DR THAKKAR. To start with, the patients were only a few months old and....

DAN. How old were they exactly?

DR THAKKAR. Oh, three months.

DAN (mock surprised). Three months? Was the surgery really necessary?

DR THAKKAR. Yes, absolutely. Surgery was their only chance of survival. You see, they were twins, conjoined twins, conjoined from the chest down.

DAN. Siamese twins?

DR THAKKAR. Yes. That is the common term used for them.

DAN. Is it a rare phenomenon?

...

DR THAKKAR. Conjoined twins are quite rare. I think one in every fifty thousand twin conceptions could have a probability of containing this...defect. (331)

The conversation gears up to provide further medical details on how the conjoinment of two different fertilized eggs may develop into a conjoined twin, the conjoinment forming from the breastbone down through the pelvic area. Moreover, when asked about the special case of the Patel twin, the conversation exposes Dr Thakkar's marvel at the discovery that, contrary to the general convention, that conjoined twins developing from one fertilized ovum are invariably of the same sex, here was a special case for a new entry in the annals of medical literature. The twins were of different sexes, a very rare case, as pointed out by Dr Thakkar, resulting from not one, but two different fertilized eggs.

As the narrative of the play jumps back to the past, it appears from the conversation between Mr Patel and his wife Bharati, that Tara's physical condition has worsened following a kidney disorder, and that the family is in desperate search for a donor. It is important to remember here in the light of Dr Thakkar's observations that each of the twins had been sharing one kidney each since their separation. Apart from the kidneys, the twins did not share any other vital organ as revealed by the X Ray reports and scan results. But in order to maintain the suspense in the plot, Dr Thakkar's revelation in this scene is cut short. He only hints at the revelation of more details on the pelvic region of the conjoined twins and the "extent of conjoinment there." After this the stage lights cross-fade to the Patel living room. More scattered hints are thrown in here and there in this scene on Bharati's desire to reveal some other secret to Tara, to which her husband Patel objects:

BHARATI. All right! You want me to be all right? Yes, I will do it.

PATEL. Good. I will call him (the doctor) right now.

BHARATI. I will tell her.

Patel stops.

I will tell them everything.

Patel goes to her and slaps her. The moment she recovers, Bharati looks at him with some triumph.

PATEL. You wouldn't dare tell them. Not you. Please don't! Not yet!

BHARATI. Then let me do what I want to do.

PATEL. (defeated). You cannot tell them. For their sake, don't! (*Looks at her suddenly with determination.*) If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you. (345)

A dark secret seems to haunt the Patel couple, which Dan the playwright gradually reveals in retrospect, as he scripts his play, a secret about Tara. The content of the secret, though not revealed completely, finds a parallel in an apparently insignificant comment made by Roopa, a neighbour. She makes a snipe at the Patels' obsession with milk, when it came to feeding girl-children. In other words, the Patels were so passionately patriarchal that they disowned new-born girl-children by drowning them to death in milk. Students are advised to note the following conversation between Chandan, Roopa and Tara in Act I:

ROOPA. Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies – you know dowry and things like that – so they used to drown them in milk....so that when people asked about how the baby died, they could say that she choked while drinking her milk. (349)

Roopa's taunts at the Patel tradition must be read as being wound up with serious gender-related questions which Dattani poses through the play. These are the questions that may be considered to be archaic or medieval in modern urban India theoretically, but in praxis the domestic spaces of urban India even today are infested with such prejudiced gender practices. Dattani regulates his calibrated snipe at such attitudes relentlessly in this play. A little later when Chandan is shown to be helping his mother with knitting, Mr Patel does not miss the opportunity to snub at his wife for teaching Chandan how to knit. He bursts out at his son first: "Chandan, leave that damn thing alone!" (351), and then targets his wife: "But you can think of turning him into a sissy –teaching him to knit!" (351).

• ACT II

This act is primarily an *anagnorisis* for the spectator. Those of you who are acquainted with Aristotle's *Poetics* must have come across this term in his assessment of a play. This a revelatory act in which Dan, as the writer of his play, reveals the truth about himself and Tara, and primarily about the culmination of the medical experiment of Dr Thakkar. The revelations unfold through a narration of certain factual details about the complications involving the separation of the twins:

DR THAKKAR. Complications were expected. Our team of doctors were aware of that. The pelvic region, as I had mentioned before, was a problem. There was only one bladder and it belonged to the boy. So did the rectum. We would have to have an artificial one made for the girl.

Later on, when she grows up, we can fashion one from her intestinal tissues. And the boy's lungs aren't fully developed. However, considering the magnitude of the work involved, this was a minor detail. The prognosis, on the whole, was favourable to both. Nature had done a near-complete job. (356)

Ironically however, Dan reveals immediately before the above speech, "Poor Tara. Even nature gave her a raw deal" (356). Dr Thakkar's assertion of nature's near-perfect job clearly contradicts both his and Dan's revelations, as readers/spectators are about to gather later. Dr Thakkar later reveals, "Our greatest challenge would be to keep the girl alive. Nature wanted to kill her. We couldn't allow it" (376). Tara however survived, despite the odds pitted against her. But one particular "oddity" stood out, as revealed by her father Mr Patel: "There were problems, you know them. But there was one complication which hadn't been discussed. There were three legs" (377). This oddity had to be negotiated by the Patel couple, and it is at this juncture that a decision is taken, on which the premise of the entire play stands.

Dear students, you are requested to carefully go through the final confession of Mr Patel which may be read as the *anagnorisis* of the play:

PATEL: A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. Your mother asked for a reconfirmation. The result was the same. The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive ...on the girl. Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr Thakkar. I wasn't asked to come. That same evening, your mother told me of her decision. Everything will be done as planned. Except – I couldn't believe what she told me – that they would risk giving both legs to the boy...Maybe if I had protested more strongly! I tried to reason with her that it wasn't right and that even the doctor would realize that it was unethical! The doctor had agreed, I was told. It was only later I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home – the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land – in the heart of the city – from the state. Your grandfather's political influence had been used. A few days later, the surgery was done. As planned by them, Chandan had two legs – for two days. It didn't take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have – might have – been Tara. Because of the unusual nature of the operation,

it was easy to pass it off as a natural rejection. I – I was meaning to tell you both when you were older, but... (378)

The revelation of Mrs Patel's decision favouring the boy-child at the cost of her daughter's complex physical condition thus forms the *anagnorisis* of Dattani's play Tara, after which the play proceeds towards its natural *telos* or ending, with Chandan gradually coming to terms with a tragedy, the memory of which he has unable to set aside, despite the death of his sister years later.

4.1.6. Analysis of the Text

✓ Stagecraft/Significance of the Multiple Stage-Levels:

The reading of a Dattani play can never be complete without a concerted study of the stage space. If we are on the look-out for a single word to describe Dattani's stagecraft or his use of stage space, we may opt for the word "cerebral." By splitting the stage space into multiple levels, he engages audience attention with a cerebral exploration of multiple spaces and time zones. The archives of history, memory continuously engage with the present within the spatiality of Dattani's stage. It generates an encounter of sorts, which become the ultimate food for theatre.

The stage is split into three levels. The lowest level that happens to be the major space of action actually represents the past recollected through memory, the memory of Dan or Chandan, the protagonist. This level represents the house of the Patels. On this level, the playwright has also reserved some space along the cyclorama in an L shape, for the representation of the "galli outside the Patels' house." In other words, it is the neighbourhood of the Patels, suggested by cross-lighting. The second level represents the present in which the aged Chandan at present, referred to as Dan, is on a bedsitter in a "seedy suburb of London," thousands of miles away from home, beside the writing table and a small bed in the foreground. There is typewriter on the table with a sheaf of papers. This is the only realistic level in which Dan is shown as relentlessly engaged in the act of typing notes as the play begins. The entire action of the play visually recreates the entries in Dan's relentlessly typed diary-pages. Students, you are requested to note the body-language of Dan in the play in the first scene itself. Here he is shown on one occasion to be limping as he walks across from his bedsitter to a cabinet to pour himself a drink. He seems to be suffering from some kind of disability, evident from his body-language. As you read the play, you would gain clarity on the action. The third level is a static level and is situated at a slightly higher position in which the character referred to as Dr Thakkar remains seated throughout the play. He is not a witness to the action

of the play, but his presence is overarching, as the playwright indicates in the stage directions.

➤ **Activities:**

1. Students reading Dattani for the first time may note that the playwright's genius lies in his fusion of stage spaces. He splits up the stage space in quite a number of plays such as *Final Solutions*, *Thirty Days in September* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Through such a theatrical trick, he simultaneously captures two or more time frames not just in stasis, but in action. Dialogues belonging to different spatialities effortlessly are juxtaposed for the cerebral engagement of the playgoer.

Read the plays mentioned above to have a glimpse of Dattani's art, almost in the manner of a cinematographer splitting up the screen to juxtapose two different time frames or spaces for visual effect.

4.1.7. Plot Function

From your reading of the above analysis of the two acts of the play, it is clear that Dattani primarily derives his effect from his treatment of information. In other words, the desired dramatic effect of the play largely arises out of the way Dattani manages the release and suppression of information, skilfully vacillating between time and space. This typical handling of plot almost resembles a whodunit narrative or a detective thriller. Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd in their book *Studying Plays* have called this method "actantial analysis." Commenting on the analysis of dramatic texts, they observe:

A useful conception here is that of actantial analysis. Deriving from a study of Russian folk tales, this model is especially relevant to quest narratives...Basically, the idea is that there are various functions to be fulfilled by the characters in order for the narrative to operate. For instance, there needs to be a hero (called the 'subject of the quest'), an object of the quest (what is being sought by the hero – may be a lost sister, or the answer to a question), a helper and an antagonist. Characters in a quest narrative can be seen as different sorts of 'actants', that is, as fulfilling these basic roles. Many dramatic texts are themselves quest narratives...An 'actantial analysis' of a dramatic script regards characters purely in their mutual relation to the quest – though this and the object of the quest may change. (28)

You may thus begin to use the same model of 'actantial analysis' to understand how

Dattani proceeds to dramatize Dan's quest. In the process, his quest becomes the reader's/spectator's quest.

➤ **Activities:**

Visualise the play in performance. Please remember that a 'playtext' is not designed to function in the same way as words in a novel or a poem. The text is designed to become a performance. So, your ability to visualise drama on the stage is the basis for all commentary and analysis. Therefore your 'reading' of the text of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* must be different from your reading of the text of a poem or a novel. Here is a selection of some typical tasks which might be useful for you in analysing and interpreting the play:

- Identify the principal dramatic effects used by Dattani to build up the plot, particularly his use of memory, flashbacks etc.
- How has Dattani used stage space in this play?
- Trace the evolution of the plot of the play leading to the resolution (*dénouement*). Also, consult Aristotle's definition of plot as recorded in the *Poetics*. Find out the meaning of 'anagnorisis.'
- Describe the events of the play as they might have been observed from the point of view of any other character apart from Chandan, for Dattani relies primarily upon the point of view of Chandan. You may imagine Tara's point of view or even Roopa's.
- Identify the point in the play which elicits an edge-of-the-seat kind of a response from the audience, in other words, a central climactic point where an audience is expected to experience the maximum amount of tension/suspense.
- Describe the relationship between Chandan and Tara. Why does Chandan wish to forget Tara at the end of the play?
- List the number the 'secrets' you come across in the play.

4.1.8. Critical Approaches to Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

A play at a very basic level assumes a certain amount of shared knowledge on the part of an audience. It is from this awareness that an audience detects its genre. Genre, as you all know is a word of Latin origin meaning 'kind', or a categorization. To fit a

work of art, a play or a film in this case, within the framework of a genre, amounts to identifying it as ‘tragedy’, ‘comedy’, ‘thriller’, ‘farce’, ‘horror’, ‘family social’ etc. After the recognition of the category, the audience begins to interpret its validity or its effectiveness, and draw certain expectations about its content. It is from here that a critical approach to a play evolves. The audience gradually develops a technique for the understanding of the play in question. A murder mystery, for example, would automatically signal a formalistic approach. There the interpreter would begin to assess how effectively the dramatist has been able to build up suspense through the crafting of the plot. However, as a student of literature, you have to be familiar with the most suitable approach to the play taken up for study. In this case, a study of *Tara* would automatically involve two major approaches. The first approach is the formalist approach, already introduced earlier, which would involve a careful re-reading of the plot, the unravelling of action through the memory of Dan. An ‘actantial analysis,’ as discussed earlier may be considered, accompanied by a close reading of the text. The culmination of the ‘quest’ of the protagonist, leading to a discovery by the audience may also be read in the light of Aristotle’s definition of ‘anagnorisis’ (discovery) as stated earlier. Aristotle, in Chapter 10 of the *Poetics* describes the phenomenon of ‘anagnorisis’ in dramatic literature: “A Discovery is, as the very word implies, a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortune” (Bywater 47). Aristotle further adds, “The best of all Discoveries, however, is that arising from the incidents themselves, when the great surprise comes about through a probable incident...” (60). Mahesh Dattani’s *Tara* therefore, may be subject to a formalistic scrutiny in the light of both the actantial model as well as the classical Aristotelian model.

The second approach may involve a reading of certain pertinent and burning issues related with gender studies. From this perspective the play provides a caustic attack on gender stereotypes, challenging age old notions of masculinity and femininity. Chandan, the male protagonist of *Tara*, has never been groomed according to set notions of masculinity, which is why he and his mother Mrs Patel are perfectly comfortable with his expertise in knitting and helping with the domestic chores. Ironically, however, it is the same Mrs Patel who had once decided to risk donating the residual limb to the boy child Chandan despite all odds, compromising the life of their twin daughter *Tara*. The surgery becomes a failure as the limb does not suit the boy and is left to rot. As a man, Chandan is perfectly comfortable with the idea of playing jig-saw puzzle at home and Tara, his sister, going out to work. The opening conversation between Patel and Chandan expose the deeply entrenched stereotype perpetuated by what Luce Irigaray calls “male

libidinal economy” (422), an economic model legitimized and perpetuated through centuries debarring the woman from entering into the work sphere that was reserved for the male. The woman’s role was conveniently confined to the domestic sphere, and her body especially demarcated for the production of healthy offsprings, who would later contribute to the economy further. A close reading of the opening conversation exposes these entrenched stereotypes:

The lights cross-fade to the living room, Bharati has exited to the kitchen.

PATEL: Chandan.

CHANDAN: (dealing the cards). Ya.

PATEL: I was just thinking...It may be a good idea for you to come to the office with me. (Glances surreptitiously towards the kitchen.)

CHANDAN. What for?

PATEL. Just to get a feel of it.

CHANDAN. You can take Tara. She’ll make a great business woman.

TARA. How do you know?

CHANDAN. Because you always cheat at cards!

.....

TARA: Not at all. The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave.

CHANDAN. I haven’t decided yet. (Looks at Patel) I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle.

TARA. Or carve another story on the walls... He’s a writer, you know. (327-328)

A little later Patel’s backlash is evident. Not being able to confront his son and daughter, he taunts his wife for having ‘wrongly’ groomed her son, teaching him how to knit and help with the household chores:

PATEL: What are you two doing?

CHANDAN. Mummy’s knitting and I’m helping her sort out her mistake.

PATEL. Let Tara do it.

CHANDAN. It's okay.

PATEL. Give it to her.

CHANDA. Why?

BHARATI. It's all right, I'll manage. Leave it.

CHANDAN. I will just roll all this and...

PATEL. Chandan, leave that damn thing alone!

BHARATI. (frantically). Go! Chandan, just go!

PATEL (to Bharati). How dare you do this to him?

CHANDAN. Wait a minute, daddy, she never asked me to do any...

PATEL. Can't you even look after the children?

CHANDAN. Look Daddy, it's...

PATEL. What did you do the whole day, huh? Watch video?

BHARATI. I can't think of things for them to do all the time!

PATEL: But you can think of turning him into a sissy – teaching him to knit.

CHANDAN. Daddy, that's unfair.

...

PATEL. I am disappointed in you. From now on you are coming to the office with me. I can't see you rotting at home! (351)

It would be advisable for students to cross refer to another play by Dattani called *Dance Like a Man*. In this play too the playwright addresses similar questions on stereotyped notions of gender within the discourse of patriarchy. The play exposes how modern urban Indian society would react even today to a man who takes to dance, not just as a hobby, but also as a career. The play is about the importance of choices within the parameters of gender. In *Tara* the entire conspiracy of favouring the male child compromising the life of the daughter by the Patel couple exposes the hypocrisy-laden modern urban India, savouring the fruits of advanced medical research and technology while at the same time patronising medieval gender biases surreptitiously. Dr Thakkar's self-proclaimed advertisements of the rapid progress of medical technology scattered across the narrative of *Tara* are pitted against the gross violation of medical ethics and

human values. He decides to stoop to the unethical demand of the Mrs Patel to ‘gift’ to Chandan what would have easily become Tara’s limb. The operation naturally runs the risk of a physiological rejection. The family’s worst fears come true when the limb has to be amputated after the rejection of Chandan’s body. Mrs Patel’s unethical demand arises out of the same notion of male libidinal economy discussed earlier. Hence, dear students, you may attempt an interpretation of this play in the light of Gender Studies.

➤ **Activities:**

Students are advised to read two other plays by Mahesh Dattani which address similar gender issues:

A. *Dance like a Man*

B. *Bravely Fought the Queen*

4.1.9. Language of the Play

As any successful dramatic production ought to communicate in the spoken language of a culture, Indian English drama has had its share of resistance and opposition from a section of critics that has never regarded English as a natural medium of communication (both in practice as well as in the theatre) in India. The urban connect of the English language in modern India compelled playwrights to reconsider the idiom of theatrical communication in urban India, amidst the growing popularity of literary drama amidst the urban elite since the colonial era. Rashmi Sadana in her book *English Heart, Hindi Heartland : The Political Life of Literature in India* offers some background information on her identification of “urban elites”:

To speak of urban elites is to refer to the class of people (the rich, the upper middle class, and many sectors of the middle classes, who also tend to be upper caste) who are educated from primary school onward with English as their medium of instruction. The rest of India, about 80 percent of Indians have, until recently, tended to be educated in government schools that may teach English as a subject but whose medium of instruction is one of the thirteen other official state languages. (4)

Sadana further notes: “English is spoken fluently by close to 5 percent of Indians and is “known” by as much as 10 percent of the population (i.e., about 50 million to 100 million people of a population of just over one billion” (14). One must note here that despite the negligible percentage, the actual number of speakers is large. It is the numerical strength coupled with its place in the global order of things that makes English

an Indian language on its own right. “Its place in the global order of things and the fact that it is entwined with modern, urban culture give English great prestige in the Indian context, while its lack of regional specificity within India often marks it as being culturally inauthentic” (15). English thus is the language of modern urban India, and hence today deserves to be fit for becoming the language of popular culture that includes cinema, and theatre. Sadana’s observations on the connections between place, language, and textual production may be seen in the light of our understanding of English theatre in India and the urban consciousness. Sadana refers to an article titled “Jab They Met” written by Anjali Puri and published in the November 12 edition of the *Outlook*. It addresses the issue of the influx of English into the Hindi heartland of India through Hindi magazines and consequently the urbanization of the consciousness of non-urban and non-metropolis India, particularly in cities such as Lucknow, Kanpur, Meerut, Agra and Varanasi:

It spoke of how young people wanted to “get into the mode” of English. The aim of editors in such a mixing of languages was to reach “aspirational readers” – defined as people aged eighteen to thirty-five who wanted to live their lives partly in English and be part of the consumer revolution – and to use the English language “especially for descriptions of modular kitchens, cutlery, electronic gadgetry, career options and college festivals.” (5)

We may note here that the phrase “get into the mode of English” ascribed to “aspirational readers” refers to getting into the urban mindset, as there is a definite connection between English and the urban India. The emergence of drama in English in modern India thus must be seen as a postcolonial aesthetic evolution. This evolution stands parallel to the gradual urbanization of consciousness of modern India that includes the rise of the English language as an indispensable part of modern life. Moreover, in the pre-independence era, whenever writers with a strong command over English attempted to script drama in English, it adopted a certain imitative function, in the act of imitating the colonial master. They did not adopt the representative function that English serves today in the age of global consumerism. Writing in English, and in particular, writing plays in English was a way of displaying the Indian writer’s command over the language gifted by the colonial masters, even if it amounted to slavish imitation of Shakespeare or Marlowe. A close reading of the opening dialogue compositions of Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s play *Rizia: Empress of Inde: A Dramatic Fragment* composed in 1860 would definitely repel the ordinary English speaking Indian of today, but may at the same time become a subject of scrutiny for scholars pursuing early Indian drama in English:

SCENE I

Enter Altunia and Kabric

Alt: O 'tis a shame past utterance! Tell me not
I'd rather that you, vile idolator,
Trode on my father's grave – aye, built upon it
His idol'd shrines for damned rites obscene!
What must a loathsome wretch – a cursed slave
Clasp in his foul embrace the queen, who sits
Upon the mighty throne of boundless Inde,
To revel in harlot rites –

Kab: Nay – gentle friend!
For these be words which echo must not hear
To blab with that controlless tongue of hers.
I too have heard it darkly whisper'd round
That our Abassan friend – but such a tale...
So wild – so strange – Altunia!
Dost think 'tis true? (641)

English speaking theatre/cinema audiences of today may surely sarcastically brush aside such dialogues as archaic, affected and artificial. This is one of the reasons for which English drama, even in those days failed to find acceptance among theatre-goers, as theatre has always anticipated the tone and tenor of the spoken voice in its dialogues. However, a significant change was initiated in the post-independence era in the use of English in literary discourse by Nissim Ezekiel, both in his poetry and drama. Ezekiel allows the free flow of the English language with its unique Indian flavours to private spheres and spaces of the Indian household. The spaces like kitchens and drawing rooms (even streets) were not held to be hospitable to the free and spontaneous flow of the language. One must remember here that playwrights such as Ezekiel, and later Karnad, did not want to fool audiences into a willing suspension of disbelief by showcasing characters (who otherwise do not normally converse in English) using the language effortlessly. The scripting of drama can never be successful if it fails to capture

the living language of the *dramatis personae*.

Following the tradition set by Ezekiel, Dattani's English in all his plays appear spontaneously natural as a medium of communication in the city where the language flows freely from the English medium educational institutions to the realms of popular culture. A snippet of conversation from *Tara* may demonstrate how Dattani goes beyond the colonial hangovers of English in dramatic usage and exploits not just the ordinary Indian's acquisition, but naturalization too, of the language, for a distinctive hierarchical function. Tara and Chandan, marginalized by their peers for being differently abled, uses their mastery over English as a weapon to mock the 'vernies', as Dattani puts it in *Me and My Plays*. When Roopa, the neighbour, does not understand the metaphor of "two peas in a pod," and mistakenly replaces 'pod' with 'pot,' the twins have a hearty laugh at the expense of their non-English speaking or less-English knowing peers. This exclusivity or privilege enjoyed by Chandan and Tara becomes their weapon of mockery to face up to a world with a 'challenged' mindset. Roopa becomes the modern Indian Mrs Malaprop who repeatedly reduces herself to an object of mockery for her slips. We may cite the example of the following conversation from Act I of *Tara*:

BHARATI. More coffee for you Roopa?

ROOPA. No, thank you aunty. (*To Chandan*) Your mother's coffee is really something.

Bharati exits to the kitchen.

CHANDAN. Ida makes it.

ROOPA. Really? But it has the typical Southie flavour. I think it's the - you know - concoction.

CHANDAN. Concoction?

TARA. She means decoction.

ROOPA. Decoction - yes, of course! How silly of me.... (346)

Mahesh Dattani writes at a time when English has been naturalized in the Indian landscape. In his plays the language pours out from the elite circles of the posh locales of the city and enters into ordinary households. Characters belonging to diverse socio-economic backgrounds comfortably speak in English with its Indian flavours and accents.

➤ **Activities:**

- Make a list of reasons why common man's English should be incorporated in Indian English drama.

- Name the plays Nissim Ezekiel wrote. Why should they be considered innovative from linguistic point of view?
- Who is Mrs. Malaprop? Give some examples of her use of English.
- Cite from *Tara* some examples of common man's English.

4.1.10. Summing Up

As students of literature at the degree level, you are being relentlessly introduced to the world of texts. However, at times, it is important that you interrogate the idea of the text in question. In the attempt to sum up our reading of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*, let us revisit the idea of a dramatic text. A text is anything that invites a reading, ranging from a book to an advertisement hoarding. It includes cinema and obviously a performance. In the context of theatre, you will come across the term 'playtext' or 'dramatic text', such as the one that we have been discussing. A dramatic text must be differentiated from the actual performance on stage which also is another text, the theatrical text. As students when you read a play, you must be conscious of this distinction, particularly the indirect relationship between the dramatic text and the actual performed theatrical text. You must note that two performances of the same dramatic text may end up being different from each other. So, while reading a dramatic text like Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*, you must start getting into the habit of seeing the connection and the indirect relation between the playtext/dramatic text and the performance, which itself is another audio-visual text – a spectacle. In other words, when you read a play, you ought to 'stage' it in our head, remembering that the play has a real stage in mind from the perspective of the playwright. Otherwise we may lose so much of what a play has to offer us if we read them privately, as if they were short stories or novels. It is also important to theoretically differentiate between two commonly used, inadvertently synonymous word: *drama* and *theatre*. Keir Elam in his book *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* offers to clear the air on this popular confusion. He defines drama as the element of fiction used by the playwright to script the play, comprising a story-framework, plot, characters, dialogues, stage directions etc. Theatre has been defined as the production of the drama in which the reception of the audience is also involved. The table on the following page may be handy for a better understanding of the relationship between the two commonly misused terms:

➤ **Activities:**

1. Do you agree with the definition of ‘text’ given in this section? Give reasons.
2. Differentiate between a ‘dramatic text’ and a ‘theatrical text’ as well as between ‘drama’ and ‘theatre.’

