



**NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY**

STUDY MATERIAL

**PG : ENGLISH**

**PAPER - VII**

**MODULES - 1, 2, 3, 4 & 4A**

**POST GRADUATE  
ENGLISH**



## PREFACE

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

Keeping this in view, study materials of the 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 analysis.

The accepted methodology of distance education has been followed in the preparation of these study materials. Co-operation in every form of experienced scholars is indispensable for a work of this kind. We, therefore, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone whose tireless efforts went into the writing, editing and devising of 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 they may be rated as quality self-learning materials. If anything remains still obscure or difficult to follow, arrangements are there to come to terms with them through the counselling sessions regularly available at the network of study centres set up by the University.

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

**Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar**  
Vice-Chancellor

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Post-Graduate : English

PG-ENG

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**NETAJI SUBHAS  
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**Post Graduate  
Course in English  
PG : Eng. 7**

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## **Unit – 1 □ Rabindranath Tagore : Crisis in civilization**

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### **Structure**

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### **1.0 Objectives**

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This unit introduces you to an essay of Tagore. Although this essay was not originally written in English, the translation was authorized by and looked over by Tagore. As such, it is included within the body of Tagore's English writings.

Before we look in details at the essay itself you have been provided with an introduction which discusses the historical context of Indian writing in English during the early phase of colonization of India. The introduction would also give you information about the intellectual and cultural influence of the west, which Tagore speaks about in his essay.

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#### **1.1 Introduction : English prose writings by Indians : The first phase**

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The large body of literature in English, produced by writers of Indian origin, and given the name "Indian English Literature" has been the outcome of a historical factor — the colonization of India by the English. As a result of this historical encounter the English language became, here in India, as in other British colonies across the world, the preferred language of communication among different language communities. Even more important, English was the

language through which Indians pursued their acquaintance with western culture — western science, technology, political and social concepts. No educated Indian, even in the high heat of India's struggle for freedom, talked of discarding English altogether. Even Gandhi, holding strong antipathetic views against most aspects of western civilization, conceded that English constituted India's window on the world. By an irony of history, a language taught by a conquering people in order to control the conquered, was adopted and assimilated by the colonised, to become a powerful medium of self-expression and helped the modern Indian to structure his identity. Makarand Paraniape has said,

“Study of Indian English literature, its inception, growth and its status of paramountcy is the study of historical, cultural and social forces which have shaped our destiny”.

Indians began to pick up English initially for the purposes of trade and commerce. Calcutta was the centre of British commercial activities. Gradually, first by putting a puppet ruler on the throne of Murshidabad and then by directly taking up the reins of governance, the East India company turned Calcutta into the centre of political power as well.

We shall discuss here only the early beginnings of Indian English prose writings. Other kinds of writings had also begun and you will read about them, especially poetry, in the relevant units.

It was from the Bengali elite that the first significant writers of English prose emerged. Raja Rammohan Roy's essay, *A Defence of Hindu Theism* (1817) is considered the first original composition in expository prose. Rammohan Ray (1772-1833), a polymath as well as a great social reformer, was one of the pioneers who facilitated the inception of a western education through the medium of English. He also initiated the long tradition of admiration for Western civilization that was Tagore's heritage. In Rammohan Roy's view, the spread of an English education was essential to drag the contemporary moribund Bengal society out of quagmire of ignorance, superstition and lethargy. He was a close friend of Dwarkanath Tagore, Rabindranth's grandfather, and, along with his many activities of social reform, also a founder of the Brahmo Samaj. Tagore continued to hold him in great respect and admiration all his life. Rammohan Roy himself mastered a style of powerful English prose, as we can see from the following extract from his “Letter on English Education” (1823), addressed to the Governor General Lord Amherst.

“The Sangsrit (sic) language, so difficult that almost a lifetime is necessary for its perfect acquisition, is well known to have been for ages a lamentable check on the diffusion of knowledge ....

If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen, which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner, the Sangskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if, such had been the policy of the British legislature.”

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## 1.2 Indians writing in English : The second phase

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As western education spread, many Indians began to write different kinds of creative prose. The early forays into fiction were not very successful, but in non-fictional prose of

various sorts we notice distinctive achievements. Surendranath Banerjee's speeches led contemporaries to compare him with Edmund Burke, the famed English orator. A remarkable body of essays on religious, philosophical and social subjects came from the pens of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Vivekananda was not merely a man of religion, but an ardent champion of social reform. His writings, consisting mostly of lectures delivered in India and abroad, ring with passion and sincerity and have a crisp, idiomatic, pacy urgency in their style which is very different from the pedantic, long-winded heavy prose usually written by the majority of Indians at that time. I quote below from a speech condemning the narrow religiosity of the Hindus. Note the easy mastery of colloquial English and the way vivid images are drawn from everyday life.

"Our religion is in the kitchen, our God is in the cooking pot and our religion is, "Don't touch me, I am Holy."

Sri Aurobindo wrote a more formal prose. He tends to write long, balanced sentences with complex syntactic structures. We should keep it in mind that Vivekananda's speeches were meant to be heard, whereas Aurobindo's writings were to be published and read. Early in his career Aurobindo wrote a number of anti-government articles, eg. "New Lamps for Old". His later and better known writings like *The Life Divine*, *Synthesis of Yoga* are all on spiritual subjects. He also wrote on social and cultural issues, eg. *The Renaissance in India*, *Is India civilized* etc. Read the quote below from *Is India civilized*, one of the early examples of polemical defence of Indian culture against the western concept that India had neither culture nor civilization. Notice that Aurobindo unhesitatingly uses Sanskrit words, especially where equivalent English words would not convey his meaning.

"India's central conception is that of the eternal, the spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and the realm of conscious morality, dharma".

Nearly all the renowned leaders of India's freedom struggle, like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahadev Govind Ranade, V. S. Srinivasa Shastri etc, were eloquent speakers in English. Their published speeches, as well as their other writings, for example, the biographies of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and Gokhale written by Srinivasa Shastri are impressive monuments to show how they achieved a grand synthesis of assimilation and mastery of the foreign tongue of their rulers and strong nationalist feelings.

Gandhiji repeatedly condemned the "English education", — a system devised by Lord Macauley and his successors to produce "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". Gandhi was a strong advocate of India's native languages. However he himself wrote an English simple, lucid and immensely readable. In fact the quote above, from *Hind Swaraj*, is Gandhi's own translation from the original Gujrati.

We should note one interesting point, however. None of these writers show any hint of mutual influence. Rather, they all owed their distinctive manners of writing to their extensive readings in English literature.

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### 1.3 Rabindranath's writings in English

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We, who read Rabindranath in his own language know him as a myriad-minded creative artist, who transformed not only every literary genre in Bengali, but the language itself. Moreover, he pioneered a holistic culture, inaugurated an experimental parallel system of education at Shantiniketan and even left the stamp of his distinctive genius on painting, when, much later in life, he assayed that new field of creativity.

Tagore himself translated the lyrics in the English *Gitanjali*, a collection from three of his original Bengali publications. The poems are free translations, virtually transcreations. Controversy still runs rife about how much of the original versions of Tagore was revised by W. B. Yeats, who was handed over the manuscript. The fame which *Gitanjali* brought him and his subsequent reception of the Nobel prize for literature were the impetus for his later English prose writings. Sisir Kumar Das has called Tagore the most reputed as well as controversial bilingual author of India. Tagore himself was always extremely modest about his grasp of the English language, deprecatingly referring to himself as a school drop-out. However quite a significant body of English prose stands to his name. The original (as different from translations by Tagore himself or authorised by him) prose writings comprise primarily the speeches he delivered in India and abroad; the letters he wrote to various famous contemporary personalities; and there is also a motley group of occasional writings like messages, tributes, public statements, open letters etc. His extensive travels all over the world necessitated most of his English writings, which date from 1912 onwards.

The major prose works begin with the lectures he delivered at the U.S.A. at the invitation of the unitarians. These were later published together under the title *Sadhana. Personality* was another exposition of his spiritual thought, and very popular with his western audience. *The Religion of Man* (1931) was delivered as the Hibbert lectures at Oxford in 1930. It is an elaborate and powerful exposition of his understanding of religion, which he saw not as institutionalised ritual, but as a transcendent force governing man's life and his cultural civilization. Another outstanding work is *Nationalism* (1917), written while the First World War was still raging across Europe. It is one of his first indictments, couched in extremely strong terms, of militant nationalism, and he pinpoints the evils of imperialism with outspoken clarity. The critique of imperialism that began in *Nationalism*, reached its apogee in *Crisis in civilization*. Another major piece of writing in which he exposed imperialism's inevitable corrosion from within is the letter he sent to the Governor-general Lord Chelmsford, to renouncing his knighthood.

The other part of Tagore's English writings comprises translations. The translations may be subdivided into two groups: Those made by Tagore himself, and those done by some of his close associates, permitted, and sometimes supervised by Tagore himself. Both groups were produced when Tagore's star was in the ascendant in the western world.

Translations by others of Tagore's prose works, both fiction and non-fiction were done, often in a hasty and slipshod manner, to take advantage of his high popularity immediately after the reception of the Nobel prize. They were often the root cause of the decline of his

reputation in the English speaking world. Yet translations of Tagore's works serve a very necessary purpose. Without them, this writer of world stature would remain a closed book. The loss would be theirs, who are prevented by the language barrier from reading him. In recent years, some competent translations are being made. The *Oxford English translations* for example, are fairly competent English renderings of Tagore's fictional and non-fictional prose.

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#### 1.4 Writing in English : the colonial dilemma.

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Tagore's original prose writings in English, as well as translations done or authorized by him, present before us an interesting aspect of the colonial dilemma. I have mentioned before that Tagore always deprecated his command of the English language. Unlike his predecessors like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee or Ramesh Chander Dutt, he never showed any early inclination to channel his creative impulse through English. He wrote in a letter to his niece Indira Devi :

"You have alluded to the English translation of *Gitanjali*. I cannot imagine to the day how people came to like it so much. That I cannot write English is such a patent fact that I never had the vanity to feel ashamed of it". (Letter dated, 6 May, 1913. Translated from Bengali by Indira Devi). It was therefore a historical, rather than a creative compulsion that occasioned his English writings. In a foreword to a collection of English poems by Bengalis of an earlier generation, *The Bengali Book of English Verse* (1918) edited by Theodore Douglas Dunn, Tagore described the poems as illustrations of imitations by Bengalis who passionately responded to western literature on their first introduction to it and commented that "Our literature (i.e., Bengali literature) has finally discovered its natural channel in the mother tongue."

As Sisir Kumar Das says in his introduction to the Sahitya Academy collection of Tagore's English works :

"The issue of linguistic choice of the Indian writer was also part of a larger problem involving a power relation between the major and minor languages. In the colonial context, English was perceived as the major language because of its associations of political, economic and ideological power."

Tagore's English writings can be seen as a paradigm of his ambivalent relationship with the west. After the phenomenal success of *Gitanjali* Tagore himself authorized and encouraged a number of often incompetent translations which were marketed in quick succession, resulting in a rapid fall of his popularity and reputation in the English speaking world.

For us, it is important to note that practically none of Tagore's English writings is on a literary subject. While his Bengali prose spans a wide gamut of literary and sociopolitical topics, Tagore's shorter English writings engage with and show his deep commitment to contemporary social and political issues. He addresses a wide and varied range of national and international problems during a turbulent period of his country's and the world's history. A study of these are essential for understanding the structure of modern Indian thought.

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## 1.5 Crisis in civilization : initial information

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*Crisis in civilization* was Rabindranath's last public address, delivered on 14th April, 1941. In Shantiniketan, because of the unbearable summer heat and scarcity of water, Tagore's birthday used to be celebrated on the first day of the Bengali month 'Baisakh', instead of the 25th, his actual birthday. The birthday celebrations were combined with celebrations of the Bengali new year. It had long been the custom that if Tagore was in the country, he would read a piece he had written specially for the day. On this occasion he was too ill to read it himself. He just spoke a few words to the inmates, after which Kshitomohan Sen, a noted scholar and teacher at Shantiniketan, read it aloud. The essay is the final poignant expression of an agonized mind, concerned with the welfare of humanity. With the Second World War devastating the continents and the British government directing punitive measures against Congress leaders and freedom fighters, with Hindu-Muslim disunity growing by the day, Tagore's long cherished faith in the nobleness of the leaders of the British nation and even in western civilization itself, reached its nadir. In his final days, he tried to structure a new faith – the birth of a new civilization in the East.

The text you will read is the authorized English translation of the Bengali essay "*Savyatar Sankat*". The first draft was prepared by Kshitish Roy, a teacher at Shantiniketan, and Krishna Kripalani, another teacher who had married Tagore's granddaughter. It was revised by Tagore himself before being published in *Visva-Bharati News* (volume IX No ii) and also in *The Modern Review* (May 1941). The editorial note in *Visva-Bharati News* mentions that Tagore himself revised the translation.

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## 1.6 A sweeping survey of the East-West encounter-India under colonial rule (Paras 1 and 2)

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Tagore begins with and builds up the psychological perspective of the impact of colonial rule, discussing how the colonized appreciate, assimilate and appropriate the culture of their rulers. There is a balanced view of British rule, anticipating some recent discourses which take off from Edward Said's ideas, Tagore points out the historical reality, that colonial conquest broke down the narrow, cloistered world of the Indians, who came into contact with the larger world through their interactions with the English in India. What Tagore says about education in pre-colonial India echoes Rammohan Roy's views in his letter to Lord Amherst (see Introduction), and were in fact, the views of Tagore's 19th century predecessors. The British introduced a literature-based western education in India for their own benefits. Gouri Viswanathan comments :

"British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education." (The Beginnings of English Literary study in British India 1987). But, the native's assimilation of colonial culture also engendered an element of subversion. This recent post-colonial idea can be traced in a germinal form in Tagore's presentation of the Indian's relationship with British culture.

Tagore mentions those elements in the British culture which the first generation of Bengalis, introduced to British culture and liberal education, fed on and from which the mind and identity of the modern Indian was gradually constructed — the writings of Burke and Macauley, the drama of Shakespeare, the poetry of Byron. The educated Indian consciously and avidly adopted the liberal humanism of 19th century British radical thinkers and political leaders. In this, the first phase of assimilation of colonial culture, any question or critique of the inherent dichotomy in the manifestation of British liberalism at home and its absence in the colonies was entirely non-existent. In Tagore's own family the legacy of liberal humanism flowered in the legendary generosity and progressive attitude of his grandfather Prince Dwarakanath Tagore and in the way the other members of the next two generations stood at the vanguard of India's social, educational and cultural reform.

### 1.6.1 National identity forged through the colonial encounter (paras 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

India's desire for political independence was a later phenomenon. Although the different groups involved in the uprising of 1857 were loosely connected by a rather vague idea of restoring the Mughal monarchy (The last Mughal monarch was still officially, the ruler of India), the new elite in Bengal remained entirely unresponsive to the ferment that spread across Northern India. To the Bengalis, especially the Bengali Hindus, engaged in lucrative commercial dealings with the East India Company (Tagore's own family fortune was made that way) the rule of John Company was preferable to the Nawabs of Murshidabad. Typically, it was the liberal western education, with its lessons of European politics, history and culture which slowly developed a nascent nationalism. But, as Tagore recounts with sympathetic humour in *My Childhood* (Chhelebelā) and *My Reminiscences* (Jibansmriti), the early sparks of nationalistic spirit were no more than damp squibs. He describes the closed-door conspiratorial meetings of his elder brothers and their friends, and the doomed attempts at national enterprise by one brother. Tagore's own early nationalistic outburst consisted of a rather fiery poem against the Government, contrasting, Lord Lytton's Durbar in Delhi to celebrate Queen Victoria's accession as Empress of India with the plight of Indian peasants. The beneficiaries of western education, the Indian gentlemen, did not evince any desire to free themselves from British rule even upto the closing years of the 19th century.

Tagore had the benefit of an enlightened education in his own home. Sent to England at seventeen he was greatly impressed by the radical liberalism of political leaders like John Bright, whom he heard in the parliament. Tagore first went to England in 1878. His early response to the English in their native lair was ambivalent. For example he felt early on, and came to believe with deepening conviction as he grew older that there was an essential difference between the English in England and the English who went to the colonies. The idea of two races of Englishmen whom he distinguished as "Noble-hearted English" (Baro Ingrej) and the Ignoble English (Chhoto Ingrej) first came to his mind during this first English sojourn. This idea recurs frequently in his writings and remains a point in *Crisis*. He sarcastically describes two dyed in the wool John Bull types in a letter. They thought — an example of typical colonial attitude — that Indians were barbarians and ignoramuses, and carefully explained to him the working of clocks and photographs. On the other hand he came to admire Dr. Scott and his family, with whom he stayed for a few months. In another letter he writes :

“One thing struck me when living in the family : human nature is everywhere the same.” You find this idea in para 4 of *Crisis* in the fag end of his life.

The synthesis of East and West was one of the focal prints of Tagore’s thought. The colonial culture in the Tagore family milieu implanted the thought in him. It was nurtured through his early experience in England, where inspite of certain reservations about English life and culture, he could find much to admire in the leaders he heard in parliament, the teachers whose classes he attended at the university of London and the common Englishmen he came to be acquainted with. The larger issues of colonialism were not immediately taken up. In an essey, *Bangalir Asha O Nairasya* (The Hope and Despair of Bengalis), he writes :

“The European idea in which freedom predominates and the Indian idea in which welfare predominates ; the profound thought of the eastern countries and the active thought of the western countries ; European acquisition and Indian conservartism ; the imagination of the eastern countries and the practical intelligence of the west — what a full character will be formed from a synthesis between these two.”

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### 1.7 The enchantment of English literature versus the rude reality of India (para 8)

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In 1940, reminiscing about his first visit (1875-76) to shelidah, a village in the Tagore Estates in erstwhile East Bengal in the company of his elder brother Jyotirindranath, Tagore pondered over the British indigo-planters, once infamous for their reign of terror over the local peasantry :

“Where is now the indigo factory’s steward, the ‘messenger of death’? where the troop of bailiffs ... the authorities (the sahibs) never heard the appealing cries of the wretched ryots (the peasants).”

Ironically, the Tagore Zamindari office was housed in the building of the indigo factory. Tagore would also remember that the fortunes of the Bengal Renaissance leaders were not infrequently made by collaborating and profit sharing with the colonial rulers. Tagore’s grandfather Dwarakanath had himself dealt profitably in the indigo trade.

It was later, during his longer stint at Shelidah, for Zamindari supervision, through first hand observation of the quotidian experiences of the peasants that Tagore realized the misery of those others – the vast majority of his countrymen to whom the benefits of British rule so enjoyed by the urban elite did not percolate down. In essay after essay, in *Raja-Praja* (Ruler and Subject), *Kalantar* (The Changing Times) etc, he takes up the issue of India’s produce feeding two nations, the lion’s share being given over for the benefit of the British nation, leaving the Indians who produce the wealth for Britain, to suffer and starve. Shortly before his death, in June 1941, he received a letter from the Bishop of Calcutta, pleading for more sympathetic Congress understanding of Britain’s peril in war. Tagore replied in measured words :

“I have neither the right nor the desire to judge the British people as such ; but I cannot help being concerned at the conduct of the British government in India, since it directly involves



the life and well being of millions of my countrymen. I am too painfully conscious of the extreme poverty, helplessness and misery of our people not to deplore the supineness of the Government that has tolerated this condition for so long .... I had hoped that the leaders of the British nation, who had grown apathetic to our suffering and forgetful of their own sacred trust in India during their days of prosperity and success, would at last, in the time of their own great need, awake to the justice and humanity of our cause. It has been a most grievous disappointment to me to find that fondly cherished hope receding further and further from realization each day."

