PREFACE

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Post Graduate degree programme, the opportunity to pursue Post Graduate course in Subjects 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.

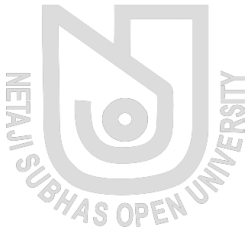
Keeping this in view, study materials of the Post Graduate level in different subjects are being prepared on the basis of a well laid-out syllabus. The course structure combines the best elements in the approved syllabi of Central and State Universities in respective subjects. It has been so designed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

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 a 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 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 part 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.

Dr. Surabhi Banerjee
Vice-Chancellor



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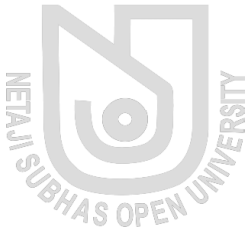
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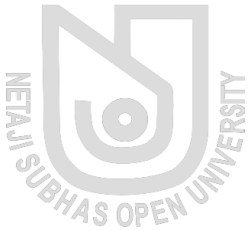
PAPER VII

Module 2


NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

Unit 1 Untouchable : Mulk Raj Anand

Structure :

1.0 Objective

In this unit various aspects of Mulk Raj Anand's Novel *Untouchable* are discussed. This will help you to understand and appreciate the novel. Before going through the unit, you must read the original text and then read the module.

1.1 Introduction/Background

Indian English Literature (IEL) or Indian Writing in English refers to the works by writers in India who write in the English language. Their native language could be one of the many Indian languages. IEL is also associated with some of the writers belonging to the Indian Diaspora.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the Three Great Novelists in IEL. The Trio consists of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan born in Peshawar. Mulk Raj Anand was the son of Lal Chand and Ishwar Kaur. He attended Khalsa College in Amritsar and entered the University of Punjab in 1921,

graduating with honours in 1924. Thereafter, Anand pursued his higher studies at Cambridge and at London University. In the 1930s and 1940s Anand divided his time between literary London and Gandhi's India. He joined the struggle for independence, but also fought with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. After the war Anand returned permanently to India and made Bombay his home-town and center of activity. Anand began his career as a writer in England. But it was not until the two novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) that he gained wide recognition.

1.2 Brief Notes on Author & Text

Mulk Raj Anand, speaking about the real test of the novelist, once said:

> It may lie in the transformation of words into prophecy. Because, what is writer if he is not the fiery voice of the people who through his own torments, urges and exaltations, by realizing the pains, frustrations and aspirations of others, and by cultivating his incipient powers of expression, transmutes in art all feeling, all thought, all experience—thus becoming the seer of a new vision in any given situation.
> (Quoted in Dhawan, 14)

Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* published in 1935 exposes mercilessly the experiences of the untouchable caste in India. The novel deals with the story of a day in the life of Bakha the toilet cleaner. In the Preface to the novel, E.M. forster writes, "Avoiding the toric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it". It is ironical that only after 19 rejection slips Anand was able to publish *Untouchable* in England with a Preface by Forster.

In April 1929, Anand went to see Gandhiji in the Sabarmati Ashram in the boiling heat of Gujarat. He showed Gandhiji the novel he had written. Gandhiji was, at first, opposed to the idea of writing a novel depicting the love affair of a boy. Anand convinced him that the novel is about Bakha, a sweeper, and an untouchable. Anand then stayed in Gandhiji's Ashram for three months. He read some portions of the novel to Gandhiji who suggested certain changes.

1.3 Critical Analysis of the text

1.3.1 Storyline

Untouchable tells the story of Bakha who lived in Bullshah and focuses on his search for identity in the society to which he belongs—a society, which had not given a respectable position to the young man. The novel begins with an elaborate description of the locality, where Bakha lives :

> The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society.

Bakha gets a pair of old breeches and a pair of old boots and would like to look like the white man. Despite this dream, he begins to work hard as the day begins as cleaning toilets can be a demanding and extremely laborious task. Sohini is Bakha's sister and she is young. When she goes to the well to draw water, she is not allowed to do it as she is a 'lower-caste'. Anand ironically shows how even the low castes have a class-distinction and Sohini is rejected because she belongs to a lower caste. Kali Nath, the priest, comes to the well and agrees to draw water for the outcastes. He is attracted by Sohini's youth and drives away everybody in order to give the water to her. In return, he asks her to come to his house to clean the courtyard. When she goes to his house, Kali Nath makes an indecent proposal to the young girl. She screams and Kalinath shouts "polluted". Soon many of the upper castes go there and Kali Nath tries to put the entire blame on sohini. Bakha happens to come and is furious. He sends Sohini home. He comes back home bitter and disillusioned as he tells his father, "They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt". Bakha feels that this is a curse he must fight against and destroy it.

In the afternoon Bakha goes to the marriage of the sister of Ram Charan, the washerman's son. Bakha himself could not marry the girl who belonged to a higher caste. In the midst of all the guests however he forgets his pain and thinks of playing hockey in the evening. At Havilder Charat Singh's

place he forgets all class-distinction as the havilder treats him affectionately and gives him a hockey stick. When the game begins, Bakha sends a goal and there is a free fight in which a little boy is injured. Bakha tries to save the boy be holding him up and the boy's mother accuses him of polluting the little boy who beiongs to a higher caste. When Bakha comes back home, his father is indignant for he thinks that his son had only wasted his time. As a punishment, he is driven out of the house. Bakha is shattered.

The novel goes on to offer Bakha three solutions for his frustration and humiliation: Col. Hutchinson, the Salvationist who suggests that Bakha should turn Christian and thus escape from the caste-system. Gandhiji in a public meeting speaks about untouchability as being one of the worst blots in Hinduism. *Harijan* is a 'man of God' he says and no one can be 'polluted' due to his caste. Bakha is both disturbed and also finds some solace in his words. Later, he meets the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar. He says simply that, when the scavengers change their profession they will end their caste and a modern sanitary system—the flush—will bring about this revolution. "Then the sweepers can be free" the poet concludes "from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society".

Bakha is hopeful about his future and goes back to his father to tell him everything he has heard after he left home. The novel ends on a note of hope for Bakha as he reflects : "Perhaps I can find the poet some day and ask him about his machine". And he proceeded homewards.

1.3.2 Characters

Bakha

Bakha is portrayed both as a type and as an individual. He represents that untouchable in Indian Society but is also an individual with distinctive features. It is Bakha's search for identity that is particularly appealing to the reader. He is not passive or static. He changes and grows during the course of the novel. As Mulk Raj Anand observes in a different context, Bakha reveals the change of consciousness from the old feudal orthodox community life to the new modern confrontation of human values in the individual life. Anand dramatizes the conflict of the character beyond the age of the gods, into the age of man where the evil in other men became so important and

when the release into future growth begins to seem possible through the individual's of democracy. This gives man the right to feel, to think, to be aware of his own vital sentience.

Bakha the central character is introduced to us on the very first page of the novel. He is described as a young man of 18, strong and able bodied, who does his job of cleaning the public iatrines promptly and satisfactorily. His father is a 'Jemadar' (Chief) of all the sweepers in the town and is officially in charge of three rows of public latrines, which line the extreme and of the colony.

Although his job is dirty, Bakha remains neat and clean. He does not let even his sleeves become soiled in the process of his sweeping and scrubbing the commodes. His laborious work results in his developing a fine physique. His muscular figure gives a wonderful wholeness to his body and imparts a certain nobility to him, which is in contrast to his filthy profession and to the sub-human status to which he is born.

Bakha appears as a victim of social injustice at the very outset. He must get up early in the morning and attend to his work of cleaning the public latrines. He sleeps in a corner of his father's one-roomed mud-house. His father, Lakha shouts at him if he is late in getting up from his bed. Bakha does not get a moment's rest and is frequently abused by his father who is proud of being addressed as 'Jemadar' by the Indian sepoys.

Bakha has a desire to look like a Sahib, to create his own world modelled affer that of the English. Aware of his position the sweeper does not accept his status and is eager to make others ignore it. As Anand says : "he had built up a new world which was commendable, if nothing eles, it represented a change from the old ossified order and the stagnating conventions of the life to which he was born."

The futility of Bakha's rebellion and the exient of his suffering reveal an aspect of the conflict between the individual and the society. In spite of his revolt and strong resistance to repressive forces, Bakha is helplessly bound to his low caste status. He is conscious of the fact that his protest and rebellion will lead him nowhere.

As E.M. Forster says in the Preface to the novel :

> Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive : we can recognize his broad intelligent face, graceful torso, and heavy

buttocks as he does his nasty jobs or steps out in artillery boots in hopes of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper packet of cheap sweets in his hand.

Other Characters

One of the significant minor characters is Bakha's father, Lakha who is the 'Jemadar' of the sweepers in the cantonment of Bulandshahr. He is a kind of patriarch whom his children hold in great awe especially after the death of his wife. Though he bullies his children, but he is tender when he tells the story of Bakha's illness in his childhood. He accepts the superiority of caste-Hindus and is reconciled to his low and inferior position in society.

Lakha's younger son Rakha has no element of intuitive protest in his character and lacks Bukha's love of cleanliness. Neither does he attend to the work of sweeping and cleaning in the same efficient and natural manner, as does Bakha. His futtered flannel shiri, grimy with the blowings of his ever-running nose obstructed his walk slightly. The discomfort the fatigue, assumed or genuine, due to the work he had put in that morning, gave a rather drawn long-jawed look to his dirty face on which flies gatherd to taste the saliva on the corners of his lips.

Sohini an important female character in the novel has a pleasing personality like her brother Bakha. She has a sylph-like form, an arched narrow waist. Anand has introduced the character of Sohini with the aim of exposing the hypocrisy of the caste Hindus. Sohini's maternal instinct towards her brothers is of great significance in the novel. Her mother being dead, it is she who looks after the household, and the needs of her father and two brothers. Pundit Kali Nath is a functional character with whose help Anand satirses and ridicules the hypocrisy and cruelty of conventional religion. He is one of the priesis of the local temple. He favours Sohini because he is enomoured of her physical charm. Later on when Sohini protests against the attempt of molestation, he exploits his religious respectability and comes out shouting "polluted, polluted" and the crowd in the temple seems to be on his side. Thus he becomes a representative of the traditional tyranny and injustice often inflicted on the low castes in the name of religion by the so-called high castes.

Charat Singh is a generous-minded caste Hindu who is to be contrasted

with the hypocritical priest. He is a Havilder in the army and is a famous hockey player of the 38th Dogra regiment. He is above caste prejudices and is free from the 'pollution' complex. He not only gives Bakha the promised hockey stick but also offers him a cup of tea.

Col. Hutchinson, with his nagging wife, is one of the two English characters in the novel. The dress he designs for himself is a funny mixture of English and Indian costumes : a pair of white trousers, a scarlet jacket and a white turban with a red band across it. He tries to persuade Lakha to become a Christian.

Iqbal Nath Sarshar, the poet, is a young man. He is a revolutionary social reformer who has a progressive outlook offering the introduction of the flush system as another alternative solution to the removal of the evil of untouchability. He becomes the representative of those who consider modern technology to be the saviour of mankind.

1.4 Structure & Meaning

Untouchable is an impassioned plea for a social couse. The novel shows a singleness of purpose i.e. exposing the evil of untouchability and analysing its various aspects—social, moral, psychological, religion-based etc.—that provides structural unity to the plot. Observing the three unities, though unconsciously, the novel records a day's events in Bakha's life which serve as a mirror to the pathetic condition of the untouchables who form the lower stratum of society in the caste-ridden orthodox Hindu society especially in pre-partition times.

The novel begins with an autumn morning in Bakha's life. The plot of *Untouchable*, though linear in form and simple in content, may be described as experimental. The use of the stream-of-consciousness narrative technique (flashback, reverie, interior monologue etc.) and confining of the action to less than twenty-four hours in the life of its hero Bakha makes it one of the most well structured plots. The single-purpose theme of untouchability, being defined and analysed from different viewpoints and in all its complexity, provides it coherence.

The binding together, the orchestration, and the interplay of Bakha's inner feelings and outer experience—all these contribute to the structural unity of the novel. Though *Untouchable* does not have the conventional form of a proper beginning middle and end, it does have a conclusive open-

endedness offering three probable solutions to the removal of the evil of untouchability viz. conversion to Christianity. Gandhi's exhortation to the Harijans to shun the bad habits and get integrated into the mainstream of the Indian nation slowly but surely, and the introduction of the flush system. The book has from though it is simply planned. The action occupies one day and takes place in a small area.

1.4.1 Narrative Technique

The stream of consciousness of the hero Bakha in *Untouchable* runs throughout the novel with the undercurrents of reminiscence reverie and infuition indicated in certain phrases, symbolic words and fragmented thoughts.

In the middle of the day Anand sets a dream sequence, which was culled from the hero's imagination as a fable of his pilgrim's progress. At the end of the hero's reverie, in this strange haunted world, he finds himself among a swarm of monkeys. This is the novelist's way of keeping Bakha within the confines of his own hell.

The narrative techniques of flashback reverie reminiscence, instinctive awareness of reality, intuition, etc. coupled with symbolic images, words and phrases and truncated thoughts make *Untouchable* a modern novel in the real sense of the term.