DRAMA

DRAMATIC TEXT/PLAYTEXT AUTHORED BY THE PLAYWRIGHT

Scripted Plotline, Dialogue, Stage directions, Comments by the playwright

THEATRE

THEATRICAL TEXT/PERFORMANCE ON STAGE SPECTACLE

Space Character dialogue action actor gesture

Music lighting special effects sound

Now you may revisit Dattani’s *Tara* once again and identify the performance markers indicated by the playwright throughout the playtext, and note down how a theatre director may conceptualize the performance of this play on the stage, particularly the fusion between the different time frames used in the narration of the story.

4.1.11. Comprehension Exercises

Essay Type Questions (20marks):

1. Examine critically all clues given in the stage directions and in the words spoken by the characters, silences, pauses and actions which help you visualize the performance of Mahesh Dattani’s *Tara*.
2. Make short critical notes on the dramatic build-up to climaxes or sudden changes of direction or switches in mood within the framework of the essential conflict which makes the drama in Mahesh Dattani’s *Tara*.
3. The establishment of characters and the relations and interactions between them is fundamental to the dramatist’s purpose in Mahesh Dattani’s *Tara*. Discuss.

4. Critically discuss the exposition (the opening scene) of *Tara*.
5. Critically discuss Dattani's indication of the levels of language (the 'registers' as they are sometimes called) on which *Tara* works to establish its meanings.
6. Critically comment on the technical skill of the playwright in selecting his material and bringing together items that should go together to establish meaning, or contrasting items to jolt audiences into awareness, in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*.
7. How does Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* sustain or challenge established audience assumptions, views and beliefs? Discuss.
8. Discuss how Dattani's drama addresses stereotyped notions of gender, with special reference to *Tara*.

Mid-length Answer Type Questions (12 marks):

1. Comment on Dattani's use of the multi-level set in *Tara*.
2. Assess the role of Dr Thakkar in *Tara*.
3. What role does Roopa play in the shaping up of the identity of the Siamese twins in *Tara*?
4. How would you assess the effectiveness of the denouement of Dattani's play *Tara*?

Short Answer Type Questions (6 Marks)

1. How would you explain Chandan's objective behind the composition of a play in order to "masticate" memories in "my mind and spit out the result to the world, in anger"? Why is Chandan angry?
2. Explain the following observation of Chandan in the light of your understanding of Dattani's *Tara*: "Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash, with some unknown force."
3. Critically comment on the *anagnorisis* of Dattani's play *Tara*.

4.1.12. Suggested Reading:

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Unit - 2 □ Meenakshi Mukherjee: The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English

4.2.0: Introduction

4.2.1: Meenakshi Mukherjee: An Academic Bio-brief

4.2.2: Summary of “Anxiety of Indianness”

4.2.3: Text of “Anxiety of Indianness”

4.2.4: Critical Understanding of the Text

4.2.5: Anxiety of Indianness: Definition

4.2.6: Indianness in Indian English Writings and the Bhasha Literatures

4.2.7: Anxiety of Indian English Writers: Generational Perspectives

4.2.8: Summing Up

4.2.9: Comprehension Exercises

4.2.10: Recommended Reading

4.2.0. Introduction

Dear students, this unit, for a change, will not concentrate on a creative writing. The focus instead will be on a critical essay written by one of the doyens of Indian English criticism. We have very little comprehensive discussion on the non-fictional critical writings – for instance, on critics like K.R.S. Iyengar, C.D. Narasimhiah, M.K.Naik and Meenakshi Mukherjee who helped establish Indian English literature as a distinct category to be studied in the departments of English literature and Culture Studies. Here in this unit we shall discuss “Anxiety of Indianness,” a non-fictional piece by Meenakshi Mukherjee. It is included in her book *The Perishable Empire* (2000). We shall also discuss how Mukherjee was one of the key figures who brought fresh perspectives in the study of English literature in India. Prior to the 1970s, English literature meant mainly British literature, allowing only marginal spaces to American literature, not to speak of other literatures written in English in formerly colonised countries. Although there was a large corpus of Indian English literary texts, they were not thought worthy to be studied in institutions of higher education. By speaking in

favour of inclusion of Indian English literature and Indian literatures in English translation in the syllabi of Indian universities, and doing it herself at Hyderabad University, she was helping the transformation of English Studies in India. Recognitions that the Indian English writers have been getting all over the world now testifies to the wisdom of Mukherjee and her peers. Mukherjee is truly a postcolonial critic from this point of view.

4.2.1. Meenakshi Mukherjee: An Academic Bio-brief

Meenakshi Mukherjee (1937-2009) taught at different universities in India. She was also Visiting Professor at several universities like the University of Texas at Austin, University of Chicago, University of California, The University of Canberra and so on. She was a SahityaAkademi awardee.

She was one of the doyens (like K.R.S. Iyenger, C. D. Narasimhaiha, M. K. Naik) who promoted Indian English literature as worthy to be studied in institutions of higher education. She contributed immensely to the cause of building up a critical tradition of Indian English literature. She upgraded Indian English criticism to a level of rigour and sophistication. Being a multilingual scholar well-versed in Indian languages like Bengali, Hindi and Marathi, she knew the importance of Bhasha literatures for the Indian students of English literature. That is why she not only wrote on Bhasha literatures but also was instrumental in including texts from Bhasha literatures in translation in the syllabi of English literature in Indian universities.

Many of her writings have been collected and compiled in different volumes and anthologies. She is the author of *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novels in English* (1971), a path-breaking book on Indian English literature. *Considerations: Twelve Studies of Indian Literature in English* (1977), *Realism and Reality: Novel and Society in English India* (1985), *Re-reading Jane Austen* (1994), *Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings* (1999), *The Perishable Empire* (2000), and *Early Novels in India* (2002) are some of her important works. She also jointly edited *Another India* with Nissim Ezekiel (1990).

The book *The Perishable Empire* is significant in the context of our discussion because the essay "Anxiety of Indianness," which is in our syllabus, has been taken from this book. Rita Kothari, in her review in *Economic and Political Weekly*, observes that the book "is an interweaving of the current tools of cultural materialism and 19th century colonialism, archival research and trenchant analysis" (2135). In this book, Mukherjee

evaluates the complex and evolving relationship between English and India through literary texts that emerged out of the interaction between the two. The time span of this intercourse is stretched from the mid-19th century to the end of the millennium. The book investigates the socio-politico-economic condition of the emergence of the English writing in India. It records the movement of the genre “from days of obscurity to an overwhelming presence today” (Kothari 2135). In the next segments, we are going to analyse the seminal essay, “The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English” which is, as we have stated earlier, taken from this book.

➤ **Activities:**

- Prepare a list of works written by Meenakshi Mukherjee. Check whether all her important works have been mentioned in this unit.
- Prepare a list of some important critics who have contributed to the development of Indian English literature as a distinct genre. Name at least two important works written by them.
- Try to figure out what you mean by ‘Indianness.’ Is it an attempt to essentialise/homogenise different identities?
- Note down the points that establish Meenakshi Mukherjee as a postcolonial critic.

4.2.2. Summary of “The Anxiety of Indianness : Our Novels in English”

In her influential essay “The Anxiety of Indianness,” which is divided into six sections, Meenakshi Mukherjee offers a scholarly treatment of a literary ‘malady’ that severely affects the issue of identity in Indian writings in English. She diagnoses this malady as ‘anxiety of Indianness.’ It is very much evident in Indian English writings but, interestingly, cannot be found in Bhasha literatures. This is an interesting phenomenon that requires a thorough critical understanding. Mukherjee tries to do so in her essay. In order to do this, she adopts a comparative frame of analysis. She juxtaposes Indian writings in English with literary works from Bhasha literatures (the term means literatures written in other Indian languages like Bangla, Marathi or Hindi). Mukherjee observes that a Marathi novelist is not called ‘an Indian writer in Marathi,’ but a writer writing in English is generally addressed as an ‘Indian writer in English.’ The insertion of the word ‘English’ is rather problematic and needs to be pondered over. The writers in Bhasha literatures are more concerned with representing the social reality which

surrounds them. They portray this reality with minute details. The places and characters are usually local and they are objectively presented. But the Indian writings in English appear to be self-conscious attempts to flaunt Indianness. Indian English novelists like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand project a pan-Indian reality. They homogenise their nation and their people. Here the English as a language plays on the mind of the Indian creative and critical writers. This anxiety was first mentioned by Raja Rao in the Foreword to his own novel *Kanthapura* (1938). The issue of 'Indianness' becomes "a favourite essentializing obsession" for the writers. The reviewers and critics too continue to prove that English was, and still continues to be, the language of power and prestige. Creative writers in English still bear "the larger burden of culture, tradition and civilization" (Mukherjee 168). Mukherjee also focuses on the post-colonial diasporic writers who do not cease to write about their nation. But Mukherjee also hopes that genuine writers still do not fall into the trap of homogenising tendency and maintain their distinct individualities in their writings. In his inimitable postmodernist style, Salman Rushdie, for example, depicts the fragmentariness of Indian reality and the falling images of a diverse, multi-layered India. Some of the new writers in Indian English also do not homogenise the nation and speak of places and people in terms of concrete details. They do not have any faith in the East/West binary and speak of other countries/nations in Asia and Africa. Two contemporary novelists whom Mukherjee praises in particular are Vikram Seth (*A Suitable Boy*) and Amitav Ghosh (*The Shadow Lines*).

Activities:

- How would you define 'Bhasha literature'? Make your own enquiry and find out how the term developed. In this respect read note no. 3 of Mukherjee's essay (page no.185).
- Does the question of target readers play an important role in the literary representations in English?
- Collect Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*, read the Foreword (if not the novel), and write down the main points stated there.
- Prepare a catalogue of Indian English novelists mentioned by Mukherjee in the essay. Take note of what she says about each of them.
- Prepare a list of authors and works written in Bhasha literatures mentioned by Mukherjee and write down the points she mentions about them.

4.2.3. Text of “Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English”

In 1938 a young Indian writer living in France wrote an experimental novel in English which carried a succinct Foreword of three paragraphs. This Foreword seems to have been an early diagnosis of the theoretical issues involved in this bicultural act. If we can scrape off the patina of obviousness that has gathered over this statement in the six decades that have intervened, it may be possible to examine the relevance of its implications today, at a time when English novels written by Indians have suddenly gained more visibility than ever before in the brief span of our relationship with the English language.

I call it brief because in the long history of Indian literature(s) writers in English are the latest arrival, some might even say interlopers, and certainly people who have taken their shoes off and made themselves at home. But the metaphor may not be quite appropriate because writers in English need not take their shoes off to be comfortable: they keep them on because they are, a least potentially, among those whom *Time* magazine calls ‘the new makers of World Fiction’,¹ whose raw material may be in India, but whose target readership spans countries and continents, keeping them ever-ready to undertake journeys — either real or figurative. Taking off your shoes will not do when you have to travel these days.

The Foreword mentioned above was written by Raja Rao when his novel *Kanthapura* was published in London six decades ago. Not only did he experiment with language in this novel, striving to make English take on the cadence of Kannada as spoken by women in the Kara district of Karnataka, evoking occasionally the rhythm of Sanskrit, but also with narrative mode, challenging the generic expectations of the novel as prevalent in western Europe in the 1930s. He used the form of a ‘sthalapurana’, the legendary history of a village caught up in the Gandhian movement as told by an old woman — thus trying to intergrate myth with history, realism with fabulation, linearity with a cyclic notion of time long before post-modernism made such enterprises trendy. In the heyday of modernism, with its implicit ideology of the alienation of the artist and the deliberate separation of art from mass culture and community life, this novel predictably did not get much attention in England; and then as now the Indian reception of the book, or lack of it, invariably reflected the attitude out there. It is only decades later that the novel was resurrected and ‘canonized’ in India. The Foreword alerts us to Raja Rao’s self-reflexivity in undertaking this project:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use 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.²

Having said this, Raja Rao goes on in the text to pollinate this intellectually acquired language of formal discourse with memory, myth, oral tales and gossip to capture the texture of daily existence, the quarrels and alliances, the smell and sound of a village on the slopes of the Sahyadri mountains, where life is determined not by the clock or the Gregorian calendar but by seasonal rhythm. The national movement for freedom gets narrativized not through accepted historical modes of chronology and records, but by adopting an indigenous model of validation through stories, a practice kept alive by women. I single out Raja Rao for mention not only because he is the first to articulate the anxieties of the Indian novelist in English in his prefatory remarks, but also because in the text he works out a strategy for negotiating the contesting claims of language and culture.

II

If I were to write a novel in Marathi, I would not be called an Indian writer in Marathi, but simply a Marathi novelist, the epithet Marathi referring only to the language, not conveying the larger burden of culture, tradition and civilization. No one would write a doctoral dissertation on the Indianness of my Marathi novel. But when it comes to English fiction originating in our country, not only does the issue of Indianness become a favourite essentializing obsession in academic writings and the book-review circuit, the writers themselves do not seem unaffected by it, the complicating factor being that English is not just any language — it was the language of our colonial rulers and continues even now to be the language of power and privilege. It is not a language that permeates all social levels or is used in subaltern contexts. Our discourse on Indian novels in English tends to get congealed into fairly rigid and opposed positions. When an earlier version of this paper was orally presented in Delhi, the audience, both general and academic, was much more interested in my position in the cultural war between the global and the regional, between English for the world market and Hindi/Bengali/Marathi, etc. for an indigenous and therefore presumably more 'authentic' readership than in looking at

them as disparate literary products of a complex plural culture.

The unspoken premise in this war is that writing in English and writing in the other Indian languages (hereafter referred to as ‘bhasha’)³ are antithetical enterprises marked by a commitment to, or betrayal of, certain undefinable cultural values. To me the issues are far more complex, entangled with questions of class, mobility and readership. It is not easy to demarcate cultural categories in India, but it may be said that there tends to be an element of urban/mofussil divide in the matter of linguistic choice. That is, of course if language is at all a matter of choice. I cannot imagine any Indian — whether Punjabi, Bengali or Oriya — one day making a deliberate decision to write in English because it would guarantee him a wide audience and ensure access to the literary reproduction system of a world market, hence yield royalties in foreign exchange. Those who write in English do so because — no matter what language they speak at home — they have literary competence only in English. Contrary to popular belief, not all of them achieve fame abroad, and it is possible that some are read by numerically fewer people than read a bhasha novel. It may be more useful for us to understand the circumstances that lead to the loss of the mother tongue than to charge these writers for capitalizing on their loss.

If any one has a choice, it is the occasional bhasha writer — never the one who is writing in English. Most people would agree that writers like Agyeya, Buddhadeb Bose, B. S. Mardhekar, Krishna Baldev Vaid, U. R. Anantha Murthy, Gauri Deshapande, Nabaneeta Deb Sen, Mrinal Pande and many others could just as well have chosen to write in English. If they did, whether they would have evolved differently from what they are now would always remain a hypothetical question. But the more pertinent question to ask is would their children (figuratively speaking) opt to write in their mother tongues, and if not, what are the pressures that compel them to choose differently? What has changed in the last decade or two? My attempt here is to analyse the cultural implications of the Indian English novel, not to praise or bury it.

Indian writing in English as a recognizable literary phenomenon became visible only in the 1930s (the earlier attempts failed to make an impact for reasons I have tried to explore in the first essay of this volume), and the first generation of writers, as a ballast to the supposed alienness/elitism of the language, tended to deploy certain thematic or formal devices to tether their texts to indigenous contexts. This compensatory act was not necessarily undertaken self-consciously, nor was the effect always obtrusive. Mulk Raj Anand’s anger at the class and caste inequities in a hierarchic Hindu society, Bhabani Bhattacharya’s exposure of religious charlatanism,

Kamala Markandaya's concern with the suffering of the unspecified 'Indian' woman — are as much illustrative cases of this anxiety manifested in themes as are the efforts of Raja Rao, G. V. Desani and Sudhin N. Ghose in narrative mode. The latter try in different ways to dismantle the constraints of the written novel to achieve the meandering freedom of the oral narrative. It is necessary to understand the process historically, even though not all these writers deserve equal attention, because out of this uneasy collusion between language and sensibility a few remarkable fictional texts have emerged.

Among this older generation of writers R. K. Narayan has had a fairly steady and wide readership at the popular level — augmented in the late eighties and nineties by a delightful television serial based on his stories — and at the literary level bolstered by the glossy editions of his novels that appeared in London and New York. For decades Malgudi has been perceived as a quintessential Indian town, ordinary and uneventful, where shopkeepers ply their easy-going trades, idlers sit around the Market Street gutter, benign crooks go about their business of cheating gullible people, husbands absent-mindedly torture their wives — all in a gentle and unchanging rhythm. If complications arise, they are bound to be resolved by the end and normalcy restored. What is always emphasized is its 'Indianness', by which is meant a good-humoured inertia and a casual tolerance which almost any reader in the country is expected to recognize as familiar. Like other imaginary towns in literature we do not know the latitude and longitude of Malgudi, nor do we know its different languages, its ethnic or communal tensions. Whether a character is called Swamy or Sen, Krishnan or Pal, Daisy or Kamala, s/he belongs to a harmonious Malgudian milieu, except occasionally when the man who has come from Junagarh is allowed to be more aggressive than the one from Mangala. Malgudi is Hindu upper-caste pan-India, resistant to change, eternal and immutable — very different, say, from Maryganj in Phanishwar Renu's *Maila Anchal* (Hindi : 1954) or Purnea in Satinath Bhaduri's *Jagori* (Bangla : 1946), both in north Bihar, variegated in terms of caste and subcaste, language and dialect, and in the throes of constant turmoil. Or Shivpalganj in Srilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* (Hindi: 1968), which is so convoluted in its power equations that it subverts the comfortable pastoral connotations of the rural-urban dyad, commonly seen in simplicity/sophistication and spontaneity/artifice polarities. The visitor from the city is completely baffled by the complications of Shivpalganj. As examples of spatial specificity and the resultant complexity of social and cultural configurations it is possible to cite examples from Mahasweta Devi's fiction also. Her powerful stories about tribal life are always located — in Tohar,

Palani or Lohardaga — their conflicts subtly implicated in the local ethnic, class, gender and language dissonance. While reading her, we know exactly where Lohri is situated — at the intersection of three districts of Chotanagpur — Ranchi, Palamau and Sarguja — and this is not a gratuitous piece of information.

I am neither trying to privilege ethnographic documentation in fiction over other aspects, nor insisting that mimetic representation should always be the desired narrative mode, but merely suggesting that in the English texts of India there may be a greater pull towards a homogenization of reality, an essentializing of India, a certain flattening out of the complicated and conflicting contours, the ambiguous and shifting relations that exist between individuals and groups in a plural community. This attenuation may be artistically valid when the narrative aspires to the condition of allegory but for the Indian writer in English there may be other unarticulated compulsions — the uncertainty about his target audience, for example.

An O. V. Vijayan or Bhalchandra Nemade knows his exact constituency and is secure in the knowledge of the shades of response his associative word-play or ironic understatement will evoke in the Malayalam or Marathi readers who are equipped with the keys for decoding these oblique messages. But R. K. Narayan's audience is spread far and wide, within India and outside, hence the need for an even-toned minimalist representation that will not depend too much on the intricacies and contradictions in the culture and the inflections of voice which only an insider can decipher.

Of course it can be argued that Narayan has the humour and talent to convert all these constraints to his advantage. V. Y. Katak once compared his style to the one-stringed instrument made of clay which used to be sold on the streets to children. The man who sold it could play any tune on it, but having brought one you could never replicate his feat. In his bare, unadorned, understated manner Narayan achieves quite a range of effects not possible for others to emulate, but An one-stringed instrument, even in the hands of the master, cannot become a sitar or a veena.

III

For a long time it had seemed that English writing in India was destined to remain An one-stringed instrument, because the normal ground conditions of literary production — where a culture and its variations, a language and its dialects, centuries of oral traditions and written literature, all interact to create a new text — do not exist in the case of English in India. Take for example the case of Malayalam, which is not only the spoken and written language of the geographic space called Kerala with

oral variations among different groups — the Nairs, Nambudris, the Christians, the Mapillas, etc. — but also the language of its films, both commercial and serious, its songs, folk tales, riddles, nonsense verse, nursery rhymes, proceedings in the Vidhan Sabha, slogans in processions, rhetoric of political speech, conversation on the football field, street-corner humour as well as of Kathakali and a long literary culture. A fictional text that is produced in this language today draws upon, and echoes, the reverberations of this layered plurality that surrounds and nurtures it. English in India on the other hand functions on relatively fewer registers and it would not have been surprising if this remained a permanent liability, allowing the novelists to operate only within a limited parameter.

The themes handled by the older generation of novelists in English had for a long time remained predictably pan-Indian: the national movement, partition of the country, the clash between tradition and modernity, faith and rationality or similar time-worn clichés of east-west confrontation, disintegration of the joint family, exploitation of women, etc. In this project they were in a way defining ‘Indian’ concerns as against local or regional issues. All students of literature are aware how the novel as a genre has traditionally been implicated in the construction and consolidation of the idea of the nation. The history of the English novel in Britain from *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tom Jones*, *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre* to *The Forsyte Saga* and *Brideshead Revisited* is a chronicle of the discourse of the nation, the totalization of British culture through a dissemination of ideas that construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life, at the same time differentiating it from what is not British. The Indian novel in English has also in its brief history been visibly concerned with defining such a national identity. It may not be a coincidence that the novel in English emerged in India in the 1930s, the decade prior to independence, when there was an urgency to foreground the idea of a composite nation. In colonial India — in the nineteenth and early twentieth century — English was not a major language of literary production. It was the language of administration and higher education while the novel flourished in Hindi, Urdu, Bangla, Marathi and other bhashas. Only towards the end of the imperial chapter do we find isolated fictional attempts in English, slowly (but not steadily, because there have been occasional fallow periods) gaining momentum to become a dominant presence by the last decade of the century.

The three pioneering writers who began their careers almost simultaneously in the 1930s (and who continue to be productive and prolific after a half a century) may have been worlds apart in their ideology, background and narrative modes, but they

shared an unspoken faith in a distillable Indian reality which could then be rendered through particularized situations. In *The Serpent and the Rope* Raja Rao constructed an advaitic brahmanic India; Anand's novels on the other hand exposed the claims of this high culture by taking up the cause of the paradigmatic Indian under-class. R. K. Narayan's *Malgudi*, I have already argued, had a metonymic relationship with India as a whole.

Any project of constructing a national identity is predicated upon two simultaneous imperatives : an erasure of differences within the border and accentuating the difference with what lies outside. As a language English in India automatically achieves the first, and the second is facilitated when a homogenous Indian tradition is pitted against an equally unified imaginary west. It is worth noting that in this dialectic of alterity the non-western countries (in Asia and Africa) never had a part to play until a few years ago when Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth brought them in, though marginally — through their fictional as well as non-fictional work — by writing about Egypt, Cambodia, Burma and Tibet. The schematic and metaphysical polarization of the east and the west, common in the middle decades of our country, is seen not only in the novels of Raja Rao but also in those of Balachandra Rajan, Kamala Markandaya and Bhabani Bhattacharya.

The contrasts do not operate so sharply in the subsequent decades; Despite a few prominent writers emerging in the 1960s (or a little before and after) — like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi — who are all very different from each other, the 1970s were a relativity barren decade (except for the work of one novelist, Shashi Deshpande), and for a while it almost seemed that this sub-genre of the Indian novel had run out of steam and come to the natural end of its brief life. But then came the explosion of the 1980s.

The 'tradition' of Indian writing in English is discontinuous; there is no genealogy that can be traced satisfactorily, however much scholars might attempt to create one. A young man or woman in Bombay or Delhi who has a half-written manuscript in English inside the desk — and there are scores of such closet writers today — aspires to be part of a global league, and not contribute to some outmoded category called the Indo-Anglian novel. These young people may have drawn literary inspiration entirely from the English or American books studied in the classrooms and European or Latin American novels borrowed from libraries, or from Rushdie or Kundera — without ever taking the trouble to find out how Indian writers of an older generation responded to the creative urge in English. It goes without saying of course that they hardly have any acquaintance with bhasha literatures. Yet, paradoxically, if

they achieve any fame abroad it will be on the basis of their relationship with India and their ability to find new modes of representing the complex reality of their own culture. Alternatively, these aspiring writers may have spent a few years abroad, or have settled down in some other country, thus qualifying to be part of the 'displaced', 'diasporic' migrancy, to belong to which is becoming almost mandatory for the Indian writer in English. In that case they write about their mixed heritage with the lost country looming large in the mosaic. There is no getting away from the burden of India if you want to write in English.