## 1.8 Industrialism : Tagore's attitude to the machine age (para 9)

Tagore's critique of the British denying the Indians the advantages of scientific and technological knowledge would remind us that Rammohan Roy, in the letter to Lord Amherst already referred to (Introduction) had pleaded for a scientific education which would include "Mathematics, natural philosophy (i.e. science) chemistry and anatomy with other useful sciences". The British had actually introduced a literature-centred system of education.

It is important in this context to note that the two greatest Indians of modern India – Gandhi and Tagore – had diametrically different attitudes to western science and technology. Tagore believed that modern science was essential to the understanding of physical phenomena although he did not take the simple realist opposition often associated with modern science. During his tours of Japan and the former U.S.S.R he was full of admiration for the scientific and technological progress in both countries. He sang the praise of Soviet Russia's efforts to simultaneously advance agricultural technology and a scientific education that was not confined to mere book learning. He repeatedly disagreed in talk and in writing, with Gandhi's total denunciation of western science and technology, his sharpest polemics directed at Gandhi's call to boycott foreign goods and give up western education. In a strongly worded essay he questions Gandhi's claim that a daily stint at the spinning wheel (charka) by all Indians would bring "Swaraj" (self government) within a year. Gandhi wanted Indians to throw away all western technology, give up living in cities, go back to the villages, spin their own clothes, grow their own food and live austerely. "I doubt if the steel age is an advance on the flint age", he told Tagore in 1921. Their differences were irreconcilable, though that did not abate the high respect each felt for the other.

Tagore was not an unquestioning votary of the industrial civilization. In his essays as well as in plays like *Red oleanders* (*Raktakarabi*), *Muktadhara* he shows an astonishing even prophetic insight into the attendant evils of the industrial civilization. In *Can science be Humanized* (published *Visva-Bharati News* volume II No. 2 August 1933) he wrote :

"Today the profit that the machine brings to our door is too big and we do not hesitate to scramble for it even at the cost of our humanity ... We can only hope that science herself will help us to bring back sanity to the human world by lessening the opportunity to gamble with our future."

In another essay *Swadhikarpromatta* (Drunk with self-indulgence) he said science is great where it is harnessed to alleviate human poverty and suffering, but when used to enrich or aggrandise or particualr nation or person, science has a mighty fall.

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## 1.9 The communal problem (Paras 10, 11)

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Another problem which had always exercised his deepest concern was the problem of communal disharmony. In reply to questions at a Moscow commune during his visit there, he averred that in his youth he had seen the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal coexist in perfect amity. Mutual ill-feelings had only developed during the freedom struggle. In his writings he was sternly critical of the divisive policies of the British Government as well as of the factor of Hindu sectarianism. In the U. S. S. R and Iran he was highly impressed by their government's attempts at not only maintaining good relations amidst different ethnic groups, but particularly at Russian efforts to uplift backward peoples and Iran's care for the minority Zoroastrians. It pained him that in comparison the two major religious communities in his own country were set on a collision course. At the time *Crisis* was written, the Indian Muslim league had already set forth their demand for a separate homeland for Muslims. Tagore mentions with particular care that both Russia and Iran were free of the shackles of western colonial government diplomacy thus indirectly blaming the colonial Government for its communal mischief-making.

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## 1.10 China and Spain : European liberalism questioned (paras 13, 14)

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Pre-revolutionary China had always aroused Tagore's sympathy. While China was never directly ruled by a European colonial government, the Chinese government had nominal power, being totally subservient to western commercial interests. After the Boxer rebellion the different western nations had sliced off parts of China and had exclusive commercial rights on Chinese territory. When a resurgent Japan began its conquest of Manchuria in 1931, neither Britain nor America tried to stop her. Possibly they had thought that the Japanese army would be an effective counter to the growing communist influence. However, Tagore's experiences in China during his tour in 1924 were not happy. He spoke in China about the superiority of eastern spiritualism to western materialism. But to the Chinese, influenced by western and communist ideology under Sun Yat-Sen, Tagore's ideas seemed outmoded, a throwback to the feudal past. Japan's invasion of China however seemed to him to be the inevitable product of the aggressive nationalism he had observed in Japan during his visit there. He repeatedly said, in his speeches and in his writings, that Japan has donned the mantle of Europe. On his very first visit he said in a message "The new Japan is only an imitation of the West. This will ruin Japan". The warning was not well-received and Tagore's popularity declined in Japan, as it did later in China.

In Spain, the Fascist forces led by the army general Francisco Franco staged an army coup and overthrew the republican Popular Front government on the eve of the Second World War. A civil war began. The Fascist governments of Germany and Italy flagrantly gave help to the fascist rebels. Neither the British nor the French Government came forward to help the republicans. The Popular Front government received help from the International Brigade, a band of soldiers recruited mainly from left-wing opponents of fascism in several

European countries, including Britain and France. The members of the brigade were untrained, ill-equipped and the venture was doomed to failure. But at least the decisive victory of Franco was delayed till 1939. In England, popular sympathy lay with the republicans and many renowned writers, like George Orwell, Christopher Caudwell, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender joined the Brigade. This event, widely seen by most people as the British and French government's shameful betrayal of democracy, further strengthened Tagore's long held belief about the two different races of Englishmen— noble and ignoble. In one of his *Kalantar* essays Tagore wrote that however difficult it is for an Indian to believe—in view of his experience of Englishmen in India—the race of noble Englishmen does have a geographical existence. The noble English are not merely preoccupied with colony and commerce; they express themselves through art, literature, philosophy, science, constructive work in society. They are the high priests of Western civilization. Tagore added a rider that unfortunately the ignoble English sabotage any possibility of a relationship between the Indians and the noble English.

## 2.11 A world in turmoil (Paras 15, 16, 17, 18)

Tagore's last years were troubled by ill health, personal tragedies like the death of his grandson (the son of his younger daughter), and his grave concerns about troubles in India and the war abroad. The increase in communal disharmony, the incidents of violence often marring Gandhi's non-violent freedom struggle, the government's wartime repressive measures—all combined to depress and disturb him. Yet, in spite of intrusive physical pain, he remained wholly alert, extremely sensitive to what was happening around. His last poems bear ample testimony to his concern about the happenings around him.

*Crisis* provides the final proof that Tagore till his very last days held on to a heritage of humanism. He continued to pledge his faith for the human individual's capacity for goodness—in other words, believing in the ability of the individual to transcend spiritually and morally, his historic-political environment. He pays tribute to the individually noble Englishmen. The immediate reference is to C. F. Andrews, a Christian missionary who became a close friend of both Gandhi and Tagore. Disowned by his own countrymen in India for his association with the natives, and his identification with Indian causes, Andrews lived for long stretches of time at Shantiniketan, acted as an intermediary between Indian leaders and officials of the British Raj. Another Englishman who was a great admirer of Tagore and a close associate was W. W. Pearson. Pearson acted as an unofficial secretary of Tagore during his tours of Japan and the U.S.A., and translated many of his books, including *Gora*. Yet a third noble Englishman within Tagore's close circle was Leonard Elmhurst, who was entrusted by Tagore with the work of rural development and co-operative farming at *Sriniketan* (Surul). Tagore regarded these men as representatives of his ideal Englishman—just, humane, dedicated and courageous. In this tribute we find that the belief Tagore inherited—that the colonial government essentially meant good governance (although this was vitiated by local officials) and its dissemination of western civilization was a beneficial act—died hard.

Tagore's essays on sociopolitical issues have essentially solid ideas, but they are not usually presented analytically. In these penultimate paragraphs the idea obliquely presented is of course his realization of the failure of western enlightenment. The colonised elite were

passionate admirers of the Enlightenment ideas. It took another half century until the dichotomies inherent in Western Enlightenment were recognised and analysed. Tagore gives a glimpse of his realization of such contradictions when he wrote in an essay that even for the noble Englishman the sufferings of India were mere statistical figures, not experienced reality. The colonized always remained the "other" even for the most enlightened westerner.

## 1.12 Disenchantment with the west

Tagore's criticism of the British Administration in India was part of a wider perspective of his critique of certain aspects of the western world. In his earlier writings he always made a special effort to dissociate his criticism of the Raj or Western imperialism and jingoism from any denigration of British or Western people or culture. When he was in England, in reply to a journalist's question about what he thought of western civilization, Mahatma Gandhi famously quipped, "It would be a good idea." Such a quip could never have come from Tagore. But from quite early on during his tours, after the Nobel Prize had made him famous in the west, he had been clear and unhesitating in his indictment. His sharp criticism of the imperial and commercial spirit of western civilization in the lectures delivered in Japan (1916-17) made him very unpopular there as we have already mentioned. Tagore disapproved of Japan's attempts to emulate and equal the west in both these spheres. In 1915, in a letter to C. F. Andrews Tagore wrote :

"Japan is the youngest disciple of Europe – she has no soul – she is all science – and she has no sentiment to spare for other people than her own."

In the lecture delivered in Santa Barbara in the U. S. A. and later published under the title *Nationalism* Tagore warned both Japan and the U.S.A. about the dangers of militarism inherent in this politics. It took him several years to make up his mind about Fascism in Germany and Italy, since he was very well received in both countries during his tours and carefully shown only the development aspects. By the 1930s, however, he had explicitly rejected fascism in Germany, Italy and Japan. In 1934, in a stirring appeal for the republican side in the Spanish civil war, he wrote;

"This devastating tide of international fascism must be checked ... come in your millions to the aid of democracy, to the succour of civilization and culture."

After the second World War was finally declared, Tagore wrote a song which he himself translated on Christmas Day, 1939. The last stanza reads :

"Those who struck him once  
In the name of their rulers  
Are born again in the present age.  
They gather in their prayer halls in a pious garb  
They call their soldiers,  
"Kill, kill", they shout.  
In their roaring mingles  
The music of their hymns,

While the Son of Man,  
In his agony prays,  
"O God, fling, fling far away  
This cup filled with the bitterest of poisons."

Earlier after Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, he had written a poem on Africa. It is remarkable less for what it said about Africa than for its views on western civilization as a form of savagery. Below is the last verse in his own translation :

"Today when on the western horizon  
The sunset sky is stifled with dust-storm,  
When the beast creeping out of its dark den  
Proclaims the death of the day with ghastly howls,  
Come, you poet of the fatal hour,  
Stand in the dying light before nightfall,  
At the door of that ravished woman  
And beg her "Forgive, forgive"  
In the midst of violent delirium  
Let that be your civilization's last great word".

We should note that even in this last phase Tagore's thoughts show a contradiction. When in the appeal for the Spanish republicans he speaks of succouring "civilization and culture", it is western civilization and culture that he is thinking of.

In this last four paragraphs of *Crisis* (18,19,20,21) he does utter a sweeping denunciation of western civilization. Interestingly, in *Crisis* there is not a whisper of his usual unsparing criticism of his own country men, usually, in essays written up till now, he indicted the wrongs done by the government, but was also scathing about his own people's weaknesses. Also, he makes no distinction between fascism and imperialism, realizing perhaps that fascism was the inevitable fallout of imperialism. Unlike in the appeal for the republicans, he makes no distinction between the allied champions of democracy and the axis of fascist powers. With hindsight, we may think that even in *Crisis* Tagore shows the political shortsightedness he had displayed earlier in his first overview of Germany and Italy. Much of the praise he bestows upon the Soviet Union may seem ill-judged, for by 1941, some news of the Stalinist purges had trickled out. His eloquent hopes about the dawn of a new kind of civilization, a rebirth of the human spirit seem equally ironical. Hardly anyone, looking at any of the countries in the East — be it China or Japan or India — can have any confidence that any of these countries will create a more human civilization. It was a mirage even at the time of its utterance, for Tagore had already seen westernization carried out in full force in Japan and eagerly pursued by China. As for India, he himself talks about the debris of mud and filth" that will be left behind when colonial rule finally comes to an end. The ideas themselves are visionary rather than realistic. But the passionate faith of Tagore, expressed in immensely forceful language in the original Bengali and adequately conveyed in the translation, compels a response. V. S. Naipaul wrote of it in India : *A million Mutinies Now* (1990).

“It was an old man’s melancholy farewell to the world. Five years later the war was over. Europe began to heal ; in the second half of the century (20th) Europe and the West were to be stronger and more creative and more influential than they had ever been.”

The concluding words of the essay are actually from a Sanskrit quote that was Tagore’s favourite. Notice how it closely resembles Jesus’s words in the Gospel according to Mark : “What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?”

Like all prophetic voices, Tagore’s too seems to have no import for the practical business of the world. Tagore was not an analytical thinker but an intuitive one who preferred poetic analogy to logical argument. Although his vision of a new civilization remains just a dream and the march of western civilization shows no signs of flagging, his basic critique of its ugly face does remain valid. His dream was of a civilization that was not mechanical, but a living organism. E. P. Thompson, introducing a new edition (1990) of *Nationalism* writes :

“More than any other thinker of his time, Tagore had a clear conception of civil society, as something distinct from and of stronger and more personal texture than political or economic structures.” The last rhetorical flourish about “unvanquished Man” winning back “his lost human heritage” is an expression of this personal texture of human society which was for Tagore the most important element in civilization.

### Questions

Long essay-type questions.

1. Briefly sum up Tagore’s views on western civilization.
2. What change took place in Tagore’s attitude & the psychology of Indians through the span of Tagore’s life ?
3. How did colonial culture influence Indians ?
4. How does Tagore compare India with other countries he had visited ?

Medium length questions.

5. Why did Tagore “set the English on the throw” of his heart ?
6. In what ways was western education beneficial for India ?
7. Why did Tagore think western civilization was crumbling ? Was he right in thinking so ?
8. What, according to Tagore, are the major evils of colonial administration ?

### Short Questions

9. What are Tagore’s view on Western science and technology ?
10. Which recent event reminded Tagore of the “true English spirit” ?
11. What were Tagore’s hopes for the future of humanity ?
12. Who are the Englishmen to whom the pays tribute in the essay ?

### Recommended reading :

1. The English works of Rabindranath Tagore (volumes 1, 2, 3) edited by Sisir Kumar Das (Sahitya Academy)  
Introductions to the volumes & content essays.

## CRISIS IN CIVILIZATION

Today I complete eighty years of my life. As I look back on the vast stretch of years that lie behind me and see in clear perspective the history of my early development, I am struck by the change that has taken place both in my own attitude and in the psychology of my countrymen—a change that carries within it a cause of profound tragedy.

Our direct contact with the larger world of men was linked up with the contemporary history of the English people whom we came to know in those earlier days. It was mainly through their mighty literature that we formed our ideas with regard to these newcomers to our Indian shores. In those days the type of learning that was served out to us was neither plentiful nor diverse, nor was the spirit of scientific enquiry very much in evidence. Thus their scope being strictly limited, the educated of those days had recourse to English language and literature. Their days and nights were eloquent with the stately declamations of Burke, with Macaulay's long-rolling sentences : discussions centred upon Shakespeare's drama and Byron's poetry and above all upon the large-hearted liberalism of the nineteenth-century English politics.

At the time though tentative attempts were being made to gain our national independence, at heart we had not lost faith in the generosity of the English race. This belief was so firmly rooted in the sentiments of our leaders as to lead them to hope that the victor would of his own grace pave the path of freedom for the vanquished. This belief was based upon the fact that England at the time provided a shelter to all those who had to flee from persecution in their own country. Political martyrs who had suffered for the honour of their people were accorded unreserved welcome at the hands of the English. I was impressed by this evidence of liberal humanity in the character of the English and thus I was led to set them on the pedestal of my highest respect. This generosity in their national character had not yet been vitiated by Imperialist pride. About this time, as a boy in England, I had the opportunity of listening to the speeches of John Bright, both in and outside Parliament. The large-hearted, radical liberalism of those speeches, overflowing all narrow national bounds, had made so deep an impression on my mind that something of it lingers even today, even in these days of graceless disillusionment.

Certainly that spirit of abject dependence upon the charity of our rulers was no matter for pride. What was remarkable, however, was the wholehearted way in which we gave our recognition to human greatness even when it revealed itself in the foreigner. The best and noblest gifts of humanity cannot be the monopoly of a particular race or country; its scope may not be limited nor may it be regarded as the miser's hoard buried underground. That is why English literature which nourished our minds in the past, does even now convey its deep resonance to the recesses of our heart.

It is difficult to find a suitable Bengali equivalent for the English word 'civilization'. That phase of civilization with which we were familiar in this country has been called by Manu '*Sadachar*' (*lit.* proper conduct), that is, the conduct prescribed by the tradition of the race. Narrow in themselves these time-honoured social conventions originated and held good in a

circumscribed geographical area, in that strip of land, Brahmavarta by name, bound on either side by the rivers Saraswati and Drisadvati. That is how a pharisaic formalism gradually got the upper hand of free thought and the ideal of 'proper conduct' which Manu found established in Brahmavarta steadily degenerated into socialized tyranny.

During my boyhood days the attitude of the cultured and educated section of Bengal, nurtured on English learning, was charged with a feeling of revolt against these rigid regulations of society. A perusal of what Rajnarain Bose has written describing the ways of the educated gentry of those days will amply bear out what I have said just now. In place of these set codes of conduct we accepted the ideal of 'civilization' as represented by the English term.

In our own family this change of spirit was welcomed for the sake of its sheer rational and moral force and its influence was felt in every sphere of our life. Born in that atmosphere, which was moreover coloured by our intuitive bias for literature, I naturally set the English on the throne of my heart. Thus passed the first chapters of my life. Then came the parting of ways accompanied with a painful feeling of disillusion when I began increasingly to discover how easily those who accepted the highest truths of civilization disowned them with impunity whenever questions of national self-interest were involved.

There came a time when perforce I had to snatch myself away from the mere appreciation of literature. As I emerged into the stark light of bare facts, the sight of the dire poverty of the Indian masses rent my heart. Rudely shaken out of my dreams, I began to realize that perhaps in no other modern state was there such hopeless dearth of the most elementary needs of existence. And yet it was this country whose resources had fed for so long the wealth and magnificence of the British people. While I was lost in the contemplation of the great world of civilization, I could never have remotely imagined that the great ideals of humanity would end in such ruthless travesty. But today a glaring example of it stares me in the face in the utter and contemptuous indifference of a so-called civilized race to the well-being of crores of Indian people.

That mastery over the machine, by which the British have consolidated their sovereignty over their vast Empire, has been kept a sealed book, to which due access has been denied to this helpless country. And all the time before our very eyes Japan has been transforming herself into a mighty and prosperous nation. I have seen with my own eyes the admirable use to which Japan has put in her own country the fruits of this progress. I have also been privileged to witness, while in Moscow, the unsparing energy with which Russia has tried to fight disease and illiteracy, and has succeeded in steadily liquidating ignorance and poverty, wiping off the humiliation from the face of a vast continent. Her civilization is free from all invidious distinction between one class and another, between one sect and another. The rapid and astounding progress achieved by her made me happy and jealous at the same time. One aspect of the Soviet administration which particularly pleased me was that it provided no scope for unseemly conflict of religious difference nor set one community against another by unbalanced distribution of political favours. That I consider a truly civilized administration which impartially serves the common interests of the people.