1.5 Language/Style

The English which Anand employs in his works is on the whole correct and Idiomatic; but not without a strong flavour of the Indian manner of speaking English. He tends to be accurately descriptive and his tendency towards using more words than required to emphasize an idea is unmistakable. His word patterns in the dialogues give the impression of unplanned and spontaneous speech.

Anand's style is peppered with the use of Indian words, which fall into three categories : (a) Untranslated Hindi or Punjabi words, e.g., *girja ghar, jalebis, harijan, babu,* etc., (b) Proverbs and swear words, which are translated into English, e.g., son of a pig, cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion, rape-mother, rape-sister etc., and, (c) English words which have become a part of Indian vocabulary by subsequently adopting themselves to Indian pronunciations, e.g., *injun, gerneman,* etc.

We find two images which recur periodically in *Untouchable*—the sun and the river.

The sun is a creative and regenerative force in the novel indicating the upsurge of life :

> As they sat or stood in the sun showing their dark hands and feet they had a curiously lackadaisical, lazy, lousy look sbout them. It seemed their insides were concentrated in the act of emergence of new birth, as it were, from the raw, bleak wintry feeling in their souls to the world of warmth. The great life-giver had cut the inscrutable knots that tied them up in themselves. It had melted the innermost parts of their being. And their souls stared at the wonder of it all, the mystery of it, the miracle of it.

The sun concerns Bakha; it is an emblem of his vital impulse, a movement of energy, an effluence. It is also a symbolic index of his day and of his emotions. The second image that we find in the novel is the river. It is symbolic of the discontent and enguish of the hero. The image stands for the flow of existence and temporality.

Not all the imagery in Anand's novel is visual. There are some powerful kinetic and auditory images such as in the following extract :

> In the hills and fields however there was a strange quickening. Long rows of birds flew over against the cold blue sky toward their homes. The grasshoppers chirped in the anxious chorus as they fell back into the places where they always lay waiting for food. A lone beetle sent electric waves of ground quivering into the cool clean air. Every blade of grass along the pathway was gilded with light.

1.6 Let us sun up

Untouchable centres on the issue of untouchability in Indian society and Mulk Raj Anand uses the novel to explore different points of view regarding untouchability. It is through Bakhas character that the author exposes the exploitation of the lower caste Hindus. Three solutions are suggested as a means of changing the pitiable condition of the lower castes. These are based on religion (Col. Hutchinson), social and moral change (Gandhiji) and technological advancement (Iqbal Nath Sarshar). The novel looks forward to a better future and ends on a positive note.

1.7 Questions

1. Comment on Anand's portrayal of Bakha's character.
2. Do you think Anand follows a structural pattern in *Untouchable*? Discuss with textual illustration.
3. How does Anand present the theme of untouchability in his novel? Discuss, in this context, the appropriateness of the title *Untouchable.*
4. Discuss at least two minor characters in *Untouchable.*
5. What are the features which make *Untouchable* a distinctive novel?
6. Is Anand's novel relevant for the 21th century readers? Discuss.
7. Write a note on Gandhi's influence on *Untouchable.*
8. Examine the structure of the novel *Untouchable*.

1.8 Text/Selected Reading list

1. *Untouchable*, Penguin Books, India, 2001
2. Dhawan, R.K., (ed.), *Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, N.Y., Prestige, 1992
3. Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *Realism and Reality*. *The Novel and Society in India,* New Delhi, OUP, 1985
4. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice-born Fiction*, London, Heinemann, 1971
5. Narasimhaiah C.D. *The Swan and the Eagle* Delhi : Motilal, 1987

Unit 2 The Guide : R. K. Narayan

Structure :

2.0 Objective

This unit takes up for discussion certain aspects of R.K. Narayan's novel, *The Guide*. We will try to make you familior with the portrayal of characters, the structure, themes and narrative technique.

2.1 Introduction / Background

Any discussion on the early Indian English novel is bound to remind us of the trinity—Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. All of them began writing during the 1930s and have a profound effect on Indian English fiction. It was William Walsh who coined the phrase The Big Three to refer to these writers. R.K. Narayan has been a popular writer and his stories have been taken for TV serials and movie-adoptation. He has remained a writer—a man of letters, pure and simple.

2.2 Brief Notes on Author/Text

R. K. Narayan was born in Madras, India. He is one of the few Indian English writers who spent nearly all his time in India. He went abroad to the United States in 1956 at the invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation. He began his literary career with short stories, which were published in *The Hindu.* He also worked for sometime as a Mysore correspondent of *Justice,* a Madras-based newspaper.

R. K. Narayan won numerous awards for his works. He was given a National award from Sahitya Akademi for *The Guide.* He passed away on 13 May, 2001 at the age of 95.

Text

R. K. Narayan's *The Guide,* like many of his works, is set in Malgudi. The novel starts with a simple tale of a railway guide Raju. But he finds himself in an unexpected and strange situation from which he connot escape. He has to fast for the villagers believe that only a Swami is capable of miracles—bringing rain to a parched village. Raju has no option but to do this. Finally, as he collapses the rains come. The novel is entertaining and humorous but it also leads us to serious reflections—how circumstances can completely change man's life.

A film called *The Guide* (released in 1965) was based on R. K. Narayan's novel and was a commercial success.

2.3 Critical Analysis of the Text

2.3.1 Storyline

The novel begins with Raju talking casually to a barber. He is a railway guide and is obsessed by Rosie. Rosie loves dancing but Marco, her husband, does not approve of it. Encouraged by Raju Rosie leaves her husband and decides to pursue her dreams of becoming a dancer. Raju is her stage manager. With Raju's help, Rosie soon becomes a successful dancer. Gradually the relationship between the two becomes strained as Raju tries to dominate her. Marco appears and inadvertently Raju goes to prison for two years. After he completes his prison sentence, Raju leaves and on the way, the villagers take

Raju to be a swami. Swami Raju now stays in the village temple. The villagers respect him and have faith in his power as a Swami. They are confident that it is only the Swami who will be able to bring the rains and save the village. For this the Swami has to fast. Raju finds himself in a situation from which he cannot escape. Finally, like a miracle, the rains come as Raju collapses. The end of the novel leaves the readers with a question : does Raju really die?

2.3.2 Characters

Raju

Raju has an ordinary childhood and an extraordinary love affair with Rosie. Rosie desperately wants to become a dancer and Raju encourages her. This becomes a mission in his life. When Rosie eventually becomes a successful dancer, Raju can no longer provide her with intellectual support, nor can he, with his limited education stimulate Rosie's creativity. R.K. Narayan appropriately describes the growing tension in their relationship : "Whenever I watched her away her figure, if there was no one about I constantly interrupted her performance although I was supposed to watch her from an art critic's point of view. She pushed me away with, 'What has come over you?'

At the end of the novel Raju the railway guide is gradually transformed into one who guides man's soul—the spiritual guide. The significance of the title also strikes us at this point. The novel becomes the story of Raju's unexpected metamorphosis—his development from an ordinary guide to the Swami. We are prepared for this transformation by a passage in the novel in which Raju is seen counting the stars. This passage clearly highlights the later change in Raju.

> ‘‘The sky was clear. Having nothing else to do, he started counting the stars. He said to himself, 'I shall be rewarded for this profound service to humanity. People will say : there is the man who knows the exact number of stars in the sky. If you have any trouble on that account consult him. He will be your night guide for the skies.' He told himself, the thing to do is to start from a corner and go on patch by patch."

Towards the end, Raju undergoes a remarkable change. When Raju begins to

fast so that it may rain in the village, it is the first time in his life that he does something for the welfare of others and not for his own benefit. The moment he does this he renounces his old life. It is his rebirth. This is emphasized by the image of Raju as a baby and phoenix-like, he wipes out the past and recreates himself.

Rosie

There is an element of sensuousness in Rosie and her marriage to Marco has not been successful. The artist in Rosie needs stimulation and her husband can hardly give her inspiration. Even Raju cannot stimulate her creativity although he does encourage her. That she first meets Raju on the railway platform is significant. The railway has been Raju's life till he meets her and soon his familiar life is going to be disrupted and he will have to move away from this world. Rosie is associated with the snake and R. K. Narayan frequently uses the snake-imagery to suggest the sensuousness of Rosie, the enchantress.

2.4 Structure Meaning and narrative devices

The Guide centres on the experiences of Raju, the protagonist of the novel. The author tills the story in an interesting manner. While narrating Raju's story R.K. Narayan does not follow the linear movement of time. The narration shifts from the present to the past and then back to the present. The novel opens with Raju in conversation with the Barber and the narrative then reverts to into the past. The villager who comes to talk to him is a thing of the past.

The narrative becomes all the more intricate when the author takes us forward into a time when Raju will tell Velan the story of his life. This brings him to Rosie who will be introduced to Raju later.

R. K. Narayan uses a series of flashbacks to make the narration credible and interesting. Another flashback takes us back to Raju's childhood (Chap.2).

The story of his childhood is interrupted as Raju rerally the past to tell us about his conversation with Velan.

In Chap. 4, the story returns to the present. The narrative flows on in this way and R. K. Narayan seems to be working with three strands—past,

present and future—and skilfully fuses them as Raju finishes the telling of his story to Velan.

The consistent exploration of all levels of time and their harmonious blending at the end of the novel gives a sense of timelessness. This is in keeping with the Swami and his 'miracle'. We are taken to a different world —a world that is grounded in reality slides into another world : a world of faith and miracles. The ingenious structure of the novel serves to complement the theme of the novel—metamorphosis of a common ordinary man into a Saint. Moreover, the author also shows how, sometimes, circumstances are beyond our control and it is the situation that can make a man, a hero. The role of a Swami was thrust on Raju and at one point, he also got deeply involved in it.

2.4.1 Language/Style

R. K. Narayan deals with simple and down-to-earth people and the style he uses is also simple and humorous. The style at times can be vivid and photographic when, for instance, R. K. Narayan describes Raju's visit to the market place. The passage brings out the child's point of view and his observation as well as a detailed description of the market in the opening chapter. In another passage the description of the village in Chap.6, we notice, how R. K. Narayan varies his style. This village slowly unfolds itself before us through the description. It is no longer the child's observation but a sight recollected through the vision of an adult observer.

The dialogues in the novel are also interesting as the speaker's character is brought out through the choice of words and the tone used. We may quote here a witty dialogue between the barber and Raju in chapter 1. As the barber confidently makes an assessment of Raju's character, he is serious and tries to impress raju. We appreciate the way in which the dialogue shifts from seriousness to the mock seriousness of Raju :

"What else have I not done?" Raju asked.

"You have not cheated in any big way : but perhaps only in a small, petty manner."

"Go on. What next?"

"You have not abducted or raped anyone, or set fire to a house."

R. K. Narayan's eye for minute details and his mostery of the photographic style is best illustrated towards the end of the novel. At Raju's request Velan lifts him up as he is helped by others to take Raju to the water. The entire incident—how Raju stands in the water, prays, tells the people that it is raining in the mountains and finally sags down—is presented in a dramatic style. The last three words—"he sagged down" are cryptic and suggestive. The novel ends on an enigmatic note and we do not know whether Raju dies or not but the miracle has been accomplished.

2.5 Let us sun up

In this unit we have discussed the background, theme, characters, narrative devices and style. With these insights you will be in a better position to appreciated the novel. *The Guide* is a novel which explores the psychology of the common people. With a strange twist to the story, R. K. Narayan raises the novel from a trivial portrayal of characters to a study of transformation. When Raju finds himself in a strange situation—people think that the Swami will bring them rain—he cannot back out. The 'conversion' from a common man to a Swami— it is this theme that distinguished the novel from any other tale bases on the life of the simple and unsophisticated villagers.

2.6 Questions

1. Comment on R. K. Narayan's narrative devices in *The Guide.*
2. Would you agree with the view that *The Guide* is merely the story of a railway guide? Discuss with suitable textual illustrations.
3. Why does R. K. Narayan's novel *The Guide* appeal to the reader?
4. Write a note on R. K. Narayan's use of language in *The Guide* Substantiate your answer with textual illustrations.
5. Discuss the structure of *The Guide.*
6. Show how *The Guide* is both entertaining as well as thought provoking.
7. Write a brief note on R. K. Narayan's portrayal of Rosie.
8. Analyse the character of Raju as portrayed in *The Guide.*

2.7. Selected Reading list

1. Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *Realism and Reality. The Novel and Society in India,* New Delhi, OUP. 1985.
2. Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *The Twice-born Fiction,* London, Heinemann. 1971.
3. Naik, M. K., *A. History of Indian Writing in English,* New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1982.
4. Walsh, William, *Indian Literature in English,* London, 1990.

Unit 3 Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

Structure :

3.1 Life of Raja Rao and The History of The Indian English Novel

Raja Rao was born in 1908, in Mysore in Hassan, a well-populated district of Mysore, a southern state in India, speaking Kannad as his mother tongue. Rao had a uniquely cosmopolitan upbringing, and was enriched by a fascinating array of cultural influences. He was born in a well-known orthodox Brahman family, but went on to do his schooling in the Hassan district of Karnataka, in a Muslim dominated institution. He then left for Chennai to take his undergraduate degree in Madras University. Rao was thus as well versed in Kannad as in Tamil. He finally left for Europe to complete his postgraduate studies. He studied at the University of Montpellier in France, then University of Sorbonne, researching Christian theology, and history.