IV

It is generally agreed that the sudden profusion, liveliness and visibility of the new Indian fiction in the 1980s can be traced back to the success of one seminal novel: *Midnight's Children* (London, 1981). Rushdie celebrated the plenitude of India in what came to be labelled as the post-modernist mode, but even those not schooled in the latest in literary theory recognized that several assumptions about language, nation, history and narrative mode were being challenged here. In retrospect we see that *Mid-night's Children* had a very important role to play in the reversal of the 'centre-periphery' paradigm in English literary culture, in dissolving the great tradition of F. R. Leavis into a plurality of traditions, coming from many races, many regions, many cultures. But even if one did not take a global view, the novel offered the Indian reader a playful and imaginative representation of his own recent history and remembered public events that could open out to different kinds of readings. It could be read as a narrative where the abundant multiplicity of India is threatened by the bleak forces of binary opposition. On the other hand it could be read as a novel where the obsessive fear of fragmentation assumes a concrete shape in the cracks and fissures that appear in human bodies and on the map, prefiguring a total disintegration.

Images of mutilation and holes pervade the novel, beginning with the perforated sheet through which the doctor was permitted to examine the female patient, anticipating the many partial views of reality the novel plays with, and going on to show the country splitting up amoeba-like first into two and then more pieces. But there is also the inclusive image of the MCC — the parliament of children where all the languages, religions and ethnic identities co-exist as in All-India Radio. Saleem is nostalgic about the India of his childhood where 'he was beset by an infinity of alternative realities' and critical of the Pakistan of his adolescence where this choice was denied through the forced binariness of truth: right and wrong, black and white,

friend and enemy.

There may be an element of comic and parodic exaggeration in the rendition of an easy co-existence of diversity in the land of his birth, encapsulated for example in *Amar-Akbar-Anthony* fashion, in the varieties of mothers Saleem has: biological, adoptive and nutrient — Vanita, Amina and Mary Pareira, and the many fathers he acquires through life — British, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh — but this playfulness does not go against the central project of the novel.

Although in an entirely different way from the earlier novels, *Midnight's Children* is also constructing the idea of a nation — an India that is inclusive and tolerant — and the novel is beset with an anxiety about the fragility of this concept of India. (Rushdie's later novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 1995, reads like an elegy for this lost ideal.) The narrative ends with declaration of Emergency in 1975 when the inclusive principle fails, the binary antinomy comes to prevail. As Shiva comes to power and Saleem is marginalized, the comic ebullience darkens. But at this point of the end there is also another kind of beginning. Because Saleem Sinai is on the verge of disappearing, he feels compelled to record the past. The act of writing becomes a cathartic effort at recapturing his control over the world through language: 'This is why I have resolved to confide in paper.' Hence the importance of memory — often fallible — and the centrality of the pickle factory where fruits in bottles, like truth in books, are being preserved against the 'corruption of the clock', even though the colour and the flavour change in the process.

Rushdie's example — his inventiveness, his irreverence, his audacity, and above all his success — became liberating for a large group of Indian writers living either at home or abroad. At first many of them seemed to be Rushdie clones, but over the years unusual writers with distinct voices have emerged, many who do not have more than only a vague family likeness to him. Collectively the younger writers have been able to enter the discursive space in literature which in the western world was earlier reserved for the privileged race. But there is a discursive space in India too — not confined merely to the Sunday supplements of English dailies and chat shows on television channels; what place do these writers occupy there when they are seen in conjunction with young writers in the Indian languages? Or are they never seen in relation to each other? As I have mentioned earlier, there is a tendency to see these writers (in English and bhasha) in opposed camps, partly out of an awareness in the disparity of their fame and fortune — not necessarily in proportion to the disparity of talent. But surprisingly, *Desh*, the magazine of the Bangla literary establishment, of late has been very enthusiastic about claiming some of these novelists who have

earned fame abroad, perhaps partly out of a regional chauvinism, because many of the new writers have names that mark their Bengali origin.⁴ It is indeed a curious phenomenon, because a cultural group based on language solidarity seems suddenly eager to appropriate those who have achieved fame by severing connection with that language.

V

In 1989 Timothy Brennan proposed a new category of novelists: the ‘Third World Cosmopolitans’, who are globally visible, whom the reviewers in *New York* and *London Review of Books* hail as interpreters and authentic voices of the ‘Third World’.⁵ According to Brennan, this group includes Mario Vargas Llosa, Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Bharati Mukherjee, but not Chinua Achebe or Wole Soyinka. If he wrote his book a few years later he might have added the names of Ben Okri, Robert Antoni, Michael Ondaatje and a few others. The Third World cosmopolitans emerge from a non-western culture, but their mastery over the current idiom of the metropolitan meta-language of narrative ensures their favourable reception in the global centres of publication and criticism. It should also be noted that not all outstanding writers from other cultures (writing in English or translated into English) receive this attention. The new receptivity in London or New York many have made it easier for some writers from outside the western world to get a hearing, but they may do so only within a field of reception already defined by metropolitan parameters and agendas. The criteria of evaluation are naturally selective, determined by the demands of the recipient culture.

One implicit expectation from Third World cosmopolitan writers (also known as postcolonials) is that they will highlight the experience of colonialism as theme or metaphor — as for example Rushdie did in the Methwold part of *Midnight's Children*. Even at the time of his departure from Bombay, Methwold made sure that the furniture, the painting and the other objects of the house would remain unchanged, a plot device used by the author to underline the continuing impact of a way of life (and thought) imposed by the rulers which gradually becomes part of one's own. Postcolonialism, a burgeoning branch in academic studies, initiated incidentally by countries that have not been at the receiving end of the imperial process in the recent past, privileges colonialism as the framework for the major cultural experience of the century, and it is these academies now that set the terms for critical debates and creative enterprise in the world. Yet we know that in very few

of the major works of fiction in the Indian languages is colonialism any longer an important concern. Far more pervasive has been, for example, the theme of partition and writers in at least four languages of the country (Hindi, Urdu, Bangla and Punjabi) have gone back again and again to this rupture to understand our present. Many other forms of internal dissension, dislocation and oppression engage the attention of the bhasha writer today, relegating the trauma of colonial experience to the background. From my limited reading I would venture to say that even in the past, barring an unusual novel like *Gora* (Bangla : 1909) which is a long reflection on identity, nationality and the impact of colonialism, most of our fictional literature has been conditioned by other, either older or newer, more local, diverse and complex pressures and intricate social hierarchies than can be explained entirely by British rule in India.⁶ This may be one reason why many of our bhasha classics — past and present — even when translated into English, do not get noticed either by the academic establishment or the publication/distribution system outside the country.

Many of the books that have been taken up for discussion in this system recently happen to be those that have successfully manipulated western forms — fabulist narratives and a post-modernist mode with local legends and popular fables as a means of mythicizing contemporary reality. Another issue to which value is attached in the West these days is cultural hybridity, which is said to offer certain advantages ‘in negotiating the collisions of language, race and art in the world of disparate people comprising a single, if not unified world’.⁷ Experience of rootlessness and displacement are thus privileged in the cosmopolitan discourse. Ondaatje (born in Sri Lanka, educated in England, lives in Canada) describes his fictional characters darkly as ‘international bastards, born in one place, choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or get away from our homelands all our lives’,⁸ while Bharati Mukherjee (born in India, lived in Canada, lives in USA) joyously celebrates her mixed heritage:

I have joined imaginative forces with an anonymous driven underclass of semi-assimilated Indians with sentimental attachment to a distant homeland, but no real desire for permanent return — Instead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or worse, a ‘visible’ disfigurement to be hidden) I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated — Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of comprehending the world.⁹

Indianness remains important for her, but only as a metaphor India less as a place than a topos, a set of imaginative references.

But the problem is that for those who live at home, who are not global migrants, the reality of India has to be daily confronted at a non-metaphoric level. Henry Louis

Gates Jr. has an amusing anecdote about himself and another black colleague coming out of an academic seminar where 'blackness' had been discussed as a literary trope, and not being able to get a taxi in downtown New York. 'But it is only a trope', they shouted to the taxi-drivers; but that did not make any of them stop.¹⁰ India may be a 'discursive space' for the writer of Indian origin living elsewhere, but those living and writing here, particularly the bhasha novelist, would seldom make figurative use of something as amorphous as the idea of India, because s/he has a multitude of specific and local experiences to turn into tropes and play with.

VI

If the anxiety of Indianness in Raja Rao, Anand and Narayan came out of their own desire to be rooted, the anxiety of the new generation who can thrive on easy international accessibility may be attributed to the pressures of the global marketplace which demand that Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* — a zany existential comedy — be subtitled 'An Indian Tale', and Shashi Tharoor's playful intertextual exercise *The Great Indian Novel* be perceived as a national allegory. As Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out, even in India there seems to be developing a new urban culture...

for whom only the literary document produced in English is a national document.

All else is regional, hence minor and forgettable, so that English emerges in this imagination not as one of the Indian languages, which it undoubtedly is, but as the language of literary sophistication and bourgeois civility.¹¹

Newspapers and journals often discuss the phenomenon of the new Indian novel in English merely as the 'New Indian Novel' as if other languages do not matter, and in April 1993 a two-part television programme was shown on the national television channel on 'Publishing in India' which assumed English as the only language in which publishing is done in India. This amnesia about Indian languages whose texts in any case have a longer history and a large numerical presence is not an accident. It is part of a cultural change overtaking us that covers an area larger than the domain of literary production. Elistism, for example, is no longer an allegation to be avoided or a burden to be alleviated by a conscious identification with the 'people', or concern with political or ideological issues. Part of the appeal of Upamanyu Chatterjee or Amit Chaudhuri for the younger generation may be located in their unapologetic acceptance of their exclusive upbringing, which some of these readers share and the others aspire to.¹²

The demands of economy, both national and global, create a thrust towards a homogenization of culture, and in India the language that can most effectively

achieve this is English, which is also the language of upward social mobility. The sudden communication revolution that has brought international television channels inside urban homes is helping to spread this amnesia where the culture constructed by the media, the advertisement and entertainment industry — a slicker and more attractive package than what real life in India can offer — is successfully obliterating the local and the regional sub-cultures unless they are brought back as ‘planned authenticity’ or the exportable ethnic. English is being spoken, at least partially, in more upper middle-class homes than ever before, kinship terms are simplified to suit a supposedly western model, and clothes, behaviour patterns, footwear and leisure activities are geared towards an international norm. It is logical that reading habits should also follow this trend. Whether it is desirable or not, seen from this point of view, the growing visibility of English as the preferred language of literature in India seems to be an irreversible process. We shall probably encounter more and more writers who will write in English, propelled by the logic of social dynamics within the country, lured by the forces of global marketplaces and driven by the mirage of international fame.

But genuine writers as a species are individualistic in any language refusing to fall into predictable models. This is one reason why the imperatives set up by multinational publishing corporations in complicity with the metropolitan institutions that determine fictional standards may not always succeed in controlling and directing our literary production. Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* may have been an international best-seller, but it became so entirely on terms set by the author, not the publisher. Reading the manuscript before publication, I remember wondering if anybody except a reader like me who shares the same regional background would get so completely involved in the nuances of the story of these interlocked upper middle-class families in UP, Bihar and Bengal. We know that the author is familiar with Jane Austen and Dickens and George Eliot, and advertisement hype even linked the book with *War and Peace*, but for me, his novel might just as well have been written in Bangla where a tradition exists of long three-decker realistic stories about families.¹³ This tradition, most probably shared by other Indian languages also, is marked not by any anxiety but by a confident prolixity. Perhaps this point is further proved by the easy assimilation into the Hindi literary world of the recent translation of *A Suitable Boy* (*Koi Achcha sa Ladka*, tr. Gopal Gandhi, 1998). A critic as biculturally perceptive as Harish Trivedi has commented on how the novel naturally flows into Hindi while *Midnight’s Children* (*Aadhi Raat ki Santanen*, tr. Priyadarshan, 1998), according to him, fails to pass this acid test of translation.¹⁴ Trivedi goes to the extent

of admitting that at times the Hindi translation ‘merrily surges ahead and outstrips the original’. This is possible, he thinks, because *A Suitable Boy* is ‘most deeply embedded in the theme and the context which it depicts and the most intimately complicit in a local language’. Perhaps ‘languages’ in the plural will be a better description, because a distinctive quality of *A Suitable Boy* is its polyphonic mosaic. Despite the initial impression of the novel being entirely documentary without verbal resonance, the variety of linguistic registers it plays with turns out to be wide-ranging. Ghazals of Mir, Ghalib, Vali Dakkani and Mast are as easily embedded in the text as are the nonsense verse of Sukumar Ray, *chaupais* from *Ramacharitmanas*, parodied lines of *Rabindra sangeet*, long passages of *Marsiya* at Muharram, as well as Landor’s epitaph for Rose Aylmer. The rustic Urdu spoken at Debaria is made to sound different from the courtly grace of Saeeda Bai’s conversation, and Haresh Khanna’s studied English is evidently worlds apart from the casual doggerel-spouting wit of the Chatterjee family in Calcutta. In an unobtrusive way Seth manages to capture the linguistic diversity of Indian life even though he is writing in English.

As a different kind of example I will mention Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988), to me the one novel written in the 1980s that will survive all the rest that appeared in that boom decade.¹⁵ The novel betrays no anxiety because it attempts to prove nothing and interrogates rather than defines the concept of a totalizing India. The narrator speculates tentatively on the varieties of human freedom and the bonds across space and time to explore personal relationships. India is neither a metaphor nor a philosophical idea. Calcutta and Dhaka are concrete places, so are New Delhi and London, but the boundaries between countries that arbitrarily separate people to congeal their identities in rigid shells are seen as illusory tricks that politics plays with human history and natural geography. The book glows with the light of a cartographic imagination and Bartholomew’s Atlas plays not a small part in it.¹⁶ Ghosh’s geographic inclusiveness is free of anxiety about roots and cultural ties. As in the works of the best Indian language writers today, words like ‘marginality’ and ‘hybridity’ seem irrelevant here and segmenting the world into first and third regions a rather absurd activity. The Indian novelists to be taken seriously are the ones not conditioned by the pressures of the global market. If they succeed, they do so as individuals, unfettered by the burden of otherness.

Notes

1. ‘The Empire Writes Back’, Pico Iyer, *Time*, 8 February 1993, pp.46-56.
2. Foreword to *Kanthapura* (1938; Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1947).

3. I am borrowing this usage from G. N. Devy (*After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism*, Bombay: Orient Longman, 1993). It is more convenient to use *bhasha* as a generic term instead of mentioning every time the names of the languages, e.g. Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, etc. Using the term 'Indian languages' may be misleading because English too is an Indian language. *Bhasha* refers to the modern languages of India other than English.
4. For example, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri; also, the old stalwart Nirad C. Chaudhuri. One enthusiastic commentator in *Desh* even claimed Vikram Seth as a Bengali because he was born in Calcutta. When *The God of Small Things* appeared in 1997, there was an attempt to call Arundhati Roy a Bengali as well, because of her last name.
5. Timothy Brennan. *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989) p. 34.
6. See Aijaz Ahmad's cogent arguments on this issue in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London, Verso, 1992; rpt Delhi: Oxford University Press). Specially relevant is chapter 3.
7. Quoted in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, p. 35.
8. Quoted in the *Time* magazine article cited above.
9. Bharati Mukherjee, Preface to *Darkness and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995).
10. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Loose Canon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 47.
11. *In Theory*, p. 47.
12. Salman Rushdie's statement claiming that the post-1947 Indian writing in prose 'both fiction and non-fiction...is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen "recognised" languages of India, the so-called "vernacular languages at the same time" (*The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*) was not published when this paper was written, but already, in the early nineties, ignorance of *bhasha* literature was beginning to be regarded as a mark of sophistication.
13. While reading *A Suitable Boy* I caught myself remembering several massive novels in Bangla that I enjoyed in my youth, particularly Buddhadeb Bose's *Tithidor* (the title means marriage) which is also woven around the theme of a girl choosing a suitable husband from the limited options available to her. More generally, Seth's novel can be related to the voluminous trilogies by Ashapura Debi and Bimal Mitra (beginning with *Pratham Pratishruti* and *Saheb Bibi Golam* respectively). Paralled examples from other Indian languages may not be

difficult to find. Incidentally, the recent Bangla translation of *A Suitable Boy* (*Satpatro*, 1999, tr. Enakshi Chatterjee) has been very well-received by the Bengali reading public.

14. Harish Trivedi, 'Translation as Recovery: *A Suitable Boy* as *Koi Achacha-sa Ladka*' and 'Rushdie into Hindi: *Midnight's Children* on Native Ground', *The Book Review*, September 1998 (pp. 30-31) and December 1998 (pp. 35-7).
15. Whether *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1997) will assume the same status in relation to the novels of the nineties is too early to say, but Ghosh's extraordinary new novel dismantles in a radical way many assumptions one has so far associated with English writing in India.
16. I am tempted to trace this back to Bibhutibhusan Banerjee, whose Bangla novels, *Pather Panchali* (1929) and *Aparajito* (1931) are replete with a similar fascination with geography. Young Opu's imagination is fired as much by the tales of Mahabharata as by a poem about the German soldier who thinks of his village Bingen on the Rhine, the stories of the sunken ship off the coast of Porto Plata and typhoons in the China Sea. At the end of *Aparajito*, the adult Opu sets sail for South America, an unusual destination for an Indian in 1931 when the book was published. Another novel by Banerjee, *Chander Pahar*, is set almost entirely in Uganda.

4.2.4 Critical Understanding of the Text

Having gone through both the crisp summary of the ideas broached by Mukherjee in 4.2.2 and perused the complete text in 4.2.3, we shall now embark upon a critical understanding of her thoughts. As you must have understood by now, she addresses several key issues concerning Indian literature – its scope and definition, history, what constitutes the element of Indianness which itself is a highly contested category, the critical relationship that Indian English shares with the huge number of vernacular languages and its literature, and so on. As you will see in the following sub-sections, Meenakshi Mukherjee critically and impartially addresses all these issues. With help from your counsellor, and on the basis of your reading of Bangla literature (or other regional literatures) you should now be in a position to understand the theoretical debates that surround Indian literature and relate your understanding to the comprehension of this essay.

4.2.5. ‘Anxiety of Indianness’: Definition

In “The Anxiety of Indianness” Mukherjee concentrates on a trend symptomatic in the literary works, mainly novels, written by Indian writers in English. She diagnoses this symptom as ‘anxiety of Indianness.’ She investigates into its causes, and even suggests remedy for this malady.

The *Time* magazine calls the contemporary Indian English writers “the new makers of World Fiction,” because, though they write about India, their target readership spans across the continents. And it is the setting of this target readership that contains the crux of the “anxiety” of the Indian English writers. The obsessive concern for Indianness in Indian English novelists was first clearly articulated by the celebrated novelist Raja Rao in his three-paragraphed foreword to his novel *Kanthapura*. (Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, as you know, are the three pioneering figures of Indian English novels.). In the “Foreword” to *Kanthapura*, Rao explains the dilemma he himself had experienced:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey *in a language that is not one’s own, the spirit that is one’s own*. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use 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*. (qtd. in Mukherjee 167; emphases added)

If you read the extract carefully, you will find that Rao is here speaking from his own experience. He finds that Indian authors inevitably experience a gap between two languages/cultures. The ‘thought movements’ one has are moulded by one’s own cultural background and upbringing. These are often at odds with the medium of expression if it is an ‘alien’ one. English is an ‘alien’ language and yet, curiously, it is not an ‘alien’ one. It occupies a unique, and problematic, status in India. It had been the coloniser’s language for a long time, but we have appropriated it for our purposes. It is the language of power, yet a large part of Indians do not have proper access to it. It is one of the Indian languages now, yet its idiom is different from those of the Indian languages. It was more so when the earlier Indian English authors had been writing in the heydays of colonialism.

The gap therefore remains between ‘our emotional make-up’ (which results in the

‘thought movement) and ‘our intellectual make-up’ (which leads to the act of writing). The Indian authors in English are, therefore, the children of a bi-cultural environment. Mukherjee claims that Rao, who diagnosed the anxiety quite perfectly, tried to negotiate the contesting claims of language and culture. She states clearly that such an exercise of writing in English by an Indian is a “bicultural act.” It involves a meeting between Indian cultures (reflected through themes) and a foreign culture (mainly expressed through the English language). Rao, according to Mukherjee, is speaking of the fact that the Indian English writers pollinate “English, the intellectually acquired language of formal discussions,” with memory, myth and oral traditions (167). This generic experimentation challenges the prevalent narrative modes of Western Europe in the 1930s. Rao’s own experimentation of inflecting the English language with Kannada idiom and ‘thought movements’ is noteworthy in this respect. Sisir Chatterjee argues that “[a]ll these narrative devices and strategies adopted by Raja Rao are merely the symptoms of his ‘anxiety of Indianness’”(6). He feels that this anxiety relates to how to present to the author’s English-knowing target audience, spread all over the world, the essential spirit of Indian culture in English. Hence, what Mukherjee argues is that the “anxiety” is created when one tries to capture the quintessential spirit of India in an ‘alien’ medium of expression. Therefore, Mukherjee’s argument implies that the root cause of the “anxiety” is the choice of language, which in turn, results from the desire to reach out to a wider audience outside the periphery of the native languages and, by extension, the national readership. In the diasporic writers this anxiety is notably present. Most of such writers have either never lived in India (like V. S. Naipaul) or have not been in the country for a long time (like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more). Still, these writers get involved with India and Indian themes. Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London to Bengali parents, grew up in Rhode Island (USA); studied at Boston University, now lives in America and considers America her “home.” Naipaul’s relationship with India is much more complicated as he has only ancestral memory to fall back upon.

4.2.6. Indianness in Indian English Writings and the Bhasha Literatures

Mukherjee argues that in a *Bhasha* novel (written in Marathi or any other Indian language), the author, and the critics (as well as the readers) do not care for a specific “Indianness.” It is so because a Bhasha writer does not carry “the larger burden of culture, tradition and civilization” (168). She emphatically observes, “No one would

write a doctoral dissertation on the Indianness of a Marathi novel” (168). By contrast, as we have seen, in the case of an Indian English writer, s/he makes the issue of Indianness a favourite essentialising obsession. The principal reason for this is that English is still perceived as a language of power and privilege. And therefore, we find a continual culture clash between the global (English) and the regional (other Indian languages). Thus, Mukherjee offers us another reason for the birth of the “anxiety of Indianness” — the consciousness of writing in a language possessing a place higher in the hierarchy.

This antithetical position between writing in English and writing in any other Indian language is produced by our constructions of some values as well as by the linguistic reach of the works. It matters whether the target readers are ‘local’ or global. A Bengali, Marathi or Malayalam writer can portray the multi-layered socio-cultural reality and plurality of the geo-political space when the target readers belong to his/her language. The readers would know about “the shades of response, its associative word-play or ironic understatement will evoke in the Malayalam or Marathi readers who are equipped with the keys for decoding these oblique messages” (172). On the contrary, this specificity is missing in the Indian English writers. The English language allows its users “to operate only within a limited parameter” (Mukherjee 172). Mukherjee even suggests that the latter are uncertain about their target audience and ‘exact constituency’ (172). It was a liability for the Indian English novelists to foreground the idea of a composite nation in their fictional works before independence. It was for the alienation factor and elitism of the language/culture that the Indian English novelists “tended to deploy certain thematic or formal devices to tether their texts to indigenous contexts” (170). There was no such commitment on the part of the Bhasha writers. Mukherjee refers to the older generation of Indian novelists in English. All the three pioneering authors (Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan), despite their ideological and technical differences, shared a pan-Indian vision, “an unspoken faith in a distillable Indian reality” (Mukherjee 174). Mukherjee comments, “Malgudi is a Hindu upper caste pan-India, resistant to change, eternal and immutable” (171). It is different from Maryganj in Phanishwar Renu’s *Malia Anchal* (1974) or Purnea in Satinath Bhaduri’s *Jagori* (1946). The latter category of works can convey the social differences, cultural heterogeneity and power hierarchy through their portrayal of tribal lives, local castes and sub-castes, and turmoil generated by the caste and sub-caste factors. They reject the generalisations and the simplistic binary of rural-urban. Mukherjee argues:

I am... merely suggesting that in the English texts of India there may be a greater pull towards a homogenisation of reality, an essentialising of India, a

certain flattening out of the complicated and conflicting contours, the ambiguous and shifting relations that exist between individuals and groups in a plural community. (171)

But Mukherjee is also of the opinion that language is seldom a matter of choice. She implies that many Indian writers choose to write in English not because they are lured by the prospect of gaining access “to the literary reproduction system of a world market” but because “they have literary competence only in English” (169). The language becomes congenial to the writer’s creative imagination, intellect and educational background. She also enquires into the circumstances that have led to the ‘loss of the mother tongue’ and compelled them to write their works in English. She does so by analysing the works of R. K. Narayan, one of the three great pioneers of Indian English writing.

4.2.7. Anxiety of Indian English Writers: Generational Perspectives

The effective beginning of Indian English writings, Mukherjee argues, dates back to the 1930s. The fictional writers used various strategies to ‘tether their texts to indigenous contexts’ and embedded Indianness in their novels. Mukherjee explains:

Mulk Raj Anand’s anger at the class and caste inequities in a hierarchic Hindu society, Bhabani Bhattacharya’s exposure of religious charlatanism, Kamala Markandeya’s concern with the suffering of the unspecified ‘Indian’ women—are as much illustrative cases of this anxiety manifested in themes as are the efforts of Raja Rao, G. V. Desani and Sudhin N. Ghose to dismantle the constraints of the written novel to achieve the meandering freedom of the oral narrative examples in terms of form. (170)

The themes have always been taken from Indian life and simultaneously there have often been attempts to employ new narrative techniques.