While other imperialist powers sacrifice the welfare of the subject races to their own national greed, in the USSR I found a genuine attempt being made to harmonise the interests of the various nationalities that are scattered over its vast area. I saw peoples and tribes, who, only the other day, were nomadic savages being encouraged and indeed trained, to avail themselves freely of the benefits of civilization. Enormous sums are being spent on their education to expedite the process. When I see elsewhere some two hundred nationalities—which only a few years ago were at vastly different stages of development—marching ahead in peaceful progress and amity, and when I look about my own country and see a very highly evolved and intellectual people drifting into the disorder of barbarism, I cannot help contrasting the two systems of governments, one based on co-operation, the other on exploitation, which have made such contrary conditions possible.

I have also seen Iran, newly awakened to a sense of national self-sufficiency, attempting to fulfil her own destiny freed from the deadly grinding-stones of two European powers. During my recent visit to that country I discovered to my delight that Zoroastrians who once suffered from the fanatical hatred of the major community and whose rights had been curtailed by the ruling power were now free from this age-long repression, and that civilized life had established itself in the happy land. It is significant that Iran's good fortune dates from the day when she finally disentangled herself from the meshes of European diplomacy. With all my heart I wish Iran well.

Turning to the neighbouring kingdom of Afghanistan I find that though there is much room for improvement in the field of education and social development, yet she is fortunate in that she can look forward to unending progress; for none of the European powers, boastful of their civilization, has yet succeeded in overwhelming and crushing her possibilities.

Thus while these other countries were marching ahead, India, smothered under the dead weight of British administration, lay static in her utter helplessness. Another great and ancient civilization for whose recent tragic history the British cannot disclaim responsibility, is China. To serve their own national profit the British first doped her people with opium and then appropriated a portion of her territory. As the world was about to forget the memory of this outrage, we were painfully surprised by another event. While Japan was quietly devouring North China, her act of wanton aggression was ignored as a minor incident by the veterans of British diplomacy. We have also witnessed from this distance how actively the British statesmen acquiesced in the destruction of the Spanish Republic.

On the other hand, we also noted with admiration how a band of valiant Englishmen laid down their lives for Spain. Even though the English had not aroused themselves sufficiently to their sense of responsibility towards China in the Far East, in their own immediate neighbourhood they did not hesitate to sacrifice themselves to the cause of freedom. Such acts of heroism reminded me over again of the true English spirit to which in those early days I had given my full faith, and made me wonder how imperialist greed could bring about so ugly a transformation in the character of so great a race.

Such is the tragic tale of the gradual loss of my faith in the claims of the European

nations to civilization. In India the misfortune of being governed by a foreign race is daily brought home to us not only in the callous neglect of such minimum necessities of life as adequate provision for food, clothing, educational and medical facilities for the people, but in an even unhappier form in the way the people have been divided among themselves. The pity of it is that the blame is laid at the door of our own society. So frightful a culmination of the history of our people would never have been possible, but for the encouragement it has received from secret influences emanating from high places.

One cannot believe that Indians are in any way inferior to the Japanese in intellectual capacity. The most effective difference between these two eastern peoples is that whereas India lies at the mercy of the British, Japan has been spared the shadow of alien domination. We know what we have been deprived of. That which was truly best in their own civilizations the upholding of the dignity of human relationship, has no place in the British administration of this country. If in its place they have established, with baton in hand, a reign of 'law and order', in other words a policeman's rule, such mockery of civilization can claim no respect from us. It is the mission of civilization to bring unity among people and establish peace and harmony. But in unfortunate India the social fabric is being rent into shreds by unseemly outbursts of hooliganism daily growing in intensity, right under the very aegis of 'law and order'. In India, so long as no personal injury is inflicted upon any member of the ruling race, this barbarism seems to be assured of perpetuity, making us ashamed to live under such an administration.

And yet my good fortune has often brought me into close contact with really large-hearted Englishmen. Without the slightest hesitation I may say that the nobility of their character was without parallel—in no country or community have I come across such greatness of soul. Such examples would not allow me wholly to lose faith in the race which produced them. I had the rare blessing of having Andrews—a real Englishman, a real Christian and a true man—for a very close friend. Today in the perspective of death his unselfish and courageous magnanimity shines all the brighter. The whole of India remains indebted to him for innumerable acts of love and devotion. But personally speaking, I am especially beholden to him because he helped me to retain in my old age that feeling of respect for the English race with which in the past I was inspired by their literature and which I was about to lose completely. I count such Englishmen as Andrews not only as my personal and intimate friends but as friends of the whole human race. To have known them has been to me a treasured privilege. It is my belief that such Englishmen will save British honour from shipwreck. At any rate if I had not known them, my despair at the prospect of western civilization would be unrelieved.

In the meanwhile the demon of barbarity has given up all pretence and has emerged with unconcealed fangs, ready to tear up humnity in an orgy of devastation. From one end of the world to the other the poisonous fumes of hatred darken the atmosphere. The spirit of violence which perhaps lay dormant in the psychology of the West, has at last roused itself and desecrates the spirit of man.

The wheels of Fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery ? When the stream of their centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth they will leave behind them ! I had at one time believed that the springs of civilization would issue out of the heart of Europe. But today when I am about to quit the world that faith has gone bankrupt altogether.

As look around I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises. A day will come when unvanquished Man will retrace his path of conquest, despite all barriers, to win back his lost human heritage.

Today we witness the perils which attend on the insolence of might ; one day shall be borne out the full truth of what the sages have proclaimed :

'By unrighteousness man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root.'

1941

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## Unit – 2 □ Subhas Chandra Bose : An Indian Pilgrim

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### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 The Philosophical Foundations of Subhas Chandra Bose's Political Ideas
- 2.2 Conclusion
- 2.3 Questions
- 2.4 Suggested Readings

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### 2.0 Introduction

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Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's *An Indian Pilgrim or Autobiography of Subhas Chandra Bose* (1897-1920) was first published in Calcutta by Thacker, Spink & Company in 1948. As a work, it may be considered to be the representation of his perception of the philosophical bases of nationalism. It could thus be felt to be the consequence of that train of thought which led him, during a period in his youth, to set off on pilgrimages in search of a Guru. Sent by his family to Cambridge for higher studies, he successfully competed in the Indian Civil Service examination in 1920. In May, 1921, he resigned from the Indian Civil Service and at the age of twenty-four joined active politics. He believed in self-abnegation and was devoted to political work which he saw as a part of the mission of his life. He had an intense capacity for suffering. Netaji was imprisoned ten times and was in jail for a total period of eight years. He was profoundly devoted to the ideal of Indian freedom and tirelessly worked for its realization. A fearless and indomitable fighter, Bose was one of the greatest patriots of the world.

Bose had studied philosophy as a student at Calcutta and Cambridge and had read Vivekananda and Aurobindo. But he was not a political philosopher or a theorist. He was a dynamic man of action. His strength lay in big political activities. He was a militant fighter for swaraj. He was an agitator, a propagandist, an uncompromising fighter and a revolutionary leader, rather than a philosopher. He was also a great orator. Twice he became the president of the Indian National Congress — in 1938 and 1939. But although not a theorist or political thinker in the academic sense of the term, Bose reflected upon the course and development of the national movement of the country. He certainly had his own views about the realisation of India's freedom. His book *The Indian Struggle (1920-34)* is full of deep analysis and keen reflection. His speeches are characterized by force and simplicity as we find in *Important Speeches and writings of Subhas Bose* which was published by The Indian Printing Works (Lahore) in 1946, edited by Jagat S. Bright. Bose combined the capacity for action a keen analytical mind.

Netaji began his political life like many others in the 1920's as a follower of Gandhi in the non-co-operation movement ; but soon he parted company with Gandhi and in 1923 he

became a Swarajist under C R Das. He was not in sympathy with the Gandhian programme. He was imprisoned in Burma from 1925 to 1927. From a Swarajist, he became a member of the Independence League. He rose to political fame as one of the leaders of the forces which were opposed to the acceptance of the federation contemplated in the Government of India Act of 1935. Bose was elected the president at the Haripura session of the Congress which was held in February 1938. He rose to triumphant eminence when he became the President of the Indian National Congress at Tripuri in 1939 after having defeated Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the nominee of Gandhi and of the Congress right wing. He was in favour of giving an ultimatum to the British Government if the national demand for complete independence was not accepted within a specific period. But he resigned from the Congress presidentship. This was due to the passage of the "Pant resolution" which required him to select the members of the Congress Working Committee in consultation with Mahatma Gandhi. In 1939, he wanted to organize the leftist forces by having formed a new party, the Forward Bloc, in the month of May of that year. He could not work in the Left-Consolidation Committee which had been formed in Bombay (Mumbai) in June, 1940, consisting of the Congress Socialists, the Radical League of M N Roy, the Communists, etc. In March, 1940, he presided over the Anti-compromise Conference at Ramgarh. He stood for a joint demand by the Hindus and Moslems for a provisional national government to which all powers should be immediately transferred. In December, 1940, he succeeded in escaping from house arrest in Calcutta. He reached Berlin by air from Kabul in March, 1941. The story of his escape from the country through Peshawar and Kabul to Germany is an epic of adventure. From Berlin, on February 27, 1942, he began a vehement propaganda campaign against the British imperialists. In June, 1943, Bose arrived in Japan. In the meantime in South-East Asia the Japanese had handed over thousands of Indian prisoners of war to Mohan Singh, an Indian officer of the British Indian Army. The Japanese action had brought as many as 45,000 Indian POW's under Mohan Singh who wanted to form an Indian National Army. And on 1st Sept. 1942 Mohan Singh formed the first division of the INA with 16,300 men. But very soon differences emerged between Mohan Singh and the Japanese. Singh was arrested by the Japanese army. The INA was disbanded. Singh had not waited for the arrival of Bose. On July 5, 1943, Subhas Bose started the second phase as he announced the reorganization of the Indian, National Army composed of over sixty thousand Indians. He gave the battle cry "March to Delhi." On October 21, 1943, Bose established the Provisional Government of Free India, setting up two headquarters at Rangoon and Singapore. From February 1944 to April 1945, the Indian National Army carried on a heroic campaign against the Allied forces and even entered Indian territory. Unfortunately, on August 18, 1945, while on his way to Tokyo, Bose was controversially reported to have received fatal injuries in a plane crash in Formosa. The transition in the political career of Bose is thus very remarkable. From an active member of the Swaraj party he became the leader and commander of the forces of the Indian National Army for the liberation of the country. *Crossroads* highlights this phase of Bose's Career.

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## 2.1 The Philosophical Foundations of Bose's Political Ideas

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Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose studied philosophy as a student. He had been tremendously inspired by the writings of Vivekananda and Aurobindo. Netaji was especially drawn to

Vivekananda whom he studied at the age of fifteen. In Vivekananda he found the embodiment of fearless manhood. From him, he learnt the philosophy of life — 'Atmano Mokshartham Jagadhitaya' — for personal salvation and for the good of humanity. He regarded Vivekananda's utterances as 'heroic'.

Bose did not accept the Samkarite theory of illusion although, as a student, he had regarded Samkara's monistic doctrine as the quintessence of Hindu philosophy. He believed in God and in the worship of the Mother-Goddess. Netaji was deeply influenced by the ideas of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda who felt that the world should be seen as the 'field of play' of God. Bengal never sympathetically responded to the monistic spiritualism of Samkara's Vedanta. It, on the other hand, had a predilection for theistic philosophies. The rejection of the absolutist and illusionistic concept of the world which Bose sponsored, having come under the influence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, was strengthened by his studies of the writings of Aurobindo in the *Arya*. Bose accepted the supremacy of a providential dispensation but thoroughly adhered to the conception of the reality of the world and the imperative character of its obligations and claims.

He also believed in the concept of progressive evolution. In his theorisation of the concept of progress he adduces three considerations. First, that the observation of natural phenomena and history would give proof of progress. Secondly, Netaji said that we have an intuitive apprehension that we are moving ahead. Thirdly, he added an axiological consideration. He said that the faith in progress is a necessity both on biological and moral grounds.

Netaji feels that the definitive stages and categories of evolutionary progression which were formulated by the Samkhya philosophers in ancient times would not appeal to the modern mind. He mentions the Spencerian theory of evolution of Social life from simple to complex. He also refers to the notion of the manifestation of blind will as accepted by Von Hartmann. Netaji's awareness of the Bergsonian theories of creative evolution and intuition is evident in his writings though he feels that the Hegelian theory of dialectical evolution is more adequate than any of these. Bose mentions Hegel, Spencer, Hartmann and Bergson in two paragraphs in the book *An Indian Pilgrim*. Bose accepts that no theory can be adequate to philosophically describe the totality of Reality but he thinks that the Hegelian concept of dialectical progression both in the realm of logical concept and in the realm of spatio-temporal manifestation is more adequate than the Spencerian theory of evolution or the Bergsonian concept of creative evolution. He says: "But undoubtedly Hegel's theory is the nearest approximation to truth. It explains the facts more satisfactorily than any other theory. At the same time, it cannot be regarded as the whole truth since all the facts, as we know them, do not accord with it."

In spite of being inspired by the Hegelian theory of dialectical evolution in the world-process, Bose does not accept the Hegelian theory of the rational character of reality. Anaxagoras and Hegel viewed reality as nous or Idea. But Bose conceives of love as the nature of reality. He writes in *Indian Pilgrim*:

"For me, the essential nature of reality is Love. Love is the essence of the universe and is the essential principle in human life. I admit that this conception also is imperfect — for I do not know today what reality is in itself and I cannot lay claim to knowing the Absolute today — even if it be within the ultimate reach of human knowledge or experience. Nevertheless,

with all its imperfection, for me this theory represents the maximum truth and is the nearest approach to absolute truth. I may be asked how I come to the conclusion that the essential nature of reality is Love. I am afraid my epistemology is not quite orthodox. I have come to this conclusion partly from a rational study of life in all aspects — partly from intuition and partly from pragmatic considerations. I see all around me the play of love; I perceive within me the same instinct; I feel that I must love in order to fulfil myself and I need love as the basic principle on which to reconstruct life. A plurality of considerations drives me to one and the same conclusion. I have remarked above that the essential principle in human life is love. This statement may be challenged when one can see so much in life that is opposed to love; but the paradox can be easily explained. The 'essential principle' is not fully manifest yet; it is unfolding itself in space and time. Love, like reality of which it is the essence, is dynamic."

It is possible that Subhas Bose has borrowed the conception of love as the essence of reality from McTaggart, the Cambridge neo-Hegelian.

The conception of reality in terms of love shows that Bose has a humanistic approach to reality. His conception of reality having its essence in love is also akin to the Vaishnava philosophy. While, according to Aurobindo, delight or ananda is the supreme essence of reality, Bose adheres more to the Vaishnava ideas of theism and hence regards love and not ananda as the intrinsic nature of reality. It may be possible that he has also been unconsciously influenced by the Christian concept of love.

Bose's concept of reality as Love which he has possibly borrowed from McTaggart shows also that he develops an existentialist approach to philosophy. He is interested in life. He is not a conceptualist. He is not in sympathy with the Vedantic concept of the Absolute as undifferentiated indeterminate spiritual real. He calls himself a pragmatist to the extent that he wants to accept that conception of the reality according to which life may possibly be moulded. Bose asks "Now can we comprehend the Absolute through Yogic perception? Is there a supra-mental plane which the individual can reach and where the subject and the object merge into oneness? My attitude to this question is one of benevolent agnosticism — if I may coin this expression. On the one hand, I am not prepared to take anything on trust. I must have first-hand experience, but this sort of experience in the matter of the Absolute, I am unable to get. On the other hand, I cannot just rule out as sheer moonshine what so many individuals claim to have experienced in the past. To repudiate all that would be to repudiate much, which I am not prepared to do. I have, therefore, to leave the question of the supra-mental open, until such time as I am able to experience it myself. Meanwhile I take up the position of a relativist. I mean thereby that Truth as known to us is not absolute but relative. It is relative to our common mental constitution — to our distinctive characteristics as individuals — and to changes in the same individual during the process of time."

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## 2.2 Conclusion

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Netaji was a believer in the creative force of ideas. At times, in the spirit of a theistic devotee, he accepted the infinite majesty and power of God and felt that man was only a humble figure in the hands of providence.

“The world is a manifestation of Spirit and just as spirit is eternal so also is the world of creation. Creation does not and cannot end at any point of time. This view is similar to the Vaishnavic conception of Eternal play (Nitya Leela). Creation is not the offspring of sin ; nor is it the result of ‘avidya’ or ‘ignorance’ as the Shankarites would say. It reflects the eternal play of eternal forces—the Divine play, if you will.”

And finally Bose sums up. “Reality, therefore, is spirit, the essence of which is love, gradually unfolding itself in an eternal play of conflicting forces and their solutions.” It is clearly a mixture of mysticism and idealist metaphysics.

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## 2.3 Questions

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1. Write a note on the philosophic foundations of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’s political ideas.
2. Comment on the philosophical ideas of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as reflected in “An Indian Pilgrim”.
3. Analyse Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as a writer.
4. Give a brief account of the evolution of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as a national leader.

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## 2.4 Suggested Readings

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1. Subhas Bose and His ideas : J. S. Bright
2. Netaji Speaks : S. Subuhay
3. The Springing Tiger : Hugh Toye
4. The Indian Struggle : S. C. Bose
5. Subhas Chandra Bose : Man, Mission and Means – by Prof. Subhash Ch. Chatterjee (Minerva Publishers)



## My Faith (Philosophical)

In 1917 I became very friendly with a Jesuit father. We used to have long talks on matters of common interest. In the Jesuit order founded by Ignatius Loyala I then found much that appealed to me, for instance, their triple vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience.<sup>1</sup> Unlike many Jesuits, this father was not dogmatic and he was well versed in Hindu philosophy. In our discussions he naturally took his stand on Christian theology as interpreted by his church, while I took my stand on the Vedanta as interpreted by Shankaracharya. I did not of course comprehend the Shankarite Doctrine of Maya<sup>2</sup> in all its abstruseness, but I grasped the essential principles of it—or at least I thought I did. One day the Jesuit father turned round to me and said “I admit that Shankara’s position is logically the soundest—but to those who cannot live up to it, we offer the next best.”

There was a time when I believed that Absolute Truth was within the reach of human mind and that the Doctrine of Maya represented the quintessence of knowledge. Today I would hesitate to subscribe to that position. I have ceased to be an absolutist (if I may use that word in my own sense) and am much more of a pragmatist. What I cannot live up to—what is not workable—I feel inclined to discard. Shankara’s Doctrine of Maya intrigued me for a long time, but ultimately I found that I could not accept it because I could not live it. So I had to turn to a different philosophy. But that did not oblige me to go to Christian theology. There are several schools of Indian philosophy which regard the world, creation, as a reality and not as an illusion. There is, for example, the theory of Qualified Monism according to which the ultimate reality is One and the world is a manifestation of it. Ramakrishna’s view is similar, that both the One (God) and the Many (Creation) are true. Several theories have been advanced to explain the nature of creation. According to some the universe is the manifestation of Ananda or Divine Bliss. Others hold that it is the manifestation of Divine Play or ‘Leela’. Several attempts have also been made to describe the One—the Absolute—God—in human language and imagery. To some, like the Vaishnavas, God is Love, to some like the Shaktas, He is Power; to others He is Knowledge; to still others He is Bliss. Then there is the traditional conception of the Absolute in Hindu philosophy as ‘Sat-Chit-Ananda’, which may be translated as ‘Existence-Consciousness (or Knowledge)-Bliss’. The more consistent philosophers say that the Absolute is indescribable or inexpressible (anir-vachaneeya). And it is reported of Buddha that whenever he was questioned about the Absolute he remained silent.