In 1931, he married a French academic, Camille Mouly. His marriage however, broke up by 1938-39, as he has narrated in his *Serpent and the Rope.* Raja Rao, returned to India at this point, and began to actively support the Indian anti-colonial agitations, and especially the Gandhian, Non-Cooperation movement till 1942. He edited a literary magazine named *Tomorrow* during this period. *Kanthapura* (1938) was born out of Raja Rao's fascination with the Gandhian principles *of ahimsa* and his programme of *satyagraha,* to bring about *swaraj.*

Rao returned to the theme of Gandhian ideologies and their impact on Indian minds, in the collection of short stories called *The Cow of the Barricades.* (1947). After the World War II, Rao spent most of his time in France, and travelling throughout the world. In 1950, he visited The United States of America, and lived there for some time in an ashram. In 1960 he wrote his metaphysical, and semi-autobiographical novel *The Serpent and the Rope,* where he portrays the breaking up of a marriage between two intellectuals due to philosophical and ideological discord. In 1965, he wrote the inscrutable *The Cat and Shakespeare,* and in 1976, he examined the complexities of Indian liberalism in his *Comrade Kirillov.*

In 1965, he married the American actress, Katherine Jones. From 1963 till 1983, he taught Hindu philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin. In 1988, he received the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for literary efforts. In 1988, he wrote *The Chess master and His Moves.* In 1998, he also wrote a biography of Gandhi entitled *The Great Indian Way : A Life ofMahatma Gandhi.*

Raja Rao occupies a unique position in the history of Indian English writing in the sense that he was one of the first to recognize the immense potential of the English language, and to shape and fashion the alien language to express Indian realities. He was also one of the first to theorize about the sustainability of a hybrid beast called Indian English literature.

3.2 Occasion for *Kanthapura*

Kanthapura was influenced by Raja Rao's reading of Ignazio's Silone's *Fontamara,* the story of the exploitation of the poor by the rich, as seen through the eyes of an idealist/socialist of the 1930s, during Mussolini's reign. On a personal level, the Gandhian Non-Cooperation Movement, and its momentous impact on Indian lives, at all possible levels, influenced Rao. It is significant that *Kanthapura* has been variously called a 'Gandhipurana,' because it deals with the impact of Gandhian ideologies on a remote village in Southern India. It is significant that the Gandhian anti-colonial movement democratized and broad-based the nationalist movement to the furthest extent possible, and hence acted as a kind of literary catalyst. *Kanthapura* must be placed in the context of a plethora of political novels written during this period.

3.3 Plot Structure of *Kanthapura*

Kanthapura, begins expressly as a tale of a small, non-descript Kannad village in Southern India. The story of the village's transition from a state of relative stasis to chaos, change and ultimate destruction, is narrated by a Brahman widow, named Achakka

Achakka's narration is clearly divided into two sections; the description of the peaceful, idyllic, and fairly ordered past of Kanthapura, and portrayal of the violent changes which its inhabitants undergo, as a result of the coming of Gandhian nationalistic ideas via the idealistic Brahmin young man 'Corner-House' Moorthy. Moorthy, cleverly brings home Gandhi's ideologies, and the essence of his anti-colonial movement, by incorporating Gandhi as the latest *avatar* among the pantheon of Hindu deities, and transforming a political conflict into a moral/theological conflict, between *sura* (godly) and *asuras* (demonic). Moorthy chooses the medium *of harikathas* or oral recounting of Hindu *puranic* tales to convey the new ideas of necessity of a nationalistic movement and ousting of imperialist powers like Britain from India. Within the confines of Kanthapura, through these *harikatha* sessions, Moorthy preaches the Gandhian ideals of embracing the 'untouchable' as ones own; inculcating economic self-reliance through spinning, and use of *kaddar* clothes; encouraging women to come out of the traditional confines of their home to participate in the anti-colonial nationalist movement. He also goes outside the village, to the adjoining Skeffington Coffee Estate to alleviate the miserable plight of the *coolies* by motivating them to abjure drinks, and join the nationalist movement, thereby giving some meaning to lives ruined by chronic alcoholism and apathy.

Significantly, Moorthy's essentially subversive ideas, (though packaged in a traditional form) turns not only the British against him, but also the traditional Brahmins like Bhatta, whose business/economic interests were best served by colluding with the British, and perpetrating retrogressive structures of caste and gender hierarchy, and systematic oppression of poor. They retaliate by 'excommunicating' Moorthy and branding him as an enemy of traditional Hindu religion. Moorthy however continues his good work and finally leads the people of Kanthapura to join in a massive Civil Disobedience movement, which involves people refusing to pay taxes and setting up a parallel government. The colonial administration retaliates by

violently repressing the Civil Disobedience procession (led by Ratna) and injuring or imprisoning most of the inhabitants of the village. Ultimately the very identity of the village is changed as the land belonging to most of its inhabitants is sold in auction to complete strangers. The uprooted inhabitants find shelter in the neighboring villages where the middle-aged and barren widows go on living almost the same kind of life, as at the beginning of the action, believing in the Mahatma as the saviour. Paradoxically, Moorthy, along with many other young people join the socialist camp, having lost faith in the efficacy of the Gandhian ideology.

Woven within this primary plot are many subsidiary plots; such as an incipient love-affair between the widow Ratna, and Moorthy, ultimately transformed into Ratna and Moorthy's all-sacrificing love for the nation, toiling under foreign yoke; the transformation of conservative Brahmin widows with rooted caste/gender prejudices like Acakka and Rangamma, from inconsequential individuals, into martyrs for the national cause, establishing solidarity, and fighting along side with their lower caste neighbours; '? Patel Range Gowda's spirited defence of the village from the likes of Bade Khan, (police and spy to the colonial government); a change of hearts in Skeffington Tea Estate *coolies,* who promise to give up addiction, and make their lives meaningful by fighting for the national cause .Ultimately, the novel is about transformation of people "for the call of the Mahatma had sung in their hearts."

3.4 The Theme of Village

Raja Rao describes Kanthapura as a *shalapurana,* or the story of a place : " There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *sthala-purana,* or a legendary history of its own" {*Kanthapura,* "Foreword", n.pag.). It goes without saying that *Kanthapura* is the story of a place, a village, its existence in mythical times, its transformation as a result of the proliferation of Gandhian ideologies, and its final destruction, as a result of its political clashes with the colonial government. *Kanthapura* is distinctive in the history of the Indian English literature in its foregrounding of a spatial construct, a village in South India, rather than the exploits of individual characters. In fact, most of the characters in the novel are shadowy, underdeveloped, or like Bhatta, introduced to be simply forgotten in the end.

Significantly the novel begins with a topographical description followed by an account of its demographic composition:

> Our village— I don't think you have ever heard about it— Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara, High on the Ghats is it, high up on the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur [...]
>
> Our village has four and twenty houses [...] Till now I've spoken only of the Brahmin quarter. Our village has a Pariah quarter too, a Potter's quarter, a Weaver's quarter, and a Sudra quarter. How many huts had we there? I do not know. There may have been ninety or a hundred— though a hundred may be the right number. Of course you would not expect me to go to the Pariah quarter, but I have seen from the street-corner Beadle Timmayya's hut *{Kanthapura,* 7-11).

It is important to note that this importance given to village-space in Rao's novel is not an entirely arbitrary decision, or even a decision born out of purely aesthetic reasons. In fact the idea of going back to villages or upliftment of village-India was the locus of the Gandhian struggle for *swaraj* or independence from colonial rule. Historically speaking, the upliftment of village India and a programme for decentralization, with the fostering *of gram panchayats,* constituted the major thrust of the Congress Movement. It was C.R.Das who first spoke of the importance of village in the nationalist struggle, and in his first Presidential address of 1922, he had noted that the real *Swaraj,* could only come through the "organization of village life and the practical autonomy of small local centres." (C. R. Das. *Freedom through Disobedience. Presidential Address at the 37th Indian National Congress.* Madras: Arka Press, 1922, 40).

However, Gandhi was unique in transforming this political and organizational importance given to villages into an ideological and cultural programme, aimed at mass mobilization. By embracing the village as truly Indian, and rejecting urban spaces as contaminated by foreign rule, Gandhi was able to establish the desired difference between the European discourse of nationalism, and the Indian struggle for freedom which he appropriately calls *swaraj,* or control over our selves.

Ultimately then, for Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* is not simply a village, but a cultural and ideological concept, a representative of India as a whole,

struggling to free itself, not only from chains of foreign control, but also its own rooted caste, and gender prejudices.

The most significant aspect of Rao's portrayal of village life of Kanthapura is not so much related to the outward changes wrought upon of a sleepy little village, as a result of its being drawn into the vortex of the nationwide anti-colonial agitation, and its ultimate destruction, but the internal and psychological changes which the villagers voluntarily undergo. Significantly there are two paradoxical movements in *Kanthapura.* In realistic terms, the story is about the physical destruction of a south Indian village as a result of its conflicts with the British government, and the consequent reprisals effected by the colonial administration in terms of burning down houses and property, imprisoning killing or wounding men, and forcing women and children to migrate to other villages.

However, on a psychological level *Kanthapura* is about making of a village that never existed. The novel begins with the Brahmin widow Achakka's description of a loose confederation of people, occupying a village-space, but divided radically along lines of caste, class and religion. Within the same caste-group, the inhabitants of Kanthapura are further divided on lines of class, wealth and gender. The village has no common minimum programme or common trajectory, except perhaps a belief in the efficacy of the mythical goddess Kechamma in protecting them from disease and destruction.

The novel begins with Brahmin widows like Achakka, Vedamma, and Rangamma subscribing to belief in caste hierarchies, so much so that the narrator takes it for granted that she is not expected to know the demographic character of the Pariah and Sudra Quarters of her village. Bhatta, the Brahmin money-lender, and his female audience such as Satamma, shudder at the prospect of caste pollution, reversal of gender hierarchies, and impending miscegenation as a result of the proliferation of Gandhian ideologies. Bhatta notes:

> 'But really aunt, we live in a strange age. What with modern education and their modern women. Do you know, in the city they already have grown-up girls, fit enough to be mothers of two or three children going to Universities? And they talk to this boy and that boy; and one too, I heard, went and married a Mohammedan. Really aunt that is horrible!'

'That's horrible, repeats Satamma. 'After all, my son, it is the Kaliyuga floods, and as the sastras say, there will be confusion of castes and the pollution of the progeny." *(Kanthapura,* 33-4)

But change comes slowly and surely, as Brahmin widows led by more informed ones like Rangamma, ultimately come to share Moorthy's point of view of loving one's neighbour, Brahmin or Pariah, and fighting shoulder to shoulder with their low-caste neighbours to oust the foreign devil. This transformation of the villagers, and their ability to overcome their century-old prejudices, is portrayed in a microcosm through the transformation of their leader, Moorthy himself. In a touchingly human scene, Moorthy overcomes his ingrained sense of disgust as he accepts and eats food at a pariah household in a conscious effort to erase caste prejudices:

> [..] Moorthy who had never entered a pariah house—he had always spoken to the pariahs from the gutter-slab,—Moorthy thinks this is something new, and with one foot to the back and one foot to the fore, he stands trembling and undecided, and then suddenly hurries up the steps and crosses the threshold and squats on the earthen floor. But Rachanna's wife quickly sweeps a corner, and spreads a wattle mat, but Moorthy confused blurts out, 'No, no, no, no,' and looks this side and that and thinks surely there is a carcass in the backyard, and its surely being skinned, and he smells the stench of pickled pigs and the roof seems to shake, and all the gods and all the manes of heaven seem to cry out against him, and his hands steal mechanically to his holy thread, the holding it, he would like to say, 'Hari-Om, Hari-Om.' But Rachanna's wife has come back with a little milk in a shining bass tumbler, and placing it on the floor with stretched hands, she says, 'accept this from this poor hussy!' and slips behind the corn-ins; and Moorthy says, 'I've just taken coffee Lingamma...' but she interrupts him and says, 'Touch it, Moorthappa, touch it only as though it were offered to the gods and we shall be sanctified'; and Moorthy, with many a trembling prayer, touches the tumbler and brings it to his lips, and taking one sip, lays it aside. *(Kanthapura,* 77-78).

What strikes the reader at the beginning of the novel is, the deep sense of division, and difference so far as the demographic content of Kanthapura is concerned. The narrator (a Brahmin widow) speaks of 'one village' but paradoxically highlights the "differences' between the righteous and pure,

'us,' and the unknown, and impure 'them,' the pariah portions of the village. The village, then,, is visibly, as well as demographically divided between the upper and lower classes, so much so that Achakka is even unaware of the physical shape or size of the pariah quarters. What Moorthy's propaganda does is to make aware the people of Kanthapura their 'sameness' rather than 'difference.' By going to pariah households, sharing food with them, and inviting them to make common cause in the independence struggle against the British, Moorthy succeeds in making Kanthapura *one village,* rather than a hierarchically organized group of people, operating under principles of rigorous segregation, and hence connected by ties of mutual mistrust, hatred, and resentment.