Raja Rao deployed in his *Kanthapura* a narrative mode that tries to integrate “myth with history, realism with fabulation” and presented India, blending “oral tales and gossip to capture the daily existence, the quarrels and alliances, the smell and sound of a village... where life is determined not by clock or the Gregorian calendar but by seasonal rhythm” (Mukherjee 167-8). On the other hand, R. K. Narayan’s language, narrative technique and subject matter have some special features. Having a steady and wide acceptability both at the popular level and academic platforms, he remains one of

the most successful authors in India. He has created Malgudi, a fictional place, as the setting of all his novels and short stories. Malgudi is a typical, quintessential Indian town, representing the very image of a homogenous India. This composite, one-dimensional image of India, devoid of any plurality or conflict, is carefully constructed by Narayan. He presents Malgudi metonymically to represent the Indian nation. It is a space for the “Hindu upper caste pan-India” (Mukherjee 171). The town’s exact location is not known. We do not even know which language the people of that town speak. All of the residents of the town belong to a harmonious Indian milieu, which rejects any possibility of differences. Narayan set up a model for the other Indian writers in English to follow. The act of eliminating the cultural differences and individualities paves the way for gaining success outside India as the intricacies of the different Indian cultures cannot be deciphered by an outsider. This tendency of portraying an even-toned, minimalistic India is reflective of the “anxiety of Indianness,” that we have discussed earlier. It is this “anxiety,” Meenakshi Mukherjee argues, that led Narayan and many other Indian novelists of that period to resort to a portrayal of a composite nation, instead of exploring the differences and the subtleties of the cultural nuances of the Indian society.

Now, the projection of a homogenous national identity involves two imperatives. Mukherjee explains that it needs “an erasure of difference within the border and accentuating the difference with what lies outside” (174). Mukherjee observes that English, being a foreign language, automatically fulfils the first of the two conditions. And consequently, when a homogenous image of the nation is projected, it spontaneously serves as a contrast to the equally homogenous image of the West. It is important to note here, as Mukherjee points out, that the non-western countries in Asia and Africa are seldom mentioned in the whole phenomenon of the East-West bipolarisation until the novels of Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth came into the scenario. The contrast does not sharply operate in the subsequent decades. The writers of younger generation usually seek to be a part of a global literary league and are not much interested in maintaining familiarity with the works of the Indian English writers of older generation or of the *Bhasha* literatures. Yet, paradoxically, they achieve fame on the basis of their relationship with India. Thus, even these writers, most of whom live outside the country, cannot escape the “anxiety of Indianness.” Mukherjee comments, rather sarcastically, that “there is no getting away from the burden of India if you want to write in English” (176). She refers to the term “third world cosmopolitans.” It was first used by Timothy Brennan in 1989, to represent those, who emerge from a non-western culture, but their mastery over the current idiom of ‘metropolitan meta-language’ of narrative makes them

'authentic' voices of the 'Third World' in the global centres of publication and criticism. The diasporic Indian English fiction writers perfectly fit into this category. As Mukherjee further explains, they highlight the experience of colonialism as the theme or metaphor, unlike the authors from the Bhasha literatures. Very few of the major works of fiction in other Indian languages deal with colonialism any longer. This can be the very reason, Mukherjee points out, why the Bhasha novels, even when translated in English, do not get attention of the western academia. Many forms of internal and external dislocation, rootlessness, cultural hybridity are privileged in a cosmopolitan writer's fiction. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indian novelists were keen to be rooted in Indian culture, as it was a matter of identity for them. But today, 'Indianness' seems to be a metaphor or symbol to them to deal with. While writers like Michael Ondaatje describes his characters as "international bastards, born in one place, choosing to live elsewhere," Bharati Mukherjee celebrates her mixed heritage by suggesting that 'Indianness' is now a metaphor, "a particular way of comprehending the world" (qtd. in Mukherjee 181). But the fact remains that the treatment of India as a 'discursive space' can only be expected from an Indian English writer. Bhasha novelists do not consider Indianness as a metaphor. It is too real for them. Thus, it can be said that the literary imperialism of the Western academic establishment gives birth to a new kind of "anxiety" that drives the Indian English novelists to cater to a pre-determined package for winning global recognition. This endemically infects the Indian writers in English.

Mukherjee mentions the prominent Indian English novelist, Salman Rushdie, who opened a new vista for the younger generation by expanding the scope of the novelist. The liberating influence of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has inspired the new Indian English novelists to explore India as a discursive space. It has challenged the previous hierarchy and helped them to earn a place in world literature which was earlier reserved for the British authors only. Mukherjee, by analysing *Midnight's Children*, shows us how Rushdie refuses to conform to the conventional assumptions about narrative mode and national history. Discarding the centre-periphery paradigm, "in a typically post-modernist fashion, he perceives an India under the threat of fragmentation and disintegration" (Chatterjee 24). The novel is very much open to different kinds of readings. Mukherjee opines that it can be read as a novel where the abundant multiplicity of India is threatened by the forces inimical to diversity and differences.

Images of mutilation and holes pervades the novel, beginning with the perforated sheet through which the doctor was permitted to examine the female patient, anticipating the many partial views of reality the novel would play with, and

going on to show the country splitting up amoeba-like first into two and then more pieces (Mukherjee 176-77).

In the novel, the image of India is represented through the interesting metaphor of the All-India radio which used to broadcast programmes in all its different languages, projecting multiple ethnic and religious identities. By contrast, Doordarshan in its early days represented only the dominant culture and official languages. Mukherjee thinks that *Midnight's Children* also attempts to construct the idea of an inclusive and tolerant India (though in an entirely different way). She also admits that the novel seeks to emancipate the Indian English novelists in English from the “anxiety” of presenting an image of a composite, homogenized nation. But while the “anxiety of Indianness” is demolished, another emerges. Mukherjee elaborates that there is, quite surprisingly, a sudden spurt of enthusiasm to appreciate the new Indian English writers, especially among the Bengali academia, partly because many of the new writers are of Bengali origin. Now, this enthusiasm will inspire the writers to write in English about India, as it brings recognition both at home and abroad, which, in turn, creates an unspoken compulsion among the new generation of the Indian English writers to fall prey to the “anxiety of Indianness.”

Referring to Aijaz Ahmad, Mukherjee points out that “even in India there seems to be developing a new urban culture for whom only the literary document produced in English is a national document. All else is regional, hence minor and forgettable” (182). Her argument is validated by the fact that the newspapers and journals refer to the new Indian novels in English as the “New Indian Novel,” almost denying the contribution and existence of the Bhasha literatures. Mukherjee, echoing G. N. Devy’s use of the term, calls this literary elitism as a kind of ‘amnesia’—amnesia about the other Indian languages which have a long history and a larger numerical presence. But Mukherjee also mentions of those ‘genuine’ writers who refuses to fall into predictable models. In order to explain further, she cites the example of Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh. Mukherjee claims that their fictional works are marked not by any anxiety but by a confident individuality. To illustrate this point, Mukherjee cites the example of Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* which becomes a bestseller on terms entirely set by the author, and not the publisher or the market. That Seth’s novel is deeply rooted in Indian culture is proved by the fact that it yields to an astounding translation into Hindi (*Koi Acchha sa Ladka*). Even though it is written in English, it successfully captures the linguistic diversity of Indian life. Mukherjee also shows the example of Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* and comments that it betrays no ‘anxiety,’ as it attempts to prove

nothing and interrogates rather than defines the concept of a totalising India. Towards the end of the essay, she prescribes a remedy to cure the ‘anxiety.’ That remedy is resistance to the lures of global market pressures. She suggests that one has to resist the temptation of the global market and perceive the cities, the languages, the cultures, the ‘Indianness’ not as a metaphor, but as concrete, real phenomena. Only then, the ‘anxiety’ of being an Indian will transform into strength.

➤ **Activities**

- “The ‘tradition’ of Indian writing in English is discontinuous” – Analyse.
- Why were countries in Asia and Africa not mentioned by the earlier writers in English?
- What does Mukherjee mean by ‘reversal of centre-periphery paradigm’ in English literary culture?
- What role does colonialism and globalisation play in creating the ‘anxiety of Indianness’ in Indian English writers?

4.2.8. Summing Up

The English Education Act of 1835, based on Macaulay’s minute, made the Indians realise the ‘cultural inferiority’ of the native culture and the education system against the supposed superiority of the Western knowledge system. The epigraph of Meenakshi Mukherjee’s book *The Perishable Empire* refers to the infamous minute of Macaulay, which foresees an imperishable empire of British art and culture in India. Whether it perishes or not is a matter of debate. What remains imperishable, however, is the English language, which has now become an inseparable part of Indian culture and literature. In “The Anxiety of Indianness,” Meenakshi Mukherjee carefully compares the performance and reception of the Indian writings in English and Bhahsa literatures. She raises the crucial issues of Indianness which becomes an obsession with the Indian English novelists. Satish C. Aikant, who has reviewed Mukherje’s book, observes that since the global market demands, there is a greater pull for the homogenization of cultures in most Indian English. A penchant for presenting an undifferentiated India is all too evident. In the present-day scenario, the writers are subjected to the pressure of a global market economy. On the one hand, s/he wants to be rooted in her/his indigenous culture; on the other hand, s/he wants to be part of the cosmopolitan crowd. It is to solve this conflict that the “anxiety of Indianness” affects the Indian English writers. But genuine artists transcend this ‘anxiety’ and stamp their works with their own distinctive personalities.

4.2.6 Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type Questions (20 marks)

1. Discuss the different situations from which an Indian writer's "anxiety" arises out of the language s/he chooses.
2. Analyse the essay "The Anxiety of Indianness" from a postcolonial context.
3. Analyse the characteristics of 'Indianness' evident in the Indian English literature of the colonial period and the Indian English literature of the post-colonial period.

Medium-length Answer Type Questions (12 marks)

1. Show how Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand were 'victims' of 'anxiety of Indianness.'
2. Discuss how Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh evaded 'anxiety of Indianness' in their works.
3. Elaborate how globalised market forces determine the nature of literary works.

Short Questions (6 marks)

1. Why does Mukherjee 'single out' Raja Rao for discussion?
2. What does Mukherjee say about *Desh*, a Bengali magazine?
3. Define the term 'Third World Cosmopolitans' as used by Timothy Brennan? Who belong to the category?
4. Comment on the Methwold episode in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

4.2.7 Recommended Reading

Aikant, Satish C. Rev. of *The Perishable Empire*, by Meenakshi Mukherjee. *World Literature Today* 75.2 (2001): 318-319. Web. 22 June, 2017.

Chatterjee, Sisir Kumar. "Indianitis: Symptoms, Causes and Cure: Treating 'The Anxiety of Indianness.'" *Critical Essays on Non-Fictional Prose*. Ed. Sisir Kumar Chatterjee, Huzafia Omar Siddiqi and N. B. Routh. New Delhi: Imprint, 2008.

Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasan. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling, 2012.

Kothari, Rita. "Crossing Boundaries: Indo-Anglian Writing." Rev. of *The Perishable Empire*, by Meenakshi Mukherjee. *Economic and Political Weekly* 36.24 (2001): 2135-2136. Web. 22 June, 2017.

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Unit- 3 □ Ruskin Bond: Escape from Java

Raja Rao: India: A Fable

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4.3.0. Introduction

In this Unit which is devoted to the genre of the short story in Indian English, you will be introduced to two authors – Raja Rao, of whom you have read earlier as a novelist and one of the triumvirate with Mulk Raj Anand and R. K Narayan; and Ruskin Bond who is our contemporary. While Rao, who wrote mostly from abroad, fused Indian philosophical ideas into the very texture of his stories; Bond, an Anglo-Indian writer born in Kasauli (Himachal Pradesh) and having lived in places like Jamnagar (Gujarat), Dehra (Uttarakhand), Shimla (Himachal Pradesh) and Delhi, has made the foothills of

the Himalayas his literary terrain in most of his works. Here you have a short story each by these two authors. While cultural and ideological locations become important in studying the work of Raja Rao, what endears one to Ruskin Bond is the aplomb with which he appeals to young and mature readers alike. Thus you will come across two very different kind of writers in this Unit, and our focus through the stories will be to unravel the diversity that underlies the genre of the short story in Indian English.

4.3.1. Ruskin Bond as an Anglo-Indian Author

As noted in the Introduction, Ruskin Bond (1934-), an iconic writer of Anglo-Indian descent, has made significant contribution to Indian Writing in English by writing prolifically for the young as well as for the adult readers. His first novel *The Room on the Roof* was written at the age of seventeen. Since then, he has produced several novels and short stories, which are set mostly in the foothills of the Himalayas. In fact, he still lives with his adopted family in Mussourie, and literary enthusiasts on a visit to the hill town often try to have a date with the celebrated author!

Bond's creative oeuvre is varied. He has written short stories, novels, edited anthologies. Ruskin Bond's first novel had fetched him the John Llewellyn Memorial Prize in 1957. Its sequel is *Vagrants in the Valley*. His other notable works are *Delhi is not Far*, *The Sensualist*, *The Penguin Book of Indian Railway Stories*, *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories* and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. He has also written a memoir called *Scenes from a Writer's Life*. He received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 for his book *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. He has been graced with prestigious national awards such as "Padmashri" in 1999 and "Padmabhushan" in 2014. His works such as *A Flight of Pigeons*, *The Blue Umbrella* and *Susanna's Seven Husbands* have been adapted into films by eminent filmmakers in Bollywood such as Shyam Benegal (*Junoon*) and Vishal Bharadwaj (*The Blue Umbrella*, *7 Khoon Maaf*).

In his narratives, the description of the flora and the fauna of the hill stations are complemented by the author's own childhood memories of growing up in Dehra. Bond represents, among others, the domiciled Europeans and the Anglo-Indian people residing in these places. His representation throws light on the life and society of this group of people who were representatives of the colonial rule in India. Being born into that society, Bond confesses in the "Preamble, Prelude, Prologue" to his memoir *Scenes from a Writer's Life* that he had to resolve his inner conflicts for saying 'I am an Indian' (xv). Like most of the Anglo-Indian children of his time, he was brought up on European

cultural norms. His childhood memories are fraught with his father's plans for going back 'home,' that is England. After completing the school degree from Bishop Cotton School in Shimla, he had gone to England for better prospects. It was during his stay there for four years that he had realised his rootedness in India. Nostalgia of the mountains, valleys, forests, fields and friends in India had made him so much homesick that he has observed "no sooner had I set foot in the West, than I wanted to return to India and to all that I had known and loved" (*Scenes from a Writer's Life* xv).

To him India is more of an atmosphere than a land (*Scenes from a Writer's Life* xv). His familiarity with the people, animals, nature and culture in this environment instilled in him a sense of security of being at home. The gamut of his literary works is but a creative recreation of this 'homely' environment which had a deep-seated impact on his mixed-racial identity: "Being a child of changing times, I had grown up with divided loyalties; but at the end of the journey I had come to realize that I was blessed with a double inheritance" (*Scenes from a Writer's Life* xvi). Thus, when we read the adventures and the experiences of Rusty, an Anglo-Indian boy, in his novels such as *The Room on the Roof* and *The Vagrants in the Valley* and also in anthologies such as *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills* and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, we can observe the implications of Bond's "double inheritance." On the one hand, his fiction communicates the anxiety of bearing the legacy of partly British and partly Indian origin, and on the other hand, it expresses his joy to feel at home in the social matrix of culturally diverse India.

In *The Room on the Roof*, we can observe that racial hybridity disturbed his young mind, which he represented through Rusty's groping for facts: "His guardian was pink, and the missionary's wife a bright red, but Rusty was white. With his thick lower lip and prominent cheekbones, he looked slightly Mongolian, especially in a half-light. He often wondered why no one else in the community had the same features" (11). Prior to the Independence, the Europeans and the Anglo-Indians, who lived in the foothills of the Himalayas, were mostly referred to as one community. However, Rusty's remark on his physical appearance shows that racial differences persisted among the members of this white society. The Anglo-Indian community, to which Rusty belonged, was formed as a result of interracial marriages between European men and Indian women. People of unmixed origins held prejudiced views against the racially hybrid persons. As a result of this, derogatory terms such as 'half-caste,' 'eight annas' and 'blackly whites' were used to refer to the members of the Anglo-Indian community.

His racial hybridity had placed Rusty in the liminal space from where he could view critically the attitudes of the local people as well as those of the pukka-bred Europeans.

Critiquing the latter group, he points out that to his guardian, Mr. Harrison, the missionaries and their neighbours, the bazaar in Dehra was the “real India,” “a forbidden place—‘full of thieves and germs’” (*The Room on the Roof* 10). In the story “The Last Tonga Ride,” the Ayah scolds Rusty for accompanying Bansi, the *tonga*-driver, whom she believes to be a rogue affected by tuberculosis (125). Rusty knew that such prejudices were considered as serious issues within the white community residing in the hilly regions of Northern India. So, he was apprehensive that if, by chance, the Ayah caught him taking a joyful ride on Bansi’s *tonga*, then, that would become his last *tonga* ride (135).

In the “Author’s Note” of his collection *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills* (2003), Bond tells us that Rusty represents his alter ego (vii). Autobiographical resonances in the stories of Rusty reveal Bond’s attitude towards different Indian communities, which unlike the one exhibited by the European characters of his fictional works, is full of empathy and discretion. In “The Last Tonga Ride,” Rusty’s excitement on seeing the bazaar, his stealthy rides on Bansi’s *tonga* and his honest description of the racial prejudices of the white people manifest his authorial endeavours to represent the boy as one belonging to this country. Stories such as “The Tree Lover,” “The Funeral,” “Coming Home to Dehra,” and “The Last Tonga Ride” represent not only the persistence of colonial values in his Westernised upbringing but also his deep attachment with the flora and fauna of the hills. By associating his alter ego’s identity with the topography of a particular region of the Indian territory he tries not only to strengthen his own sense of belonging to this country but also to resolve the conflict in his community identity. He tries to represent his community as an inseparable part of culturally diverse India and justifies his national identity in the following words: “‘I am an Indian’—in the broadest, all-embracing, all-Indian sense of the word” (xv-xvi *Scenes from a Writer’s Life*).

In this all-embracing cultural space of India, Rusty’s stories representing Anglo-Indian life in the colonial milieu have gained wide popularity. These stories provide an alternative view of the colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. In his novella *A Flight of Pigeons*, Bond presents an alternative view of Indian nationalism by representing the trials and tribulations of the European families during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 through the narrative of Ruth Labadoor, an Anglo-Indian girl, and her captor, Javed Khan. Such a narrative can also be read as a text of alternative history, which testifies to the hangover of colonial legacy on his postcolonial consciousness. This hangover, however, fills his mind with the memories of his father, whose untimely death had left him destitute of parental affection in childhood.

Rusty's deep attachment with his father is reflected in stories such as "The Funeral" and "Escape from Java". When Rusty was very young, his mother had left his father and had married a Punjabi businessman. Her indifference towards Rusty and even towards his infant half-brother has been made explicit in the story "Coming Home to Dehra." These as well as the other stories in the anthology *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills*, are but fragmented images of Bond's own childhood. However, one has to keep in mind that in spite of being the author's alter ego, Rusty is a fictional persona. While studying these stories, we should concentrate more on understanding Bond as a writer than as an individual. His lucid style of storytelling has made him one of the most popular writers in India.

➤ **Activities:**

- Consult *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills* and find out the number of stories on Rusty included there. Mention what flora and fauna find mention in the stories.
- Consider how Ruskin Bond, an Anglo-Indian author, can be considered as an Indian English writer. Is there any conflict between Indianness and Anglo-Indian identity?
- What kind of landscape do you find in the short stories written by Ruskin Bond? Does the story prescribed in your syllabus deviate from that? If so, how?
- Can you mention any other Anglo-Indian author writing in India now? Mention some of his creative works.
- Find some autobiographical echoes mentioned in the section above? How does Rusty represent Bond's 'alter ego'?

4.3.2. Text of "Escape from Java"

IT ALL HAPPENED within the space of a few days. The cassia tree' had barely come into flower when the first bombs fell on Batavia (now called Jakarta) and the bright pink blossoms lay scattered over the wreckage in the streets.

News had reached us that Singapore had fallen to the Japanese. My father said: 'I expect it won't be long before they take Java. With the British defeated, how can the Dutch be expected to win!' He did not mean to be critical of the Dutch; he knew they did not have the backing of the Empire that Britain had. Singapore had been called the Gibraltar of the East. After its surrender there could only be retreat, a vast exodus of Europeans from South East Asia.

It was 1940 and the Second World War was on. What the Javanese thought about the war is now hard for me to say. because I was only nine at the time and knew very little of worldly matters. Most people knew they would be exchanging their Dutch rulers for Japanese rulers, but there were also many who spoke in terms of freedom for Java when the war was over.

Our neighbour, Mr Hartono, was one of those who looked ahead to a time when Java, Sumatra and the other islands would make up one independent nation. He was a college professor and spoke Dutch, Chinese, Javanese and a little English. His son, Sono, was about my age. He was the only boy I knew who could talk to me in English, and as a result we spent a lot of time together. Our favourite pastime was flying kites in the park.

The bombing soon put an end to kite flying. Air raid alerts sounded at all hours of the day and night and, although in the beginning most of the bombs fell near the docks, a couple of miles from where we lived, we had to stay indoors. If the planes sounded very near, we dived under beds or tables. I don't remember if there were any trenches. Probably there hadn't been time for trench digging, and now there was time only for digging graves. Events had moved all too swiftly. and everyone (except of course the Javanese) was anxious to get away from Java.

'When are you going?' asked Sono, as we sat on the veranda steps in a pause between air raids.

'I don't know,' I said. 'It all depends on my father.'

'My father says the Japs will be here in a week. And if you're still here then. they'll put you to work building a railway,'

'I wouldn't mind building a railway,' I said.

'But they won't give you enough to eat, Just rice with worms in it. And if you don't work properly, they'll shoot you.'

'They do that to soldiers,' I said. 'We're civilians.'

'They do it to civilians too,' said Sono.

What was I doing in Batavia, when the only homes I had known had been in India—first with my father, and later my paternal grandparents? My father worked for a firm dealing in rubber—his job took him to many places—and six months earlier he had been sent to Batavia to open a new office in partnership with a Dutch business house. I had joined my Father in Batavia only four months back. After the war was over he was going to take me to England.

'Are we going to win the war?' I asked.

'It doesn't look like it from here,' he said.

No, it didn't look as though we were winning. Standing at the docks with my father, I

watched the ships arrive from Singapore crowded with refugees—men, women and children, all living on the decks in the hot tropical sun; they looked pale and worn-out and worried.

They were on their way to Colombo or Bombay. No one came ashore at: Baravia. It wasn't British territory; it was Dutch; and everyone knew it wouldn't be Dutch for long.

'Aren't we going too?' I asked. 'Seno's father says the Japs will be here any day:

'We've still got a few days,' said my father. He was a short, stocky man, who seldom got excited. If he was worried, he didn't show it. 'I've got to wind up a few business matters; and then we'll be off.'

'How will we go? There's no room for us on those ships.'

'There certainly isn't. But we'll find a way, Rusty, 'don't worry.

I didn't worry. I had complete confidence in my father's ability to find a way out of difficulties. He used to say. 'Every problem has a solution hidden away somewhere, and if only you look hard enough you will find it.'

There were British soldiers in the streets but they did not make us feel much safer. They were just waiting for troop ships to come and take them away. No one, it seemed, was interested in defending Java, only in getting out as fast as possible.

Although the Dutch were unpopular with the Javanese people, there was no ill-feeling against individual Europeans. I could walk safely through the streets. Occasionally small boys in the crowded Chinese quarter would point at me and shout. '*Orang Balandi!* (Dutchman!) but they did so in good humour, and I didn't know the language well enough to stop and explain that the English weren't Dutch. For them, all white people were the same, and understandably so.

My father's office was in the commercial area, along the canal banks. Our two-storeyed house, about a mile away, was an old building with a roof of red tiles and a broad balcony which had stone dragons at either end. There were rowers in the garden almost all the year round. If there was anything in Batavia more regular than the bombing, it was the rain, which came pattering down on the roof and on the banana fronds almost every afternoon. In the hot and steamy atmosphere of Java, the rain was always welcome.

There were no anti-aircraft guns in Batavia—at least we never heard any—and the Jap bombers came over at will, dropping their bombs by daylight. Sometimes bombs fell in the town. One day the building next to my father's office received a direct hit and tumbled into the river. A number of office workers were killed.

The schools closed, and Sono and I had nothing to do all day except sit in the house, playing darts or carrom, wrestling on the carpets, or playing the gramophone.

We had records by Gracie Fields, Harry Lauder, George Formby and Arthur Askey, all popular British artists, One song by Arthur Askey made fun of Adolph Hitler, with the words, "Adolph, we're gonna hang up your washing on the Siegfried Line, if the Siegfried Line's still there!" It made us feel quite cheerful to know that back in Britain people were confident of winning the war!

One day Sono said, "The bombs are falling on Batavia, not in the countryside. Why don't we get cycles and ride out of town?"

I fell in with the idea at once. After the morning all-clear had sounded. we mounted our cycles and rode out of town. Mine was a hired cycle, but Sono's was his own. He'd had it since the age of five, and it was constantly in need of repair. 'The soul has gone out of it', he used to say.

Our fathers were at work; Sonos mother had gone out to do her shopping (during air raids she took shelter under the most convenient shop counter) and wouldn't be back for at least an hour. We expected to be back before lunch.