It is impossible to comprehend the Absolute through our human intellect with all its limitations. We cannot perceive reality as it is objectively—as it is in itself—we have to do so through our own spectacles, whether these spectacles be Bacon’s ‘Idola’ or Kant’s ‘forms of the understanding’ or something else. The Hindu philosopher will probably say that as long as

1. There is some analogy to the triple prayer of the Buddhists which has to be repeated daily—“I take refuge in Buddha : I take refuge in Dharma (Truth); I take refuge in the Sangha (Order)”.

2. In brief, this theory implies that the world as we perceive it through our senses is an illusion. It is a case of the rope being mistaken for a snake, the snake being the world of the senses.

the duality of Subject (Jnata) and Object (Jneya) remains, knowledge is bound to be imperfect. Perfect knowledge can be attained only when Subject and Object merge into oneness. This is not possible on the mental plane—the plane of ordinary consciousness. It is possible only in the supra-mental plane—in the region of super-consciousness. But the conception of the supra-mental, of the super-conscious, is peculiar to Hindu philosophy and is repudiated by Western philosophers. According to the former, perfect knowledge is attainable only when we reach the level of the super-conscious through Yogic perception, i.e., intuition of some sort. Intuition as an instrument of knowledge has, of course, been admitted in Western philosophy since the time of Henri Bergson, though it may still be ridiculed in certain quarters. But Western philosophy has yet to admit the existence of the supra-mental and the possibility of our comprehending it through Yogic perception.

Assuming for a moment for argument's sake that we can comprehend the Absolute through Yogic perception, the difficulty about describing it will still remain. When we attempt to describe it, we fall back into the plane of normal consciousness and we are handicapped by all the limitations of the normal human mind. Our descriptions of the Absolute God are consequently anthropomorphic. And what is anthropomorphic cannot be regarded as Absolute Truth.

Now can we comprehend the Absolute through Yogic perception? Is there a supra-mental plane which the individual can reach and where the Subject and the Object merge into oneness? My attitude to this question is one of benevolent agnosticism—if I may coin this expression. On the one hand, I am not prepared to take anything on trust. I must have first-hand experience, but this sort of experience in the matter of the Absolute, I am unable to get. On the other hand, I cannot just rule out as sheer moonshine what so many individuals claim to have experienced in the past. To repudiate all that would be to repudiate much, which I am not prepared to do. I have, therefore, to leave the question of the supra-mental open, until such time as I am able to experience it myself. Meanwhile I take up the position of a relativist. I mean thereby that Truth as known to us is not absolute but relative. It is relative to our common mental constitution—to our distinctive characteristics as individuals—and to changes in the same individual during the process of time.

Once we admit that our notions of the Absolute are relative to our human mind, we should be relieved of a great deal of philosophical controversy. It would follow that when such notions differ, they may all be equally true—the divergence being accounted for by the distinctive individuality of the subject. It would follow, further, that the notions of the same individual with regard to the Absolute may vary with time along with his mental development. But none of these notions need be regarded as false. As Vivekananda used to say, 'Man proceeds not from error to truth but from truth to higher truth'. There should accordingly be scope for the widest toleration.

The question now arises: Granting that reality as known to me is relative and not absolute, what is its nature? In the first place, it has an objective existence and is not an illusion. I come to this conclusion not from *a priori* considerations but mainly from the pragmatic point of view. The Doctrine of Maya does not work. My life is incompatible with it, though I tried long and hard to make my life fit in with it. I have, therefore, to discard it. On the other hand, if the world be real (not, of course, in an absolute but in a relative sense) then life becomes interesting and acquires meaning and purpose.

Secondly, this reality is not static, but dynamic—it is ever changing. Has this change any direction? Yes, it has; it is moving towards a better state of existence. Actual experience demonstrates that the changes imply progress—and not meaningless motion.

Further, this reality is, for me, Spirit working with a conscious purpose through time and space. This conception does not, of course, represent the Absolute Truth which is beyond description for all time and which for me is also beyond comprehension at the present moment. It is therefore a relative truth and is liable to change along with the changes in my mind.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is a conception which represents my utmost effort to comprehend reality and which offers a basis on which to build my life.

Why do I believe in Spirit? Because it is a pragmatic necessity. My nature demands it. I see purpose and design in nature; I discern an 'increasing purpose' in my own life. I feel that I am not a mere conglomeration of atoms. I perceive, too, that reality is not a fortuitous combination of molecules. Moreover, no other theory can explain reality (as I understand it) so well. This theory is in short an intellectual and moral necessity, a necessity of my very life, so far as I am concerned.

The world is a manifestation of Spirit and just as Spirit is eternal so also is the world of creation. Creation does not and cannot end at any point of time. This view is similar to the Vaishnavic conception of Eternal Play (Nitya Leela). Creation is not the offspring of sin; nor is it the result of 'avidya' or 'ignorance' as the Shankarites would say. It reflects the eternal play of eternal forces—the Divine Play, if you will.

I may very well be asked why I am bothering about the ultimate nature of reality and similar problems and am not contenting myself with experience as I find it. The answer to that is simple. The moment we analyse experience, we have to posit the self—the mind which receives—and the non-self—the source of all impressions, which form the stuff of our experience. The non-self—reality apart from the self—is there and we cannot ignore its existence by shutting our eyes to it. This reality underlies all our experience and on our conception of it depends much that is of theoretical and practical value to us.

No, we cannot ignore reality. We must endeavour to know its nature—though, as I have already indicated, that knowledge can at best be relative and cannot be dignified with the name of Absolute Truth. This relative truth must form the basis of our life—even if what is relative is liable to change.

What then is the nature of this Spirit which is reality? One is reminded of the parable of Ramakrishna about a number of blind men trying to describe an elephant—each giving a description in accordance with the organ he touched and therefore violently disagreeing with the rest. My own view is that most of the conceptions of reality are true, though partially, and the main question is which conception represents the maximum truth. For me, the essential nature of reality is LOVE. LOVE is the essence of the Universe and is the essential principle

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1. There is nothing wrong in this—for as Emerson said, a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. Moreover, what is progress if it does not involve change?

in human life. I admit that this conception also is imperfect—for I do not know today what reality is in itself and I cannot lay claim to knowing the Absolute today—even if it be within the ultimate reach of human knowledge or experience. Nevertheless, with all its imperfection, for me this theory represents the maximum truth and is the nearest approach to Absolute Truth.

I may be asked how I come to the conclusion that the essential nature of reality is LOVE. I am afraid my epistemology is not quite orthodox. I have come to this conclusion partly from a rational study of life in all aspects—partly from intuition and partly from pragmatic considerations. I see all around me the play of love; I perceive within me the same instinct; I feel that I must love in order to fulfil myself and I need love as the basic principle on which to reconstruct life. A plurality of considerations drives me to one and the same conclusion.

I have remarked above that the essential principle in human life is love. This statement may be challenged when one can see so much in life that is opposed to love; but the paradox can be easily explained. The 'essential principle is not fully manifest yet; it is unfolding itself in space and time. Love, like reality of which it is the essence, is dynamic.

What, now, is the nature of the process of unfolding? Firstly, is it a movement forward or not? Secondly, is there any law underlying this movement?

The unfolding process is progressive in character. This assertion is not quite dogmatic. Observation and study of nature point to the conclusion that everywhere there is progress. This progress may not be unilinear; there may be periodic setbacks—but on the whole, i.e., considered from a long period point of view, there is progress. Apart from this rational consideration there is the intuitive experience that we are moving ahead with the lapse of time. And last but not least, there is the necessity, both biological and moral, to have faith in progress.

As various attempts have been made to know reality and to describe it—so also have attempts been made to comprehend the law of progress. None of these efforts is futile; each gives us a glimpse of the truth. The Sankhya Philosophy of the Hindus was probably the oldest endeavour to describe the evolutionary process in nature. That solution will not satisfy the modern mind. In more recent times, we have various theories, or perhaps descriptions of evolution. Some like Spencer would have us believe that evolution consists in a development from the simple to the complex. Others like von Hartmann would assert that the world is manifestation of blind will—from which one could conclude that it is futile to look for an underlying idea. Bergson would maintain his own theory of creative evolution; evolution should imply a new creation or departure at every stage, which cannot be calculated in advance by the human intellect. Hegel, on the contrary, would dogmatise that the nature of the evolutionary process, whether in the thought world or in reality outside, is dialectic. We progress through conflicts and their solutions. Every thesis provokes an antithesis. This conflict is solved by a synthesis, which in its turn, provokes new antithesis—and so on.

All these theories have undoubtedly an element of truth. Each of the above thinkers has endeavoured to reveal the truth as he has perceived it. But undoubtedly Hegel's theory is the nearest approximation to truth. It explains the facts more satisfactorily than any other theory.

At the same time, it cannot be regarded as the whole truth since all the facts as we know them, do not accord with it. Reality is, after all, too big for our frail understanding to fully comprehend. Nevertheless, we have to build our life on the theory which contains the maximum truth. We cannot sit still because we cannot, or donot, know the Absolute Truth.

Reality, therefore, is Spirit, the essence of which is Love, gradually unfolding itself in an eternal play of conflicting forces and their solutions.

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## **Unit – 3   □   Jawaharlal Nehru : The Discovery of India**

### **(Ch, 3, 4, 6)**

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#### **Structure**

- 3.0   Nehru and Indian English : The Literary Landscape**
- 3.1   The Discovery of India : An Introduction**
- 3.2   Nehru : A Man of letters**
- 3.3   Nehru : A Connoisseur of the Arts**
- 3.4   Questions**
- 3.5   Recommended readings**

### **3.0   Nehru and Indian English : the Literary Landscape**

Jawaharlal Nehru's childhood was spent at Allahabad. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge in England, he returned to India in 1912, an indecisive young man dominated by a strong father. Meeting Gandhi for the first time in 1916, Jawaharlal soon drew closer to him – a man with a mission. The challenge of the Non-Cooperation movement brought out his latent abilities and his rise in the Congress organization was rapid. Twice president of the Congress, he was jailed seven times for political activity. In addition to his British education, his tours in Europe in 1926-27 and 1936-38 helped him acquire an international perspective, which he, among his peers in the Congress, possessed to the fullest extent. With the advent of Independence in 1947, he became the Prime Minister of India and died in harness in 1964.

During his nearly seven years stay in England, he imbibed the traditions of British humanist liberalism. He subscribed to the general philosophical ethos whose protagonists were Mill, Gladstone and Morley. He had been influenced by the writings of Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell. Nehru was not a political philosopher in the academic sense Cicero, Hobbes or Rousseau were. But certainly he was a man of ideas. A man of action, he had the capacity for detachment and like most thinkers he was often tormented by doubts and quests. He was one of the chief figures who brought the independence struggle to a successful culmination. The foundation of India's independence was laid by great souls-Dadabhai, Tilak, Gokhale, Lala Lajpat Rai, S. N. Banerjee, Chittaranjan Das and others. It was the will of destiny that Gandhi with his lieutenants, like Vallabhbai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and others should be instrumental in building the foundations of Independence. Among Gandhi's great lieutenants in the struggle for freedom, Jawaharlal had a preeminent place. He was one of the indomitable fighters of the Indian freedom movement, who pioneered the concepts of complete Independence, Constituent Assembly and Socialism as suited to India.

His spirit was restless for the cause of Mother India and he sacrificed his youth and family for her.

Jawaharlal Nehru lives in the popular imagination as the leader of Indian nationalism and the first Prime Minister of independent India. The passion for Indian freedom possessed him while he was still in his teens. His entire life was devoted to the cause of Indian freedom, and then to the reconstruction of independent India. His life was one of toil, and an endless round of travel for meetings, big and small, and of crises, major and minor. There was scarcely any time which he could call his own; he seemed to live under the public gaze; every word he uttered was public property. From early morning till after midnight his schedule was made for him — sometimes weeks and months ahead.

This is not the kind of life associated with writers, who want to be left alone to read, to think, and to write: Jawaharlal did not live in an ivory tower; a good part of his life was spent in railway compartments, aeroplanes, motor cars, public meetings, conferences, and last, but not least, in prison.

The nine years that he spent in prison were an ordeal, but they gave him a much needed respite. It was during these periods of enforced rest and seclusion that Jawaharlal wrote the books that gave him a place among the greatest and most influential writers of our time.

Jawaharlal's literary gifts were evident even at an early age. Some of his letters from Harrow and Cambridge to his father were exceedingly well-written; they revealed a keen observation, lively humour and an unusual fluency. In a letter from Harrow he described a cricket match with the Eton Eleven. He succeeded in making us almost fellow-spectators of the match, we cannot but share his excitement as the wickets fall, and the Eton Eleven won the match against the home team.

Cricket tournaments were exciting enough, but, even at that early age, Jawaharlal was deeply interested in another tournament being played thousands of miles away, back home between Indian nationalism and the British Empire. In this tournament Jawaharlal wanted the Indian side to develop the finest team spirit and to hit hard, to put the British on the defensive.

For many years Jawaharlal's patriotism did not find a practical outlet. From Harrow he went on to Cambridge from where he graduated in the natural sciences. Afterwards he qualified as a barrister and returned to India in 1912 at the age of twenty one. He was a conscientious and painstaking assistant of his father, hunting up references in the law reports, preparing briefs, making appearances in courts. But his heart did not lie in what he once described as "the technicalities and trivialities" of the profession of law. He felt almost suffocated in the barrister's gown. He longed to work on a different kind of brief; he wanted to plead the cause of India's freedom, not at the bar of the Allahabad High Court, but at the bar of world opinion. He loved reading; his studies covered a wide range of history, political science, economics, biography, fiction, and poetry. He was a voracious reader of books. He went to political meetings at Allahabad; he accompanied his father to annual Congress sessions during the Christmas week. Though he did not speak at public meetings, at home he entered into heated discussions with his father on the events of the day. His scientific training, his stay abroad and

his critical approach combined to give him a new approach to India's politics. He found it difficult to swallow the optimism of the moderate leaders or the professions of the British Government. He wanted more action, less talk; this was what brought him into the Gandhian fold. It was a revulsion against armchair politics and a desire to do something effective that drew Jawaharlal to Gandhi. Throughout his life Jawaharlal felt the call to action, but for an intellectual in politics action could not be divorced from ideas. Hence we find Jawaharlal engaged in a constant and agonising endeavour to harmonise thought and action. It is because of this trait in his character that we admire his great books. Unlike most writers he did not set out to win literary renown or to make money. He wrote because he thought and felt deeply and wanted to do something urgently about the freedom of India and her place in the modern world. He wanted to share his thoughts and feelings with others. To the extent they inspired the people of India or put India's case across to the rest of the world, his books became part of the armoury of Indian nationalism.

Jawaharlal was not the first Indian leader to write books in jail. Bal Gangadhar Tilak wrote his famous commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, the *Gita Rahasya* while he was in Mandalay jail. It was, however not religion which occupied Jawaharlal's thoughts in jail; his theme was the same which had possessed him outside the jail, the freedom of India and her place in the modern world. For years his reading had been wide but discursive. Since 1922 he had been making notes of the books he read, and these notes came handy to him, when he started what might be called a correspondence course on world history for his daughter Indira. In fact he did nothing so formal as that. Hectic political life and long spells in prison had made it impossible for him to spend much time with her. In 1928, when she was ten and at Mussoorie during the summer months with her mother, and he was at Allahabad, he wrote thirty letters to her, which were collected and published as *Letters from a Father to his Daughter*. In these letters he told her of rocks and plants and the first living things, of the struggle of early man against the forces of nature, of the races, and religions and languages of mankind and of the evolution of the great civilisations of India.

### Greece and Rome

During his imprisonment during the years 1931-33, he returned to this theme in his letters to Indira, who had meanwhile grown up and could appreciate a fuller narrative and analysis than he had given her in 1928. Jawaharlal did not set out to write a history for children; he was merely writing for the instruction and entertainment of his own child. The letters were simple, direct, almost conversational in tone; he seemed to be talking to her. He did not flood her with facts and figures. He did not lecture; he simply took her by the hand and let her accompany him on an imaginative journey along the high ways of world history. He did not impose his judgments on her. In one of the letters he wrote: "But that is my opinion. Some differ from this. You need not take anything for granted and when time comes you can draw your own conclusions." He did not unearth new facts. Neither did he spell out startling theories. He made his daughter a fellow spectator of the panorama of the past and a fellow seeker after truth. His enthusiasm for scientific humanism, socialism, and nationalism enlivened the spirit and colour of his image of the past. The *Glimpses of World History* remains a delightful introduction to world history for all irrespective of age. *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* and the *Glimpses of World History* are collections of letters.



*Autobiography* Jawaharlal Nehru's the first book is written according to plan. This is his most widely read and undoubtedly his most important work.

He wrote it over a period of eight months from June 1934 to February, 1935. "The primary object in writing these pages", he wrote in the preface, "Was to occupy myself with a definite task, so necessary in the long solitudes of gaol life as well as to review past events in India ..... to enable myself to think clearly about them."

He began the task, he confessed, in a self-questioning mood. There were reasons enough for Jawaharlal to be in this mood. The civil disobedience movement, which started with such high hopes in 1930, was languishing; popular enthusiasm was at a low ebb, the nationalist leadership seemed unsure and divided and the rank and file were confused or apathetic.

The British Government was again speaking in accents of authority, if not of arrogance. Jawaharlal himself was tortured with doubts. He sought a way out of this confusion by tracing his own mental development. He felt that if he could take a critical look at his own past life and activity it might enable him to see the present and the future in better perspective. The book began with a brief flash-back to the ancestry of the Nehrus in Kashmir and life in Anand Bhawan.

The early chapters contain fascinating glimpses of his father, whom he used to admire, love and fear as well. He spoke of his delicate mother whom he loved as much. He talked of Munshi Mubarak Ali with his fine grey beard and endless stock of stories like the *Arabian Nights*, Ferdinand T. Brooks, the resident tutor who introduced young Nehru to the joys of reading, the thrills of science and the mysteries of theosophy. There is an interesting account of seven exciting years at Harrow, Cambridge and London before he returned home as a young barrister in 1912.

An autobiography by definition is an account of one's own personal life. Curiously enough, Jawaharlal gives barely forty pages to the story of his early years before plunging into the history of the national movement. It almost appears that the personal story was subordinated to the political one. The original title of the book was *In and out of Prison* with a sub-title: "An autobiographical narrative with musings on recent events in India." The author could have fallen between two stools; he could have produced an autobiography with too much extraneous matter to be considered a personal narrative, or he could have written a history of the national movement which was too subjective and sketchy to be a reliable commentary. In fact, Jawaharlal achieved the miracle by blending the personal and the political with extraordinary skill. His habit of self-questioning detachment, modesty and capacity to laugh at himself saved him from the pitfalls of writing autobiography.