Soon, the Brahmin women of Kanthapura make common cause with pariah women, as they walk side by side, protesting against British imperialism. Equally significant is the way in which the sympathies of the coolies of the Skeffington Tea Estate are won over. These migrant people, who have been lured away from their distant villages, live despicable, animal-like lives, burdened by debts, ravaged by oppression of the tea estate manager, and broken by ruinous diseases, which the nature of their work exposes them to. Moorthy's campaigning gives these pariah lives, a new meaning, and they unite with the inhabitants of Kanthapura to fight against foreign oppression. It is this physical and spiritual union of the people of Kanthapura, and its adjoining lands, the formation of an united group of people, sympathetic and responsive to each others needs, which, I feel, is the most remarkable aspect of Rao's portrayal of village -life in *Kanthapura.* I would go so far as to say that, through the course of the novel, *Kanthapura* becomes 'one village.' The novel is about the *making of the village Kanthapura,* through the spiritual union of its inmates, rather than its *physical demolition.*

Equally significant in Rao's portrayal of how the inmates of Kanthapura overcome other kinds of ingrained prejudices such as deep rooted gender prejudices. The very fact that widows, traditionally considered to be inauspicious and marginal in upper-class Hindu society, are given the leadership of the civil disobedience movement is significant. Here again the prejudices against widows, and especially young widows who were considered a sexual threat, is voiced though the apprehensions of Bhatta when he first sees the young widow Ratna, the daughter of Rangamma's sister:

> Then Rangamma's sister Kamalamma came along with her widowed daughter Ratna, and Bhatta rose up to go, for he could never utter a kind word to that young widow, who not only went about the streets like a boy, but even wore her hair to the left like a concubine, and still she kept her bangles and her nose-rings and her ear-rings, and when she was asked why she behaved as though she hadn't lost her husband, she said that that was nobody's business, {Kanthapura 37).

However, as the novel progresses, under the influence of egalitarian Gandhian ideologies, the prejudices against women in general, and widows in particular, gradually wither away, so much so that Ratna, the young widow, actually leads the civil disobedience movement in Kanthapura, while older widows, and women also fight along side men to put an end to British rule in India.

3.5 Myth and Reality in *Kanthapura*

One of the significant aspects of *Kanthapura* is Raja Rao's skill intermingling of mythical elements with social and historical realities of freedom struggle in India. Raja Rao gives an indication of his intentions in the 'Foreword' of the novel where he declares his intentions of using the *puranic* mode of telling a tale :

> There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich shala-purana, or legendary history, of its own. Some god or god-like hero has passed by the village-Rama might have rested under his peepul tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with the men [...] (*Kanthapura*, 'Foreword' n.pag).

Raja Rao's use of a mythical structure to buttress his tale of political oppression and popular resistance to colonial oppression, must be placed in the context of Rao's own awareness of trends in European Modernism, where artists like James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats were, during this very period, making extensive use of Greco-Roman, and Celtic mythical structures, to give meaning, and substance to the chaotic flux of modern European life. Rao's situatedness in the heart of the Western metropolis, and his long association with Western

cultural trends, made him acutely aware of the importance of mythology in giving structure and substance to modern day, realistic experiences.

Rao's fascination with Hindu mythical structures can also be ascribed to his roots in a pious South-Indian Brahmin family, rigorously believing, and practising Hindu rituals. The most formative influence in Rao's life was that of his grandfather, Ramakrishna, who was a Vedantist, and who taught Rao the *Upanishads,* at the age of five. His higher studies in History and Philosophy, both Indian and Western, also motivated him to use the mythical pattern to buttress his works. Above all, his intimacy with, and submission to, Guru Sri Attmananda, also contributed to his philosophic vision of life. Finally, Rao repeatedly notes, that unlike the Western novelists, his writing is not an intellectual adventure but a *sadhana,* a spiritual experience:

> So, the idea of literature as anything but a spiritual experience or *sadhana*—a much better word—is outside my perspective. I really think that only through dedication to the absolute or metaphysical Principle can one be fully creative. (S.V. V. "Raja Rao, *The Illustrated Weekly of India,* Jan 5, 1964, 44-45).

In *Kanthapura,* this intermingling of gods and men is apparent when during *harikathas* (narration of mythical tales), Gandhi, a political figure located in the here and now, is actually incorporated within the pantheon of Hindu gods, and actually perceived as an *avatar,* of Lord Krishna, who had declared that he would appear in every *yuga* to punish the ungodly, and protect the good. In fact, the "god-world" is never too far in this village, and the narrator Achakka speaks with utmost conviction about the mythical origins of Kanthapura:

> Kenchamma is our goddess. Great and bounteous is she. She killed a demon ages ago, a demon that had come to ask our young sons as food and young women as wives. Kenchamma came from the heavens— it was the sage Tripur who had made penances to bring her down— and she waged such a battle and she had fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth, and that is why the Kenchamma hill is all red [...] Thank heavens that she not only did she slay the demon, but she even settled down among us {*Kanthapura,* 8).

The realistic and everyday story of *Kanthapura,* that of a South Indian village,

undergoing a spiritual change under the impact of Gandhian ideologies, and attempting to oust their British colonial masters through a civil disobedience movement, is placed within this mythical framework. The mythical framework which has reference to some local gods/ goddesses like Kenchamma, the human sacrifice-demanding demon, and sages like Tripur, are an echo of the larger and all abiding Hindu myth of Lord Krishna who had declared that he would appear in many *avatars,* (incarnation) whenever the earth would be plagued by demonic figures, and good men would need protection.

This is the mythical pattern, which is superimposed on the realistic frame of events in *Kanthapura.* In the *harikathas* that are organized by the local Gandhi, Moorthy, Mahatma Gandhi is conceived of as an avatar of the Hindu pantheon, and the entire struggle between the Indian National congress and the colonial government is seen as a struggle between *suras* and *asuras,* gods and demons. Significantly, Jayaramachar, the stellar attraction in the *harikatha* recitals in Kanthapura, brings the entire weight of Hindu mythology to bear upon the anti-colonial struggle to make it acceptable and less alien to simple village widow listeners :

> 'Today' he says, 'it will be the story of Shiva and Parvati.' And Parvati in her penance becomes the country and Shiva becomes heaven knows what!' he is three-eyed,' he says, 'and swaraj too is three-eyed: Self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, Khaddar.' And then he talks of Damayanthi and Sakunthala and Yashodha and everywhere there is something about our country and something about Swaraj *(Kanthapura,* 16).

It is equally significant that Jayaramachar introduces Gandhi, an entirely political entity, in terms of an *avatar* in Hindu mythology, and goes on to construct a full-scale story about the mythical origins of this god-like entity:

In the great heavens Brahma the Self-created One was lying on his serpent, when the sage Valmiki entered [...] 'Rise up, O God of Gods! I bring you sinister news. Far down on the earth you chose as your chief daughter Bharatha, the goddess of wisdom and wellbeing. [...] But, O Brahma! [...] you have forgotten us so log that men have come from across the seas and the oceans to trample on our wisdom and to spit on virtue itself. They have come to bind us and to whip us, to make our women milkless and our men die

ignorant. O Brahma! deign to send us one of our Gods so that he may incarnate the earth and bring backlight and plenty to your enslaved daughter.'[...]

And lo ! When the sage was still partaking of the pleasures Brahma offered him in hospitality, there was born in a family in Gujerat, a son such as the world had never beheld. As soon as he came forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the Kingdom of the Sun, and hardly was he in his cradle than he began to lisp the language of wisdom. You remember how Krishna, when he was but a baby of four, had begun to fight against the demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country. And as he grew up [...] more and more men began to follow him as they did Krishna the flute player; and so he goes from village to village to slay the serpent of foreign rule *(Kanthapura, l-18).*

Moorthy of course is the equivalent of the sage Tripur, who through his conspicuous suffering, and penance, is able to bring Gandhian ideologies, and thus a change of heart, among the inhabitants of Kanthapura. Before he actually launches into a full scale war against caste prejudice, and exhorts people to join the civil disobedience movement, he undergoes a periods of *tapas* or penance, by fasting for three days. Moorthy can also be profitably compared to Bhagirath, a figure in the epic *Mahabharata* who brought down the Ganga river to the earth, through his penance, and suffering. In addition, Moorthy is also compared to Ram, the epic hero who voluntarily underwent fourteen years of penance, and exile to honour his father's vow, and ultimately destroyed the demon Ravana, who had enslaved his beloved wife. Even minor figures are clothed in mythical garbs. Seenu, the narrator Achakka's only son, and Moorthy's faithful follower is called "Ajanayya, and [...] your fire-tailed Hanuman,' *{Kanthapura,* 81).

Though there are no actual gods or goddesses helping Kanthapurians against their battle against the red-faced demons or the British, Gandhi is surely imagined as a godlike figure whose blessings will help the people of Kanthapura to overcome their problems. The red-devils, like the mythical demon demands sacrifice in terms of wealth, and dignity. In the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the British master is almost an exact replica of the mythical demon because his coffee plantation demands human sacrifice in terms of the high rate of mortality due to disease and hard work. He also demands the wives and daughters of his coolies, for personal enjoyment.

The final battle is also conceived in mythical terms as an epic encounter

between the forces of good and evil and even though, in material terms, the inhabitants of Kanthapura are no match against the might of the British empire, their conspicuous suffering does bring them glory, and hope of a better tomorrow. Most significantly, they have now "a paradise within [...] happier far" (Milton Bk l2, *Paradise Lost)* because they are united as a nation, irrespective of class, gender or caste divides. Even material defeat seems paltry in face of eternal hope, culled in mythical terms. At the end of the novel, when all seems to be lost, Achakka assures the villagers, as well as the readers that, Gandhi will ultimately bring independence, and the Ram-like Moorthy's period of exile will end in the destruction of the Ravan or British rulers :

> They say the Mahatma will go to the Red-Man's country and he will get us Swaraj. [...] And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita free, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air, and brother Bharatha will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the Master on his head. And as they enter Ayodhya there will be rain of flowers *{Kanthapura* 183).

Raja Rao thus intersperses the mythical and the realistic mode to narrate his tale in *Kanthapura.*

On the structural level, the plot of *Kanthapura* resembles the circular structure of the Hindu myth of *yugas* or time cycles. According to the Puranas, time is divided into four *yugas—Satya, Treta, Dwaper* and *Kali,* after which there is the great destruction or *pralaya,* and then again, the entire cycle of *yugas* is repeated. *Kanthapura* begins with a description of a village which is apparently stable, peaceful, and content with its lot, till of course there is the entry of foreign devil the Red man, whose oppressions reach a peak point. The attempts to resist and oust the Red-demon, and the consequent (and conspicuous) suffering of the villagers, at the behest of the almost mythical hero Moorthy (and through him, the god-like Mahatma Gandhi), leads to a veritable *pralaya,* as man and beast are destroyed, and the very existence of the village is threatened. However, this penultimate battle brings hope of a *satyayuga,* a new Utopia, built on the blood and sacrifice of people.

3.6 Kanthapura as *Gandhipurana*

It was K.R..S. Iyengar who had first defined Rao's *Kanthapura* as a "Gandhipurana" in his book *Indian Writing in English* (1973, p-391). Today, after fifty-seven years of Independence, it is difficult to gauge the impact of Gandian ideologies on Indian minds, especially during the late Nineteen-twenties and early thirties, when Gandhi launched his Civil Disobedience Movement against the colonial government. Significantly, the Indian English novel itself came of age, in the thirties, at the height of Gandhian civil disobedience movement. So all pervasive was the effect of Gandhian ideologies on Indian minds, that hardly a writer of repute, whether expressing himself in vernacular or English, could actually avoid alluding to the topic of the unique non-violent anti-colonial movement that was sweeping across India. It is interesting to note what M. K. Naik, one of the early commentators on Indian English literature said about the Gandhi phenomenon in Indian English literature:

> Up to the 1930s there was no Indian novelist who could claim sustained and considerable achievement in fiction originally written in English. Then came a sudden flowering, and it is significant that it came in the 1930s— a period during which the glory that was Gandhi attained perhaps its brightest splendour. The Indian freedom struggle was already more than a generation old, but with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, it was so thoroughly democratized that freedom consciousness percolated for the first time to the very grassroots of Indian society and revitalized. It is possible to see a connection between this development and the rise of the Indian English novel; for fiction, of all literary forms, is the most vitally connected with social conditions and values. (Naik, *Raja Rao.* New York, 1972, 75).

All the three major Indian novelists writing during this period chose Gandhian ideologies as their central concern. In the *Untouchable,* not only does Mulk Raj Anand, tackle the problem of untouchability, and caste prejudice, social evils against which Gandhi fought throughout his life, but he also introduces Gandhi as a character in the novel. In R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for Mahatma,* again Gandhi appears as a character, though the novel is an ironic, comic portrayal of the coming of Gandhian ideologies in the protagonist Sriram's

life as he falls hopelessly in love with Bharathi, a volunteer in Gandhi's "Non-Cooperation Movement. Raja Rao himself wrote about Gandhi in a short story called *The Cow of the Barricades.* Like the simple villagers in Rao's *Kanthapura,* Narsiga. the simple shepherd boy confuses legend with history and transforms Gandhi into an *avatar* of the Hindu pantheon. He believes that like the mythical hero Rama, Gandhi "is going to fly in the air in a chariot of flowers drawn by four horses, four white horses." (Rao, *The Cow of the Barricades,* 116).