We were soon out of town, on a road that passed through rice fields, pineapple orchards and cinchona plantations, On our right lay dark green hills, on our left, groves of coconut palms and, beyond them. the sea. Men and women were working in the rice fields. knee-deep in mud, their broad-brimmed hats protecting them from the fierce sun. Here and there a buffalo wallowed in a pool of brown water, while a naked boy lay stretched out on the animal's broad back

We took a bumpy crack through the palms. They grew right down to the edge of the sea. Leaving our cycles on the shingle, we ran down a smooth, sandy beach and into the shallow water.

'Don't go too far in, 'warned Sono, 'There may be sharks about.'

Wading in amongst the rocks, we searched for interesting shells, then sat down on a large rock and looked out to sea, where a sailing ship moved placidly on the crisp, blue waters. It was difficult to imagine that half the world was at war. and that Batavia, two or three miles away, was right in the middle of it.

On our way home we decided to take a shortcut through the rice fields, but soon found that our tyres got bogged down in the soft mud. This delayed our return; and to make things worse, we got the roads mixed up and reached an area of the town that seemed unfamiliar. We had barely entered the outskirts when the siren sounded followed soon after by the drone of an approaching aircraft.

'Should we get off our cycles and take shelter somewbere?' I called out.

'No, let's race home shouted Sono. 'The bombs won't fall here.'

But he was wrong. The planes flew in very low. Looking up for a moment, I saw

the sun blotted out by the sinister shape of a Jap fighter-bomber. We pedalled furiously; but we had barely covered fifty yards when there was a terrific explosion on our right, behind some houses. The shock sent us spinning across the road. We were flung from our cycles. And the cycles, still propelled by the blast, crashed into a wall.

I felt a stinging sensation in my hands and legs, as though scores of little insects had bitten me. Tiny droplets of blood appeared here and there on my flesh. Sono was on all fours, crawling beside me, and I saw that he too had the same small scratches on his hands and forehead. made by tiny shards of flying glass.

We were quickly on our feet, and then we began running in the general direction of our homes. The twisted cycles lay forgotten on the road.

'Get off the street, you two!' shouted someone from a window; but we weren't going to stop running until we got home. And we ran faster than we'd ever run in our lives.

My father and Sono's parents were themselves running about the street, calling for us, when we came rushing around the corner and rumbled into their arms,

'Where have you been?'

'What happened to you?'

'How did you get those cuts?'

All superfluous questions but before we could recover our breath and start explaining, we were bundled into our respective homes. My father washed my cuts and scratches and dabbed at my face and legs with iodine-ignoring my yelps-and then stuck plaster all over my face.

Sono and I had a fright. and we did not venture far from the house again.

That night my father said. 'I think we'll be able to leave in a day or two.'

'Has another ship come in?'

'No.'

'Then how are we going? By plane?'

'Wait and see, Rusty. It isn't settled yet, But we won't be able to take much with us-just enough to fill a couple of travelling bags:

'What about the stamp collection?' I asked.

My father's stamp collection was quite valuable and filled several volumes.

'I'm afraid we'll have to leave most of it behind: he said. 'Perhaps Mr Hartono will keep it for me and when the war is over-if it's over-we'll come back for it.'

'But we can take one or two albums with us. can't we?'

'I'll take one. There'll be room for one. Then if we're short of money in Bombay, we can sell the stamps.'

'Bombay? That's in India. I thought we were, going straight to England.'

'First we must go to India.'

The following morning I found Sono in the garden, patched up like me, and with one foot in a bandage. But he was as cheerful as ever and gave me his usual wide grin.

'We're leaving tomorrow: I said.

'The grin left his face.

'I will be sad when you go: he said. 'But I will be glad too, because then you will be able to escape from the Japs.'

'After the war, I'll come back.'

'Yes, you must come back. And then, when we are big, we will go round the world together. I want to see England and America and Africa and India and Japan,

I want: to go everywhere.'

'We can't go everywhere'.

'Yes, we can. No one can stop us!'

We had to be up very early the next morning. Our bags had been packed late at night. We were taking a few clothes, some of my father's business papers, a pair of binoculars, one Stamp album, and several bars of chocolate. I was pleased about the stamp album and the chocolates, but I had to give up several of my treasures—favourite books, the gramophone and records, an old Samurai sword, a train set and a dartboard. The only consolation was that Sono, and not a stranger, would have them.

In the first faint light of dawn a truck drew up in front of the house. It was driven by a Dutch businessman. Mr Hookens, who worked with my father, Sono was already at the gate, waiting to say goodbye.

'I have a present for you: he said,

He took me by the hand and pressed a smooth hard object into my palm. I grasped it and then held it up against the light. It was a beautiful little seahorse, carved out: of pale blue jade.

'It will bring you luck,' said Sono.

'Thank you,' I said. 'I will keep it forever.'

And I slipped the little seahorse into my pocket.

'In you get, Rusty,' said my father, and I got up on the front seat between him and Mr Hookens,

As the truck started up. I turned to wave to Sono. He was sitting on his garden wall, grinning at me. He called out: 'We will go everywhere, and no one can stop us!'

He was still waving when the truck took us round the bend at the end of the road.

We drove through the still, quiet streets of Batavia, occasionally passing burnt-out

trucks and shattered buildings. Then we left the sleeping city far behind and were climbing into the forested hills. It had rained during the night, and when the sun came up over the green hills, it twinkled and glittered on the broad, wet leaves. The light in the forest changed from dark green to greenish gold, broken here and there by the flaming red or orange of a trumpet-shaped blossom. It was impossible to know the names of all those fantastic plants! The road had been cut through dense tropical forest, and on either side the trees jostled each other (hungry for the sun; but they were chained together by the liana creepers and vines that fed upon the struggling trees).

Occasionally a Jelarang, a large Javan squirrel, frightened by the passing of the truck, leapt through the trees before disappearing into the depths of the forest. We saw many birds: peacocks, junglefowl, and once, standing majestically at the side of the road, a crowned pigeon, its great size and splendid crest making it a striking object even at a distance.

Mr Hookens slowed down so that we could look at the bird. It bowed its head so that its crest swept the ground; then it emitted a low hollow boom rather than the call of a turkey.

When we came to a small clearing, we stopped for breakfast. Butterflies, black, green and gold, flitted across the clearing. The silence of the forest was broken only by the drone of airplanes, Japanese Zeros heading for Batavia on another raid. I thought about Sono, and wondered what he would be doing at home: probably trying out the gramophone!

We ate boiled eggs and drank tea from a thermos, then got back into the truck and resumed our journey.

I must have dozed off soon after, because the next thing I remember is that we were going quite fast down a steep, winding road and in the distance I could see a calm blue lagoon.

'We've reached the sea again,' I said.

'That's right,' said my father. 'But we're now nearly a hundred miles from Batavia, in another part of the island. You're looking out over the Sunda Straits.'

Then he pointed towards a shimmering white object resting on the waters of the lagoon.

'There's our plane,' he said.

'A seaplane!' I exclaimed, 'I never guessed. Where will it take us?'

'To Bombay. I hope. There aren't many other places left to go to!'

It was a very old seaplane, and no one, not even the captain—the pilot was called the captain—could promise that it would take off. Mr Hookens wasn't coming with us;

he said the plane would be back for him the next day. Besides my father and me, there were four other passengers and all but one were Dutch. The odd man out was a Londoner, a motor mechanic who'd been left behind in Java when his unit was evacuated. (He told us later that he'd fallen asleep at a bar in the Chinese quarter, waking up some hours after his regiment had moved off!) He looked rather scruffy. He'd lost the top button of his shirt, but, instead of leaving his collar open, as we did, he'd kept it together with a large safety pin, which thrust itself out from behind a bright pink tie.

'It's a relief to find you here. guvnor,' he said, shaking my father by the hand. 'Knew you for a Yorkshisemar the minute I set eyes on you. It's the *song-fried* that does it. if you know what I mean.' (He meant *sang-froid*, French for a 'cool look'.) And here I was, with all these flippin' forriners, and me not knowing word of what they've been yatterlng about. Do you think this old tub will get us back to Blighty?'

'It does look a bit shaky,' said my father. 'One of the first flying boats, from the looks of it. If it gets us to Bombay, that's far enough.'

'Anywhere out of Java's good enough for me,' said our new companion. 'The names Muggeridge',

'Pleased to know you, Mr Muggeridge: said my father. 'I'm Bond. This is my son.'

Mr Muggeridge rumpled my hair and favoured me with a large wink.

The captain of the seaplane was beckoning to us to join him in a small skiff which was about to take us across a short stretch of water to the seaplane.

'Here we go,' said Mr Muggeridge. 'Say your prayers and keep your fingers crossed.'

The seaplane was a long time getting airborne. It had to make several runs before it finally took off. Then, lurching drunkenly, it rose into the clear blue sky.

'For a moment I thought we were going to end up in the briny,' said Mr Muggeridge, untying his seat belt. 'And talkin' of fish. I'd give a week's wages for a place of fish an' chips and a pint of beer.'

'I'll buy you a beer in Bombay: said my father.

'Have an egg,' I said, remembering we still had some boiled eggs in one of the travelling bags.

'Thanks, mate,' said Mr Muggeridge, accepting an egg with alacrity. 'A real egg, too! I've been livin' on egg powder these last six months. That's what they give you in the Army, And it ain't hens' eggs they make it from, let me tell you. It's either gulls' or turtles' eggs!'

'No,' said my father with a straight face. 'Snakes' eggs'.

Mr Muggeridge turned a delicate shade of green; but he soon recovered his, poise, and for about an hour kept talkng about almost everything under the sun. including

Churchill. Hitler, Roosevelt. Mahatma Gandhi and Betty Grable. (The last named was famous for her beautiful legs.) He would have gone on talking all the way to Bombay had he been given a chance; but suddenly a shudder passed through the old plane, and it began lurching again.

'I think an engine is giving trouble.' said my father.

When I looked through the small glassed-in window, it seemed as though the sea was rushing up to meet us.

The co-pilot entered the passenger cabin and said something in Dutch. The passengers looked dismayed, and immediately began fastening their seat belts.

'Well, what did the blighter say?' asked Mr. Muggeridge.

'I think he's going to have to ditch the plane: said my father, who knew enough Dutch to get the gist of anything that was said.

'Down in the drink!' exclaimed Mr Muggeridge, 'Gawd 'elp us! And how far are we from Bombay, guv?'

'A few hundred miles', said my father.

'Can you swim, mate?' asked Mr Muggeridge looking at me.

'Yes,' I said. 'But not all the way to Bombay. How far can you swim?'

'The length of a bathtub,' he said.

'Don't worry,' said my father. 'Just make sure your life jacket's properly tied.'

We looked to our life jackets; my father checked mine twice, making sure that it was properly fastened.

The pilot had now cut both engines, and was bringing the plane down in a circling movement.

But he couldn't control the speed, and it was tilting heavily to one side. Instead of landing smoothly on its belly, it came down on a wingtip. and this caused the plane to swivel violently around in the choppy sea. There was a terrific jolt when the plane hit the water, and if it hadn't been for the seat belts we'd have been flung from our seats. Even so, Mr Muggcridge struck his head against the seat in front, and was now holding a bleeding nose and using some shocking language.

As soon as the plane came to a standstil, my father undid my seat belt. There was no time to lose. Water was already filling the cabin, and all the passengers- except one, who was dead in his seat with a broken neck-were scrambling for the exit hatch. The co-pilot pulled a lever and the door fell away to reveal high waves slapping against the sides of the stricken plane.

Holding me by the hand, my father was leading me towards the exit.

'Quick, Rusty,' he said. 'We won't stay afloat for long:

'Give us a hand!' shouted Mr Muggeridge, still struggling with his life jacket. (First this bloody bleedin' nose, and now something's gone and stuck!

My father helped him fix the life jacket, then pushed him out of the door ahead of us.

As we swam away from the seaplane (Mr Muggeridge splashing fiercely alongside us), we were aware of the other passengers in the water. One of them shouted to us in Dutch to follow him.

We swam after him towards the dinghy, which had been released the moment we hit the water. That yellow dinghy, bobbing about on the waves, was as welcome as land.

All who had left the plane managed to climb into the dinghy. We were seven altogether—a tight fit. We had hardly settled down in the well of the dinghy when Mr Muggeridge, still holding his nose, exclaimed: 'There she goes!' And as we looked on helplessly, the seaplane sank swiftly and silently beneath the waves.

The dinghy had shipped a lot of water, and soon everyone was busy bailing it out with mugs (there were a couple in the dinghy), hats and bare hands. There was a light swell, and every now and then water would roll in again and half fill the dinghy. But within half an hour we had most of the water out, and then it was possible to take turns, two men doing the bailing while the others rested. No one expected me to do this work, but I gave a hand anyway. using my father's sola topi for the purpose.

'Where are we?' asked one of the passengers.

'A long way from anywhere,' said another.

'There must be a few islands in the Indian Ocean.'

'But we may be at sea for days before we come to one of them.'

'Days or even weeks,' said the captain. 'Lee us look at our supplies.'

The dinghy appeared to be fairly well provided with emergency rations: biscuits, raisins, chocolates (we'd lost our own) and enough water to last a week. There was also a first-aid box, which was put to immediate use, as Mr Muggeridge's nose needed attention. A few others had cuts and bruises. One of the passengers had received a hard knock on the head and appeared to be suffering from a loss of memory. He had no idea how we happened to be drifting about in the middle of the Indian Ocean; he was convinced that we were on a pleasure cruise a few miles off Batavia.

The unfamiliar motion of the dinghy, as it rose and fell in the troughs between the waves, resulted in almost everyone getting seasick. As no one could eat anything, a day's rations were saved.

The sun was very hot, but my father covered my head with a large spotted

handkerchief. He'd always had a fancy for bandanna handkerchiefs with yellow spots, and seldom carried fewer than two on his person; so he had one for himself too. The sola topi, well soaked in seawater, was being used by Mr Muggeridge.

It was only when I had recovered to some extent from my seasickness that I remembered the valuable stamp album, and sat up, exclaiming. 'The stamps! Did you bring the stamp album, Dad?'

He shook his head ruefully. 'It must be at the bottom of the sea by now. But don't worry. I kept a few rare stamps in my wallet: And looking pleased with himself, he tapped the pocket of his bush shirt.

The dinghy drifted all day, with no one having the least idea where it might be taking us.

'Probably going round in circles: said Mr Muggeridge pessimistically.

There was no compass and no sail, and paddling wouldn't have got us far even if we'd had paddles; we could only resign ourselves to the whims of the current and hope it would take us towards land or at least to within hailing distance of some passing ship.

The sun went down like an overripe tomato dissolving slowly in the sea. The darkness pressed down on us. It was a moonless night, and all we could see was the white foam on the crests of the waves. I lay with my head on my father's shoulder, and looked up at the stars which glittered in the remote heavens.

'Perhaps your friend Sono will look up at the sky tonight and see those same stars' said my father. 'The world isn't so big after all.'

All the same, there's a lot of sea around us,' said Mr Muggeridge from out of the darkness.

Remembering Sono, I put my hand into my pocket and was reassured to feel the smooth outline of the jade seahorse.

'I've still got Sono's seahorse,' I said, showing it to my father.

'Keep it carefully,' he said. 'It may bring us luck.'

'Are seahorses lucky?'

'Who knows? But he gave it to you with love, and love is like a prayer. So keep it carefully.'

I didn't sleep much that night. I don't think anyone slept. No one spoke much either, except of course Mr Muggeridge who kept muttering something about cold beer and salami.

I didn't feel so sick the next day. By ten o'clock I was quite hungry; but breakfast consisted of two biscuits, a piece of chocolate, and a little drinking water. It was another

hot day, and we were soon very thirsty; but everyone agreed that we should ration ourselves strictly.

Two or three still felt ill, but the others, including Mr Muggeridge, had recovered their appetites and normal spirits, and there was some discussion about the prospects of being picked up.

'Are there any distress rockets in the dinghy?' asked my father; 'If we see a ship or a plane, we can fire a rocket and hope to be spotted. Otherwise there's not much chance of our being seen from a distance.'

A thorough search was made in the dinghy, but there were no rockets.

'Someone must have used them last Guy Fawkes Day; commented Mr Muggeridge.

'They don't celebrate Guy Fawkes Day in Holland,' said my father. 'Guy Fawkes was an Englishman.'

'Ah,' said Mr Muggeridge, not in the least put out.

'I've always said, most great men are Englishmen. And what did this chap Guy Fawkes do?'

'Tried to blow up Parliament.' replied my father.

That afternoon we saw our first sharks. They were enormous creatures, and as they glided backward and forward under the boat it seemed they might hit and capsize us. They went away for some time, but returned in the evening.

At night, as I lay half asleep beside my father, I felt a few drops of water strike my face. At first I thought it was the sea spray; but when the sprinkling continued, I realized that it was raining lightly.

'Rain!' I shouted, sitting up. 'It's raining!'

Everyone woke up and did their best to collect water in mugs, hats or other containers. Mr Muggeridge lay back with his mouth open, drinking the rain as it fell.

'This is more like it; he said. 'You can have all the sun and sand in the world. Give me a rainy day in England!'

But by early morning the clouds had passed, and the day turned out to be even hotter than the previous one. Soon we were all red and raw from sunburn. By midday even Mr Muggeridge was silent. No one had the energy to talk.

Then my father whispered, 'Can you hear a plane, Rusty?'

I listened carefully, and above the hiss of the waves I heard what sounded like the distant drone of a plane; but it must have been very far away, because we could not see it. Perhaps it was flying into the sun, and the glare was too much for our sore eyes, or perhaps we'd just imagined the sound.

Then the Dutchman who'd lost his memory thought he saw land, and kept pointing towards the horizon and saying, "That's Batavia, I told you we were close to shore!" No one else saw anything. So my father and I weren't the only ones imagining things.

Said my father, 'It only goes to show that a man can see what he wants to see, even if there's nothing to be seen!'

The sharks were still with us. Mr Muggeridge began to resent them. He took off one of his shoes and hurled it at the nearest shark; but the big fish ignored the shoe and swam on after us.

'Now, if your leg had been in that shoe, Mr Muggeridge, the shark might have accepted it: observed my father.

'Don't throw your shoes away,' said the captain. "We might land on a deserted coastline and have to walk hundreds of miles!'

A light breeze sprang up that evening, and the dinghy moved more swiftly on the choppy water.

'At last we're moving forward,' said the captain.

'In circles: said Mr Muggeridge.

But the breeze was refreshing; it cooled our burning limbs and helped us to get some sleep. In the middle of the night I woke up feeling very hungry.

'Are you all right?' asked my father, who had been awake all the time.

'Just hungry,' I said.

'And what would you like to eat?'

'Oranges!'

He laughed. 'No oranges on board. But I kept a piece of my chocolate for you. And there's a little water, if you're thirsty.'

I kept the chocolate in my mouth for a long time, trying to make it last. Then I sipped a little water.

'Aren't you hungry?' I asked.

'Ravenous! I could eat a whole turkey. When we get to Bombay or Madras or Colombo, or wherever it is we get to, we'll go to the best restaurant in town and eat like—like—'

'Like shipwrecked sailors!' I said.

'Exactly.'

'Do you think we'll ever get to land, Dad?'

'I'm sure we will, You're not afraid, are you?'

'No, Not as long as you're with me.'

Next morning, to everyone's delight, we saw seagulls. This was a sure sign that land couldn't be far away; but a dinghy could take days to drift a distance of thirty or forty miles. The birds wheeled noisily above the dinghy. Their cries were the first familiar sounds we had heard for three days and three nights, apart from the wind and the sea and our own weary voices.

The sharks had disappeared, and that too was an encouraging sign. They didn't like the oil slicks that were appearing in the water.

But presently the gulls left us, and we feared we were drifting away from land.

'Circles,' repeated Mr Muggeridge. 'Circles.'

We had sufficient food and water for another week at sea; but no one even wanted to think about spending another week at sea.

The sun was a ball of fire, Our water ration wasn't sufficient to quench our thirst. By noon, we were without much hope or energy.

My father had his pipe in his mouth. He didn't have any tobacco. but he liked holding the pipe between his teeth. He said it prevented his mouth from getting too dry.

The sharks came back.

Mr Muggeridge removed his other shoe and threw it at them.

'Nothing like a lovely wet English summer; he mumbled.

I fell asleep in the well of the dinghy, my father's large handkerchief spread over my face. The yellow spots on the cloth seemed to grow into enormous revolving suns.

When I woke up, I found a huge shadow hanging over us. At first I thought it was a cloud. But it was a shifting shadow. My father took the handkerchief from my face and said, 'You can wake up now, Rusty. We'll be home and dry soon:

A fishing boat was beside us, and the shadow came from its wide, flapping sail. A number of bronzed, smiling, chattering fishermen were gazing down at us from the deck of their boat.

A few days later my father and I were in Bombay.

My father sold his rare stamps for over a thousand rupees, and we were able to live in a comfortable hotel.

Mr Muggeridge was flown back to England. Later we got a postcard from him, saying the English rain was awful!

Meanwhile, I had the jade seahorse which Sono had given me.

And I have it with me today.

4.3.3. Analysis / Critical Understanding of the Text

Now that you have read the story in the original, let us quickly embark on a critical understanding of it, that will in a way also help you recall the text.

The story “Escape from Java” is taken from the anthology *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills*. It is set in Java, an island in Indonesia. Java had been a Dutch colony for a century or so before it was invaded by the British in 1811. However, the British returned it to the Dutch through the Treaty of Paris. During the Second World War, Japan was gradually taking over the British colonies in Southeast Asia. The story is a first person narrative. Rusty begins his narrative by describing such a phase of national crisis. After the fall of Singapore to the Japanese army, the inhabitants of Java had become apprehensive about its consequences. Rusty specifies that the year was 1940 and at that time he was just nine years old. The boy from the hills in Dehra had gone to Java to spend time with his father who had been there for six months on an official tour. He worked for a firm dealing in rubber and had to travel to different countries. The rubber firm had sent him to Batavia, presently known as Jakarta, for opening a new office in partnership with a Dutch company. There, Rusty had befriended Sono, a Javanese boy of his age, whose father, Mr. Hartono, was a professor in a college. Mr. Hartono knew several languages such as Dutch, Chinese, Javanese and a bit of English. His multilingual proficiency suggests that Java was inhabited by people of different cultures and nationalities.

Rusty and Sono had become good friends because the latter was the only boy he knew in the neighbourhood who could speak English. Both spent time together by playing and flying kites. The air raids by the Axis forces had not only stopped their kite flying but also had injured them one day when they had gone to the countryside on their cycles. They had to hide themselves under a table or a bed whenever the fighter planes flew low. By narrating these details, Bond represents the atrocities of the war from the perspective of a nine-year old boy who “knew very little about worldly matters” (61). After being wounded by the shards of glasses scattered during the explosion of the bomb, the two children were very much scared. They ran for life to escape the bombers who were chasing them madly from above. This incident highlights the fact that cruelty in war leads to insensitivity and loss of sanity among grown-up people.

Mr. Hartono and Sono were anxious about Rusty and his father’s escape from the impending horrors of the war in Java. The refugees in the Indonesian islands and Singapore were hurrying their way either to Colombo or to Bombay. With the defeat of Great Britain, it had become evident that the Dutch would be overpowered. The fate of

the Javanese people was already decided: “they would be exchanging their Dutch rulers for Japanese rulers” (61). However, there were people like Mr. Hartono, who believed that Java would become an independent nation in near future, which turned out to be true. Java gained her freedom in 1949.

The nationalist urge of the Javanese people was non-aggressive. In spite of the fact that the Dutch rulers were unpopular among the Javanese people, the latter did not have any personal grudge against the Europeans. Rusty observes that he could walk safely in the streets. Sometimes, children in the Chinese neighbourhood yelled at him calling ‘*Orang Balandi*’ which means “Dutchman.” To them, “all white people were the same” (64). The members of the Anglo-Indian community, as we have noted earlier, also preferred to identify themselves with their English forefathers. It becomes clear when Rusty makes the following statement in response to the children, who took him to be a Dutch: “I didn’t know the language well enough to explain that the English weren’t Dutch” (64). Rusty’s belief that they would be going to England recurs as a motif of anxiety among Anglo-Indian people who considered England as their homeland and yearned to settle down there for vindicating their English identity. The escape from Java can be symbolically interpreted as an escape from the anxiety of being represented as non-English. The crisis of lying between and betwixt two racial-cultural axes usually intensifies during a situation of general crisis such as war.

Their escape from Java began one early morning in a truck driven by the Dutch businessman, Mr. Hookens, who was his father’s colleague. Sono gave him a seahorse made of jade as parting gift and told him that the token would bring goodluck. They carried minimum luggage consisting of “a few clothes...business papers, a pair of binoculars, one stamp album, and several bars of chocolate” (71). On their way, Rusty observed the destruction caused by the air raids: “We drove through the still, quiet streets of Batavia, occasionally passing burnt-out trucks and shattered buildings” (72). The truck brought them to the Sunda Straits, which was in another part of Java, almost a hundred miles away from Batavia. From there, they had to board an old, worn out seaplane which was to take them to Bombay. Apart from Rusty and his father, there were four other passengers in the plane, among whom three were Dutch and the odd man out was a Londoner, Mr. Muggeridge. In the course of the escape journey, there developed a cordial relationship between Mr. Muggeridge and Rusty’s father, who introduced himself as Mr. Bond. From a critical perspective, the bond between them suggests that the British people, who generally looked down upon the Anglo-Indians for their racial hybridity, were diplomatic enough to treat them as equals at the time of

difficulty. Rusty's father shared with him the meager refreshments he had in his stock. This apparently exhibits his kindness but speaking critically, it reveals the pro-British attitude of the members of the Anglo-Indian community.