If autobiography is fiction written by a man who knows the facts, Jawaharlal produced something entirely different. His was a voyage of discovery of himself; he had been driven to write this book by his own intellectual quest. The movement into which he had thrown himself had run into a dead-end, and he had to grope his way out. Thus he was not constructing an apologia or a myth; in the enforced solitude of the jail, he was merely clarifying his own ideas, and restoring the jigsaw puzzle of national politics. It was this mood which gave its peculiar charm to the book and made it one of the greatest autobiographies as well as one of the most

influential political testaments. In the first year of its publication in 1936, the book ran through ten printings. It had since been reprinted many times and translated in many languages. That this book should have become a bestseller in the very country against which he had raised the standard of revolt was a remarkable fact. Mrs Ellen Elkinson, a member of the House of Commons, left it on record that she started reading it one afternoon, and finished it at 5 O'clock in the next morning.

Jawaharlal's place as the hero of India's youth and as a dynamic leader of the national movement was established long before 1936. But it was the *Autobiography* which won him his high place in the world of literature. The book marked him out as the ablest exponent of the Indian case to the West. In India the book had a tremendous impact. It gave a great boost to national feeling.

During the years 1935-41, Nehru was again caught up in national politics and he was able to write only occasional essays, which were published later under the title : *The Unity of India, and Eighteen months in India*. The opportunity of writing another book did not come his way until his next term in Ahmednagar Fort prison. His previous imprisonments had led him to probe the past : *The Glimpses of World History* had been an excursion into the history of mankind ; *The Autobiography* had been a flash back on his own life and on the history of the Indian freedom movement during the years 1920-1934. Imprisoned at Ahmednagar Fort, Jawaharlal felt an irresistible urge to explore the past again, the past of his own country. "What is my inheritance ?", he asked himself, "To what am I heir?" What was India apart from her physical and geographical aspects ? What gave her strength ? Why did she lose that strength ? Did she represent anything vital, apart from being the home of a vast number of human beings ? Did she fit into the modern world ? The answers to these questions unfold themselves in the *Discovery of India*. It is not a history of India in the conventional sense. The past of India is not neatly cut up into ancient, medieval and modern periods, with dates and dynasties causes and consequences of wars and peace. We get something more exciting, we see a pageant of India's past unfold itself as on a screen, as it were. He gives us pen-pictures of our ancient civilisation from the mounds of Mohenjadaró in the dawn of history to the second World War. He contemplates the great works of Indian art, the frescoes of Ajanta and Ellora, the magnificent architecture of the Mughals. His mind becomes a picture gallery, crowded with scenes from the past : the Buddha preaching his first sermon at Sarnath, King Ashoka embarking on the conquest of the hearts of men, Akbar the Great Mughal debating with great men of religions in the hall of Fatehpur Sikri.

Jawaharlal was not a professional historian. He did not master the more controversial aspects of our history ; he did not stand outside the events he described, his own passion for freedom and crusade against poverty and injustice colour his judgements of men and events. He did not follow a fixed pattern in his narrative ; he rambled a good deal, but his easy, informal and engaging manner marked him out as a fascinating guide for an imaginative tour of India's past. He did not labour at conscious literary artistry, but his command over the English language was such that he could discuss the most controversial issues of politics as well as delicately sketch the sunset over the hills with equal grace. The freshness and vigour of his

style expressing his varying moods of gaiety and depression, humour and pathos, gentle irony and sarcasm make the *Discovery of India* delightful reading.

Numerous collections of Nehru's speeches, essays press statements, letters etc. have been published from time to time. These include Recent Essays and writings on : the Future of India, Communalism and other subjects (1934); India and the world (1936); Eighteen Months in India (1936); The unity of India : Collected writing 1937-1940(1941); Before and After Independence (*Collected Speeches* : 1922-1950 (1950); *A Bunch of old Letters* (1958) and Independence and After (collected Speeches ; 1946-1964) Vols. I - V (1949-1965). Eleven Volumes of the selected works (1970) edited by S. Gopal have appeared so far.

Nehru's political thought was shaped by diverse and at times conflicting influences, including his early training in science, rationalism, the British liberal tradition, Fabian socialism, Marxism and Gandhism. Both before and after Independence, he visualised a secular, democratic and socialist society as the goal before India, and inveighed against bigotry, obscurantism, exploitation, regimentation and corruption in public life. In the economic sphere he advocated planned development, a mixed economy and rapid industrialization on a large scale. Never losing sight of the broader international perspective even during the day of the national freedom struggle, he became, after Independence, the foremost exponent of the doctrines of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence and a spokesman of a viable political philosophy for developing countries. However, his critics argue that a dreamy idealism, a lack of firmness rendered Nehru largely ineffectual in implementing his programmes, of socio-political ideals and his quest for the road to modernity.

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### 3.1 The Discovery of India : an introduction

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Jawaharlal Nehru was more than just the Prime Minister of India, and his ideals and efforts had meaning for the whole world and not merely for his country alone. Nehru, like all his great Indian contemporaries, was made up of the two cultures of east and west, and he had developed quite early a keen international sense and his intense commitment to his own people.

The promotion of peace is more than a matter of political negotiations and the reconciliation of different interests is of immense importance. It involves the creation of a proper mental and psychological climate in the world, and the first prerequisite of such a climate, where human dignity can grow, is freedom. As a leader of the national movement in India, Nehru stood against narrow chauvinism. He stressed that freedom, like peace, was indivisible, and that Indians, striving for their own liberty, should stretch out their hands to fellow-fighters for freedom in other parts of the world. He also emphasised that the common cause itself should not look solely inwards and that indigenous traditions should interplay with the thoughts and philosophies of the world outside.

Both Gandhi and Nehru were uncompromising fighters against imperialism. Yet Gandhi insisted that one should resist the sin and not the sinner, and Nehru never failed to see that it was the system which bred imperialism that had to be combated, rather than just the agents of imperialism. An understanding of the forces which governed colonialism strengthened anti-colonial resistance.

The *Discovery of India* (published 1946) was written in 1944 during his last internment at Ahmednagar fort. His aim here was to write about the past. He asked himself the question, "What is my inheritance? To what am I an heir?" and answered the question by declaring: "There is a special heritage for those of us of India .... something that is in our flesh and blood and bones, that has gone to make us what we are and what we are likely to be". "The thought of this particular heritage and of its application to the present" made Nehru survey the annals of his country from the Indus Valley Civilization to the nineteen forties. As in his earlier historical works, what Nehru attempted was not a scholarly history but a vision of the past seen through the eyes of one imbued with a sense of history. Nehru's passionate love of India and his faith in her destiny were tempered by a constant awareness of the cross-currents of world history; and his commitment to the values of democratic socialism, secularism, and humanism, was as firm as ever. He concluded by telling his countrymen that their pride in their ancient culture and tradition should not be for a romanticized past. In his own inimitable words, "We must co-operate with other races and nations in common tasks, and must, while remaining true Indians, become at the same time good internationalists and world citizens."

A confirmed socialist, Nehru sought to grasp the essential spirit of man and the meaning of freedom over the centuries notwithstanding his continual encounters with socially reactionary forces. His scientific temper questioned the antiquated institutions of India's social systems and attempted to rescue her eternal spirit, from the inert immobility caused by the silt of centuries.

He was keen to link the all-embracing vitality of India to the probings and quests of the irresistible advancement of the natural sciences. In the process, he sought to discover the essence of India's heritage, place her history in the context of the world's progress and examine Indian realities against the backdrop of her struggle for freedom. His works, *Discovery of India*, *Glimpses of World History* and *An Autobiography* encapsulated the inheritance of India in a changing world, her resurgence and struggle for freedom with a promise for an egalitarian society, and the hopes for a just world order. Together they constituted the positive contents of Indian nationalism. Social change and freedom from all exploitative social and economic bondages, anti-imperialism and freedom from all direct and indirect foreign restraints and monoeuvres, anti-fascism and freedom from the grip of capitalism were the distinctive characteristics of Nehru's vision of creative nationalism. It became over time a significant intellectual consensus undisturbed by the waves and ripples of communal and reactionary forces both in India and abroad. In *Discovery of India* Nehru says: "I cannot write academically of past events in the manner of a historian or scholar. I have not the knowledge or equipment or training; nor do I possess the mood for that kind of work".

Was this merely Nehru's modesty, and should we take serious note of Nehru as a historian? Or should we take his words at face value and consider his major works, *Glimpses of World History* (1934, 35) and his *Autobiography* (first published 1936), and the *Discovery of India*, more as milestones in Nehru's intellectual development than serious history?

Our first impression is that despite his modesty, Nehru was, if not contemptuous, impatient with the historians of his times (with some exceptions), though he made it plain that for him history did not mean heaping facts upon facts in an impersonal, lifeless manner. This

obviously was a departure from the German school of historiography which was still fashionable in those days. The business of the historian, it was believed, was not to interpret or establish linkages, but to present facts which would speak for themselves.

That was not the way Nehru saw history. For him, the past was integrally related to the present and the future. "... the past is ever with us and all that we are and has come from the past," he says. "We are its products and we live immersed in it. Not to understand it and feel it as something living within us is not to understanding the present."

For Nehru history was thus "a living process", a continuum linked to the present, and "influencing the future, partly determining it." However, he refused to accept the philosophy of determinism which was often confused with Maxism. Nehru admired Marx for his scientific outlook on history but he did not feel sure that the complexity of human life and history could be framed in any hard and fast rules and systems. He was drawn to the Marxian "dynamic concept" of history and felt that it left room for an individual's contribution to the process of social change. However, social forces remained more important than individuals. While rejecting the concept of history providing lessons, Nehru felt it was possible to learn from history by "trying to discover the forces that move it."

But there is also a psychological aspect to Nehru's approach to history. He explains that all this life he had trained himself for action. But life in prison was 'actionless'. For Nehru, history was both "imagined action" and a preparation for future action. This also marked his approach to history intensely personal. As he explains in the *Discovery of India*: "Inevitably, my approach will often be a personal one ; how the idea grew in my mind, what shapes it took, how it influenced me and affected my action. There will also be some entirely personal experiences which have nothing to do with the subject in its wider aspects, but which coloured my mind and influenced my approach to the whole problem."

Thus, Nehru, the action-oriented individual, and Nehru, the historian and student of social change, constantly interacted with each other. That precisely was the charm of Nehru's historical writing, as also its limitation.

The essence of history, for Nehru was change. He says in *Glimpses of World History*: "what is history indeed but a record of change ? And if there had been very few changes in the past, there would have been little of history to write." Nehru traced this process of change in all its aspects— social, economic, intellectual, culultural in various periods and climes. Part of the "Voyage of discovery", which he undertook was to link himself with the past, and to place India in time. This implied a rebuttal of the highly Eurocentric view of history which was then the fashion in the west, and which even H. G. Wells had not been able to escape in his *Outline of World History*. Tracing the ascent of man, and the antiquity of civilization preceding the Greco-Roman civilization, Nehru found much in common between Greece and Iran, India, China. "Greeks and Indians and Chinese and Iranians were always seeking a religion and a philosophy of life which affected all thier activities and which was intended to produce an equilibrium and a sense of harmony."

This, he says, was reflected in every aspect of life – in literature, art and institutions, and produced “a sense of proportion and completeness”. That is why Nehru rejected the notion of a fundamental difference between the Orient and the Occident. He found it vague and unscientific, without much basis in fact. “The difference was really based on the industrialization of Europe and America in which respect Asia was backward. “This industrialization is new in the world's history”, and he presaged that as it spread, it would “change the world more than anything else has done”. His attempt was to see World History as not within the framework of the west, and the conclusion he drew was that as an Indian he was the inheritor not only of all that India achieved but all that man had achieved anywhere in the world. Nehru's approach to history was not national, but international in the true sense of the word. It was, in a sense, a continuation of the Indian concept of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.”

Revolutions – the French, the American, the Russian and others in the offing, attracted Nehru. He did not see in them a break with the past, rather the result of long processes of evolution. Also, he was thrilled to see the movement of hundreds of thousands of people.

For Nehru, the people were not only the pulse of history, he also felt a unique empathy with them. They did not move at the bidding of agitators, but represented unconscious social forces. History did not necessarily move in the direction aimed at by conscious actors: there were unintended consequences in history. “Imperialism produces nationalism.” This was hardly novel. For Nehru was merely echoing the Hegelian – Marxist idea of “thesis - antithesis”, one action producing its own reaction.

He candidly confesses: “often as I look at this world, I have a sense of mysteries of unknown depths.” Thus a spirit of wonder is reflected in Nehru's writings. He talks of unconscious memory, and of the “complex and mysterious personality of India”, some aspects of which he admitted he could not fathom.

After his aerial survey of the world in *Glimpses*, in *Discovery* Nehru comes back home to India. There is much in India that Nehru finds exhilarating and sometimes oppressive. He thunders: “India must break with much of her past and not allow it to dominate the present. Our lives are encumbered with the dead wood of this past; all that is dead and has served its purpose has to go.” And warns, “But that does not mean a break with, or a forgetting of, the vital and life-giving in that past.”

Nehru searches for the deep springs of the vital, life-giving source which was the secret of the remarkable continuity of India's civilization. Nehru traces it in the unity and diversity of India. With his eclectic mind Nehru traces the unique synthesis between divergent elements in human civilizations and institutions. Nehru places the first synthesis between the Aryans and the non-Aryans, the last, the result of Turko-Afghan incursions during Mughal rule. Between the 6th and 10th centuries AD, India passed through a phase of sterility where the original impulse seemed to dry up. India became more and more insular mentally as also in her foreign contacts. It was this outlook which led to the decline of science, and India's conquest by the foreigners. The Turko-Afghan invasions posed a new challenge. The foreigners became rapidly Indianised, and a new synthesis was arrived at in various fields. The Sufi and Bhakti saints

played a role in this, though he made manifest his reservations about mysticism. It was "Not a rigorous discipline of the mind but a surrender of mental faculties and living in a sea of emotional experiences."

It is easy to pick holes in some of Nehru's arguments, and to say that he either over-estimated the "essential unity" of India before the arrival of the British, or did not adequately understand the forces of religion. In fact, it is possible to argue that the partition of the country, carried out under foreign rule, did not vitiate any of the arguments of Nehru about the essential cultural unity of Hind-Pakistan.

Nehru is not on equally strong grounds when he traces the evolution of caste, and bases the stability of Indian life on village panchayats, caste and the joint family. A lot of work has been done on these aspects since Nehru wrote. The assumption that the panchayats continued to function uninterrupted, and that wars and other developments had no impact on the ambience of village life is no longer tenable. There were phases in the development of society in which the villages were deeply affected. Caste had been linked more closely with the evolution of society in ancient India rather than a process of fusion between Aryans and non-Aryans. Nehru's belief that growth of industrialisation and education in India would erode the caste system in the country is also not free of controversy.

Not all that Nehru has written can stand the test of time. But the essence of what Nehru has said cannot but attract us regarding Indian civilisation as depicted in song, dance, sculptures, music, our early ancestors' spirit of enquiry in all aspects of life, the advancement of science and the gradual atrophying of the critical faculties on account of the growth of religious obscurantism.

To be able to hold the attention of the readers almost half a century or more after the works were written is no mean tribute to Nehru. It is something of which any academic historian would be proud. What Nehru tries to inculcate through his writings is above all a sense of history. Ignoring history "Produced a vagueness of outlook, a divorce from life ...., a wooliness of mind". On the other hand, what Nehru wanted to achieve through history and the scientific method was a "greater appreciation of facts, a more critical faculty, a weighing of evidence, a refusal to accept tradition merely because it is tradition."

It will be safe to characterize Nehru's basic philosophical position as agnosticism. Nehru, however, was not a Kantian but only a Spencerian agnostic.

He writes, "Often, as I look at this world, I have a sense of mysteries, of unknown depths. What the mysterious is I do not know. I do not call it God because God has come to mean much that I do not believe in. I find myself incapable of thinking of a deity or of any unknown supreme power in anthropomorphic terms .... Any idea of a personal God seems very odd to me. Intellectually, I can appreciate to some extent the conception of monism, and I have been attracted towards the Advaita (non-dualist) philosophy of the Vedanta .... At the same time the Vedanta, as well as other similar approaches, rather frighten me with their vague formless incursions into infinity. The diversity and fullness of nature stir me and produce a harmony of the spirit, and I can imagine myself feeling at home in the old Indian or Greek Pagan and pantheistic atmosphere, but minus the conception of God or gods that was attached to it."

Nehru must have been aware of modern physical scientific researches associated with the names of Einstein, Planck and Heisenberg. He would even accept that materialism in the nineteenth century Marxian sense appeared to be anachronistic. He does use the word 'spiritual' but in his terminology it is almost synonymous with the words 'moral' and 'mental'. Nehru's early philosophy of life has been partly Cyrenaic. He was influenced in his impressionable years by the writings of Pater and Oscar Wilde. His philosophy of life, however, has not been solely formed by intellectual studies or metaphysical argumentations. It has proceeded mainly from reflections on his own experiences. He took an optimistic view of life and its numerous opportunities. Like the ancient Greeks, he believed in the harmonious development of all the latent faculties and potentialities of man. Like the Faustian Western man, he was thrilled by a sense of enjoying adventures and risks. Even if he did not subscribe to the Vedantic-Buddhistic ethics of self-abnegation and self-mortification, he would never accept the bourgeois creed of a complacent the gratification of life. He was a social idealist and had a democratic concern for the feelings of the average man. The Buddhist influence had also been deep on the life and political philosophy of Nehru. He says "The Buddha story attracted me even in early boyhood .... Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* became one of my favourite books." The psychological method of analysis into mental phenomena and the concept of reality as a ceaseless moving matter would have drawn his admiration. But it appears that the greatest influences have been those of the "rational ethical doctrine" of the Aryan Eightfold path and the compassion, serene vitality and exalted nobility typified in the personality of Gautama Buddha. Buddha's magnificence and ethical grandeur symbolised for him the deep strength and subterranean reserves of power of Indian culture. It is significant that in 1954 he used the Buddhist concept of Pancha Sila in a secular context to indicate the principles of co-existence in a divided world. Jawaharlal showered great praise on Asoka the "astonishing ruler" who was keenly devoted to public business and had dedicated himself to popular welfare. It may be stated that the Buddhist influence on Nehru must have partly guided his political action also and might have been an antidote to his being swayed by the impact of communism. His reflections on the personality of Buddha must have reinforced his adherence to the Gandhian stress on the impossibility of separating noble means from good objectives.

Jawaharlal did not make any thorough study of the anthropological origins of the Hindu caste structure. But he adhered to the thesis of some western historians that the caste system originated in a racial desire of the Indo-Aryans to preserve their purity. He emphasised, that the original meaning of the term Varna was colour. The sudras were recruited, in his view, from the Dravidians and the and the aboriginal population of the country. He did refer to racial and political struggles between the Indo-Aryans and the Dravidians. The Vedas were the works of the Indo-Aryan priests while the pre-Vedic Mohenjodaro-Harappa civilizations were the creations of the Dravidians. Not only had Jawaharlal refrained from doing any research into this vexed and controversial issue of the origin of the caste but it was also a fact that he never showed any passionate enthusiasm in denouncing the dogmatic and atrocious claim of caste superiority.

As a front runner nationalist leader and a socialist intellectual he did, of course, swear by the ideal of a casteless and classless society. But in his writings one misses the noble and crusading zeal of Kabir, Vivekananda, Gandhi and Lohia for removing this evil.



An Indian social and political scientist who does not concern himself with the objective analysis of the dehumanising implications of the caste hierarchy would miss the objecting reality as it is. As an intellectual deeply influenced by Marx, he, nonetheless, felt that powerful economic forces had generated a conflict between the concept of group solidarity which was the basis of the caste structure and modern rational individualism.