Kanthapura is unique in its wholehearted and sustained analysis of Gandhian ideology, and portrayal of how such ideologies were able to change life of an entire village community. At the outset, it is important to note that, the very situation of the story in a remote Kannad village, is in accordance with Gandhi's preoccupation with rural India, and his designation of rural India as the true face of Indian life.

Most of Mohandas Gandhi's cherished ideals,— such as boycotting of foreign, goods; spinning one's own clothes on the *charkha* to foster economic self sufficiency; practising of *ahimsa* or non-violence towards all; abjuring of caste hierarchies and accepting of the untouchables as one's own; acceptance of all down trodden, including women as legitimate part of the anti-colonial struggle; and finally practice of a moral way of life including prohibitions on partaking of liquor; — are worked out in Rao's *Kanthapura,* largely through the mediation of the 'local Gandhi,' Moorthy. Ultimately, then, *Kanthapura* is the microcosm of India itself in the 1930s, and the transformation of the village under the impact of Gandhian ideologies, is symptomatic of sweeping social and political changes that were taking place in India under the leadership of a man whom the masses called a 'Mahatma,' or saint. It is interesting to quote the following assessment of the political commentator Denis Dalton, for the benefit of those readers who feel that the plot of *Kanthapura* is largely idealistic and unreal :

> By 1921, his [Gandhi's] message of swaraj as a personal as well as social and political revolution had dug deeply into the popular consciousness. [...] Swaraj was interpreted as demanding changes in personal behavior that extended to family planning and diet. In Gorakhpur District, for example, an entire village altered its eating habits by giving up meat and fish as a step towards swaraj. Not only from poor peasants, but

> from all castes and classes in this region, the popular responses to Gandhi were truly phenomenal [...] Some of the peasantry imagined the Mahama having fantastic powers to defeat the Raj and envisaged swaraj as an imminent 'millennium,' the dawning of age of absolute justice and social equality (Dalton, *Gandhi's Power: Non-Violence in Action,* 32).

Significantly, in *Kanthapura,* anticipating the predominantly Hindu, upper-caste villagers' resistance to, and anxiety of alien ideas, the Congress leaders like Moorthy and Jayaramachar (the *harikatha* man), introduce Gandhi, and Gandhian ideologies, in specifically Hindu/religious terms. In the process, both Gandhi, and his representative in the village, Moorthy are transformed, from flesh and blood human beings into saintly, quasi-divine figures, beyond human doubts and questions. Their political and economic programme is acceptable to the people of *Kanthapura* because they are perceived as demi-gods, rather than practising politicians. In turn, Moorthy also appeals to the villagers to participate in a political movement in religious and moral terms, rather than political or economic ones, though the political and economic implications of such moral actions are always subtly suggested. Moorthy enjoins the village women to spin and wear *khadi* clothes, primarily because "to wear cloth spun and woven with your own god-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And [...] our country is being bled to death by foreigners. We have to protect our mother." *{Kanthapura,* 23).

So alien, and so essentially threatening are the Gandhian ideas of eradication of caste hierarchy, and boycotting of foreign made goods, to the prevalent upper-class Hindu interests that, not only Bhatta, the moneylender with vested interests, but even Achakka, the simple narrator, who is a staunch supporter of Moorthy, initially refuses to accept them. Widows like Najamma remind Moorthy that Brahmins are forbidden by their religion to spin, and Achakka notes that :

> Moorthy goes from house to house [...] and what do you think?— he even goes to the potter's quarter and the weaver's quarter and the Sudra quarter, and I close my ears when I heard that he went to the Pariah's quarter. We said to our selves, he is one of these Gandhi-men, who say there is neither caste nor clan nor family, and yet they pray like us and live like us. Only they say, too, one should not marry early, one should allow widows to take husbands and a Brahmin might marry a

pariah and a pariah a Brahmin. Well, well, let them say it, how does it affect us? We shall be dead before the world is polluted. We shall have closed our eyes *{Kanthapura,* 15-16).

The overcoming of the Brahmin community's deep-rooted prejudice against caste hierarchies is witnessed through Moorthy's own very human faltering and ultimate overcoming the fear of pollution. As already discussed in the Section lV, the novel begins with a description of a village segregated along lines of caste, but ends with Brahmin men and women fighting shoulder to shoulder with their pariah brethren. *Kanthapura* is a fine example of the efficacy of Gandhian ideologies, within a microcosm of a village.

This fear of an oncoming dystopia with miscegenation, overturning of caste, class and gender hierarchies, and resulting chaos is also the theme of more hardened Gandhi haters like Venkamma and Bhatta, the money-lender. Bhatta realizes right away that Gandhian ideals will topple the applecart of profit which the Brahmins in collusion with the British have established in the country. However, the root of Brahmanical opposition to Gandhi is not simply ideological but economic. Brahmins like Bhatta are quick to understand the economic implications of Gandhian propaganda enjoining his followers to use hand-spun *khaddar* cloth, and abjure foreign-made goods. It is only by compelling native people to buy foreign-made goods that the colonial administration can siphon off wealth from this country, and it is only when people are impoverished that they will turn to ruthless moneylenders like Bhatta and Subba Chetty, who in turn will further impoverish by lending the money at abnormally high rates of interest. Moorthy attempts to popularize the Gandhian ideal of spinning on the *charkha* in *Kanthapura,* by first enunciating not only the economic drain theory, but also exposing the close nexus between the colonial government and the upper-class money-lenders. Incidentally, the economic drain theory was first enunciated by Dadabhai Naoroji, but given focus and transformed into a national issue by Gandhi.

When the Brahmin widow Najamma protests that Brahmins are enjoined by their religion not to spin, Moorthy convinces her of the necessity of such work, by noting that traditional weavers like Chennayya and Rangayya, have to buy foreign yarn:

[...] and foreign yarn is bought with our money, and all this money goes across the ocean. Our gold should be in our country. And our cotton

should be in our country.[.. .] You get poorer and poorer, and the pariahs begin to starve, and one day all but Bhatta and Subba Chetty [the money lenders] will have nothing else to eat but pebbles of the Himavathy, and drink-her waters [...]

This nexus between the orthodox Brahmins and the colonial government is later exposed in a public meeting where "youngster after youngster [...] said Moorthy was excommunicated by the Swami, for Moorthy was for Gandhiji and the Unchouchables, and Swami was paid by the British to do their dirty work" *(Kanthapura,* 95), and Ranganna, the advocate, calls on people to "choose between a saint like Mahatma Gandhi and [...] those fattened Brahmins who want to frighten us with their excommunication, once the government has paid them well" *(Kanthapura, 96*).

The Gandhian movement is equally liberating for women of the village and this who also borne out by historical facts. Gandhi's call for a mass anti-colonial movement broughtout Indian women from the confines of their homes like never before, and went along way in equalizing gender relations. In *Kanthapura,* Raja Rao exposes the process of not only women, but widows, traditionally considered to be inauspicious, coming out of the confines of their limited domestic existence, and participating in a national movement. The path for women's participation in the civil disobedience movement is not always very smooth as they have to encounter rooted prejudice in the form of Bhatta and the sharp-tongued Venkamma. Opposition also comes from their own homes, when their husbands refuse to allow their wives to participate in such movements, as the men fear that in the process, their wives will neglect their duties at home. When Rangamma, the widow suggests that the women of the village form a Sevika Sangha or a Women's Volunteer movement, even the men who claimed to be Gandhi-followers treat their wives violently:

And every time the milk curdled or the dhoti was not dry, they would say 'It is all because of this Sevi business,' and Radhamma's husband beat her on the day he returned from village inspection, though she was seven month pregnant. And Post Office Satamma's husband would not talk to her: 'Why, soon it will be as if the men will have to wear bangles and cook, so that you women may show yourselves off! *{Kanthapura,* 110).

Though in *Kanthapura,* Rao does not provide any radical solution these patriarchal assumptions that women, must above all look after the comforts of their men folk, the very fact that women do come out, do form a Sevika Sangha, and do negotiate some precarious space within the rigid patriarchal structures of a south Indian Hindu village community, does suggest the success of Gandhian ideologies.

Moorthy's excursions into the Skeffington Coffeee Estate and his attempting to make the migrant coolies literate, and aware of their basic rights, as well as giving them dignity by enlisting their support in the nationalist movement, is also what gives *Kanthapura* its Gandhian flavour.

Historical details of Gandhi's famous march to Dandi to manufacture salt as a symbolic protest against the colonial government's unjust taxing of everyday items, and the tremendous impact of such civil disobedience on the Indian people, are interspersed within the fictional tale of the South Indian village. Informed by Moorthy, Achakka notes that :

> [...] the Mahatma had left Sabarmati on a long pilgrimage [...] with but eighty-two of his followers, [...] and they go with Mahatma to the Dandi beach to manufacture salt [...] And the next day the White papers told us that the Mahatma had taken a handful of salt after his ablutions, and he had brought it home [...] And so day after day men go out to the sea to make salt, and day after day men are beaten back and put into prison, and yet village after village grows empty, for the call of the Mahatma had sung in their hearts [...] *(Kanhapura* 126).

Finally of course *Kanthapura* can be called Gandhipuran because of the presence of Moorthy, the local Gandhi. As simple villagers like Range Gowda believe for the people of *Kanthapura* he is their Gandhi. Moorthy's character makes Gandhian ideologies come alive, as the reader witnesses Moorthy undergoing an arduous fast very much in the manner of Gandhi to purify himself, before he can preach the ideals *of ahimsa* and love for all. He is also able to, through his penance, overcome his desires for Ratna, and other worldly attractions. Penance also helps him to conquer fear as he is able to protest without fear of imprisonment and refuses advocates as he believes that truth does not need any advocates.

However it is important to note that the response to Gandhian ideologies is not total or uncontested. People like Range Gowda believe that the theory

of *ahimsa* is only for saints like Moorthy, and not the common people. In the final encounter *ahimsa* is forgotten in the heat of battle between policemen and *Kanthapureans.* The Gandhian ideals of *ramrajya* (literally, the kingdom of the mythical king Ram, but broadly referring to the Gandhian blueprint of an ideal republic) are undercut by Rangamma account of socialist practices in U.S.SR. as a result of the Bolshevik revolution. Rangamma narrates the story of :

> [...] the country beyond Kabul and Bukhara and Lahore, the country of, the hammer and sickle and electricity [...] and in that country there were women who worked like men [...] and when they felt tired, they went and spent their holiday in a palace— no money for railway, money for the palace—and when the women were going to have a child, they had two months and three months holiday and when the children were still young they were given milk by the Government, and when they were grown up, they were sent free to school, and when they grew older still they went to the University free, too, and when they were still more grown-up, they got a job and they got a home to live in and they took a wife to live with and they had many children and they lived happily ever after [...] and mind you [.. .] there all men are equal—every one equal to every other—and they were neither the rich nor the poor *(Kanthapura, 36).*

At the end of the novel, most youngsters such as Moorthy abandon Gandhian ideologies for the goal of a socialist republic, and that they note that getting rid of the colonizer through completely non-violent means is an impossibility in the real world. As Moorthy notes in a final letter to Ratna:

> [...] they all say the Mahatma is a noble person, a saint, but the English will know how to cheat him; and he will let himself be cheated. Have faith in your enemy, he says, have faith in him and convert him. But the world of men is hard to move, and once in motion it is wrong to stop till the goal is reached. [.. .] Oh no Ratna, it is the way of the masters that is wrong. And I have come to realize bit by bit, [...] that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee estate, [...] there will always be pariahs and poverty *{Kanthapura,* 183).

Though Moorthy's abandoning of the Gandhian path does not invalidate the

efficacy of Gandhian ideologies, the definition of *Kanthapura* as *Gandhipuran* must be qualified.

3.7 The Language of *Kanthapura*

Raja Rao was one of the first to theorize about the special problems of writing about Indian realities in the English language. In the 1930s, when Raja Rao was writing his *Kanthapura,* this problem was particularly acute because the average Indian still regarded English as the language of the hateful colonizer, and therefore not only alien but threatening. The Indian novelist/poet writing in English was at worst perceived as a. deracinated collaborator, and at best aesthetically irrelevant. The second assumption was more dangerous because, if the English language was incapable of expressing Indian realities as a result of its intrinsic alieness, then Indians writing in English could never hope to produce an aesthetically satisfying work. Raja Rao was one of the first to argue that Indian realities could be expressed in English, and that the English language itself could be transformed, and domesticated. In the oft-quoted Foreword to *Kanthapura* he notes:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own spirit. He has to convey the various shades of omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual makeup—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not our emotional makeup. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. (Rao, 'Foreword' *Kanthapura,* n.pag.).