Mr. Muggeridge, a motor mechanic, had been left behind in a Chinese bar when his unit was evacuated from Java. The fact that he had become war wrecked was apparent from his "scruffy" appearance (74). On receiving a boiled egg from Mr. Bond, he was so thrilled that he made the following comment: "A real egg, too! I've been livin' on egg powder these last six months. That's what they give you in the Army. And it ain't hens' egg they make it from... It's either gulls' or turtles' eggs!" (76). On being told by Mr. Bond that the powder was made from the eggs of snakes, he turned pale. The shocking impact of the war and also that of being marooned in the sea for a few days had an adverse effect on their sanity. While discussing political leaders such as Churchill, Hitler, Roosevelt and Mahatma Gandhi, Mr. Muggerridge abruptly spoke about Betty Grable, an American actress.

The crisis was further aggravated when something went wrong with the engine of the plane and the passengers along with the pilot-cum-captain had to land the plane on the Indian Ocean with a terrific jerk. As a result of this unusual landing, Mr. Muggeridge's nose started bleeding and one of the passengers, whose neck had been broken, met with death. Water started to inundate the cabin. The survivors put on their life jackets and sheltered themselves in a dinghy. With the tropical sun shining overhead, it was really hot in the sea. Nausea, stirred by the rise and fall of the dinghy, prevented them from eating anything. Recovering from the seasickness, Rusty enquired his father about his treasured stamp album and was in turn informed that it had got drowned and lost. They looked for distress rockets to send signals to the flying planes, which they hoped would come down for their rescue. The next life-threatening danger was the sharks. These monstrous creatures had been chasing the dinghy for quite a long time. The passengers were afraid that they might become their food in case the dinghy capsized. Mr. Muggeridge battled with those sea monsters by throwing his shoes at them. Apart from the seasickness and the sharks, limited stock of drinking water also emerged as a big problem. They could drink only when it rained.

Like Mr. Muggeridge, Rusty's father too exhibited nervousness. The latter started keeping his smoking pipe between his lips although there wasn't any tobacco in it. He also had illusions of hearing the buzz of planes. One of the Dutchmen suffered from amnesia and he kept on pointing out to the horizon as the shore of Batavia. Seasickness coupled with the anxiety of drifting towards the unknown had affected them so severely that all

of them had become victims of delusions. Since, there was nothing to be seen except water, they started imagining things that they wished to see.

Finally, they were rescued by a fishing boat with huge sails. They reached Bombay after a few days. Rusty's father had to sell his rare stamps for paying the rent of a comfortable hotel. Mr. Muggeridge went back to England. He sent them a postcard with the message that "the English rain was awful!" (87). Perhaps, he had sent this message intentionally to console the little boy, whose wish of going to England was not fulfilled. Rusty was happy that he could retain Sono's gift, the jade seahorse. The thought that it would bring him good luck filled his mind with joy. The story ends with the narrator's sudden shift from the flashback to the present time when he, a grown up man, takes pride in possessing that token of childhood. Thus, the story ends with a positive note that one may come across crises and frustrations in life, but he/she should not lose hope. We do not know whether or not the jade seahorse brought Rusty good luck but it is evidently a symbol of optimism, which has helped him to endure the hardships of life. The author seems to communicate the message that we need to have positive attitude as our seahorse for crossing the sea of troubles.

As far as characterisation is concerned, in this story, Bond has highlighted the apparent goodness in human nature. Through the personalities of Rusty's father and Mr. Hartono, he has tried to show that human values such as kindness, fellow-feeling and courage triumph over the atrocities of war, which represent inhumanity. Rusty and Sono are likely to inherit the qualities of empathy and resilience from their fathers. Representing the personalities of the adults from the perspectives of children is a sensitive matter, which Bond has handled very carefully in this story. Discussing about Bond's acumen in his stories dealing with children, Amita Aggarwal writes that "[t]he realization that children are hardly taken seriously by their elders, made him more serious towards them" (*The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond* 86).

➤ **Activities:**

- Open an atlas and find the geographical location of Java and Batavia (now called Jakarta). Gather some historical and socio-cultural information of the countries.
- Identify the two regions: South Asia and Southeast Asia. Which countries belong to these regions?
- Make a list of the characters you come across in the stories.
- What is the significance of the seahorse? Do you think that "The Seahorse" could have been an alternative title to "Escape from Java"? If so, why?

4.3.4. Major Themes in “Escape from Java”

- **War in “Escape from Java”**

As it is suggested by the title, the story describes a harrowing experience that Rusty and his father had during the Second World War. This story is different from the other stories in the anthology for its setting and theme. It is the only story in the anthology, which presents ‘war’ as its focal theme. What seems to be more interesting in this context is that here ‘war’ has been represented from the perspective of a child narrator. We all know that ambitions of the rulers and the politicians are responsible for war. The author wants to draw our attention towards the fact that children like Rusty and Sono, who are completely ignorant of the ambitions and machinations of the power-thirsty people, have to pay the price during a war. In the preceding section, we have discussed how the air raids had intervened with the normal rhythm of their childhood. They had to give up flying kites, which was their favourite pastime. The blasts made such a deafening noise that they had to converse with one another in between air raids. In spite of being children, both had accepted the fact that they could not stay together for very long. Rusty and his father would have to leave Java for safety because the Allied league, which was headed by Great Britain, had been losing its colonies in Southeast Asia to Japan representing the Axis league. Nine-year old Rusty had gathered from the interactions of the adults that the defeat of the Allied Forces in Southeast Asia would lead to de facto possession of Java by the Japanese rulers, but in any way it would not help Java to restore its pre-colonial status of an independent nation. The impending horrors of war offer the children an insight into the adult world. Sono cautions Rusty that if the Axis forces catch hold of him and other civilians belonging to the British Empire, then they would be made to work in the railways and would be given rice with worms in it. Sono’s opinion that the Japs would not distinguish between the soldiers and the civilians reveals the unquenchable animosity between nations at war.

Warfare had been highly mechanised during the Second World War. Scientifically developed weapons symbolised progress of technology. Cities were representatives of a nation’s technological and economic advancement. That was one reason as to why the opposing forces had been desperate to cause more devastation in the urban space than the rural places. Violence in the Second World War had surpassed all records of inhumanity through incidents of mass massacre such as the holocaust and the dropping of the Atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On learning from Sono that there are no bombings in the countryside, Rusty had accompanied him to the countryside. As

they were riding their cycles, a fighter plane targeted them. Their cycles were crushed in the blast and they were bruised badly. As readers, we are left shell shocked to know about the impact of the blast on their tender bodies:

I felt a stinging sensation in my hands and legs, as though scores of little insects had bitten me. Tiny droplets of blood appeared here and there on my flesh. Sono was on all fours, crawling beside me, and I saw that he too had the same small scratches on his hands and forehead, made by tiny shards of flying glass. (67)

It was a narrow escape for them. The experience taught them the lesson that no part of the island was safe during the War. Escape from Java had become an utmost necessity for escaping the atrocities of the Axis forces in Southeast Asia.

War affects mental peace of an individual by generating anxiety in his/her mind. While escaping from the war-torn island, Rusty becomes anxious for Sono and his family when he sees the “Japanese Zeros” (fighter planes) proceeding towards Batavia. Although the escape assured their survival against the bomb raids in Java and also instilled courage in his young heart, it could not recover the carefree self with which the boy from the hills had arrived in Java. From this perspective, the escape from Java can be described as a metaphorical journey from innocence to experience.

• Identity crisis in “Escape from Java”

The theme of identity crisis features as a subtext of the story. Although the narrative is temporally set against the colonial backdrop, we have to keep in mind that the story was written in the post-colonial period. Ruskin Bond is a postcolonial author, whose stories about Rusty, his alter-ego, represent the problematics of being born into a mixed race community. In “Escape from Java” this becomes apparent as Rusty, the child narrator, expresses his obsession to identify himself with the English. In spite of the fact that the Anglo-Indians were considered to be a part of white community in India, we have already discussed in the first section that racial discrimination persisted within the community. The presence of the English colonisers in the Indian subcontinent, however, assured cultural security to the members of the Anglo-Indian community. Defeat of the Allied Forces not only revealed Britain’s military and economic weaknesses but also paved way for the demolition of the Empire through decolonisation in Asia and Africa. It was evident from Mr. Bond’s remark that since Britain, who was backed by her Empire, could not resist the Japanese invasions, the Dutch would not be able to persist their hold on Java (60). By referring to Mr. Hartono’s belief that Java would

become an independent nation in near future, the narrator/author opens up indirectly the issue of decolonisation, which had begun in the middle of the 1940s.

While demolition of the Empire decided the fates/identities of many South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, it left undecided the fate/identities of the members belonging to the Anglo-Indian community. We come to know from books such as Frank Anthony's *Britain's Betrayal in India* (1969) and Lionel Caplan's *Children of Colonialism* (2001) that the British people never considered the Anglo-Indians as their equals. After the Indian Independence in 1947 the British people had abandoned the Anglo-Indians completely. The indifferent attitude of the British towards the Anglo-Indians becomes apparent in Bond's story when Rusty tells us that the British soldiers in Java did not assure their safety (63). The indifference of the British soldiers represents the indifference of Britain towards her subjects in the colonies. While this indifference did not matter to the Indians or the Javanese people, it did for the Anglo-Indians because they had always identified themselves politically and culturally with the British colonisers.

The defeat of the Allied league in the Second World War had stirred in them the anxiety of losing their cultural identity, which justified their Englishness in the Indian subcontinent to a great extent. The other option for preserving their Englishness was to go to England and settling down there as British citizens. In "Escape from Java" we can see that Rusty is almost desperate to go to England because he must have grown up with the community's notion that England was the homeland/fatherland for the Anglo-Indians. Since the identity of the community had been constructed on the basis of one's paternal lineage, England, the country from where the British colonisers had come, was considered as homeland by the Anglo-Indians. However, the futility of nurturing such a notion becomes clear through Rusty's failure to go to England. In spite of repeating time and again that they would be going to England, Rusty and his father land up in India, the country where they were born. On the other hand, Mr. Muggeridge went back to England and resumed his life there although he found the English rain awful. The story ends with a positive note but it underlines the fact that the issue of Anglo-Indian identity had been a problematic issue since the colonial period. Under the heavy weight of the big historical incidents such as the World Wars, Holocaust and Atom bomb, the crisis of the Anglo-Indians has been submerged in the depths of obscurity. Being a postcolonial author, Bond tries to salvage the traces of his community's history by foregrounding this crisis in his historical narratives. He makes an effort to assuage Rusty's anxiety by redefining the latter's identity as 'the boy from the hills.' Through this ascription, he tries to remove the obsessive hangover of colonialism from Rusty's

personality and emphasizes his rootedness to the Indian soil where he has been born and raised. In this respect, “Escape from Java” can be read as a text that redefines Rusty’s identity from the postcolonial perspective.

- **“Escape from Java” as a Father-Son Narrative**

The stories of Rusty abound in autobiographical elements. If we look into the life of Ruskin Bond, we can see that his father was the dearest person to him. His parents had separated when he was a small boy. His mother had left his father and had married a Punjabi businessman. Absence of mother must have generated in him a strong sense of insecurity and loneliness. Being deprived of mother’s affection, he had anchored his sense of parental longing solely in his father. Although his father died when he was just ten years old, his presence is like an indelible mark in Bond’s childhood memories which he represents nostalgically in the stories on Rusty.

In “Escape from Java” we can observe Rusty’s deep attachment to his father. When Batavia was being raided by the Japanese forces and there was no room for them in the ships, even then, Rusty had retained complete faith on his father’s discretion: “I didn’t worry. I had complete confidence in my father’s ability to find a way out of difficulties” (63). Although he had short and stout structure, his sense of fellow feeling for others in the time of crisis made him a heroic figure in the eyes of his son. His compassionate attitude is revealed to us when he helps the co-passengers to come out of the drowning plane, assists them in putting on their life jackets and tries his best to comfort his little son in every possible way. We do not know whether he ate anything in the dinghy or not but he offered food to Muggeridge and dropped a piece of chocolate in Rusty’s mouth when the latter had become very tired. Rusty could fall asleep in the dinghy because he knew that he was under his father’s care and protection. In order to protect Rusty from the scorching heat of the sun, he gently covered the boy’s face with his big handkerchief. He tried to entertain the child by telling that on reaching the shore of any big city such as Madras, Colombo or Bombay, they would eat in the best restaurant there. After reaching Bombay, he sold away some of his valuable stamps for arranging a comfortable boarding for his little son whom he could not provide a proper meal during the escape.

After reading this story, we can make an assumption of the pain and emptiness that Rusty had felt after the untimely death of such a caring father. Perhaps, the memories of his father were like the seahorse which helped him swim across the sea of troubles all alone.

➤ **Activities:**

1. Explain the terms ‘Allied Forces’ and ‘Axis Power.’ Try to understand their role in the Javanese context.
2. Who is the pure British character in the story? Discuss his cultural location.
3. Try to figure out the symbolic significance of the sea, airplane, dingy and seahorse.

4.3.5. Summing up:

In Ruskin Bond’s anthology *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills*, we can observe his sincere effort to represent the socio-cultural milieu of Northern India from the perspective of a small boy, whose community identity was a source of anxiety for him. The hangover of being a part of the ‘white’/hybrid society in colonial India conflicts with Bond’s postcolonial self. He is able to critique the racial prejudices of the British colonisers and figure out his own socio-cultural location in India. Autobiographical details abound in Rusty’s narratives. These stories present a wonderful *mélange* of factual and fictional elements. These characteristics can be well-observed in the story “Escape from Java.” Bond’s description of Rusty’s experiences in war-torn Java is fictional, but his representation of Rusty’s bond with his father is drawn from the facts of his own life. Similarly, Rusty’s obsession with the issue of going to England is representative of the urge that most of the Anglo-Indian people nurtured in the years preceding the Indian Independence. Bond’s lucid style of storytelling, his insightful representation of childhood and his rootedness to the foothills of the Himalayas, are some of the important features of his writing that have established him as an eminent Indian litterateur.

4.3.6. Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type Question (20 marks)

1. Comment critically on Bond’s contribution to Indian English literature.
2. Discuss the title of “Escape from Java.”
3. Make a critical assessment of Bond’s art of characterization in “Escape from Java.”
4. Assess the role of Ruskin Bond as a postcolonial writer with special reference to the story in your syllabus.

Mid-length Answer Type Questions (12 marks)

1. Describe Rusty's attitude towards the flora and fauna of the hills.
2. Discuss the theme of father-son narrative with reference to the story in your syllabus.
3. Comment critically on Rusty's role as child narrator in *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills*.
4. What impression of Java do you get in "Escape from Java"?

Short Questions (6 marks)

1. Write a note on Rusty's obsession for England.
2. Why do you think the narrator has treasured the seahorse?
3. Comment on the role of Rusty's friend in "Escape from Java."

4.3.7. Raja Rao as a writer of Indian Fiction in English

Being born into a family of learned Brahmins, Raja Rao (1908-2006) had been introduced to Indian philosophy and Sanskrit since childhood. After graduating from Nizam College in Hyderabad, he won the Asiatic Society Scholarship for pursuing higher studies at the University of Montpellier in France. There he researched on the topic of Indian influence on Irish literature. Rao spent the larger part of his adult life in the West. Although his literary perspectives were deeply influenced by the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valerie and Romain Rolland, his fictional art is deep-rooted in the Indian soil. His first novel *Kanthapura* was published in 1938. His next novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) won the SahityaAkademi Award in 1964. Other major works by him include *The Cat and the Shakespeare: A Tale of Modern India* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988). His oeuvre also includes shorter fiction such as *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947), *The Policeman and the Rose: Stories* (1978) and *On the Ganga Ghat* (1989). His significant works in non-fiction are *The Meaning of India* (1996), a collection of essays, and *The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1998), a biography. For his extraordinary contribution to literature, he has received several prestigious awards such as Padma Bhusan in 1969 and Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1988.

He moved to the United States of America in 1966 and taught Indian philosophy at

the University of Texas till 1980. Rao had joined the Quit India movement in 1942. He was deeply influenced by Shankracharya's philosophic principles of *Advaitya* (non-duality) and Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). His fictional works are but literary vehicles which represent his search for the truth through a philosophical introspection of the social and political realities. His quest for truth led to his desperate longing for a guru or mentor, which ended in 1943 when he met Sri Atmananda (1883-1959) in Trivandrum. His semi-autobiographical novel *The Serpent and the Rope* represents his search for the guru. *Kanthapura* deals with the influence of the Gandhian principles in the nationalist struggle taking place in a remote village of south India. Rao died in 2006 and was posthumously awarded Padma Vibhusan, the second highest civilian award of India, in 2007.

“The most important thing for an Indian English novelist is to have his roots deep in Indian soil” (Sharma 4). The ‘novel’ as a literary genre had evolved in Europe in the eighteenth century. The advent of ‘novel’ in India and the gradual emergence of Indian novel in English were consequences of the colonial encounter. In the early decades of the twentieth century when Indian Writing in English was developing, many critics had raised the question if it was really possible for the Indian writers to represent the Indian thought and culture/s in a language that belonged to the colonisers. Addressing this contemporary critical query in his “Foreword” to *Kanthapura* Raja Rao observes that “[t]he tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs” (5). By introducing certain stylistic and linguistic devices such as Indian words, mythological subtexts and philosophical ideas in his fictional narratives, he attempted to infuse the tempo of Indian life in his English expression. The mode of narration in *Kanthapura*, is that of the (*sthala*) *purana*, which is typically an indigenous form of narrating oral history and mythological tales. He uses this narrative mode for describing the anti-colonial struggle of a group of people in Kanthapura, a remote village in South India. As a postcolonial writer, Rao has tried to interrupt the colonial discourse in ‘novel’ with Indian perspectives, which included interweaving of indigenous narrative techniques and articulation of Gandhism and Vedantic philosophy.

Rao's philosophical perspectives are based on the precepts of guru-disciple relationship manifested in one's search for the guru (mentor), principles of the Absolute or *Brahma* in *Advaitism* (non-duality) preached by Sri Shankaracharya (788-820) and the archetype of *shiva-shakti* (masculine-feminine) represented in Tantric discourse. There is a quest for Absolute truth among his protagonists and the guru plays a very significant role in

that pursuit. In his semi-autobiographical novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, we come across the author's own desperation to find out the guru. This he represents through the anxieties of Ramaswamy, the protagonist. The philosophical principles offer a metaphysical dimension to his fiction, which can be observed in his novels as well as in his short stories such as "Akkayya," "The Policeman and the Rose," "Nimka," "India: A Fable" and "On the Ganga Ghat." For example, in "The Policeman and the Rose," *ahankaror* ego has been metaphorically addressed as "the Policeman" who arrests our soul and prevents us from achieving supreme happiness and *moksha* (liberty). 'Rose' signifies spiritual pursuit or quest for the absolute truth. Stories such as "The Cow of the Barricades" and "Javni" reveal his penchant for symbols which elucidate the principles of Hinduism. Cow is considered to be a holy animal among the Hindus and in "Indian mythology, the cow is the most revered of all animals" (Sharma, R.L. 159). In "The Cow of the Barricades" Gauri, the 'cow,' has been represented as a symbol of the nation or motherland. "She is a veritable goddess, heroic in her moves characterized by a strong inner drive and strength that magnify her role from an ordinary cow to a hero" (Sharma, R.L. 159). Similarly, references to the Ganges in his collection "On the Ganga Ghat" are permeated with spiritual symbolism. "In these stories Raja Rao explores the play of life as it unfolds in Benaras, the holy city to die in" (Vyaghreswarudu 193). Rao personifies Ganga as the "I" or the inner self. In the last story, he observes that instead of flowing, Ganga has become standstill, which is but a symbolical representation of the "flux through which one identifies and comprehends illusion and reality, truth and untruth" (Sharma 158).

Rao represents the Indian nation and the Indian nationalism in his fiction through symbols and archetypes that are found in the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. In spite of being an expatriate for the larger part of his life, his nostalgic ruminations about his homeland are strongly constituted by his knowledge of the Indian mythology and Vedantic principles. He connects the mythical past with the present by representing and critiquing the contemporary social issues in his fiction. In stories such as "The Little Gram Shop," "Javni" and "In Khandesh" he has dealt with social issues such as corruption, exploitation of women, selfishness of the feudal society, caste hierarchy and discrimination. Rao's fiction is rooted in the ground reality of both pre-Independence and post-Independence India. All these characteristics and facts reveal his commitment to establish Indian fiction in English as what Ruth PraverJhabvala has called a 'distinctive genre' (Jhabvala qtd. in Mercanti 62).

➤ **Activities**

- Make a list of Raja Rao's short stories. Choose any two stories (other than "India: A Fable") and go through them. Express within 150 words the thematic content of each story.
- Write short notes on the concepts of *Advaita* and *Vedanta*.
- Look up the following words and phrases in a dictionary of literary terms: mythology, motif, symbol, myth, archetype, oral history, expatriate literature.
- Consider how Raja Rao has established himself as an Indian English writer.

4.3.8. Text of "India: A Fable"

Never was the Luxembourg so beautiful as on that fragile spring day. March had come and gone boisterously, cold winds blew in April, and then the immense sunshine came. The pools were transparent, the sky full of ochre clouds, the trees cut through the air with their leaves, the earth was hot. Men came out, old men with coughs and whiskers, and sat by the ponds reading newspapers. The old, fat women removed their kerchiefs and spoke garrulous words. The Sorbonnard girls opened their blouses to let the cool air breathe down them, single silver bangles on their wrists, and cigarettes held lighted in the air. They read d'Alernbert or Henri Becque, while the young men basked in the sun and slept.

The children scampered all over the park. I sat under Anne of Austria (1629-1687?), grey, big-headed, big bosomed—some old tragic royalty bulging with posthumous importance. My thoughts were about morganatic marriages, U.N. statistics, parks and books, and the *chocolat chez Alsecia rue d'Assas* whose taste would not leave my mouth. The cold wind blew over my mouth. The cold wind blew over my chest, and I sat up. A child of five or six, pink-skinned and clear-eyed, was dragging a wooden camel along the path.

'Where are you going?' I asked,

'To the oasis of Arabia,' he said, and stopped.

'Where's that?' I asked, trying to see whom he was with. A woman, under a tree—his nanny no doubt—was standing, her arms round the peeling trunk of the oak. A young man, in kepi and Sunday shine, stood by her, at once disconsolate and happy.

He hoped spring would remove his-sorrow.

'Speak to the Monsieur, Pierrot,' she cried, so as to have more time with the young man.

'You know where your oasis is?' I asked.

'Oh, yes, the oasis is all water, and big like this. My camel goes there to drink.'

'Let's go there,' I said. He stopped me, turned back furtively to his nanny, and then suddenly, 'Look, you've faces in your buttons. Ah, faces, faces,' he said, and gazed up at me. He did not know whether to come forward or not, his hand upraised, holding the string of his camel. 'You've faces in your buttons,' he repeated and laughed.

'Speak to the Monsieur.' cried the nanny. Her tone voice was growing lighter. Pierrot started to say something, Then he suddenly fell silent. His camel needed a better string.

'I am called Raja.' I said, just to say something.

'You've faces in your buttons,' he said coming nearer, as though the mention of my name gave assurance of something known. But looking up again, he saw my blue-bronze face, and stopped. He was silent. Again he looked back, and his nanny had slipped behind the tree.

'Look,' I said, and showed him my gold buttons. I was wearing my sherwani and my gold buttons were bright in the sun.

'Faces, faces,' he said, and laughed, looking into my eyes. Then he looked very thoughtful.

'Speak to the gentleman. Be nice to him,' shouted the nanny warmly, as though it were a song she was singing. The wind blew hard. The child came behind me, his hands tight shut in self-protection. Yellow plane leaves fell. At the Medici fountain, the water purred in the wind. I felt as though I could count each drop.

'Where is Arabia!' I asked.

'Arabia', said Pierrot, 'well, it's where there is a lot of sand, and a prince who rides a horse of gold.'

'And the camel!'

'The camel is a friend of' his Princess. When she goes to see the Prince... No, come, my camel is called Kiki.'

'And your Princess!'

'She's called Katherine.'

'And her Prince?'

'Rudolfe. Kiki is the wedding present that the King of Arabia gave to Katherine. Kiki is from Ethiopia.'

'And you, Pierrot, were you at the wedding.'"

'Of course I was at the wedding. There's a wedding every day. Every day there is a wedding in the oasis.'

Pierrot came and sat on my lap.

'And what is it you see at the wedding, Pierrot!'

'Rudolfe comes on a white horse, and covered with white gold. And Katherine on the Red camel, and her clothes are blue, the same as the clothes of Saint Catherine, you know. And they meet in the oasis.'

'And what happens then! "

'Why, they kiss each other. And then they say "Adieu ", I'm going to the oasis.'

'And could I come and see them—your Prince and Princess', Pierrot!'

'Wait, I'll ask them,' he paused a moment, Then he said, 'Come. The Prince and Princess are happy to see you at the wedding. You're going to show them those buttons with the faces in them?' He stopped, then asked.

'And you. Are you a prince!'

'Oh, yes.' I said.

'You are a prince, Oh, yes I knew it. I do know it, you know. You are a prince. And what is your name!'