Nehru had been a great nationalist but he had not propounded any new theory of nationalism. From his article "Unity of India" it appears that he believed in the objectivity of the fundamental Unity of India nurtured on cultural foundations "which were not religious in the narrow sense of the term". He accepted that in spite of numerous diversities there is a unity running throughout Indian history. He was also inspired by the concept of cultural pluralism and synthesis. He was influenced by the concept of synthetic universalism propounded by Rabindranath Tagore and had no sympathy with the assimilative-integral religious approach to nationalism which was sponsored by Dayananda Vivekananda, Pal, and Aurobindo. He did, nevertheless, accept that there were emotional aspects of nationalism. As a man of deep emotions, even the agnostic Nehru had been considerably moved by the romantic ideal of India, the motherland. To him, nationalism was indeed a noble phase of self-magnification. He wrote :

"Nationalism is essentially a group memory of past achievements, traditions and experiences, and nationalism is stronger today than it has ever been ..... Whenever a crisis has arisen nationalism has emerged again and dominated the scene, and people have sought comfort and strength in their old traditions. One of the remarkable developments of the present age has been the rediscovery of the past and of the nation."

Nationalism has also solid, social, political and economic foundations as well as material advantages to offer.

Nehru's theory and practice of nationalism had been nurtured on three foundations. The racial arrogance of the British rulers disturbed him. To a minor extent he and his family had one such unfortunate experience. But more than the incident, the widespread manifestation of racial chauvinism was bound to be irritating. The second source of Nehru's nationalism was economic. In line with the thinkers of moderate school, Jawaharlal also blamed the British for the rampant poverty and exploitation of the country. He hazarded a hypothesis with reference to the growth of British power in different parts of India like Madras, Bengal and Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab that the longer the period of British rule in a particular province, the greater was the degree of poverty there. He deprecated Cornwallis's policy of permanent settlement in Bihar and Bengal and in some other areas. The British rule in India had uprooted the villagers. The introduction of a new Zamindari-system had deprived the village community of all control over the land and a joint corporate existence. The fundamental cause of the terrible poverty of the Indian people was the large scale dependence of nearly seventy-four percent (pre-1939 figure) of the population on agriculture as compared to the middle of the nineteenth century when it had been only fifty-five percent. He believed in the thesis that the plunder of Bengal was a factor for the growth of Industrial capitalist power.

The third root of Nehru's nationalism was political and administrative. The foreign imperialist rulers concentrated in their hands all initiative and control-mechanisms. They had the monopoly of decision-making.

The clever rulers utilized the technique of divide and rule and by creating their pockets of influence tried to disrupt the unity of the country. The movement of 1857 was a feudal revolt against the foreign rulers but had failed because it was not sufficiently imbued with the sentiments of modern nationalism.

Nehru was an internationalist too. He was aware of the dangers of racial chauvinism. His aversion to narrow egoistic and expansionist nationalism had been great. Hence, during the latter part of the years of Indian freedom struggle, he associated the Indian National Congress with a generous international outlook. He recognized the emotional appeal of nationalism. The World Wars had revealed that when there would be a choice between nationalism and some international ideals, the proletariat would choose to embrace the nation. Hence Jawaharlal opined that for the lessening of world tensions and creating the foundations of international equilibrium there "must be some kind of fusion" between the concept of nationalism and the new ideals of internationalism.

Nehru had a deep sense of respect for India's heritage. He was visibly moved by its past glory and contemporary predicament. He passionately desired that the Indian people liberate themselves from the shackles of the past. At the same time, he urged them to recondition their mind, equipping themselves with the problems of the present and a perspective on the future. This, according to him, was possible only when the people tried to imbibe the highest ideals of the present age—humanism and scientific spirit. Despite an apparent conflict between the two, there was "a growing synthesis between humanism and scientific spirit, resulting in a kind of scientific humanism." What Nehru wrote in his *Discovery of India* probably revealed much of his mind. Here he stated. "The modern mind that is to say the better type of the modern mind, is practical and pragmatic, ethical and social, altruistic and humanitarian. Its is governed by a practical idealism for social betterment ... Humanity is its god and social service its religion." His vision was based on the necessity of tolerance, the power of reason, the virtue of choices. His influence, like that of Gandhi, became part of the social consciousness of humanity, and he had still much to teach us on the various aspects of the promotion of world understanding.

The rediscovery of Nehru today is a testimony to what Hegel described as the "Cunning of history".

### 3.2 Nehru : a man of letters

In his writings and speeches Nehru tried to do with India what poets do with words. And, it is this love of India transfigured by the love of freedom which contributes to the aesthetic charm of his works. Nehru's contribution to literature is not divorced from his political activities. It is an expression of the whole man, his general outlook and personality. The style is the man himself and the medium which he had perfected with such cultivated sensibility is a

prose as sensitive as his own personality. Indeed, John Gunther observed that Nehru spoke and wrote English "in a style which hardly a dozen men alive can match". And Gandhiji, himself a master of English prose, complimented Nehru on his sensitive description of Khadi as the "livery of freedom".

Nehru's famous statement in the wake of his trial at the Gorakhpur prison on 3 November 1940 reflected his passion for liberty as well as his love of words. Nehru emphasised: "I am a lover of words and phrases and try to use them appropriately. Whatever opinions might be, the words I use are meant to express them intelligibly and in ordered sequence." No wonder C. F. Andrews remarked in a letter to Nehru that "the moment I had read through a prison window it was as clear as possible to me that this was easily intelligible in Europe."

In an address to the second inter-University Youth festival in New Delhi on 23 October 1955, Nehru gave an interesting account of the circumstances which inspired him to write his three major works. Nehru wrote his *Autobiography* in an attempt to fix himself in the context of the Indian struggle, although the book was more about the struggle in India than about himself. With his usual candour, Nehru stated that he "was naturally a kind of central figure" from his point of view "as everybody is from his point of view!" Subsequently, Nehru wrote his *Glimpses of World History* since he needed a large canvas to view his country and his age in the spacious perspective of World history. Having acquired the large frame, he focused his vision on the panorama of Indian civilization and wrote *The Discovery of India*.

The discovery of India is neither history nor a romance. Nehru himself says he is no historian: "I came late to history and, even then, not through the usual direct road of learning a mass of facts and drawing conclusions and inferences from them, unrelated to my life's course." He lives, and loves to live, in the present, but he is aware that the roots of the present lie in the past. So he made 'voyages of discovery' into the past, ever seeking a clue in it to the understanding of the present. It is in that sense — as an urge to further thought and action — that his discovery has any relevance to us living in the present and building for the future. It is not a picture of the romanticised past of India. No one is so impatient as Nehru with the dead wood of the past that encumbers our lives. All that has served its purpose has to go, says the author. But he is quick to add that this does not mean a break with or forgetting of the vital experiences of the past. Indeed he is so anxious about retaining them that he says, "If India forgets them she will no longer remain India and much that has made her our joy and pride will cease to be."

But like most others who want to understand the past, Nehru must have found the prevailing mode of writing on India utterly unsatisfactory. Our history books abound in names, dates, events and dull catalogues of ruling dynasties, of battles lost and won, of the extent of empires, and so on. What they lack is the sense of history. Nehru, it may be truly said, has this sense of history, the past of India in his bones. And his book is an attempt — there has never been a more successful one — to discover the soul of India, her art, music, drama and poetry; her achievements in trade, industry, commerce, science, religion and philosophy; and to examine the causes of her greatness, the vitality and staying-power of her culture as well as the deterioration and decay which have crept into her body-politic in recent times.

Nehru is aware that he "would not be writing for today or tomorrow but for an unknown and possibly distant future." And of his powers to produce a work which neither his contemporaries nor posterity would willingly let die, what better testimony do we want than his own, which is amply confirmed by a careful reading of the book: "I suppose I have changed a good deal during these twelve years [since the *Autobiography* was written]. I have grown more contemplative. There is perhaps a little more poise and equilibrium, some sense of detachment, a greater calmness of spirit." The discovery of India is undoubtedly his masterpiece, being the product of his mature mind. It is at the same time more readable and makes a wider appeal to the general reader in the East as well as the West than any of his previous works. The *Autobiography*, for instance, is not exclusively biographical, and the charm of the narrative is to some extent marred by the number of controversial issues he raises in the course of the book. *Glimpses of World History* is, in the very nature of things — it was written for a girl of 13 — rather superficial and largely 'historical'. It is in the *Discovery of India* one really witnesses Nehru's versatility — all the gifts of all the messes so rarely fused in one solitary man — his judgement, his genius for interpretation, and his powers for reconstructing past history and making it live before us.

He travelled widely, read extensively, had thought and suffered heroically. Maybe, he had not always gone to original sources (it is here that the academic historian grumbles although he cannot prove where Nehru is not true to history), but as Mr. K M Munshi said, Nehru had given the impression of 'walking from Plutarch's pages'. Of Nehru, as of Shakespeare, it may be justly said that he knew more history by reading Plutarch than most of us by reading all the books in the British Museum.

It is really strange for a few historians to point out the absurdity of dividing Indian history into the widely accepted 'Hindu India', 'Moslem India', 'British India'. Nehru thinks it is just as wrong and misleading to talk of a Moslem invasion or a Moslem period in India as to talk of a Christian invasion or to call the British period the Christian period. Again, while most historians, philosophers, poets, intellectuals and intelligentsia of all countries alike echo the view that modern Europe and America are children of the Hellenic spirit, Nehru refuses to follow the line of least resistance. He argues boldly and convincingly that there is no 'organic connexion' between Hellenic civilization and modern European and American civilization. Actually, it is not modern Europe or America, but India that is far nearer, in spirit and outlook to old Greece.

In the same manner Nehru's interpretative genius leads him to examine the compelling force behind the great mathematical invention and discoveries of ancient India. He argues that they cannot be the "momentary illumination of an erratic genius, much in advance of his time, but that they answered some insistent demand of the times ... Society had grown complex and large numbers of people were engaged in governmental operations and in an extensive trade. It was impossible to carry on without simple methods of calculation." If this necessity had not been felt the invention or the discovery would not have come about, and if it had, it would have had to wait for the propitious moment before it could find expression and acceptance.

Although he says that, being an Indian, he is apt to be blind to India's shortcomings, he is not slow to recognise the fallacy inherent in an argument of Radhakrishnan that Indian

philosophy lost its vigour with the loss of political freedom. Nehru frankly asks : 'why should political freedom be lost unless some kind of decay has preceded it ?' Similarly, he attacks the popular tendency of throwing the blame for all our ills on the invaders — Moslem or British. Scholars thought and the rest liked to believe that Sanskrit drama declined after the ninth century owing to lack of royal patronage during the Indo-Afghan and Moghul periods and the Islamic disapproval of drama as an art form. Nehru sees little substance in such an argument. In the first place the decline was obvious long before. But more important, if this drama had any vitality left it could have continued its creative career in the South. Besides, except in regard to actual image-making, the Muslim rulers gave excellent encouragement to Indian music, art and painting. Here is the disinterestedness of a true literary critic ; there is no sentimentality, no prejudice.

The same scientific outlook and objectivity are evident when he refuses to consider the Hindu Scriptures as holy writ. He would like to 'analyse and criticise' them and consider them as having been written by human beings, very wise and far-seeing, and thus pay homage to the astonishing mind of man which conceived them so long ago. He says that Christian missionary work in India has not always been admirable or praiseworthy, but in the matter of giving shape to some undeveloped languages and in the collection of folklore he acknowledges their valuable service. Again, he bitterly resents British Imperialism but praises Britain for sending us the England of Shakespear and Milton, of political revolution and scientific progress, and still wishes Britain well. Throughout the book he is careful to distinguish the rulers — the bureaucrat, the imperialist and the racialist — from the populace of England, and fixes the responsibility in the proper place.

If he blames the rulers, he deploras no less the complacent attitude of his own countrymen in the eighth and ninth centuries as, for all their contacts with the Arabs, they learnt nothing from them but remained aloof wrapped in their own conceits and keeping as far as possible within their own shells. "This was unfortunate," says Nehru, "for the intellectual ferment of Baghdad and the Arab renaissance movement would have shaken up the Indian mind just when it was losing much of its creative vigour." This might well be a warning to Indians of the present age, especially to the so-called nationalists, to abandon their narrow exclusiveness and partake freely of the fruits of other peoples' efforts all the world over, for we are heirs to all that humanity has ever thought and said. Indeed, he shows in successive sections of the book, how India has been influenced by her contact with Greece, Arabia, Iran, China and Europe.

We get in *Discovery* some exquisite pen-portraits of personages whom Nehru is eminently qualified to write about. Consider the description of Buddha "seated on the lotus flower, calm and impassive, above passion and desire, beyond the storm and strife of this world, so far away he seems, out of reach, unattainable ... His eyes are closed, but some power of the spirit looks out of them and a vital energy fills the frame." We not merely feel his greatness, we see him also, as it were. For the author succeeds in portraying in words what others have done with stones and clay and paint. We feel we are face to face with the enlightened One.

How powerfully Nehru conveys the meaning of Gandhi's arrival on the Indian scene ! The description is an 'Ode to the West Wind' in prose. He compares him to a powerful current of fresh air, to a beam of light that pierces the darkness, to a whirlwind that upsets

many things, but most of all the working of men's minds. How could images other than nature's own be adequate to describe the miracle wrought by Gandhi ?

While Nehru shared the feelings of the rest of India in 'hoping for little from England' under Churchill's leadership, he knows the portrait would be incomplete and that he himself would be uncharitable if he did not perceive the less known but very important aspect of Churchill's personality, and articulate it. He says : "and yet he was a big man who could take a big step." Thus Nehru's sense of justice and desire to portray the complete man seldom desert him. Similar pictures of Chanakya, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Shankara, Ramanujam and Tagore and a host of others fill the pageant. The land of our forefathers houses the men and women who lived and loved, fought and wept, suffered and sacrificed in the service of our common Mother.

Besides pen-pictures he traces the origin of several popular but little-understood names and practices. The word for an 'image' in Persian and Hindustani is but, derived from Buddha. For image-worship came to India from ancient Greece via Afghanistan where they made statues of Bodhisattvas followed by images of Buddha himself. It could not be earlier, observes Nehru, for the Vedic religion as well as Buddhism were opposed to it.

He is equally learned when it comes to tracing the history of 'purdah', and 'suttee' or clarifying mistaken notions about 'Yoga'. His extensive reading and wide experience stand him in good stead in drawing lessons from history. He does not treat the decay of Indian civilization as an isolated or inscrutable event which demands unquestioning acceptance, but tries to look for parallels elsewhere and to investigate causes common to the decay of civilizations. Doubtless the effort is rewarding. Why did Rome fall to the invader ? Long before this disaster, Rome had been on the verge of collapse from its own internal weakness. Similarly in India life became cut up into compartments where each man's job was fixed and permanent and had little concern with others.

While we commonly throw the blame for the ills of our modern society on industrialism, Nehru perceives the underlying cause and wants to root out the cause, not the symptom. He thinks that there has been a divorce from the soil, the good earth, which is bad for the individual and for the race. Is it surprising, he asks, that Nature treats men as "unwanted step-children" ? He advises us to keep in constant communion with Nature.

One of the chief values of *Discovery* consists in its attempt to give us as objective an account of the Indian National Movement as was possible by one who took so intimate a part in it and who guided the movement to its goal.

It is not mere lip service that he pays to the suffering masses. He is evidently moved to pity, yet there is no condescension, no messianic complex about him when he speaks of their lot : "There are innumerable pictures of the mass — Indian men and women and children all crowded together, looking up at me trying to fathom what lies behind those thousands of eyes.

He speaks of the death of his wife in the tenderest of terms : 'Within a few minutes that fair body and that lovely face, which used to smile so often and so well, were reduced to ashes.' In the hands of an inferior artist this might have degenerated into shoddy sentimentality,

but in Nehru's hands, as in Goldsmith's, 'melting sentiment is held in check by the precision of language'. How effectively does he contrast life's irrepressible energy, freedom and vitality with the nothingness that death reduces life to: "A small urn contained the mortal remains of one who had been so vital, so bright and so full of life." The wistfulness and pathos of the situation make for words that are Biblical in their simplicity.

If, as Ezra Pound says, in poetry it is not metre that matters but the musical phrase is everything, the following sentence is unquestionably poetic: "A vigorous Jat, wedded to the soil from immemorial generations." Not merely is it musical, but it is highly suggestive. It suggests rustic vitality, the peasant's inflexible devotion to mother Earth, an unbroken continuity through the ages, a sense of far away and long ago.

When Nehru says: "The centuries-old ideas continued, phantoms floating about the upper layer of their consciousness and fading away into the landscape they had fashioned for themselves", the airiness and the unsubstantial nature of these ideas could hardly have found a more befitting expression.

From this dry sarcasm to open indignation, there is but a short step which he chastises his countrymen for wrapping themselves up in their own conceits without profiting from the intellectual ferment of Baghdad and the Arab renaissance movement.

He can summarize a mass of information in a clear, concise style which is none the less vivid and arresting. He surveys events with a vision and perspective of which few modern historians are capable, and expresses them with inimitable simplicity. "England came to India, when Queen Elizabeth gave a charter to the East India Company in 1600, Shakespeare was alive and writing. In 1611 the authorized English edition of the Bible was issued; in 1608 Milton was born. There followed Hampden and Cromwell and the political revolution. In 1660 the Royal Society of England, which was to advance the cause of science so much, was organized. A hundred years later, in 1760, the flying shuttle was invented, and there followed in quick succession the spinning jerry, the steam-engine and the power loom. Which of these two Englands came to India?"

But he is not a cold-headed and only rational intellectual. He has a delicate feeling for nature, which is far from mere aestheticism. To Nehru Nature's varied moods are symbolic of the changes that man witnesses in the human world. Indeed, he seems to think that the same law is operating in both Nature and man: "The moon is a reminder of the loveliness of this world, of the waxing and waning of life, of light following darkness, of death and resurrection, following each other in interminable succession."

Joy and sorrow constitute the pattern of life in Nature as well as in man. This is what the ancient scriptures taught us. In his attitude to life, in his fearlessness, noble pride, love of adventure physical, mental and spiritual – in the ideal of service above self and love of humanity, Nehru seems to be the authentic symbol of the dynamic life of ancient India.

What strikes one throughout the *Discovery of India* is the complete absence of prejudices and mystical beliefs on the part of its author. He bears the stamp of total intellectual

integrity. In Gandhi we can often see the wisdom of the deed but we may not see the logic of his thought. Not so with Nehru. His weapons are logic and common sense. As M N Ray once explained, Nehru gives "his most impulsive actions a rational background". Indeed Jawaharlal the patriot, the mass leader, does not interest the intellectuals of Europe and America very much. What interests them is the Nehru who has so vigorously defended his convictions and faith (as in the *Autobiography*), humanist, and the architect of the world of tomorrow (as in *Glimpses of World History*), the patriot who has revindicated the glory of this great land and its ancient culture, not in blind veneration but in a spirit of detachment that appeals to the western world. By so doing he has rendered a signal service to India and to the world. Radhakrishnan's exposition of Indian philosophy and religion may be read by the philosophers of the West ; Ananda Coomaraswamy's interpretation of Indian art may be read by students of art in America; and there may be diverse writings of political thinkers, historians, and pamphleteers which are read and admired by the interested everywhere. But none of them have given a panorama of India's past with such scientific objectivity (Nehru says he looked at India as a friendly foreigner does), and with a literary charm that appeals to the general reader no less than to the scholar; none have analysed the causes of our decay and deterioration with such candour ; or written about the staying power of that old culture as manifested in our fight for independence — the ideals that guided us and the light that stood by us continually. His language is modern but his spirit is "Turned to perennial humanity."