Significantly enough, for Raja Rao, the decision to express himself in English was not axiomatic, Raja Rao had given much thought to the appropriate language of expression. Though he did feel that Sanskrit was extremely rich and suited most naturally to his needs, yet he did not use as he felt it was beyond his competence. He found French equally suitable but

could not use it because "it is like a harp; its delicacy needed an excellence of instinct and knowledge that seemed well-nigh terrifying. He even tried to write in his mother tongue Kannada, but abandoned it as unsuitable for his purposes. In an interview he explained :

> Kannada needs modernizing. When I started writing I found Kannada to be very limiting. Or say, if I wish to say "a young lady came to interview me", I would not have known how to say it in Kannada at that time, for there was no such thing as an 'interview'
>
> And young ladies never interviewed! The whole idea would have been foreign and would have been writing in a language where there was no relation between the language and the idea expressed[....] So Kannada was not good enough for me. ("Interview with Raja Rao").

In this section we will go on to examine the ways in which Rao domesticates the English language, and creates a unique idiom, Indian English, to express the realities of freedom struggle in a remote Kannad village in the 1930s.

At the very outset, it is important to note that *Kanthapura* is narrated by an artless, and unlearned village grandmother, and Rao therefore, instead of using the Standard English, which is frequently punctuated, and therefore conveys a sense of studied effort, introduces a perennial flow of words with the help of conjunctions like 'and' to give the impression of unhurried musings or ramblings of an old rustic woman. The telling is more akin to a grandmother's tale, where fact and fiction, past and present mingle:

> And when they had sat themselves down beneath the hanging bunyan roots beside the porch, men and women, and children, the bundles and baskets beside them, the maistri went in, and came out with the sahib, a tall fat man with golden hair, and he had spectacles as large as your palm, and he looked this side at the men and that side at the women, now at the arms of Pariah Chennaiyya and now at the legs of Pariah Siddayya, and he touched Madhavanna's son Chenna, then but a brat of seven with the butt of his whip, and he laughed when he wanted everyone to laugh with him and when the child began to cry, he looked at the child's face and began to laugh at him, but the child cried more and more, and the Sahib rose up suddenly and went in, and came out with a round white peppermint and said he was not a bad man and that

everybody would get a beating when they deserved one and sweets when they worked well *(Kanthapura,*).

Like many other after him, Rao makes use of a large number of unglossed Sanskrit or Kannad words such as ghats (1), sandal and sal (1), zamindar (333), maharaj (32), bhajan (29), lathi (46), yoga (147), panchayat (103), Hari-Om (102), karma (129), charka (27), vidya (146), patwari (33), badmash (205), coolie (65), mandap (87), laddu and pheri (1113), verana (110), to convey a sense of Indianess.

Another interesting device to convey a sense of Indianess and to transform the English language in *kanthapura,* is to combine words, as is typical of a Sanskritic dialect. For example, Rao speaks of "the temple-square-Tamarind" (41),"dung-eating curs" (212), corn-distribution Barber Venkata (134), a moon-crowned god" (191), the bang-bang of lathis" (197), front—house Suranna" (33), corner-house Narsammma's son" (9), Post-Office House people" (31), front-house people" (33), your fire-tailed hanuman" (188).

Rao directly translates Kannad dialectical idiosyncrasies and proverbs into English to create certain startling effects in *Kanthapura,* such as "If the rains come not, you all at her feet and say" (2); "The air is empty" (11); "How are the rains in your parts?" (39); "I'll drop a word in your ear" (39); Rangamma, you are a sister to me" (41); "Every squirrel has his day" (110); "I am no butcher's son to hurt you" (41); May be Ratna would be at the well" (57); "You will take to your evil ways" (50); "You know you said you did not want daughter for your son" (52); "Helpless as a calf (55); "Sons of concubines are planting well" (19); "You are sons of my woman" (15); Crow and sparrow story" (22); "Stitch up your mouth"; "Go and ask the squirrel on the fence"; "He was honest as an elephant" (12); and "I'll squash you like a bug" (21).

It is by mimetically reproducing Kannad speech rhythms, directly translating. Kannad and Tamil idioms and proverbs or using unglossed words directly within an English sentence that Rao is able to mould an alien language and enable to bear the weight of specifically Indian experiences. Rao's unique experiment in *Kanthapura* motivated several writers after him to try and domesticate the English language and use it fruitfully for their purpose of expressing their uniquely Indian realities.

3.8 Questions for Examination

1. Discuss Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* as a "Gandhipurana."
2. In the ''Foreword" to *Kanthapura,* Rao notes, that "The telling has not been easy." In what sort of language is *Kanthapura* told?
3. The village is the most important character in Rao's *Kanthapura.* Discuss.
4. Write a note on the plot-structure of *Kanthapura.*
5. How successfully has Rao used the Hindu mythical structures in *Kanthapura'?*

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Unit 4 Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day

Structure :

4.1. Objective

The objective in teaching students this novel is to make them aware of the various conditions of culture and history that inform a postcolonial literary text. An Indian novel written in English is a site which enacts the radical shifts and transitions of culture and history in its use of a once foreign language as its medium of expression. As notable critics of postcolonial theory like Homi Bhabha[1] have pointed out, the postcolonial text, emanating from the interface of a colonizing and colonized culture, is inevitably a site of hybridization. Notwithstanding the fact that cultural influences from the colonizing source (Britain, in the case of India) has often meant the explicit negation of indigenous cultural mores, the interfusion of divergent and disparate cultural forms often produces a hybridization that is enabling and creative. Desai's text, using English within the Indian context of novel writing, attests to the thriving life of the novel, initially a European genre, within the scene of Indian letters. The practice of writing novels in English in India automatically raises questions about how independent this practice is of

European norms and conventions. Raja Rao for instance, in Kanthapura, incorporates Indian speech rhythms into his English prose, thereby marking his text with the unmistakable stamp of Indian indigeneity. Rao's experimentation remains a landmark instance of remaking or redefining the novel on Indian terms. Anita Desai, however, writes entirely within the Western tradition, using the narrative technique known as "realism" to delineate characters and situations that have more psychological significance than significance as event or history.

4.2. Author

Anita Desai (1937—), born of a German mother and Bengali father, grew up in Moosourie and Delhi, and studied English at the M.A. level in Demi University. References to English authors and texts are frequent in Desai's novels, providing a rich vein of intertexuality, which becomes a cultural marker of the hybrid postcolonial text. Themes of loneliness and isolation permeate Desai's texts, her characters mostly playing the role of outsiders. As much as her texts are a testament to the changes in sensibility caused by historical change, they are also about the great themes of European modernism—alienation, exile and the rootlessness of the individual in both the metropolis and elsewhere.

She began her career as a novelist with *Cry the Peacock* (1963), and then went on to write *Voices In the City* (1965) which won the Sahitya Academy award in 1965, *Bye Bye Blackbird* in 1968 and *Where Shall We Go This Summer* in 1975. *Fire On the Mountain,* published in 1977, won the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award. She has two collections of short stories entitled *Games At Twilight and Village By the Sea. Clear Light of Day* published in 1980, was followed by In Custody (1984) and *Baumgartner 's Bombay* (1987). *Journey to Ithaca* was published in 1995, followed by *Fasting Feasting* (1999), and her latest works include *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* (2000), *The ZigZag Way* (2004), and *Hill of Silver/Hill of Lead* (2005).

4.3. Clear Light of Day

Clear Light of Day published in 1980 marks a point of consummation in Desai's narrative oevre, positioned as it is almost midway between her earlier and

later work. Themes and preoccupations that surfaced early in her work make their appearance in this novel too, although, critics have pointed out that it presents a point of graduation beyond the excessive interiority of the earlier novels like *Cry The Peacock, and Where Shall We Go This Summer and even Fire On the Mountain.* In these early novels, reality is clearly internal, focusing on the vagaries and turmoils of the hypersensitive mind trying unsuccessfully to negotiate reality. In *Clear Light of Day* however, external reality possesses firm contours of its own, influencing and moulding characters to a certain extent. Set in old Delhi, in the aftermath of partition, the novel mingles national and personal history, and records trauma and change at both the national and the familial level. If the nation is in the throes of crisis and violence, then emotional and psychological violence is the condition of family life in the novel. Although, interiority still remains pivotal in the text with Bim's consciousness carrying most of the weight of the novel, yet exteriority or external events and people, contribute significantly to the overall pattern of the narrative. *Clear Light of Day* is a novel about relationships, about childhood and its many deprivations, about the abdication of responsibility in adults and parents, about surrogate parenthood, about the paradoxes of strength and resilience, about unalleviated loneliness and isolation. It is also about woman, as an agent and subject of history.

The two narratives that are most significant in the novel are those of Bim and Tara, who are vivid contrasts to each other. Through the intertwining narratives of the two sisters, who at the moment and hour of their reunion, several years after Tara's marriage, make frequent incursions into the past, the image of a nation arises, and along with it, the histories of families who lived during that time. Although, it is Bim's family who is at the center of this narrative of the "nation", the Mishras, who were their neighbours in the adjoining house, are also drawn into the panoramic world that the novel offers. By no means comparable to the scale of Tolstoi's *War and Peace, Clear Light of Day*, assumes some of the qualities of the novel as epic, in delineating characters and situations, which help to extend the implications of the narrative beyond one family. The novel provides not only a rich polyphony of discourses relating to art, literature, politics in India, but suggests the multiple relationships and bonds that knit families to each other, and help to create the image of a nation and a society.

4.4. Critical Analysis

The two epigraphs at the outset of the novel, one from Emily Dickinson and the other from Eliot point directly and elliptically towards the thematic concerns of the novel. That the novel is about memory and its paradoxical nature as both life giving and life destroying becomes evident from Dickinson's lines which say

> Memory is a strange bell—
> Jubilee and knell

The novel also offers a view of time and history as redemptive and transformational, which is prefigured in Eliot's lines :

> And,
> See, now they vanish,
> The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
> To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern

The novel does not follow the Aristotelian pattern of causality, where "beginning" leads to "middle" and consequently to "end." The novel is principally structured according to the movement of memory in response to external events. It starts in the present during a family reunion between Bim and Tara, but constantly weaves in the past as both sisters return almost compulsively to it. Although, exteriority or external events are significant, such as India's partition, the assassination of Gandhi, the marriage of Tara and her departure from India, it is the felt and lived reality of the emotions, the responses of the mind dealing with crisis, pain and bereavement that constitute the true thematic core of the novel. It is a story about childhood, pain, bewilderment and betrayal, yet, it also offers us surprising glimpses into strength and endurance.

The organizing center of the novel is Bim or Bimala's consciousness. Like Lavinia in Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes* Electra, it is Bim, not Raja, the talented older brother, who finally takes responsibility for the family. In Desai, it is woman who emerges as the hero, as the one who meets the crisis and responds with integrity. Of course, cruelty is sometimes linked with this astonishing strength, yet, the cruelty also encompasses love that enables the woman, after the death of her parents, not only to look after a lunatic and alcoholic aunt, but also a retarded younger brother. Raja, leaves or rather abandons the family, his poetic aspirations and delicacy making it

impossible for him to face the grimness of enduring life in a bleak and deserted house in Old Delhi, with only a mad aunt and a dysfunctional brother for company. Bim's endurance, perseverance and resilience, are truly splendid and remarkable. It is a test of the greatness of Desai's mature understanding of character that she does not exclude the paradoxical and complex dimensions of this strength. The narrative contains several instances of Bim's cruelty or even sadism towards Tara, yet, it is precisely this complexity in her character that makes her psychologically interesting, and marks the text as inevitably modern.

The story begins as a family reunion. It has been stated at the very outset, that Desai is one of the principal architects of modernism in the Indian novel in English. The situation of reunion which we find at the outset of the text, will easily remind the reader about titles like Eliot's *The Family Reunion* and O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night,* which are all about revelations and "recognitions" that occur during family reunions. *Clear Light of Day* is also strongly reminiscent of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury,* which too is a novel about childhood and its many tangled relationships between siblings. The similarity is especially acute with reference to the figure of Baba, the retarded brother who recalls Faulkner's Benjy, the latter novel beginning with Benjy's "stream of consciousness" clearly bearing the marks of his mental retardation.

Clear Light of Day works through a system of contrasts. Bim the older sister and Tara the younger are vivid or dramatic contrasts to each other in many ways. Bim who is "habitually headstrong" (145), excelled at both sports and academics in school, and was elected head girl. The narrator describes the situation thus:

> Whereas school brought out Bim's natural energy and vivacity that was kept damped down at home because of the peculiar atmosphere of their house, school to Tara was a terror, a blight, a gathering of large, loud, malicious forces that threatened and mocked her fragility (123).

The "peculiar" atmosphere of their house is the looming and persistent absence of their parents from their lives, and the illness of their mother, who is a chronic diabetes patient. As the narrator informs us :

The secret hopeless suffering of their mother was somehow at the root

of this subdued greyness, this silent desperation that pervaded the house (130).

The antidote to the mother's chronic suffering from diabetes is the bridge game that she and her husband play with their partners, everyday at the club abandoning their children every evening. Tara reminisces about her childhood and the house that they lived in :

> Here in the house it was not just the empty hopeless atmosphere of childhood, but the very spirits of her parents that brooded on—here they still sat, crouched about the little green baize folding table that was now shoved into a corner with. ..(21-22).