I am called Raja,' I said.

'Raja is what they call you,' he said, trying to pronounce my name slowly, and to understand.

'Yes.' I said. 'It means a prince.'

'Then you are like Rudolfe, Rudolfe is the Prince of the Oasis and of Arabia. And you?'

'Of India.'

'And where is India!'

'Oh, far, very far, I said, looking across the tree-tops to the sky. Pierrot was taking me to the pool. The nanny was happy with the young man. Pierrot never looked back.

'Far, very far,' he repeated. 'And is there much sand in your country?'

'No, not much sand. But there are big forests.'

'What is that, Monsieur, Monsieur ... Prince, a forest?'

'A forest, well: it's lots and lots of trees.'

'Oh, you're dressed just like a prince.'

'A prince from India,' I said.

Then we came to the central pool amidst the blue flowers. There were many, many children. Pierrot walked among them as though he were going on a long journey, He was going somewhere very far, far, far as that Avenue de l'Observatoire, full of great

forests of trees, pools and big buildings and rippling sunshine. The sun shines there. The moon is big there. There are many birds, all blue and sometimes transparent. There are many clouds. And the camels there are never thirsty.

'And camels—are there many in your country?'

'Oh, we've elephants;' I said.

'An elephant—an elephant said Pierrot with much satisfaction. Meanwhile the nanny and her young man had come to the steps. The wind blew, and in the pool the boats raced one against the other, going to many lands, dashed against one another, fell on their sides, and rose up, and nobody was hurt or angry, because the sun shone.

'Your country—you get there by sail-boat?" he asked.

I said, 'No. One goes there on steamers. One goes night and day, and for fifteen days. Then one comes to India.'

'India,' he repeated. He left the camel on the gravel. He sat by the pool, thinking.

'And you? Have you a princess?'

'Yes,' I said. 'I even have two. They are not princesses. They are goddesses. One on my right hand and one on my left hand.'

'One on your right hand, and one on your left hand. They are goddesses.'

'Yes.'

'What is a goddess, a goddess, Monsieur le Prince?'

'Ah, goddesses, well: they are ladies with four arms and a golden crown on their heads, and the water of the Ganges, all sweet with perfumes, runs at their feet,'

'And you have two of them?'

'Yes,' I said. 'One for the wedding of the night, and one for the wedding of the day. One who is dark as the bee, and the other who is blonde as butter.'

'One is like dreaming. The other like waking up.' He understood, He became silent. Then.

'And they ride elephants.' He smiled to himself. Now, he really understood, He went on:

'They go down to the oasis. and they drink water:

'No, not to the oasis.' I said. 'But to the rivers:

'And the wedding—there is a wedding every day?'

Two weddings a day—one by the light of the sun and the other by the light of the moon.'

'And the goddess—they come riding on camels?'

'No, I told you, they ride elephants.'

'Yes, yes. They ride elephants. Two goddesses and they ride elephants.'

'And then there is the river.'

'Pierrot!' shouted the nanny. He sat there looking at me as though he did not hear.

'Pierrot!' she shouted again, 'What's happened to you?'

'Jeannot, I am with the Monsieur,' he shouted back, without looking at her. 'And I ride an elephant, I'm going to the elephant country. There are goddesses there—two goddesses.'

He looked up at her as she came over.

'What's happening to you anyway?'

'I am going to the country of Monsieur.'

'Look,' she reproved him, 'look at your Kiki. Look what you do with your animals.'

Pierrot was quiet for a moment. Then he said, 'There's a river there too.'

I said, 'Yes, Pierrot.'

'And no oasis?'

'None.'

'Kiki,' he said, 'you like the oasis, And there you are', he cried, and threw it into the pool. Kiki kicked up her legs and sank without a cry, Kiki went down to the bottom, and ships passed over her. Pierrot looked at the boats, borne by the wind swiftly. They encircled many continents. The nanny had gone happily away to the young man. 'He likes you, Monsieur. Will you look after him! I'll be back in a minute,' she had said to me smiling, so big and fat and young. She wanted to be pressed against some tree and kissed. The sap in the trees was so fresh and full. The boats raced in the wind. There was no sand any more. There were many valleys, green, green, like the fields. A lot of water, Then there were trees. A lot of trees made a forest. A lot of forests made a country. A country with a lot of forests, and many, many rivers, is called India.

'Your river—has it a lot of water?' asked Pierrot. He tore a flower-stalk and held it between his teeth. He looked straight at the pool and the sun inside the pool. Then suddenly he began to cry. He cried and cried silently, tears streaming down his checks.

'I want to go to your country,' he said. 'I want to go to the wedding.'

'And the elephant!'

'Oh, yes, I will ride the elephant. Take me in your arms?' I lifted him up. He held me-tight against his head. He would not look back. I bought him some candy. He held the packet in his hand. He could not speak. He would not eat. He looked down at Kiki in the water.

'And now, the fifteen days' journey is over,' he said.

'Yes,' I said.

'Where are the goddesses!'

'Don't you see, there's one to the right and one to the left. And how beautiful they are.'

'Yes, And I ride on my elephant. I'll call him Tite the Elephant.' He was pleased with his speech. "Titi, now there, turn to the left. And now to the right. There. you're a good boy." And what's the name of your river, Monsieur le Prince?'

'The Ganges,' I said.

'The Ganges, Titi, You see, you see that's your river. There are two princesses, one to the right and one to the left. It's not like the oasis. There, there's only Jeannot, And the ships have sailed everywhere. They've gone far, very far, fifteen days far. The Ganges, it's the river. It's all purple. The elephant is all white. I go to the wedding; The ships go to the wedding. There are forests. There's a wedding. The prince has buttons with faces in them. Oh, yes,' he said, smiling.

The nanny came and said: 'At whom are you smiling, Pierrot?' She was alone now.

'Jennot, Jeannot,' he cried, and jumped on the gravel. Jeanne looked very happy.

'Take me up?' he said, She lifted him and held him in her arms.

'I go to the wedding,' he shouted.

'What' wedding?'

'Your wedding,' he said, and gave her a bite on the cheek.

'*Petit nigaud!*' she said, happy.

'Jeannot,' he said. 'Do you know where we are?'

'At the Luxembourg.'

'Non. *petit nigaud*,' he answered back. 'We are far, far away, Fifteen days by steamship. There are no sands. There are no camels. There are forests—and then, there are elephants, Then, there's the Ganges,' I smiled. "This monsieur, he's the Prince of India.'

'Yes,' I said. The wind blew hard and cold. The boats fell against one another.

'We must be going home now. Oh, it's so cold,' said Jeanne, as though to the wind. She was looking at the gate of the garden, the one near the Medici fountain. The young man was gone, and the path had gone with him. The leaves were black against that grey sky.

'Jeannot,' said Pierrot, 'in that country, there are two princesses. But me,' he whispered, hugging her against his cheeks, 'I have only you'.

'His father,' explained Jeanne, 'is a colonel and is in Morocco, Pierrot's mother died in childbirth. It's now almost two years since it happened.'

'You are my friend,' he said to her, begging.

'Oh, yes, I am your sweetheart,' she said. In the Luxembourg everybody heard it. The Sorbonnard girl looked up and let fall her book on her lap, and reflected. Time

flies in the spring. One should not grow big-bosomed like some Anne of Austria (1629-1687?).

'We're going to the wedding, to the wedding!' cried Pierrot, on his way.

'And Kiki?' asked Jeanne, anxious.

'Kiki is in the oasis. I know that,' he said.

'Ah, *petit nigaud*, and what will grandfather say to me? "You're a harlot, a liar, a hypocrite!" And you, and your Kiki? What have you done with him, Pierrot"

Pierrot slid down her waist and stood on the gravel. Then he took my hand, and said. 'Prince, take me to your country, take me to the wedding. There are two goddesses, one for the wedding of the night and the other for the wedding of the day. And there's the elephant, Titi, I am on Titi this morning. He walks, he walks like this as one rides up the waves, and then rides down, The boat goes up and goes down the waves. I go to your country.'

Jeanne had gone back to search for Kiki. I did not tell her what he'd done with it.

As we went up the steps, he saw the Medici fountain, he ran towards it and said: 'I know where I am. I am in India.' He was sure I was a prince. He was sure Jeanne was nowhere to be seen. He was sure Kiki was dead.

The elephant was drinking water at the Medici fountain. He saw the two goddesses, one to the right and one to the left. One that I would marry with the moon, and one that I would marry with the sun. He looked at the water and said. 'Look, there, that's your country. How beautiful it is. Now it's the hour of the wedding,' he whispered. and he grew thoughtful.

Up above the trees, the sky bore away the rapid, white clouds, and in the waters they ran like boats. One of them had already reached the other shore, was safe in harbour. He took my hand and held it in his, and said: 'I love forests. It must be warm there.'

'Pierrot!' shouted Jeanne. I let go his hand. He cried and cried, and would not leave the Medici fountain. He saw the elephant in the forest. He saw the river Ganges. He saw the two goddesses, with four hands and a crown or white gold on their heads. He rode the elephant, covered in silk and gold, and he came to my marriage.

'Jeannot!' he cried and slipped into the water. He touched the bottom that was like himself, his hands and feet made of light. The water was not deep, but very cold and full of perfumes. It was mid-April and the winds were blowing. The new leaves were sharp, and the sky was like deep sleep. In India, the earth is warm with silence, and the Ganges flows.

Two or three days later I came to rhe Luxembourg. Pierrot was not there. Again and again. I came, Pierrot was not there. Towards the end of the month, he came and with

a new nanny—middle-aged. And when he saw me, he run towards me and said 'Monsieur...Monsieur le Prince,' and leaped straight into my arms. He was very fond of his new navy suit. It had golden buttons that shone in one's eyes. 'Look!' he said. 'Look, faces!' and he laughed. He seemed to have grown in years. 'I know now,' he said. 'I am a maharaja, I ride the elephant. The wedding is over.'

4.3.9. Analysis/Critical Understanding of the Text

As with the earlier text, we shall first briefly summarise the story and then proceed to a critical understanding of the issues therein:

This short story is set in Luxembourg, France. The author has come to a park on a spring day. There, he meets Pierrot, a French child of five or six years. Two years back, his mother died in childbirth. His father, a colonel, was away on an official tour in Morocco. He had come to the park with his young nanny. While the latter, addressed as Jeannot/Jeanne in the story, busies herself in lovemaking with a young man, the child is left under the care of the author for some time. During this short span, the story is narrated in the form of an interaction between the author and the child. He imagined that he was in the desert of Arabia. Likewise, he was dragging his (wooden) camel to the oasis. On being asked by the author, he could say that Arabia was a place with lot of sand and that there lived a prince who rode a golden horse. According to him the camel was a friend of the princess and it accompanied her when she went to meet the prince. However, he made it clear that the camel he was dragging along belonged to him. Its name was Kiki. He considered himself to be Prince Rudolfe, who was married to Princess Katherine. Kiki was brought from Ethiopia and was given to Princess Katherine as wedding present by the King of Arabia. When he comes to that the meaning of the author's name (Raja) was 'prince' he readily took him to be the prince of India. In reply to his enquiry "Where is India?" (162), the author introduces the Indian nation to him in the form of a metaphysical narrative. In stark contrast to the Arabian landscape, the topography of India consisted of forests, rivers, elephants, big moon, goddesses and the Ganges. The author described to the boy the occasion of his grand wedding with the goddesses, who wore crowns on their heads and rode elephants. Gradually, Pierrot became fascinated by the cultural variety in the narrative on India. He threw away Kiki into the pool in the park and said that "You like the oasis and there you are" (164). Now, he made himself busy with an elephant, whom he addressed as Titi. It was not a real elephant but an object of his imagination. He was also able to visualise in his imagination the entire Indian nation about which he had heard from the author. When

his nanny came back to take him home, he did not want to leave the author. After that day, the author came to the park regularly in search of Pierrot. They met almost after a month. He was accompanied by a middle-aged woman—his new nanny. He ran into the author’s arms and showed him the faces on the buttons of his favourite navy suit. The boy said that he had become a Maharaja. He also said that he rode an elephant and that the wedding was over.

Before he meets the child, Rao reflects all alone on the resplendence of the spring season and feels that “[n]ever was Luxembourg so beautiful as on that fragile spring day” (159). It was not only the nature that looked regenerated after the dull winter but also the people, who had come outdoors to revive their spirits in the pleasant sunshine encompassing the lushness. People of different age groups were enjoying the bliss of the season in their own ways:

Men came out, old men with coughs and whiskers, and sat by the ponds reading newspapers. The old, fat women removed their kerchiefs and spoke garrulous words. The Sorbonnard girls opened their blouses to let the cool air breathe down them, single silver bangles on their wrists, and cigarettes held lighted in the air. They ... read d’Alembert or Henri Becque.... (159)

In the given extract, we get a glimpse of the French society from the perspective of Rao, an expatriate. His keenness to observe the history of the hostland becomes apparent when he sits under the statue of Anne of Austria, the Spanish princess of the House of Habsburg, who was married to King Louis XIII of France. Their marriage was more of a political truce between the two nations than the union of souls sought in marriage. Although she had been a queen, a public figure of royal authority, her personal life was one of languishment in love. She had died of breast cancer. Her statue representing her magnanimous form—“grey, big-headed, big-bosomed” (159)—was ironical in the sense that it reflected “some old tragic royalty bulging with posthumous importance” (159). The sculpture of this historical figure invoked in his mind an array of grave thoughts which included “morganatic marriages, U.N. statistics, parks and books, and the *chocolat chez Alsecia rue d’Assas*” (159). The phrase “morganatic marriages” refers to a kind of marriage in which the spouse belonging to lower social status and his/her children could not claim the property of the spouse belonging to higher rank. Although Queen Anne’s marriage was not an unequal alliance, it had had certain terms and conditions attached to it. According to these, if she would remain a childless widow, she would return to Spain with her dowry, jewels, wardrobe and pre-marital property rights. In order to retain her pre-marital rights, she had agreed to the bond prior to her marriage

that she and her children would have no claim on the estate of King Louis XIII. In a broader sense, “morganatic marriages” may be interpreted as negotiations which lack warmth and mutual understanding.

Keeping in mind the fact that Rao’s collections of short stories was published in 1947 and in 1978, we can relate between his references to “morganatic marriages, U. N. statistics, parks and books” (159) and the contemporary socio-political conditions in India and the world. The treaties that were made during the Second World War, Indian Independence, Vietnam War, Indo-Chinese Wars and Indo-Pakistan Wars were similar to the morganatic marriages. U.N. or United Nations Organisation’s data about the deaths and destruction caused in the wars and the incidents of communal violence seemed to ridicule the so-called peace treaties or truces among the nations. To Rao, a philosophical writer in exile (a person living in a foreign land for a considerable length of time), cultural differences, which stimulate animosity among people belonging to different nations, religions and races, is a crisis as well as a concern. Books symbolise knowledge. The park where the action of the story takes place represents an open space where people come to relax and relish the warmth of nature. Nature as it has been represented in the author’s description of the spring day in Luxembourg, symbolises the harmony in the universe. Encompassing within its magnanimity the traits of benignity and unanimity, the universe seems to challenge the limited scope of worldly knowledge that divides people and makes them war-mongers.

In order to achieve supreme knowledge, which is like gauging the expanse of the universe, one needs to acquire a child’s curiosity. One also needs to have complete faith on the guru. Pierrot’s interaction with the author can be viewed as a pedagogical discourse in which the guru imparts supreme knowledge to the disciple. In this respect, this short story represents two important thematic characteristics of Rao’s fiction: first, the theme of quest for the absolute truth. Secondly, the guru-disciple dialogue, which caters to the fructification of the first theme. Pierrot seems to have been deeply influenced by the tales of *The Arabian Nights*, in which he has heard about the details of the oriental world of the Middle East. As a result of this, he seems to be obsessed with certain aspects of Arabian landscape and social reality such as the desert, the sand, the camel, the oasis, gorgeous weddings etc. Earlier, we have seen that Rao makes significant observations on the adult world in the park but he could not start a dialogue with them. They seemed to be engrossed in their own world without realising the fact that the borderless universe encompassed them in that bower. With Pierrot’s entry into the scene, a dialogue begins between the West and the East, which continues as a symbolic discourse dealing with the aforesaid themes of Rao’s fiction.

To a child, imagination is more real than the reality. On being asked where he was going, Pierrot tells the author that he was going to Arabia. He was taking Kiki, his (wooden) camel to the oasis. To him, the pool in the park at Luxembourg was a replication of 'oasis,' a water body located in the cultural geography of a desert. With his ability to fantasise, he broods on the royal weddings that take place in Arabia, which seems to represent the cultural space of the Oriental world in this story. From the postcolonial point of view, the trend of representing the Oriental world as a cultural space of merriment and extravaganza is nothing but a stereotyped notion nurtured by most of the intellectuals belonging to the Occidental world. According to Pierrot, weddings are extravagant occasions in which the prince and the princess kiss each other and then they say "adieu" (goodbye). On one hand, his view represents his immaturity, on the other hand, it reveals in general, our shallow knowledge about marriage, which is a ritual as well as a symbol for union. Rao focuses on the idea of union of souls in marriage and contrasts it with the physical union in heterosexual relationship, which he represents through Jeannot's lovemaking with a young man.

When Pierrot comes to know that the author's name is Raja and he is the prince of India, he tries to look at the Indian nation through the kaleidoscope of Arabian folklore. Rao enacting the symbolic role of the guru in this story, tries to modify his one-dimensional view by providing him a glimpse of the cultural variety that constitutes the oriental world. Their interaction underlines the apparent contrast in the topographical details of the two countries—Arabia and India. Instead of sand, oasis and camel there are forests, rivers and elephants in India. One has to travel for fifteen nights and days on a steamer to reach India. The journey is described through the lunar imagery of new moon and full moon. When the moon is visible in the countries of the East, then, it is absent in the countries of the West and the vice-versa. Astronomical phenomena such as the day and the night, the new moon and the full moon connect symbolically the East with the West. These diurnal and nocturnal imageries are in consonance with the principle of universal oneness propounded in *Advaitism*, the branch of *Vedanta* philosophy by which Rao was influenced.

He makes an effort to 'decolonise' the narration of the Indian nation through mythic and symbolic interpretations. In reply to Pierrot's enquiry if he had a princess, Rao tells the little boy that he had two goddesses instead of princesses. He describes the goddesses as "ladies with four arms and a golden crown on their heads, and the water of the Ganges, all sweet with perfumes, runs at their feet" (163). These goddesses symbolise daylight and night. Author's marriage with them completes the cycle of a whole day. In

this imagery, we can once again observe his philosophical attitude of viewing the universe as a whole entity.

Wholeness implies fulfilment, which in terms of spirituality can also be described as enlightenment. The mission of the guru-disciple relationship is to become enlightened by acquiring supreme knowledge. In the present story, we can observe how Pierrot is being indoctrinated into Rao's philosophical outlook of seeking wholeness or oneness in the various objects of nature/universe. In the course of the interaction, Pierrot feels that the natural objects in the park of Luxembourg resemble those that are found in India. Powered by the sails of imagination, he reaches India. He throws away the camel into the oasis. Now, he has an elephant, whom he calls Titi. Jeannot, a symbol of grim carnality in the story, is unable either to visualise his journey across the cultural borders or to comprehend his enlightenment. While the pleasures felt during sexual activities are ephemeral, ecstatic realisation of the truth that the universe represents unity in everything is an eternal bliss. Jeanne/Jeannot's ecstasy seems to fleet away with the departure of her lover but Pierrot's reaction after his forced separation from the author represents the long-lasting ecstasy felt in enlightenment:

‘Pierrot!’ shouted Jeanne. I let go his hand. He cried and cried and would not leave the Medici fountain. He saw the elephant in the forest. He saw the river Ganges. He saw the two goddesses with four hands and a crown of white gold on their on their heads. He rode the elephant covered in silk and gold, and he came to my marriage. (167)

After that day, the author searched for Pierrot several times. His eagerness to meet the boy reveals a teacher's fondness for an ideal student. The author meets Pierrot after a month. This time the boy is accompanied by a middle-aged nanny. Pierrot runs into his arms. Their meeting can be interpreted as a reunion between the mentor and the disciple. It also symbolises the reunion of the East and the West. It seems that the disciple has outshone the mentor. He calls himself a Maharaja. He tells Rao that he rides an elephant and that the wedding has been over. Earlier he had seen faces on the buttons of the author's suit and now he shows the author that there were faces on the buttons of his favourite navy suit.

➤ **Activities**

- Open an atlas and locate the following countries: Austria, Spain, France, Saudi Arabia.
- Read Walter de la Mare's poem "Arabia" and check for yourself the images of Arabia that you come across.

- In the story Rao has mentioned the life span of Anne of Austria as “(1629-1687?)”. Is it the correct life span? Write a note on Anne of Austria.
- What do you know about *The Arabian Nights*?
- What do understand by the literary term “folklore”? Can you give an example?
- How old is Pierrot? What do you know about his parents?

4.3.10. Significance of the Title

The title “India: A Fable” may seem intriguing since this short story is set in Luxembourg, France. The subtitle “A Fable” adds to the complication. ‘Fable’ refers to a short story which often includes animals as characters and sometimes incorporates elements of myths and legends. It usually ends with a moral. It reminds us of our childhood days when we enjoyed the stories in *Aesop’s Fables*. Aesop was a storyteller in ancient Greece, whose characters were mostly personified animals. Although Rao’s short story does not consist of animal characters, the two animals—the wooden camel and the imaginary elephant—have a symbolically significant role in the story. Kiki, the wooden camel stands for the stereotyped image of the Oriental world. Titi, the elephant, whom Rao introduces to Pierrot as an iconic animal of India, broadens his idea about the oriental world, which he explores indirectly by listening to stories from the adults. The story concludes with the implied message that the universe should be perceived as an undivided entity, where the co-existence of polarities suggest that one form is complementary to the opposite form.

In terms of geopolitical concerns, India is just the name of a country on the political map of the world. The title, however, provokes us to look at the Indian nation from the perspective of the metaphysical aspect. This is elucidated in the course of the narrative set within an allegorical framework. It also makes us think about the connection between the nation and the literary term ‘fable.’ In one of the previous sections, we have come across Rao’s principle that by infusing the tempo of Indian life in our English expression, we have to strengthen the generic roots of Indian Writing in English. By narrating the nation in terms of indigenous philosophy and mythology, Rao has put his principle into practice. The story conveys his nationalist urge of representing the postcolonial nation as an embodiment of the slogan “unity in diversity.” Being an expatriate writer, he wanted to feel at home in an alien land by disseminating the cultural ideologies of his homeland. A unique fact regarding ‘fable’ is that it has its origin in both Europe and in

India. Thus, this genre becomes the meeting point for the East and the West, thereby eradicating the shadow-lines of racial and cultural prejudices, which were drawn during colonialism.

Fable tries to teach a lesson to the readers/listener. The instructive approach in Rao's fable can be observed in the interaction between the author and the French child. Their statements and remarks upholding the pedagogical theme of the narrative is revealed in the following interaction between Pierrot, the student, and Rao, the teacher:

'And the goddesses—they come riding the camels?'

'No, I told you, they ride elephants.'

Yes, yes. They ride elephants. Two goddesses and they ride elephants.' (163)

In this extract, we can observe very clearly that the author's attitude is that of a teacher, who makes an authoritative effort to rectify the errors of his student. He knows well that if Pierrot is not able to comprehend the cultural distinctiveness of India, then, he would not be able to understand the values ingrained in the Indian culture. In other words, he would not be able to read the Indian nation as a story with a moral. The above analysis justifies the title "India: A Fable."

➤ **Activities**

- Do you remember any fable that you have read in your childhood?
- What are the characteristics of a 'fable?'
- Can you suggest an alternative to this story? Justify your answer with textual references.
- Comment on the two animals in the story.
- What is the moral in Rao's fable?

4.3.11. Major Symbols in "India: A Fable"

'Marriage' is a recurring motif and a major symbol in this story. As we have discussed in the previous section, it symbolises union of the self with the world, which is co-habited by different cultural and ethnic groups. Morgantic marriages (we have discussed this in the earlier section) symbolise formal unions in which the souls do not unite to feel the oneness permeating the universe. These unions are made perfunctorily. These are like the 'proxy marriages' which were solemnised between the princes and the princesses as a ritualistic part of political negotiation between kingdoms. The futility of such a marriage is implied in the reference to Anne of Austria. On the other hand, the

author's wedding with the goddesses, one as dark as the bee (night) and the other as white as butter (day), represents symbolically the union of the masculine and the feminine. It implies the totality or completeness of existence embedded in the myth of *ardhanarishwar*, which is the half-male and the half-female figure.

In the Hindu mythology, the Ganges flows from the "tangled coils" of Lord Shiva's hair. The image of the Ganges flowing from the heads of the goddesses represents the *ardhnarishwar* mythor the *shiva-shakti* archetype. The merging of the opposite genders is "suggestive of the syzygy of Jung's anima and animus" (Sharma121). The word "syzygy" means conjunction of the opposites, such as the sun and the moon. The *shiva-shakti* archetype is implied in the imagery of author's wedding with daylight and night. It can be further explained that "movement and activity of the universe (Shiva being its agent) is dependent on Shakti (the embodiment of Power) who imbues the world with motion" (*ibid.*). The diurnal and the nocturnal attributes of the goddesses represent duality. However, this duality implies conjunction of polarities (sygyzy) through which a monistic whole is being born. When Pierrot tells the author at the end that the wedding is over, the idea of considering the East and the West as a monistic whole, a unanimous part of the universe, is communicated.