Humayun Kabir rightly remarked that "it is the the evidence of the strength of his nature as an artist that continuous political life for over two decades has not blunted his finer perceptions. The artist triumphs over the politician. That explains why he is perhaps the most loved of all Indian politicians." Even his occasional statements show a love of the arts and a sense of rhythm. How freely he excels in his taste for poetic quotation, literary allusion, and the like! He would be a poor reader indeed, who fails to discover them in his writing. The chapter headings of the book, give a convincing clue to his poetic being : 'The Panorama of India's Past', 'Bharat Mata' 'The Chain of Happening'. Basil Mathews wonders whether some day Nehru's niche in the world's temple of immortality will be carved by his pen rather than by his statercraft. For although he speaks of India essentially, he lifts every subject into the world perspective. John Gunther, a journalist of world renown, thinks that Nehru 'speaks and writes English in a style which hardly a dozen men alive can match.'

It is, of course, foolish to argue on these accounts that a great writer is lost to literature by Nehru's devotion to politics. Nehru himself says that he is intensely interested in the adventures of the mind as they influence human action and promote human happiness. And it is largely because of his interest in both ideas and action that we have not only a great statesman but a distinguished man of letters.

Numerous collections of Nehru's speeches, essays, press statements, letters etc. have been published from time to time. These include *Recent Essays and Writings : On the Future of India, Communalism and other subjects* (1934); *India and the World* (1936); *Eighteen Months in India* (1936); *The Unity of India : Collected Writings 1937-1940* (1941); *Before and After Independence (Collected-Speeches : (1922-1950)* (1950) ; *A Bunch of*



*Old Letters (1958)* and *Independence and After (collected speeches : 1946-1964)* Vols. I-V (1949-1965). Eleven volumes of the selected works (1970) edited by S. Gopal have appeared so far.

Nehru's prose is a just reflection of the man, sincere and idealistic, urbane and cultured, vigorous yet graceful endowed with a clear and sharp mind, strong emotions, a feeling for beauty and a keen comic sense. His style is totally free from the periodic ponderousness of many of the nineteenth century Indians.

His prose steers clear of their heavy latinized diction, their deliberately balanced and complex sentence-structure and their magniloquence. His diction is, by and large, simple but he has a right sense for the apt word and the incisive phrase which gives his writing a remarkable poignance of expression : If the peculiar circumstances of the age of Indian nationalism had not drawn Nehru into the vortex of Indian politics, he could have led a Horatian pattern of living in an Indian setting rejoicing in books, climbing glaciers and enjoying the beauty of Kashmir in the select company of a few friends. While Nehru revealed his gifts of wide-ranging scholarship and scientific methods of reasoning in his historical and political writings, it is clear that Nehru's delicate perception is reflected in his writings.

The dream-like beauty of Kashmir was a perennial source of creative insights and inspired Nehru to write his finest prose. Indeed his lyrical description of Kashmir is like a piece of poetry. "Like some supremely beautiful woman, whose beauty is almost impersonal and above human desire, such was Kashmir in all its feminine beauty of river and valley, lake and graceful trees. And then another aspect of this magical beauty would come to view, a masculine one, of hard mountains and precipices, and snow-capped peaks, glaciers, and cruel and fierce torrents rushing down to the valleys below. It had a hundred faces and innumerable aspects, everchanging, sometimes smiling, sometimes sad and full of sorrow ..."

This aesthetic repose reminds us of Nehru's description of the clouds, which is one of the most delightful passages in his *Autobiography*. There is an elusive wistfulness which is evocative of Kalidasa's long poem *Meghadoota*. For Nehru languishing in the jail of Almora and gazing at the vast expanse of the blue sky dotted with clouds evokes memories of banished "Yaksha" in the solitude of mount Ramagiri waiting to commune with the cloud ! "Wonderful shapes these clouds assumed, and I never grew tired of watching them. I fancied I saw them take the shape of all manner of animals and sometimes they would join together and look like a mighty ocean. Or they would be like a beach and the nestling of the breeze through the deodars would sound like the coming in of the tide on a distant sea-front. Sometimes a cloud would advance boldly on us, seemingly solid and compact, and then dissolve in mist as it came near and finally enveloped us".

Nehru's approach to the Buddha was essentially an aesthetic one, although he did not neglect the deeper aspects of Buddhism. And in a moving passage he explains the nature of his response to the Buddha image : "The conception of the Buddha to which innumerable loving hands have given shape in stone and marble and bronze, seems to symbolize the whole spirit of Indian thought, or at least one vital aspect of it. Seated on the lotus flower, calm and impassive, above passion and desire, beyond the storm and strife of this world ....".

During his last days, Nehru was greatly attracted by these tantalising lines of Robert Frost : "The woods are lovely, dark and deep/But I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep/And miles to go before I sleep." It is difficult to conceive of a more sensitive tribute as a poetic epitaph for Nehru himself, for he was a lover of the beautiful flowers and trees, clouds and the soft blue sky and the beauty of mountains, rivers, children and the creations of art, science and literature. Indeed it is this perception of aesthetic values which inspired Nehru to harmonize modern Indian's twin phases of tradition and modernity into a creative process of sustained achievement.

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### 3.3 Nehru : a connoisseur of the arts

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Jawaharlal Nehru is well known the world over as a great humanist, socialist and statesman. It is not so well known that he was also a great connoisseur of arts. Had he not jumped into the fire of freedom struggle but would have pursued art and literature, he might have left a more indelible imprint on mankind. He was well conversant with all that is best in the heritage of Indian art. He was equally at home with the outstanding examples of artistic creations in other parts of the world. To him art was not only confined to plastic arts and paintings ; he viewed art in a wider perspective which included dancing, drama, music, film and literature.

While fighting for the freedom of his country, whenever he got spare time in the British Jails he devoted himself to the service of the muse. He gave us books like *Letters of a Father to a Daughter*, *Glimpses of World History* and *Discovery of India*. These alone entitle him to an abiding place among the litterateurs of this country. After independence, he utilised his position and power in promoting science and arts. He established a chain of science laboratories throughout the country and promoted art institutions and artists.

Nehru set up the academia of arts, music and literature, and took keen interest in their activities. He initiated the practice of inviting folk dancers from all corners of the country and gave them the honour of participating in the Republic Day parade. He made it a point to visit the Talkatora Gardens where the artists stayed and spent some time with them in a relaxed environment. Whenever he went abroad, he tried his best to snatch a little time to meet the literary figures and artists, and witness their performance or see their works. Among Indian artists he specially liked the paintings of Satish Gujral, M. F. Hussain and K. S. Kulkarni. Whenever he went to Kulu he stayed with Nicholas Roerich and highly appreciated his paintings of the Himalayas in various moods. A number of artistes and poets were his personal friends and he helped quite a few in their local circumstances.

In *Discovery of India* he devotes a good portion to Indian art. "The amazing expansion of Indian culture and art," he observes, "has led to some of the finest expressions of this art being found outside India. Unfortunately, many of our old monuments and sculptures have been destroyed in the course of ages." In support of his views about the impact of Indian art on neighbouring countries, he quotes several authorities. For example, Sir John Marshall says : "To know Indian art in India alone is to know but half its story. To apprehend it to the full, we must follow it in the wake of Buddhism, to Central Asia, China and Japan ; we must watch it

assuming new forms and breaking into new beauties as it spreads over Tibet and Burma and Siam; we must gaze in awe at the unexampled grandeur of its creations in Cambodia and Java. In each of these countries, Indian art encounters a different racial genius, a different local environment, and under their modifying influence it takes on a different garb."

According to Nehru, "Indian art is so intimately associated with Indian religion and philosophy that it is difficult to appreciate it fully unless one has some knowledge of the ideals that governed the Indian mind. In art as in music," he continues, "there is a gulf which separates eastern from western conceptions. Probably the great artists and builders of the Middle Ages in Europe would have felt more in tune with Indian art and sculpture than modern European artists who derive part of their inspiration at least from the Renaissance period and after." He hits the nail on the head when he adds: "For in Indian art there is always a religious urge, a looking beyond, such as probably inspired the builders of the great cathedrals of Europe. Beauty is conceived as subjective, not objective; it is a thing of the spirit, though it may take lovely shape in form or matter ..."

Nehru was deeply interested in Indian art and culture and could bring out its underlying ideals with great understanding and intensity. To trace the inspiration of Indian art we may perhaps have to go back to the very dawn of Indian civilization when that wonderful intuition flashed across the mind of Indian people that the soul of man, and that of Nature, is one with the Universal soul. Ever since it has been their constant endeavour to convey that idea in word, wood, in colour and stone, in brass and bronze. Indian art, therefore, as pointed out by Nehru, is first religious than anything else. With this as an ideal, the Indian artist developed an attitude akin to that of a philosopher or a devotee. He looked at the world of seeming reality as *maya*, an illusion. Even when he carved or painted some form or figure, he always tried to convey the underlying idea, the ultimate truth.

E B Havell beautifully puts across this idea when he observes, "The true aim of the artist is not to extract beauty from Nature but to reveal life within life, the noumenon within phenomenon, the reality within matter. When that is revealed, beauty reveals itself." And beauty is that which pulsates with passion, which exudes a flavour, a fragrance, called in Indian aesthetics as *rasa*. *Arasa* may be defined as the controlled and rhythmic expression of emotion. These *rasas*, nine in number, cover the entire area of human emotions, ranging from love, (*sringara*) to disgust (*vibhatsa*) and compassion (*karuna*) to terrible (*raudra*). For an Indian, *Mother Kali* with protruding tongue and wearing a garland of skulls is as beautiful — called by some ignorant western art critics as "grotesque" — as *Kamadeva*, the god of love, a most charming youth, riding a peacock and ready to shoot his arrow of love. *Siva Nataraja* is beautiful about whom Epstein says: "Siva dances, creating the world and destroying it, his large rhythms conjure up vast aeons of time, and his movements have a relentless magical power incantation." The Buddha bathed in spiritual ecstasy is also beautiful about whom Havell says: "It is a face which incarnates the stillness of the depth of the ocean; the serenity of an azure cloudless sky; a beauty beyond moral ken."

To create awareness about the intrinsic beauty of Indian art, as the first Prime Minister of India, Nehru gave top priority to organising a comprehensive exhibition, '5000 Years of Indian Art', soon after India attained independence. The exhibition displaying the best specimen of Indian art ranging from the artefacts of Indus Valley Civilization to the modern times, was

arranged in nine main galleries and over two dozen sections in the sprawling ornate rooms of Rastrapati Bhawan — then the Governor General House — and the spacious front courtyard. No less a person than the first — and the last — Indian Governor General C. Rajagopalachari, opened the grand exhibition in November 1948. Such an elaborate exhibition of Indian art had not been held before. At the exhibition he enjoyed looking at every piece without concealing his sense of pride in the heritage bequeathed to us. So, besides being a humanist, a socialist, and a statesman, Nehru was also every inch an artist.

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### 3.4 Questions

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1. *The Discovery of India* is not merely a presentation of the past glory of India, it is a work of art. Do you agree? Give your reasons.
2. Examine Nehru as a writer.
3. Critically examine the imaginative and poetic aspects of the *Discovery of India*.
4. Discuss the political views of Nehru.
5. Examine Nehru as a nationalist and internationalist as revealed in the *Discovery of India*.

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### 3.5 Recommended Readings

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1. Michael Brecher : *Nehru - A Political Bibliography* : Oxford Univ. Press.
2. J S. Sharma : *A Descriptive Bibliography of Nehru* : S Chand & Co., Delhi.
3. Rafiq Zakaria (ed.) : *A Study of Nehru* : Times of India Publications, Bombay
4. Frank Moraes : *Jawaharlal Nehru* : Tol Press, Bombay
5. Sachchidananda Sinha : *A Short Life-Sketch of Jawaharlal Nehru* ; Patna law Press.

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## Unit 1 □ Untouchable : Mulk Raj Anand

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### Structure :

- 1.0 Objective
- 1.1 Introduction/Background
- 1.2 Brief notes on Author & Text
- 1.3 Critical Analysis of the Text
  - 1.3.1 Story Line
  - 1.3.2 Characters
- 1.4 Structure and Meaning
  - 1.4.1 Narrative Technique
- 1.5 Language/Style
- 1.6 Sunrising up
- 1.7 Questions
- 1.8 Text/Selected Reading List

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### 1.0 □ Objective

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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.

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### 1.1 □ Introduction/Background

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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.

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## 1.2 □ Brief Notes on Author & Text

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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.

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## 1.3 □ Critical Analysis of the text

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### 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 by holding him up and the boy's mother accuses him of polluting the little boy who belongs 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.

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### 1.3.2 □ Characters

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#### 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 latrines 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 end 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 after 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 else, 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 extent 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 fattered 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 gathered 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 satirises 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 enamoured 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 38<sup>th</sup> 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.

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#### 1.4 □ Structure & Meaning

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*Untouchable* is an impassioned plea for a social cause. 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.

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#### 1.4.1 □ Narrative Technique

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The stream of consciousness of the hero Bakha in *Untouchable* runs throughout the novel with the undercurrents of reminiscence reverie and intuition 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.

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#### 1.5 □ Language/Style

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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 about 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 anguish 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.

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## 1.6 □ Let us sun up

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*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 Bakha's 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.

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## 1.7 □ Questions

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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 21<sup>st</sup> century readers? Discuss.
7. Write a note on Gandhi's influence on *Untouchable*.
8. Examine the structure of the novel *Untouchable*.

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## 1.8 □ Text/Selected Reading list

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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

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## Unit 2 □ The Guide : R. K. Narayan

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### Structure :

- 2.0 Objective
- 2.1 Introduction/Background
- 2.2 Brief notes on Author & Text
- 2.3 Critical Analysis of the text
  - 2.3.1 Storyline
  - 2.3.2 Characters
- 2.4 Structure meaning and narrative devices
  - 2.4.1 Language/Style
- 2.5 Sunrising up
- 2.6 Questions
- 2.7 Selected Reading List

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### 2.0 □ Objective

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

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### 2.1 □ Introduction / Background

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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-adaptation. He has remained a writer—a man of letters, pure and simple.

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## 2.2 □ Brief Notes on Author/Text

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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 cannot 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.

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## 2.3 □ Critical Analysis of the Text

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### 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?

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### 2.3.2 □ Characters

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#### 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.

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## 2.4 □ Structure Meaning and narrative devices

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*The Guide* centres on the experiences of Raju, the protagonist of the novel. The author tells 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.

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### 2.4.1 □ Language/Style

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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 mastery 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.

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## 2.5 □ Let us sun up

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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 appreciate 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 based on the life of the simple and unsophisticated villagers.

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## 2.6 □ Questions

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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.

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## Unit 3 □ Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

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### Structure :

- 3.1. Life of Raja Rao and the history of the Indian English Novel
- 3.2. Occasion for *Kanthapura*
- 3.3. Plot Structure of *Kanthapura*
- 3.4. The Theme of Village
- 3.5. Myth and Reality in *Kanthapura*
- 3.6. *Kanthapura* as "Gandhipuran"
- 3.7. The Language of *Kanthapura*
- 3.8. Questions for Examination
- 3.9. Conclusion and Bibliography

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

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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 of Mahatma 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.

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### 3.2 □ Occasion for *Kanthapura*

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*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.

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### 3.3 □ Plot Structure of *Kanthapura*

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*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."

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### 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 through the apprehensions of Bhatta when he first sees the young widow Ratna, the daughter of Rangamma's sister:

Then Rangamma's sister Kamamma 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.

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### 3.5 □ Myth and Reality in *Kanthapura*

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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*:

Kenamma 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. Kenamma 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 Kenamma 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 long 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*, 1-18).

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 12, *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.

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### 3.6 □ Kanthapura as *Gandhipurana*

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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 Gandhian 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 IV, 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 applear 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 Coffee 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 [...] (*Kanthapura* 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.S.R. 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.

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### 3.7 □ The Language of *Kanthapura*

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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 alienness, 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 banyan 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 Narsamma'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.

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### 3.8 □ Questions for Examination

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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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### 3.9 □ A Short Bibliography

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## Unit 4 □ Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day

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### Structure :

- 4.1. Objective
- 4.2. Author
- 4.3. Clear Light of Day
- 4.4. Critical Analysis
- 4.5. Childhood
- 4.6. Characterisation
- 4.7. Raja
- 4.8. Tara
- 4.9. Mira Masi
- 4.10. Baba
- 4.11. Language and Style
- 4.12. Notes
- 4.13. Questions :
- 4.14. Recommended Reading

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### 4.1. □ Objective

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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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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#### 4.2. □ Author

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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 Delhi University. References to English authors and texts are frequent in Desai's novels, providing a rich vein of intertextuality, 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).

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#### 4.3. □ Clear Light of Day

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*Clear Light of Day* published in 1980 marks a point of consummation in Desai's narrative oeuvre, 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.



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#### 4.4. □ Critical Analysis

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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"(111). 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."<sup>2</sup> 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).

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#### 4.5. □ Childhood

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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 and 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 father'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:

I 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 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, married 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.

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#### 4.6. □ Characterisation

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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,"<sup>4</sup>

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 of Aurangzeb*, 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 her 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 phenomenal 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).

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#### 4.7. □ Raja

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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, he would 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 and 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.

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#### 4.8. □ Tara

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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 control so angry, and unhappy and upset.(158)

Although, it is uncertain whether Tara eventually succeeds in convincing Bim to seek a rapprochement 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.

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#### 4.9. □ Mira Masi

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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. The 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." (110) They "owned" (111) her and she "owned" (111) them although she never "commanded nor chastised and was almost never obeyed" (111), 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.

Psychological 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.

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#### 4.10. □ Baba

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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*.

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#### 4.11. □ Language and Style

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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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.

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#### 4.12. □ Notes

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1. Homi k. Bhabha *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994. 171-175.
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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.

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#### 4.13. □ Questions :

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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.

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#### 4.14. □ Recommended Reading

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##### Primary Source

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## Unit 1 □ Henry Louis Vivian Derozio

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### Structure :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction : The Poet
- 1.3 Critical Analysis of Texts : Sonnets
  - A. To The Pupils of The Hindu College
  - B. The Harp of India
  - C. Chorus of Brahmins
- 1.4 Literary Labels
- 1.5 Postcolonial : Basic Concepts
- 1.6 Questions
- 1.7 References

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### 1.1 □ Objectives

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From study of this unit you will be able to understand Derozio the Man, his contribution to English poetry written in India and the context from which such works arose.