Images of death and disease proliferate throughout the text. As a child Tara is outraged and terrified by what she thinks is the daily murder of her mother by her father:

> Sometimes, edging up close to her mother, she would study the flabby, floury skin punctured with a hundred minute needle-holes, and catch her breath in an effort not to cry out. Surely these were the signs of death, she felt, not of healing ? (23)

The diabetic mother gives birth to a mentally retarded child late in life. It is to look after this child that Mira Masi makes her appearance in the text. She is a "cracked pot, torn rag, picked bone" of a figure (108). Mira Masi is always dressed in white and even the children realize that she did not qualify somehow either as a wife or a mother. However, this Mira Masi not only looks after Baba, but also plays with him. To Tara she is made of "knitting" (109) and although," angular, wrinkled and desiccated" (111), the children adhere to her like to an "ancient tree"(l 11). As much as the mother is reminiscent of the mother figure in Faulkner's Sound and Fury, who too abdicates responsibility, Mira Masi is reminiscent of the black mammy in Faulkner's novel, who truly is the nurturing center of the children's lives.

Death stalks the novel. Not only does the mother die, but there are some spectacular and unsavoury deaths that not only set the tone of the novel as dark, but also replicate the spirit of the nation, that was then passing through one of its darkest hours. Replicating Gandhi's death at the national level, Mira Masi and a cow that she had instigated the mother to buy for the sake of providing the children fresh milk, die grotesque deaths. The cow one day,

> Blundered her way through the carvanda hedge at the back of the house, and tumbled into the well and drowned in a welter of sounds that no one heard.
>
> ....The horror of that death by drowning lived in the area behind the carvanda hedge like a mad relation, a family scandal or a hereditary illness waiting to re-emerge. It was a blot, a black and stinking blot (107-108).

The phrase "death by drowning" in the above description will remind readers not only of the "drowned Phoenician Sailor" in Eliot's The Waste Land, but will also recall to their minds the title of Section IV of the poem which reads "Death By Water."[2] It is these intertextual echoes that inevitably mark Desai's text as both modernist and postcolonial, the text visibly demonstrating the interfusion of cultures, hi any case, after the death of the cow, Aunt Mira is kept awake every night to "nightly"(108) see the "white cow die in the black well" (108), The cow's death prefigures her own grotesque death in the same well. As the two sisters reminisce about the year 1947, when fires had raged through Delhi, Bim tells Tara that like Mira Masi who was haunted by the dead cow, she too was haunted by the image of the dead aunt:

> Do you know, for a long time after Mira-masi died—for a long, long time—I used to keep seeing her, just here by the hedge.. .(41).

4.5. Childhood

Despite the "sense of dullness and hopelessness that reigned over their house" (122), the children still make a desperate bid at happiness. The rhetoric of heroism permeates the conversation that Raja and Bim share. When Raja as a child announces grandly, "I shall be a hero," Bim rejoins, "And I will be a heroine." (55). A great deal of the "romance" of childhood, and its inspiration, is derived from books. As the narrator informs us,

> Raja also had the faculty of coming alive to ideas, to images, picked up in the books he read. The usual boyhood adventure stories, Robin Hood and Beau Geste, set him on fire still she almost blazed with enthusiasm.....(120).

The sisters however, did not have Raja's "vitality" to "participate in what

they read". (120). Tara in any case, never wished to be a heroine, she wished to knit sweaters for her children and look after them. Bim, who was Raja's closest companion well into her teens, felt that it was not literature she wanted to read, but "facts, history, chronology." (121). However, Raja and Bim share a closeness that almost seems incestuous at times, once again recalling Quentin's incestuous passion for Maggie in The Sound and Fury. The narrator describes Raja and Bim during one of their escapades on a summer evening:

> When they came together it was with a pure and elemental joy that shot up an stood straight and bright above the surrounding dreariness. (121)

Yet, Raja abandons Bim to flee to Hyderabad where their former landlord Hyder Ali had taken up residence after the rioting in Delhi, in the aftermath of partition. In The Dialogic Imagination, Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that the novel represents a polyphony of discourses, or a "dialogue" between various discourses.[3] Indeed, Desai's novel succeeds in presenting the complex mosaic of Indian reality astonishingly well. Muslim culture and Muslim aesthetic norms exercise a powerful attraction for Raja. Raja not only speaks and writes Urdu, advocating its superiority to Hindi, but he also writes poetry in Urdu. Passages from Iqbal pepper the narrative, as Raja tries to convince Bim that it requires guts to write poetry:

> O painter divine, Thy painting is still imperfect
> Lying in ambush for mankind are the vagabond, the exploiter and the monk.
> In thy universe the old order continueth. (83)

However, it is ironic that it is precisely this lack of "guts" that Raja displays at a moment of crisis. Not only does he refuse to accept the responsibility of continuing his fathere's insurance business, but he leaves right after Mira Masi's tragic and grotesque death, leaving Bim to deal with the house, with the finances and with Baba alone. He shouts it all out to Bim as he gets ready to leave:

> 1 have to go. Now I can go. I have to begin my life some time, don't I ? You don't want me to spend all my life down in this hole, do you? You don't think I can go on living just to keep my brother and sister company, do you? (100)

After Raja's departure Bim tells Baba:

> So now there are just you and I left, Baba...Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone's gone, except you and I. they won't come back. We'll be alone now. But we don't have to worry about anyone now—Tara or Raja or Mira-mas/. ...we're just by ourselves and there's nothing to worry about .You're not afraid , are you?...it's as if we were children again,—sitting on the veranda, waiting for father and m mother, when it's growing dark and it's bedtime. Really, it'll be just the way it was when we were children. (101)

However, this is not the moment of closure for the novel. The novel begins at a point when Tara has come for a vacation or a visit to the old house where they all grew up, and where Bim now lives with Baba. Although distanced by different sensibilities, and a sense of awe and fear on Tara's part towards Bim, for certain unpleasant incidents of childhood, there is love between the two sisters. On Tara's part there is a need to excise a persistent guilt in her mind relating to the incident of the bees, and relating to her later dramatically leaving the family behind through her marriage. At the point the novel begins, Tara has come back, and her visit inevitably rakes up the past, including the issues over Bim and Raja's estrangement. Raja who had always admired Hyder Ali, whose name coincides with that of Tipu Sultan's father, the spirited Muslim ruler of Mysore who had given battle to the British, was enraptured by the latter's elegance, his white horse, which seemed emblematic of a lost and magnificent past. He had taken books out regularly from his library, marries Benazir, his daughter and becomes rich. After the passing away of Hyder Ali, Raja writes Bim a letter in which he tells her that she can continue to pay him the same rent that his own family had paid Hyder Ali. The letter is a cruel blow to Bim, and seals the rift between brother and sister irrevocably. At the end of the text, after Bim displays violent and tumultuous anger at the way she has been forced to become the formal caretaker of the old house, she realizes that forgiveness and not anger is the key to living in this world. Although, life hands out bitter experiences, rents our hearts and our relationships, pushes us into responsibilities that we do not choose, and imposes loneliness and isolation on us, yet, love, compassion and acceptance are the only weapons that the human being is left with. As she ruminates to herself at the end,

....she saw how she loved him, loved Raja and Tara and all of them who had lived in this house with her....They were really all parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them, so that the anger or the disappointment she felt in them was only the anger and disappointment she felt at herself....

.....Bim could see as well as by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there were hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough, and because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally. (165)

Towards the end of the text the author brings in the significance of the title, when "the clear light of day" is explained as the moment when enduring problems, hurts, grievances in family life, grievances that corrupt and stain and burden the quality of life, are removed. As she sits quietly with Baba and Badshah, Bim thinks :

Everything had been said at last, cleared out of the way finally. There was nothing left in the way of a barrier or a shadow, only the clear light pouring down from the sun (177).

It is as she sits listening to Mulk's guru sing at the final moment of the text, Bim suddenly remembers a line from T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, which becomes the moment of epiphany in the text, as well as its moment of artistic closure:

'Time the destroyer is time the preserver'(182)

This pivotal moment where literary memory intervenes or steps in involuntarily, becomes a spectacular example of the redemptive powers of art to salvage and focus not only personal history, but also national history. It represents that extreme moment of clarification and catharsis which is described by the narrator as follows:

Its meaning seemed to fall out of the dark sky and settle upon her like a cloak, or like a great pair of feathered winds. She huddled in its comfort, its solace (182).

Thus, Anita Desai's text furnishes us with a splendid example of art

intervening or mediating for the human agent caught in the many trials of history. Art imparts meaning and significance to time, and gives a form to experience. Like many of Desai's other novels, particularly *Voices In the City and In Custody, Clear Light of Day* remains a testament to the value of art, literature and poetry in human life.

4.6. Characterisation

It is from characterisation or characters that Desai's novels draw most of their power. As has been stated in the critical analysis of the above section, Bim is the pivotal center of the novel, her subjectivity raising important questions about the emergent state of Indian womanhood in the middle class, in the wake of partition.

It is clear from the picture of childhood that emerges through the narratives of the sisters that their childhood was anything but idyllic. The external forms of normalcy existed in having parents who provided a family structure, a father who was a breadwinner, and a home where the usual rituals of middle class existence in India, were carried out. However, Clear light of Day is peopled with outsiders. Anybody who has any significance, is an outsider figure, like Mira Masi, and like Bim, who in spite of being caretaker of the weak, maimed and incapacitated in her family, does not submit to any traditional structures of gendered behavior.

When the Mishra girls get married early in life, Bim is clearly disapproving. She tells Tara,

> But they're not educated yet, ...They haven't any degrees. They should go to college. (140).

Tara of course, is turned off by Bim's indignation and asks somewhat lamely what other option a woman has other than marriage, and Bim aggressively replies.

> 'What else?' asked Bim, 'Can't you think? I can think of hundreds of things to do instead. I won't marry.....I shall never leave Baba and Raja and Mira Masi.....I shall work—I shall do things....I shall earn my own living—and look after Mira Masi and Baba and—and be independent. (14.0)

Bim's childhood assertion of never leaving the family hearth is fulfilled with consequences that are both poignant and redeeming. Bim, Badshah and Baba

almost constitute a tableau, with Bim, a woman of exceptional intelligence living out her life with a dog and a retarded younger brother. Her normal routine of teaching history in a nearby college, and of looking after Baba and the house and the dog, has its own stability, which however, is rudely disturbed when Tara comes to visit with her family. Meeting Tara after several years, Bim has to subject herself to both critique, and self—recognition, all of which is extremely painful. At some of these moments, we see Bim through Tara's eyes. As Tara tells Bim,

> 'I mean—I've been watching you, Bim. Do—d'you know that you talk to yourself? I've heard you—muttering—as you walk along—when you think you're alone—(142)

We sense the poignancy of her situation where she lives out her maternal instincts through her students, sometimes feeding them ice cream when they come over for an extra tutorial class (19). However, the crowning poignancy of Bim's lonely and isolated existence is her companionship with the dog Badshah, who has remained her loyal companion and friend throughout. Even her students know that Bim likes to have attention paid to her dog (19). Once again, we are reminded of the dog motif in Eliot's The Waste land, where one of the voices that cry out in the poem says,

"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,[4]

However, most of all, Tara's visit forces Bim to confront her anger against Raja and his betrayal of her and the family. Towards the end of the text, when Bim's anger breaks out like an avalanche, to the extent that she tells Baba that he could go and live with Raja, Bim has a closest confrontation with herself. At that point, sequestered in her room she reads Life ofAurangzeb, and perhaps senses certain commonalities between the emperor's final and absolute isolation and her own:

> Alone he had lived and alone he made ready to die...he wrote to Prince Azam:...'Many were around me when I was born but now I am going alone. I know not why I am or wherefore I came into the world....Life is transient and the lost moment never comes back...
>
> To his favourite Kam-Baksh he wrote....Every torment I have inflicted, every sin I have committed, every wrong I have done, I carry the consequences with me. Strange that I came with nothing into the

world, and now go away with this stupendous caravan of sin!'(167).

As Bim reflects on what she has read she thinks :

..she felt a sharp, fiery pining for college to reopen and her ordinary working life to be resumed. Then she would be able to end all this storm of emotion in which she had been dragged back and forth all summer...Once again, she felt with a certain bitterness, what a strain Tara's visit had been , what it had cost her by constantly dragging her apart into love and hostility, resentment and acceptance, forgiveness and hate (169)

As the final epiphanic moment of the text's closure suggests, Bim tries to work towards love, forgiveness and acceptance. Acceptance of Time simultaneously means the acceptance of history. Deriving solace and meaning from Eliot's line about Time being simultaneously destroyer and preserver, Bim accepts individual history as final, irrevocable and significant. She thinks:

With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as he r whole family with all their separate histories and experiences—not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. I was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her. (182)

Bim's capacity for realization, her phenomental strength and ability to endure bears out the truth of Bakul's (Tara's husband) remark to Tara when the latter is deeply concerned by what she sees as a gradual failing in Bim,

She did not find it—she made it.....She made what she wanted (158).

4.7. Raja

Initially Raja has the potential to be the "hero" that he aspires to be. He tells his father that he would like to pursue Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia University. There are deep seated psychological reasons for Raja's attraction for Urdu or Islamic culture. Hyder Ali's family provided him with the

"romance" that his nature yearned for as a child. As the impersonal narrator informs us:

> In the evenings tired of his own noisy sisters and peculiar old aunt and still more peculiar little brother, hw ould wander across to the Hyder Ali's garden where there was always a gathering of friends..and gentlemen discussing politics and quoting poetry. It was an almost shocking contrast to the shabbiness of their own house, its peculiarities that hurt Raja by embarrassing him as he grew up an began to compare them with other homes, other families. Raja naturally inclined towards society, company, applause; towards colour, song, charm....These possibilities were enticingly held out to him at the Hyder Alis' (49).