The River Ganga flowing from the heads of the goddesses has symbolic ramifications. In Hindu mythology, Ganga (the personified form of the river) is the eldest daughter of Himalaya and sister of Uma, Shiva's wife. Bhagiratha, a sage, dedicated himself in hard penance for bringing Ganga from the heaven to the Earth so that the mortals can taste divinity. In order to control her torrential flow, Shiva held her in his matted coils, after which she descended on Earth as seven streams. Due to Ganga's descent, Bhagiratha's ancestors, who had been cursed by Rishi Kapila, were spiritually liberated. Since then, the Ganges has become an embodiment of divinity to the Hindus: "The Ganga through apotheosis is the symbol of ultimate purity as far as freedom from the continual cycle of birth, death and rebirth is concerned" (*ibid.* 153). Rao represents the River Ganga at two levels: "At the mundane level, the water of the Ganga is just water. It can be perceived, heard, touched, felt, tasted, seen and smelt. At the spiritual level, however, Ganga is eternal truth and pure consciousness" (*ibid.* 155).

As far as Rao's symbolic representation of women in the story is concerned, Anne of Austria, Jeanne/Jeanot and the Sorbonnard girls symbolise the tangible form of femininity. They lack the spiritual attribute of the River Ganga, with which the two goddesses have been graced. Therefore, with these women, the author symbolically representing "Shiva," cannot unite in the mythic androgynous form of *shiva-shakti*. A

mundane-self needs to acquire a sort of spiritual consciousness in order to break the hierarchical/racial barriers, which represent nothing but the ego, for uniting with the multiple selves located in the different ethnic-cultural spaces. This is how non-duality is achieved through assimilation of dual forms.

➤ **Activities**

- Make a list of the symbols in “India: A Fable.”
- Write a note on Carl Jung, the psychoanalyst.
- What idea of marriage do you get in the story?
- Do you think that the symbolic references have made the text metaphysical?

4.3.12. The Epigraph

According to Chris Baldick’s *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, an epigraph is a quotation or motto that is placed at the beginning of a book, chapter, or poem as an indication of its theme (83). The story “India: A Fable” has a very significant epigraph, which is as follows: “*Advayataivasiva*.” The English translation of this Sanskrit phrase has been given by the author: “*Non-duality alone is auspicious*” (emphasis original). Keeping in mind the fact that this story is set in Luxembourg, this epigraph can be read as an expatriate’s introspection of the traditional-cum-cosmopolitan self through his philosophical outlook, which is rooted in Vedanta, an ancient branch of Indian philosophy.

In one of the previous sections, we have discussed that Rao was born into a family which followed, down the generations, the *Advaita* (monism) philosophy of Shankaracharya, a Vedanta scholar. Vedanta deals with detachment of the self from ego and other worldly assets through meditation for achieving *moksha* or liberty from the cycle of life and death. Kaushal Sharma explains that there are three major philosophies in the *Vedanta*: “the *Advaita* expounded by Shankaracharya (788-820), the *Vishistadvaita* upheld by Ramanuja (1067-1137) and *Dvaita* propounded by Madhavacharya (1197-1276)” (3). He further informs us that “[a]ll these theories are related to Jiva-Brahman relationship, prescribing different paths for man’s spiritual elevation” (3). Roshan Lal Sharma observes that the “*Vedantic* concept of *Advaitam*, of the presence of One in all, and the world being the manifestation of the Absolute *Brahman*, often finds an eloquent, epiphanic expression in his (Rao’s) writings” (5).

“In the Indian tradition, literature is a way of realizing the Absolute (Brahman) through

the mediation of language” (Parthasarathy viii). R. Parthasarathy writes that in an interview with him, Rao had commented, “I think I try to belong to the great Indian tradition of the past when literature was considered a *sadhana*” (viii). Raja Rao considered his literary engagement as *sadhna* (perseverance) for achieving spiritual fulfilment. This is reflected in the guru-disciple theme in “India: A Fable.” The symbolic significance of seeing faces on the buttons represents the spiritual quest of the self. Shiva, whom Rao mentions in the epigraph, is not only the god of destruction in Hindu mythology, but also the archetype of the Self in Jungian terms (Sharma, R.L. 121). In terms of psychoanalysis, the “self is a symbol of wholeness or individuation. Shiva in his completeness, however, goes far beyond this. He is totality of being in a cosmic sense” (Sharma 121). The Sanskrit phrase “*Advayataivasiva*” implies the realisation of the self as an undivided entity in a cosmic sense. He wants to feel the oneness of his self with the universe by connecting and communicating with the selves belonging to different cultural and national domains. In this way, he shows that in spite of its being an ancient philosophy, Vedanta has its relevance in the modern society which has become spiritually barren. Non-duality or a feeling of cosmic oneness with the objects in the universe is necessary for restoring spiritual fertility in a mundane bonding between individuals. Spiritual fertilization of ideas that takes place during a pedagogical intercourse leads to reinvention of the self in this universe. The epigraph, thus rightly complies with the title and the themes of the story.

➤ **Activities**

- Identify the major theme/s in “India: A Fable.”
- In what ways can you relate the epigraph to the theme/s in the story?

4.3.13. Summing Up

“India: A Fable” is a sophisticated text in which we come across the major characteristics of Rao’s literary style. It also introduces us with the postcolonial trend of using Indian myths and aspects of Indian philosophy in Indian writing in English. Through these stylistic devices, Rao creates a counter-narrative to the stereotyped image of India represented by the litterateurs of the West in their orientalist texts. By narrating the spiritual and philosophical aspects of the Indian nation, Rao has countered the orientalist narratives that represent India as nothing more than an exotic landscape. His mission of rescuing the nation from the clutches of literary colonisation is reflected in the very

title “India: A Fable.” This short story is a specimen; in which we can observe summarily Rao’s nationalist urge flows into his literary productions.

4.3.14. Comprehension Exercises

Essay-type Question (20 marks)

1. Comment critically on Rao’s philosophical outlook in his short story “India: A Fable.”
2. Discuss “India: A Fable” as a symbolic text.
3. Make a critical assessment of Raja Rao’s contribution to Indian Writing in English.

Mid-length Answer Type Question (12 marks)

1. Comment critically on the setting of the story.
2. Justify the title “India: A Fable.”
3. Discuss the representation of women in the story.

Short Questions (6 marks)

1. Write short notes on ‘Fable’ and ‘Epigraph.’
2. Why do you think the child becomes fond of the author?
3. What is the author’s attitude towards the child?

4.3.15. Suggested Reading

(For Ruskin Bond)

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Timelines Chart

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
		1794	The first book written in English by an Indian: Dean Mahomet's <i>The Travels of Dean Mahomet</i>
1809	The first Indian English poet, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born. Also marks the birth of eminent poet Kashiprasad Ghose	1809	Cavelly Venkata Boriah's <i>Account of Jains</i> was published in <i>Asiatic Researchers</i>
		1816	Rammohun Roy published his translations <i>An Abridgement of the Vedant</i> and renderings of <i>Kena & Isa Upanishads</i>
1817	Hindu College was established in Kolkata	1817	Rammohun Roy published <i>A Defence of Hindu Theism</i> , in reply to the attack of an advocate for idolatry.
		1818	<i>A Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive</i> . Here Rammohun Roy stressed on the plight of women in orthodox Hindu Society.
		1821	To counteract the religious propaganda of the Christian missionaries, Rammohun Roy published <i>The Brahmanical Magazine</i> .
1828	Rammohun Roy founded the Brahma Samaj, which was the earliest attempt of its kind in the 19 th century to revitalize Hinduism.	1828	Derozio published <i>The Fakeer of Jungheera, a Metrical Tale; and Other Poems</i> .
		1830	<i>The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems</i> published by Kashiprasad Ghose
		1831	Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote <i>The Persecuted: or, Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
		1832	First English-cum-Marathi Journal <i>The Durpan</i> came out.
		1835	Macaulay's <i>Minute on Indian Education</i> . First fictional narrative "A Journal of Forty-eight Hours of the Year 1945" written by Kylas Chunder Dutt was published in the <i>Calcutta Literary Gezette</i> .
1843	Bengal British India Society founded in Calcutta; a politically inclined public association. It was avowedly a loyalist body based on limited Indo-British collaboration.		
		1847	Jambhekar's <i>Essay on Infanticide</i> appeared.
		1849	Michael Madhusudan Dutt published <i>The Captive Ladie</i> which narrates the story of the Rajput king Prithviraj. His <i>Vision of the Past</i> came out too.
1857	The Sepoy Mutiny, India's first struggle for independence. It began on 10 May 1857 .		
1861	Rabindranath Tagore was born	1859	Madhusudan Dutt, <i>Sermistha</i>
		1864	<i>Rajmohan's Wife</i> by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was serialized in the periodical, <i>Indian Field</i> .
1867	Prarthana Samaj was founded by Atmaram Pandurang with the help of Keshav Chandra Sen		
		1870	The Dutt brothers: Govind Chunder, Hur Chunder, Greece Chunder and Omesh Chunder jointly published <i>The Dutt Family Album</i> . This book of poems is the only instance of a family anthology in Indian English Poetry.

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
1875	Arya Samaj was established by Dayananda Saraswati		
		1876	<i>A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields</i> by Toru Dutt; <i>The Indian Muse in English Garb</i> by Behramji Merwanji Malabari
1885	Umesh Chandra Banerjee became the first president of Indian National Congress	1879	<i>The Literature of Bengal: A Biographical and Critical History From the Earliest Times, Closing with a Review of Intellectual Progress under British Rule in India</i> by Romesh Chunder Dutt
		1890	Manmohan Ghose's work was published in <i>Primavera</i> : Poems by Four Authors, with Laurence Binyon, Arthur S. Cripps, and Stephen Phillips.
		1892	'The Lady of the Lake', a poem by Sarojini Naidu
1893	Swami Vivekananda attended the Parliament of Religions at Chicago	1893	A series of Vivekananda's anonymous articles entitled <i>New Lamps for Old</i> came out in a Bombay journal named <i>Induprakash</i>
		1894	Romesh Chunder Dutt published <i>Lays of Ancient India</i>
		1895	Gandhi published <i>The Indian Franchise: An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa</i>
		1901	Tagore, <i>Offerings (Naibedya)</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
1905	The decision to effect the Partition of Bengal was announced in July 1905 by the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon. The partition took place on 16 October 1905 and separated the largely Muslim eastern areas from the largely Hindu western areas.		Sarojini Naidu published her first volume of poetry <i>The Golden Threshold</i>
		1909	<i>The Slave Girl of Agra: An Indian Historical Romance</i> by Romesh Chunder Dutt came out.
		1912	Rabindranath Tagore published his magnum opus <i>Gitanjali: Song Offerings</i> Sarojini Naidu published <i>The Bird of Time</i> . <i>Songs of Life, Death & the Spring</i> .
1913	The Nobel Prize in Literature 1913 was awarded to Rabindranath Tagore	1913	Tagore, <i>The Gardener</i> and <i>The Crescent Moon</i>
		1914	Sri Aurobindo founded the monthly journal <i>Arya</i>
1915	Gandhi returned from South Africa to India after his Satyagraha triumph		
		1917	Naidu, <i>The Broken Wing</i> Lala Lajpat Rai, <i>Young India</i>
1919	The Jallianwala Bagh massacre, also known as the Amritsar massacre, took place on 13 April, 1919		
1920	The Non-Cooperation Movement was initiated by Gandhi. It aimed to resist British rule in India through nonviolent means. All India Trade Union Congress was founded by by LalaLajpat Rai and others	1920	<i>Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy</i> by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan came out

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
		1923	First volume of Radhakrishnan's magnum opus <i>Indian Philosophy</i> was published
		1924	Tagore, <i>Red Oleanders</i>
1925	Sarojini Naidu presided over the annual session of Indian National Congress		
		1927	<i>The Story of My Experiments with Truth</i> , the autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Vol I. Radhakrishnan <i>Indian Philosophy</i> Vol II.
		1928	Tagore, <i>Fireflies</i> ; Gandhi, <i>The Story of My Experiments with Truth</i> Vol II.
1930	Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement	1930	Jawaharlal Nehru, <i>Letters from a Father to His Daughter</i>. It is a collection of 31 letters written by Jawaharlal Nehru to his daughter Indira Gandhi
1932	Gandhi founded Harijan Sevak Sangh.		
		1935	Mulk Raj Anand: <i>Untouchable</i> R. K Narayan: <i>Swami and Friends</i> Nirad C. Chaudhari: <i>Defence of India</i>
		1936	<i>An Autobiography</i> also known as <i>Toward Freedom</i> was published by Nehru; Mulk Raj Anand: <i>Coolie</i>
		1937	Anand, <i>Two Leaves and a Bud</i> ; Narayan, <i>The Bachelor of Arts</i>
		1938	Anand, <i>The Dark Room</i> ; Raja Rao, <i>Kanthapura</i>
		1939	Sri Aurobindo published <i>The Life Divine</i>
		1941	Tagore: <i>Crisis in Civilization</i> ; Anand: <i>Across the Black Waters</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
1942	The Quit India Movement or the India August Movement		
		1943	Narayan: <i>Malgudi Days</i>
1945	Soshee Chunder Dutt's "The Republic of Orissa: A Page from the Annals of the Twentieth Century" was published in the <i>Saturday Evening Harakuru</i> in 1945.	1945	Narayan: <i>The English Teacher</i>
		1946	Nehru: <i>The Discovery of India</i> ; Anand, <i>Apology for Heroism: A Brief Autobiography of Ideas</i> ; Art magazine <i>Marg</i> ; Narayan, <i>The English Teacher</i>
1947	India and Pakistan gain independence. Partition of the sub-continent leads to massacre.	1947	Raja Rao: <i>The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories</i> ; Bhabani Bhattacharya: <i>So Many Hungers</i>
		1948	Subhash Chandra Bose: <i>An Indian Pilgrim</i> was published. This is a posthumous publication. His unfinished autobiography.
		1950	Aurobindo: <i>Savitri</i> , S. C. Sengupta, <i>Shakespearean Comedy</i>
		1951	Nirad C. Chaudhuri <i>The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian</i>
		1952	Narayan, <i>The Financial Expert</i> Bhabani Bhattacharya, <i>Music for Mohini</i>
		1954	Kamala Markandaya published her first novel <i>Nectar in a Sieve</i>
		1955	Narayan, <i>Waiting for the Mahatma</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
		1956	Khuswant Singh published his first novel <i>Train to Pakistan</i> ; Narayan, <i>Lawley Road & Other Stories</i>
		1958	Narayan, <i>The Guide</i> ; The first modernist anthology <i>Modern Indo-Anglican Poetry</i> edited by P. Lal, was published; Nayantara Sahgal published her first novel <i>A Time to be Happy</i>
		1959	Nirad C. Chaudhuri, <i>A Passage to England</i>
1960	R. K. Narayan won Sahitya Akademi Award for <i>The Guide</i>	1960	Raja Rao, <i>The Serpent and the Rope</i> ; Manohar Malgonkar, <i>Distant Drum</i> ; Markandaya, <i>A Silence of Desire</i>
		1961	Attia Hosain's <i>Sunlight on a Broken Column</i>
		1962	Narayan, <i>The Man-eater of Malgudi</i> ; Adil Jussawalla, <i>Land's End</i> ; Malgonkar, <i>Combat of Shadows</i>
1963	<i>The Serpent and the Rope</i> won the Sahitya Akademi Award		
		1964	Anand, <i>Death of a Hero</i> Malgonkar, <i>A Bend in the Ganges</i>
		1965	Raja Rao, <i>The Cat and Shakespeare</i> ; P. Lal published creative translation of <i>Bhagawad Gita</i> ; Kamala Das <i>Summer in Calcutta</i>
		1966	Ramanujan, <i>The Striders</i> ; Nirad C. Chaudhuri <i>The Continent of Circe: Essays on the People of India</i> Bhabani Bhattacharya, <i>Shadow from Ladakh</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
1967	<i>Shadow from Ladakh</i> won the Sahitya Akademi Award	1967	Narayan, <i>The Vendor of Sweets</i>
		1968	Dom Moraes, <i>My Son's Father</i>
		1969	Nissim Ezekiel, <i>Three Plays - Nalini: A Comedy in Three Acts; Marriage Poem: A One-Act Tragi-Comedy; and The Sleepwalkers: An Indo-American Farce</i>
		1970	Narayan, <i>A Horse & Two Goats</i> ; K. N. Daruwalla, <i>Under Orion</i>
1971	Mulk Raj Anand won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel, <i>Morning Face</i> ; Naipaul won Booker for <i>In a Free State</i>	1971	K. N. Daruwalla, <i>Apparition in April</i> Jayanta Mahapatra, <i>Svayamvara & Other Poems</i>
		1972	Anand, <i>Morning Face</i> Girish Karnad, Tughlaq
		1973	Kamala Das, <i>My Story</i>
		1974	Nirad C. Chaudhuri, <i>The Life Friedrich Max Muller or Scholar Extraordinary</i>
1975	Chaudhuri was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his biography on Max Müller; Jhabvala was awarded Booker for <i>Heat and Dust</i>	1975	Chaman Nahal, <i>Azadi</i> ; Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Girish Karnad, <i>Hayavadana</i>
		1976	Anand, <i>Confession of a Lover</i> ; Narayan, <i>The Painter of Signs</i> ; Raja Rao, <i>Comrade Kirillov</i> ; Arun Kolatkar, <i>Jejuri</i>
1977	<i>Azadi</i> won the Sahitya Akademi Award	1977	R. Parthasarathy, <i>Rough Passage</i> ; Anita Desai, <i>Fire on the mountain</i>
1978	<i>Fire on the mountain</i> won the Sahitya Akademi Award	1978	Ved Mehta, <i>The New India</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
		1980	Jayanta Mahapatra, <i>Relationship</i> Shashi Despande, <i>The Dark Holds No Terrors</i> ; Desai, <i>Clear Light of the Day</i>
1981	Mahapatra was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his <i>Relationship</i>	1981	Rushdie, <i>Midnight's Children</i>
		1982	Desai, <i>The Village by the Sea</i> ; Despande, <i>If I Die Today</i> ; Ved Mehta, <i>A Family Affair: India Under Three Prime Ministers</i> ; Markandaya, <i>Pleasure City</i>
		1983	Rushdie, <i>Shame</i> ; Mahapatra, <i>Life Signs</i>
		1984	Desai, <i>In Custody</i> ; Vijay Tendulkar, <i>Ghashiram Kotwal</i>
		1986	Vikram Seth published <i>The Golden Gate</i> ; Amitav Ghosh <i>The Circle of Reason</i> ; Nayantara Sahgal, <i>Rich Like Us</i>
		1987	Rohinton Mistry, <i>Tales from FirozshaBaag</i> ; V. S. Naipaul, <i>The Enigma of Arrival</i> ; Agha Shahid Ali, <i>A Walk Through the Yellow Pages</i>
1988	Vikram Seth won the Sahitya Akademi Award for <i>The Golden Gate</i>	1988	Rushdie, <i>The Satanic Verses</i> ; Despande, <i>That Long Silence</i> ; Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Shadow Lines</i> ; Desai, <i>Baumgartner's Bombay</i> ; Irwin Allan Sealy , <i>The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle</i> ; Upamanyu Chatterjee, English, August
1989	Amitav Ghosh was awarded the Sahitya Akademi for <i>The Shadow Lines</i>	1989	Shashi Tharoor, <i>The Great Indian Novel</i> , Mahapatra, <i>Temple</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
		1990	<i>Salman Rushdie, Haroun and the Sea of Stories</i> <i>Mahesh Dattani, Tara</i>
		1992	Shashi Tharoor, <i>Show Business</i> , Vikram Seth, <i>Beastly Tales from Here and There</i>
		1993	Vikram Seth, <i>A Suitable Boy</i> ; Shashi Deshpande, <i>The Binding Vine</i> , Mahesh Dattani, <i>The Final Solutions</i>
		1994	V. S. Naipaul, <i>A Way in the World: A Novel</i> ; Mukul Kesavan, <i>Looking Through Glass</i>
		1995	Rohinton Mistry, <i>A Fine Balance</i> ; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, <i>Arranged Marriage</i> ; Despande, <i>The Narayanpur Incident</i> ; Amitav Ghosh, <i>Calcutta Chromosome</i> ; Desai, <i>Journey to Ithaca</i>
1997	<i>Arundhati Roy was awarded Booker for The God of Small Things</i>	1997	<i>Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things</i> ; <i>Kiran Nagarkar; Cuckold</i> ; <i>Agha Shahid Ali, The Country without a Post Office</i> ; <i>Jayanta Mahapatra, Shadow Space</i> ; <i>Divakaruni, Leaving Yuba City</i>
		1998	Kiran Desai, <i>Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard</i>
		1999	<i>Rushdie, The Ground Beneath Her Feet</i> ; <i>Vikram Seth, An Equal Music</i> ; <i>Jhumpa Lahiri, The Interpreter of Maladies</i> ; <i>Anita Desai, Fasting, Feasting</i> ; <i>Khuswant Singh, The Company of Women</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
		2000	Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Glass Palace</i> ; Shashi Deshpande, <i>Small Remedies</i> ; Upamanyu Chatterjee, <i>The Mammaries of the Welfare State</i> ; Meenakshi Mukherjee, <i>The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English</i>
		2001	Ved Mehta, <i>All for Love</i> ; Rushdie, <i>Fury</i> ; Naipaul, <i>Half a Life</i> ; Anita Nair, <i>Ladies Coupé</i> ; Divakaruni, <i>The Unknown Errors of Our Lives</i>
		2002	Mistry, <i>Family Matters</i> ; Divakaruni, <i>Neela: Victory Song</i> ; <i>The Vine of Desire</i> ; Vijay Tendulkar, <i>Kanyadaan</i> ; Khuswant Singh, <i>Truth, Love and a Little Malice</i>
		2003	Jhumpa Lahiri, <i>The Namesake</i>
		2004	Deshpande, <i>Moving On</i> ; Divakaruni, <i>Queen of Dreams</i> ; Rupa Bajwa, <i>The Sari Shop</i> ; Chetan Bhagat, <i>Five Point Someone</i> ; Naipaul, <i>Magic Seeds</i> ; Anita Desai, <i>The Zig Zag Way</i> ; Suketu Mehta, <i>Maximum City</i>
2005	<i>The Algebra of Infinite Justice</i> was awarded Sahitya Akademi	2005	Rushdie, <i>Shalimar the Clown</i> ; Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Hungry Tide</i> ; Bhagat, <i>One Night @ the Call Center</i> ; Anita Nair, <i>Mistress</i> ; Vikram Seth, <i>Two Lives</i> ; Karnad, <i>Flowers</i> ; <i>Broken Images</i> ; Rana Dasgupta, <i>Tokyo Cancelled</i>
2006	Kiran Desai won Booker for <i>The Inheritance of Loss</i> , Rupa Bajwa won the Sahitya Akademi for <i>The Sari Shop</i>	2006	Kiran Desai, <i>The Inheritance of Loss</i> ; Kiran Nagarkar, <i>God's Little Soldier</i> ; Kunal Basu, <i>Racists</i> ; Upamanyu Chatterjee , <i>Weight Loss</i> ; Raj Kamal Jha, <i>Fireproof</i>

Year	Major historical events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
2008	<i>Arvind Adiga</i> was awarded Booker for <i>The White Tiger</i>	2008	<i>Jhumpa Lahiri, Unaccustomed Earth, Amitav Ghosh, Sea of Poppies; Arvind Adiga, The White Tiger; Kunal Basu, The Japanese Wife; Divakaruni, The Palace of Illusions; Bhagat, The 3 Mistakes of My Life; 2 States: The Story of My Marriage</i>
		2011	<i>Amitav Ghosh, River of Smoke; Manju Kapur, Custody; Anita Desai, The Artist of Disappearance; Chetan Bhagat, Revolution 2020, Divakaruni, Oleander Girl; Lahiri, The Lowland; Amit Chaudhuri, Calcutta</i>
		2012	Jussawala, <i>Trying to Say Goodbye</i>
		2013	Manil Suri, <i>The City of Devi</i> ; Aman Sethi, <i>A Free Man: A True Story of Life and Death in Delhi</i>
		2014	Rana Dasgupta, <i>Capital: The Eruption of Delhi</i> ; Rajiv Malhotra, <i>Indra's Net</i> , Ravi Subramanian, <i>God is a Gamer</i> ; Devdutt Pattanaik, <i>Shikhandi And Other Tales They Don't Tell You</i>
		2015	Ravi Subramanian, <i>The Bestseller She Wrote</i> ; Raj Kamal Jha, <i>She Will Build Him a City</i> ; Kiran Nagarkar, <i>RIP Ravan and Eddie</i>
		2016	Arvind Adiga, <i>Selection Day</i> ; Ratika Kapur, <i>The Private Life of Mrs. Sharma</i> ; Savi Sharma, <i>Everyone Has A Story</i> ; Amitav Ghosh, <i>Climate Change and the Unthinkable</i> ; Kanchana Banerjee, <i>A Forgotten Affair</i> ; Preeti Shenoy, <i>It's All In The Planets</i> ; Ruskin Bond; <i>Death Under The Deodars</i>
		2017	Neel Mukherjee, <i>A State of Freedom</i> ; Arundhati Roy, <i>The Ministry of Utmost Happiness</i>

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