As Raja grows up he is seized by "restlessness"(130) over the futility, the "waiting"(122) and the lack of opportunity in his life. It is a shock to Bim as she senses his withdrawal from "..the cocoon cosiness sprung by his aunt and his sisters out of their femaleness and lack.." (118). Soon after Mira Masi dies her violent and grotesque death, Raja, who had mourned the departure of the Hyder Alis from Delhi in the wake of partition, announces his decision to leave. It is the easy way out that he takes, in direct and dramatic contrast to Bim's heroic submission to her lot and the responsible choices that she makes. Thus, all the poems of Byron on the subject of heroism that Raja read so avidly as a young college student of English literature, echo ironically when we recall them in retrospect. In the inevitable contrast with Bim, Raja emerges as unheroic, opportunistic and limited. Even though, we can sympathize with his need to leave, we can never approve his decision never to come back and enquire about Bim and Baba. If the woman as hero is a strong thematic concern in this text, the man unquestionably emerges as a coward, as someone who makes colossal compromises. The reader understands Bim's anger and hurt towards him, and takes her side. Man emerges as absence, through the figure of the father, and his two sons. Man is not around to act or take decisions. Even finally, it is Bim who once again has to accept the heroic challenge of forgiving Raja. It is the woman in this text, who is faced with the truest challenges, from both the external world, and the world of the emotions and psyche.

4.8. Tara

Like Bim, Tara too is an important center in the novel. It is because of Tara's impassioned efforts to end the estrangement between Raja and Bim, that most of the story happens, and the past emerges before our eyes through the constant excursions that Bim and Tara make to it. Revisiting old sites of pain and trauma is the way the novel tells its story and also accounts for its characters.

Tara was unlike Bim in most ways, yet, there was a necessary contiguity between them as children, and a closeness in spite of these differences among them as adults. As we have learned at the outset, Tara disliked school and academic endeavor. She was also averse to sports. She liked jewelry, dressing up, and socializing. While Bim is bored at the prenuptial ceremonies for Jaya and Sarla, Tara is excited. As Bim holds forth on the inappropriateness of an early marriage, Tara is

> ....impatient to go back down the stairs, get away from Bim and join the women who were now streaming out of the house, laughing calling to each other....(140)

There are two dark spots in Tara's memory. One is the incident of the bees, for which she carries a permanent kind of guilt which isn't easy for even Bim to assuage. Once the next door Mishras invited Bim and herself to a picnic in the Lodhi gardens, at the time that Jaya and Sarla's wedding was being arranged. The two sisters had wandered off from the engagement party and entered a tomb, where a boy's pebble disturbed a nest of bees. Tara was able to escape but not Bim who got badly bitten and disfigured from the incident. Tara held herself responsible for Bim's plight and even though Bim did not in any way hold her responsible, Tara during the duration of the narrative, must satisfy the burden on her conscience, by importuning Bim's forgiveness (149). Yet, there is also a feeling of unease in Tara regarding what she perceives as the deliberate and spontaneous cruelty of Bim's nature. As a child Tara had wanted curls and Bim in a spurt of anger and resentment against Raja for blocking her away from him, pulled Tara to the roof, promising her that a drastic haircut would ensure these curls. She practically sheared Tara's hair, which of course, did not eventually grow curls. Thus, Tara too has to deal with difficult feelings towards Bim.

However, there is in her genuine concern for Bim as she observes her talking and gesticulating to herself. She tells her husband Bakul who although secretly admiring of Bim, is nonetheless much more nonchalant about Tara's family affairs,

> 'I feel afraid for her.....I don't know what has happened to her. When we first came she seemed so normal and everyday and -contented, I felt, as though Bim had found everything she wanted in life....
>
> And now she's simply lost all controLso angry, and unhappy and upset.(158)

Although, it is uncertain whether Tara eventually succeeds in convincing Bim to seek a rapproachement with Raja, she certainly tries, and pushes Bim to confront the past and her relationship with Raja. That is her pivotal role in the text, that she paves the way by her constant incursions into the past and constant interrogation of the estrangement between Raja and Bim, of the need of a better and richer understanding. Her constant harping on the theme of reconciling old grief, burying old grievances, provokes Bim into the climactic confrontation with herself, which finally brings her the peace of reconciling with her lot and with herself.

Thus Tara by being such a vivid contrast to Bim provides a point of dramatic and narrative counterpoint that gives the novel its rich complexity.

4.9. Mira Masi

Mira Masi is an outsider figure. The wide range of Desai's characterization encompasses both the strong and the weak. If the parents signify absence in the text, then Mira Masi signifies presence. However, her value as a figure of presence in the text is shot through and through with contradictions and limitations. We encounter failure of various kinds in the text, and they all have a certain poignancy. However, Mira Masi seems to concentrate the extreme point of poignancy that the text can offer, in her self. As the text informs us, she was married when twelve, widowed while still a virgin, her husband having died accidentally of a cold while still student in England. Characteristically enough, given the oppressive patriarchal norms of India, she was blamed for her husband's death and treated little better than a servant in her husband's household.

When she arrives to take care of Baba, the children sense the tremulous quality in her, her desire to please them at all costs. She children realize that she is begging them for their "tolerance and patronage."(105). Yet, this "quick, nervy and jumpy" (110) surrogate mother figure who would scold them in a low voice so that their mother could not hear, who would protect butterflies from cats, "was as constant as a staff, a tree that can be counted on not to pull up its roots and shift in the night."(l 10) They "owned" (111) her and she "owned"(l 11) them although she never "commanded nor chastised and was almost never obeyed"(l 11), the children and Mira Masi fulfilled a rich mutuality in each other.

However, as the text informs us the aunt subject to a life of constant emotional deprivations and insistent demand from others starts becoming a prey to delusions and loses control. Her nerves reach such a point of breaking that she feels she is drowning in a threatening deluge (77). She starts taking to alcohol, slowly at first, and eventually compulsively. This becomes Bim's problem after the death of her parents. Eventually, Mira Masi, who sometimes felt that she was being attacked by rats, commits suicide in the family well.

Psycholological excess is one of Desai's themes. Her major protagonists like Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain or Bim in Clear Light of Day, have an excess of will or energy which also sometimes manifests as cruelty. In Mira Masi we get the twin symptoms of deprivation and deviation in character. If control and energy characterize Bim, then it is weakness and lack of control that characterize Mira Masi. Mira Masi's further helps to inscribe the motif of death, which is even otherwise powerfully present in the novel.

4.10. Baba

Baba, who is completely silent in the novel, presents another rich counterpoint to the flurry of language and action that characterize the other characters in the novel. The only sound that one associates with him, are American folk songs like the Donkey Serenade. Listening to these songs is part of Baba's daily ritual, the inviolable strand in Bim's life. She is extremely protective towards him, and towards the end of the text, when the storm of feeling that had arisen in her vis a vis questions relating to the past and her own responses to them, she feels that Baba and she make up a whole. The passage that describes Bim's feelings is worth quoting here:

> She felt an immense almost irresistible feeling to lie down beside him on the bed, stretch out limb to limb, silent and immobile together.....Together they would form a whole that would be perfect and pure. She needed only to lie down and stretch out beside him to become perfect and pure (166).

Thus, the character of Baba apart from reminding the reader about the character of Benjy in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, is a further testament to Desai's rich understanding and encompassing of the varieties of failure, strength, and incongruity that make up the Comedie Humaine.

4.11. Language and Style

Fawzia Afzal-Khan calls Anita Desai a critical realist, by which she means Anita Desai's use of realism as both narrative technique and as moral strategy in the face of life's challenges and crises.[5] According to Afzal-Khan, there is a tendency in Desai's protagonists to pull away from life, which does not carry the moral sanction of their writer. Perhaps this is true of Desai's early protagonists but not true of Bim in this novel, who in spite of a need to be her own person, meets and fulfils both family and social responsibility. It is also clear that in spite of Bim's limitations, she is a sympathetic character who carries the author's approval.

Although, Anita Desai works within the basic parameters of realism, yet, her art is heavily inclined towards grotesquerie or an emphasis on the grotesque in experience. After Mira Masi breaks down once in public, this is how the narrator describes her recovery:

> Together they tucked her out of sight—the little sad wisp of grey pubic hair like a bedraggled rat's tail, the empty slack pouches of her ancient breasts....(97)

In another place the indignation of the Mishra sisters over their brother Mulk is described in the following manner:

> Then the sisters cracked like old dry pods from which the black seeds of protest and indignation split, infertile (38).

A certain savagery inscribes itself into Desai's narrative aesthetics which could be read as an enactment of her own cultural hybridity, experiencing

both attraction and repulsion for India.[6] Thus the insistent emphasis on the ugly and the loathsome in all the city locales of Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay of the novels Voices In the City, In Custody and Baumgartners 's Bombay.

Satire is another aspect of the emphasis on the grotesque or the ugly in Desai's writing. Although, widely encompassing of various character types, Desai's art is an elitist one, in that it becomes very evident that she has little patience with mediocrity. Most of Desai's main characters are outstanding or unique in some way or the other. Instances of such personalities are Nirode in Voices In the City, Nanda Kaul in Fire On the Mountain, Bim in Clear Light of Day and Nur in In Custody. However, mediocrity of the kind symbolized by Dr Biswas in the story, elicits both the writer's satire as well as her compassion. The following statement about Dr. Biswas seems singularly pointed and emphatic in its satire and lacking any element of compassion:

> The young doctor's face, his posture -clutching the bag set on his knees neatly placed together but every now and then giving an uncontrollable twitch or jerk—were the face and posture of all nonentities, people seen in a bus queue, bending over a table in a teashop.....67.

It is also obvious from the above quote that Desai is interested in individuals, not in insignificant clusters of people or groups.

Another example of the incisive satire embedded in Desai's style and observation is the description of the old guru whose music leads Bim to understand the pattern of history as both destructive and redemptive. Emphasizing the fact that the guru was "wizened" and "brown and faded and wrinkled" (181), Desai adds a detail that reveals her capacity for deflation:

> He seemed to be having trouble with his teeth which were false and did not fit (181).

Yet, Desai's art is also capable of encompassing nature, natural details often providing a point of repose or redemption to a tense narrative about family guilt and tragedy. When the two sisters first meet each other there is an episode with the dog Badshah chasing a snail:

> ....his one eye gleamed at the approval in her [Bim's] voice while the other followed the snail. But it disappeared under the rose petals once more and he came lolloping towards them..(30

Another brilliant instance of how minor and minute details balance the emphasis on tense emotions is :

The dog suddenly pounced upon the flea (81).

Perhaps, what emerges from both the above instances is the centrality of the dog in the story; how Badshah, Bim's dog is a witness to the major events in this family.

4.12. Notes

1. Homi k. Bhabha The Location of Culture. London & New York: Routledge, 1994. 171-175.
2. T.S. Eliot. Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950. New York: HBJ Publishers, 1950.46
3. Mikhail Bakhtin. The Dialogic Imagination..Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 282-284
4. T.S. Eliot. Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950. New York: HBJ Publishers, 1950.39
5. Fawzia Afzal-Khan. Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993. 60-61.
6. Sreemati Mukherjee. "The Poetics of Alienation in the Novels of Anita Desai." Indian Writing in English: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. Ed. Pranati Dutta Gupta and Susmita Ray. Kolkata: Vivekananda College, Thakurpukur, 2006. 179-186.

4.13. Questions :

1. Does the title Clear Light of Day account fully for the resolution in the novel? Does it leave something out about the abiding nature of pain?
2. Analyse Desai's Clear light of Day as a modernist novel
   Or
3. What themes and preoccupations make Desai's Clear Light of Day a modernist novel?
4. What is both traditional and modern in the character of Bim?

5. How would you substantiate the claim that Desai deals mainly in exceptional personalities.
6. Would you say that Anita desai's Clear Light of Day is more about psychological complexities than historical events?
7. What view of history do you get from Desai's Clear Light of Day?
8. Analyze narrative technique in Desai's Clear Light of Day?
9. Bring out both the strengths and weaknesses in Desai's narrative art. Do you feel that her tendency towards satire or satirical portraiture diminishes her art?
10. Analyze the variety in Desai's view of human character.

4.14. Recommended Reading

Primary Source

1. Desai, Anita. Clear Light of Day. England: Penguin Books, 1980. All references to the text in this study material are from this book.

Secondary Sources

1. Afzal-Khan, Fawzia Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel. Pennsylvania; the Pennsylvania state University Press, 1993
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4. Iyengar, Srivasa. Indian Writing in English. Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1962,2001.
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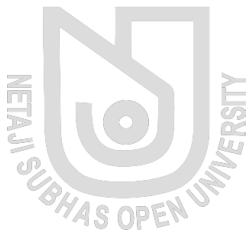
7. Nityanandam, Indira. Three Great Indian Women Novelists. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2000.
8. Uniyal, Ranu. The fiction of Margaret Drabble and Anita Desai. New Delhi: Creative Books,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