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### 1.2 □ Introduction : The Poet

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Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) is acknowledged as the first Indo-Anglian poet. His father, was Indo-Portuguese and mother English. Though a Eurasian, Derozio identified himself completely with India. He was educated at Dr. Drummond's Academy. This dour Scotsman instilled in Derozio a love for literature and free thought. At fourteen he joined his father's mercantile firm as clerk and then his uncle's indigo plantation at Bhagalpur. His early verses were noticed by Dr. John Grant editor of India Gazetttaye which he later joined as Assistant Editor. Derozio's reputation as poet and scholar earned him the position of Assistant Master at Hindu College (later Presidency College) when barely eighteen. This dynamic young man went beyond teaching English literature. He made his students think for themselves, ask questions and not shrink from the right answers. Among his students were Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Krishnamohan Banerjee, Radhanath Sikdar,

Ramtanu Lahiri, Pearychand Mitra, all of whom later made important contributions to the cultural life of India. The young minds were deeply influenced by Derozio's personal charm, intellectual brilliance, liberal ideas and zeal for social reform. This influence went into the making of the first generation of what later came to be called the Bengal Renaissance.

Derozio's ideas questioned centuries-old customs and superstitions; Hindu orthodox forces attacked Derozio. Forced to leave Hindu College, Derozio drifted briefly back to journalism. He passed away in his twenty-third year.

"The marvellous boy who perished in his prime" had a brief poetic career from 1825 to 1831. He published two volumes of poetry : *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera : A Metrical tale and other Poems'* (1828). He attempted several poetic forms like narrative verses, ballads, lyrics and sonnets. Unsurprisingly his poems echo the English romantic poets in theme and imagery. Special influences were Scott, Moore, Byron and Shelley. Oaten compared him to Keats for "in both men there was a passionate temperament combined with unbounded sympathy with Nature. Both died when their powers were not yet fully developed," Derozio visualized a human condition when

Man to man the world o'er  
Shall brothers be and a that,

From his beloved motherland he desired only "one kind wish from the"

[*'To India My Native Land'*]

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### 1.3 □ Critical Analysis of Texts : Sonnets

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#### To the Pupils of the Hindu College

Expanding like the petals young flowers  
I watch the gentle opening of your minds,  
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds  
Your intellectual energies and powers  
That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)  
Their wings to try their strength O how the winds  
Of circumstances and freshening April showers

Of early knowledge and unnumbered kinds  
Of new perceptions shed their influence,  
And how you worship truth's omnipotence'  
What joyance rains upon me when I see  
Fame in the mirror of futurity,  
Weaving the the chaplets you have yet to gain,  
An then I feel I have not lived in vain.

2

### **The Harp of India**

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

3

### **Chorus of Brahmins**

Scatter, scatter flowerets round,  
Let the tinkling cymbal sound;  
Strew the scented orient spice,  
Prelude to the sacrifice;  
Bring the balm, and bring the myrrh,  
Sweet as is the breath of her  
Who upon the funeral pyre

Shall, ere Surya sets, expire.  
Let pure incense to the skies  
Like the heart's warm wishes rise,  
Till, unto the lotus throne  
Of the great Eternal One  
High ascending, it may please  
Him who guides our destinies.  
Bring the pearl of purest white,  
Bring the diamond frashing light;  
Bring your gifts of choicest things,  
Fans of peacocks, starry wings'  
Gold refined, and ivory,  
Branches of the sandal tree,  
Which their fragrance still impart  
Like the good man's injured heart,  
This its triumph, this its boast,  
Sweetest 'tis when wounded most!  
Ere he sets, the golden sun  
Must with richest gift be won,  
Ere his glorious brow he lave  
In you sacred yellow wave,  
Rising through the realms of air  
He must hear the window's prayer—  
Haste ye, haste, the day declines  
Onward, onward while he shines,  
Let us press, and all shall see  
Glory of our Deity.

(The Fakeer of Jungheer')

Derozio can be said to have introduced the sonnet to India. Modelled on Romantic sonnets in theme and diction, the two prescribed in the course display some originality in attitude.

**A. 'To the Pupils of Hindu College' :**

The title clearly indicates the sonnet's theme and the group addressed. Derozio the teacher steps back and observes the growth of his student's minds. Watching the

gradual maturing of young minds — shaped by heightened perception, pursuit of knowledge and truth — gives joy and true meaning to his life. Behind warm benedictory tone and affectionate voice one notes qualities he considers essential to education. Observation and understanding ("perceptions"), 'knowledge' outside and beyond books, a clear-eyed engagement with "truth" and reality ("circumstance") are listed as core elements. One recalls a precept this radical teacher enjoined upon his pupils.

"He who will not reason is a bigot, he who cannot reason is a fool, and he who does not reason is a slave."

The sonnet has an odd rhyme scheme with both Petrarchian and Shakespearean elements, though the thought develops without a break. The full stop in line 6 is simply a pause for breath.

The similes drawn from nature "unfolding petals", stretching wings", "loosening spell" lend an almost organic quality to unfurling minds. "April showers", "joyance", "freshening" bring Shellyian echoes and the personal pronouns clearly Romantic. The diction is not conventionally poetic. "Intellectual", "circumstance", "perception" and that unexpected rhyme "futuraity" are hardly mellifluous. How do you see them? Is it stilted language of the inept or a early glimpse of modernism and individuality? The felicity of phrase, the genuine feeling of the poem and the beauty of the last line are unmistakable.

## B. The Harp of India

The 'harp' here represents all literature especially poetry. The sonnet is an address to the harp. Derozio grieves at the lost glory that was India and desires to reclaim it. Patriotism is blended with Byronic melancholy. The harp is essentially an image from Classical Greece but the Romantics also use it as an icon of bardic Song. Strains of Romantic poems are evident. Moore's *The Harp of Erin*, Shelley's *Ozymandias*, & Coleridge's *Eolian Harp* are intangibly present. The interrogative first line is remarkably dramatic. Do observe the innovative rhyme scheme where only four rhymes are intricately woven (abba, bab, cdcd, cbb) and the idea runs straight through in a lively, sensitive text. Unmistakable authenticity of patriotic utterance is in every line and in the phrase "my country".

### C. Chorus of Brahmins

The title poem of Derozio's second published volume is 'The Fakeer of Jungheera'. It is a sustained narrative of star-crossed love set against the picturesque Bhagalpur region. He had absorbed the sights, sounds, fragrances of the location during the lonely day spent on his uncle's indigo plantation, He wrote :

"It struck me as a place where achievements in love and war might well take place and the double character I had heard of the Fakeer together with some acquaintance with the scenery induced me to form a tale upon both these circumstances."

Nuleeni, a Brahmin widow is rescued from rescued from the 'sati' pyre by the bandit Fakeer, previously her suitor. Caste differences had forbidden that union. The idyll of the reunited lovers is short-lived as Nuleeni's relatives are determined to reclaim her. In the ensuing battle the outlaw chief is killed and the heart-broken Nuleeni expires in grief.

This fast moving tale has 52 sections where Derozio skilfully employs different metres to suit the changing tone and temper of the narrative. He uses the iambic four-foot couplet for straight-forward narration, but adopts a slower line for descriptive passages, anapaests for the battle, while the choruses of the chanting priests and the women round Nuleeni's funeral pyre are in trochaic and dactylic measures.

'Chorus of Brahmins' is a lyrical excerpt from the long poem. Here we do not find the poet's love of liberty or his attack on the caste system or the practice of 'Sati' and suppression of women. In the sensuous piling on of 'beauties' (reminiscent of *Eve of St. Agnes* by Keats) is the climax of a religious ritual, the activity before the Sacrifice. The Sun God is to be propitiated with "choicest" gifts, the ultimate of these being "the widow's prayer". Nuleeni's breath is "sweet"; she is listed among other "rich" offerings to Surya. Ironically the Eternal One is offered death not life and scent, spices, myrrh, sandalwood will embalm only ashes. The critique of cruelty in the name of religion is obvious. Trochaic tetrameter lines vividly reflect the frenetic pace of the preparations. The exotic East breathes in the list of items for the ritual and in the lyrical sweep we tend to overlook the ambiguity of "...it may please/Him who guides our destinies." Derozio bears deeper reading. Taken in isolation, the lyric may be wrongly seen as the defence of a barbaric practice. But the narrative, as already noticed, describes Nuleeni's escape from 'ATI'.



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## 1.4 □ Literary Labels

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By the last quarter of the nineteenth century English hegemony over India was well established. English education was formally introduced when Warren Hastings set up the Calcutta Madrasa in 1871 though private schools imparting education in English existed long before. Vigorous western ideas percolated into conservative, almost stagnant Indian society and a new awakening spread through the elite class especially in Bengal. Macaulay's famous 'Minutes' ensured a good crop of "English Scholars" well versed in European literature. This educated upper class wrote in English to dialogue with authority and also express their own ideas.

It is this body of writings in English language that critics have sought to label. It is distinct from British writing "...in thought, feeling, emotion and experience" while remaining greatly influenced (at least in the early stages) by writing in England. It is both Indian literature and a variation of English literature. E. F. Oaten called it *Anglo-Indian Literature* but included the writings of Englishmen in India on Indian themes. Since Anglo-Indian also refers to a particular community, the label was inappropriate. P. Sheshadri, and G. Sampson did include both Indian writers in English and English writers on Indian subjects. Sampson refused to consider pre-independence writing as Indian. Indo-Anglian is an artificial term but has caught on in literary circles. It has the advantage that it describes the theme correctly but also can be used as adjective and as substantive. It however excludes translations from regional languages into English. Such works are often categorised as Indo-English, Direct, Spontaneous, creative writing alone is Indo-Anglian. Writers in America, Canada, Australia for instance write in English but such works are not considered simply as English literature. The term *Indian Writing in English* is now popularly used to designate artistic self-expression in English where Indian creative writing contributes richly to the common pool of world writing in English.

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## 1.5 □ Postcolonial : Basic Concepts

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The term 'postcolonial' was previously used as 'post-independence' or 'after colonialism'. But now, the connotation offered by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire*

*Writes Back : Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* in generally accepted. They explain that their usage of the term covers "all the culture affected by the imperial process, from the moment of colonization to the present day, i.e. both pre-independence and post-independence. Thus, Indian writing in English as also the literature of African countries, Caribbean, Australian, Canadian etc. are all postcolonial literatures barring their distinctive regional characteristics. Nineteenth century colonial imperialism coincided with the acceptance of English literature (as opposed to classics) becoming a prestigious academic subject Gauri Viswanathan puts it succinctly :

"British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education."

Postcolonial discourse is the oppositionality of the native to the Empire at the cultural and linguistic levels. In culture, 'English' of the political-economic masters becomes the 'centre'—the privileged canon and the touchstone of taste and value. Initially the 'peripheral' or 'marginalized' 'imitates' the 'norm', immersing itself wholly in the imported constructs. Language becomes the tool of power through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order' 'reality' is established. Later on into your course you will see how language itself (together with content and perspective) subverts its privilege and hegemony. Standard English of the 'centre' is transformed into several distinctive varieties of English.

Derozio and his contemporaries used the language of the imperial rulers, retained its syntax and literary genres while foregrounding 'marginal' experience like rituals of 'sati'. Descriptions and images of the exotic East with its barbaric "otherness" is another aspect of this discourse. The Eurasian community of which Derozio was a member were in an unhappy position as they were rejected by the West and East alike and looked down upon by both, Consequently a sense of "alienation" coloured his sensibility. This perception of "otherness" by native writers is another postcolonial feature.

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## 1.6 □ Questions

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1. Can Derozio be called a romantic poet?
2. Write an essay on Derozio's craftsmanship from the two sonnets in your course.
3. What features of Derozio's poetry place him as an early nineteenth century poet?

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## 1.7 □ References

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1. Nair, K.R. Ramachandran. *Three Indo-Anglian Poets*.
2. Iyenger, K.R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*.
3. Ashcroft, Bill et. al. *The Empire Writes Back : Theory an Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London : Routledge, 1989.
4. Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory : Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London : Verso, 1992.

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## Unit 2 □ Sarojini Naidu

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### Structure :

- 2.1 Introduction : A critique on Sarojini Naidu, a poet of Colonial India.
- 2.2 Background and location of Sarojini Naidu : The in-between place.
- 2.3 Influence on Sarojini : Contradictory Criticisms
- 2.4 On Sarojini's Books of Poem—with reviews
- 2.5 Sarojini's Favourite Poets of The West
- 2.6 Conclusion : General
- 2.7 Assessment
- 2.8 Notes
- 2.9 Village Song : An Analysis
  - 2.9.1 Structure and Style
  - 2.9.2 Questions
  - 2.9.3 Notes
- 2.10 If You Call Me : An Analysis
  - 2.10.1 Structure and Style
  - 2.10.2 Questions
  - 2.10.3 Notes
- 2.11 Caprice : An Analysis
  - 2.11.1 Structure and Style
  - 2.11.2 Questions
  - 2.11.3 Notes
  - 2.11.4 References
  - 2.11.5 A Biographical Chronology

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### 2.1. □ Introduction : A critique on Sarojini Naidu, a poet of Colonial India.

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Sarojini Naidu, the "Nightingale of India", in many ways, like Toru Dutt belongs to the same phase in Indo-Anglian Writing. Sarojini's verse echoes the lyric forms of her contemporary *fin-de-siecle* British poets; the mood is lyrical, passionate and sentimental, as the heart compels, though the local colour is Indian. Sarojini's themes of poetry are almost similar to that of Toru. And yet, the techniques and the images Sarojini uses

are individual. If Toru Dutt, in the anxiety to present a pure, uncorrupted India transforms the Indian landscape morally into a western one, and her heroines into virtuous Victorians, Naidu composes a land and a people that fits into different, more exotic area in the western imagination. She feeds essentially feudal, Vedic and Islamic cultural formations into what was the structure of Victorian sentiment. And where women were concerned, these diverse patriarchal cultures were surprisingly accommodative and reinforcing of each other; where the object and the detail are Indian but the taste is western. The women she portrays are often not just conventional and subordinate, but appear "to endorse the patriarchy themselves in their words, images and attitudes... Sarojini's deliberate espousal of ephemerality and her cultivated anti-intellectualism aligns her to all those whose voices and words were lost, who were outside the purview of the high-brow, male-dominated notion of great art". (Paranjape, Makrand *Selected Poetry And Prose* 18). Certainly, there is something uniquely feminist in her aesthetics that needs to be further explored.

Naidu's poetry marks a transition. For what was to come with emergent nationalism<sup>1</sup> is a revivalism that has a new image of "Savitri" to project. It was the women, their commitment, their purity, their sacrifice who were to ensure the moral, even spiritual power of the nation and hold it together. But even as we point this out, we must not forget that this phase also prepared for a positive evaluation of femininity that did allow for a limited growth. Individual women, especially those who came from families that had risen economically and socially during the colonial regime, were able to develop, to move close to and sometimes even achieve leadership and power. However, the women who emerged from this phase often were vociferous about the traditional role of women, of the need to fulfil domestic demands and the requirements of femininity before moving on to 'serve the nation'. Again these women, Sarojini being one of them rarely admitted the real oppression of women in our society, for they believed the way out of it was open to any who had the strength and talent to try and of course the virtue to thrive. No doubt partially in response to the British focus on women, Sarojini as a part of the movement decided to create an image of the Indian woman who was not socially victimised, but voluntarily chose the path of suffering and death in order to save her people<sup>2</sup>. Indeed she became a heraldic device.

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## 2.2 □ Background and location of Sarojini Naidu : The in-between place.

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Naidu's poem as a whole paint the land of 'Romance and Mystery', the India of the common western imagination, with its colourful bangle sellers, graceful palanquin bearers and princely Rajput lovers. The definitive taste is British, although the subjects ostensibly are Indian. Significantly, the hub of Naidu's world is a cultured, refined upper class. What happens to women, or for that matter those who work: the weavers, the fishermen, the palanquin bearers within this world? To see them as they are is discomfiting, so they are transformed into a romance that will fit the requirements of European taste, but which at the same time absorbs both suffering and labour into the quietism of its lilting form. If she speaks of a life in 'purdah' as the perfect repose of protection: "... a revolving dream / Of languid and sequestered ease / Her girdles and her fillets gleam / Like changing fires on sunset seas..." (Naidu, Sarojini *The Sceptered Flute* 53), she sees the weavers as participating in the colourful, cyclic dance of life, the palanquin bearers' work as a joyful gesture; their burden weightless. "Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing / We bear her long like a pearl on a string" (*The Sceptered Flute* 3). Again in "Dirge" we find a romantic justification of tonsuring and stripping the young widow of her jewels. One can go on, but the point has been made. Naidu's burden is to project, to explain, to justify, just as much as to show around. That this makes for a distortion of the landscape and of those who inhabit it is evident. But it also makes for the peculiar formation of the Indian intellectual engaged in this relation. Not only must one remain servile to another order, one must erase, and will gradually grow to hate, all which cannot be moulded into that cultural form. This bears out the tortuous psycho-cultural situations for the Indians due to colonial presence; more so for those who came into contact with it.

Again, colonial presence in India gives rise to Indo-Anglian literature; a literary sub-culture that owes its existence to the British presence in India. One locates this point of origin, precisely because a principal burden of this literature can be regarded a working out of the urgencies that arise from the Indo-British encounter. If we regard culture in its living sense as the forms, institutions, the knowledge that arise as people come to terms with their environment, it is clear that over the past two hundred years or so, our culture has grown, and continues to grow against the stunting, even deforming background of European imperialism and colonialism. Existing social and economic

structures were crudely broken up and the political system undermined, first by the mercantile incursions of the Company and then by the imperial government. In the process, traditional institutions and values were divested of their vital functions in the society. Along with this came the developments in education and in religious attitudes that changed the cultural structure of that world. What we have come to recognise as Indo-Anglian literature, arises perhaps from the resulting pressures on the *bhadralok* and especially on those who were close to them.

As a result there was a great mingling of thought between Western and Eastern literary studies in the nineteenth century. Sanskrit was beginning to fascinate many European scholars. Then again, Indians did not stop at merely absorbing English and its rich literature. The developed West "revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation" (Sengupta 75). Bengalis were the first to pick up this impact. At the same time Indians began to criticise the new English culture. Sarojini Naidu, herself a product of the English speaking system of education, deplored that it sold generations of 'denationalised Indian youth' into a blind intellectual bondage to the West. But the immense advantages were not ignored. A new stream of literature, based on religious, secular, scientific and humanistic subjects now began to flow into India. A feeling of give and take between the West and the East created a new school of thinking<sup>3</sup>. Keshub Chander Sen was the leader of this group. Aghornath Chattopadhyay (father of Sarojini) too joined his school, after he returned from abroad and was replete with zest for reforms combined with patriotic fervour. Varada Sundari (mother of Sarojini, who composed Bengali lyrics when young) was also an inmate of the Sen family. Thus Sarojini was brought up in a tradition that was liberal and tolerant of all castes, creeds and races as her parents were associated with one of the most dynamic groups of awakening India. She was taught from earliest childhood to believe in the East-West comradeship.

In 1879 when Sarojini was born Indians were possessed with the dream of writing in English. But the background after her father had moved to Hyderabad was a mixture of Hindu, Islam and British culture. She adopted Western language and Western techniques to express herself; and here Persian poetry too had a considerable

influence on her. So it can be said that Sarojini was a child of Hindu-Muslim structure of Hyderabad with a strong background of Brahmo philosophy of tolerance and love towards humanity and English in her outlook. Truly, Karkala remarked: "Indo-English literature demonstrates the Indian philosophic outlook of unity in rich diversity" (Karkala *Indo-Engtsh Literature* 1). In fact Sarojini's three slender volumes of mystic verses are sprinkled frequently with a deep philosophy of life and otherworldly visions, although critics have found lack of philosophical depth as a major fault with Sarojini's poetry.

While surveying the nature of her poetic project and how it was shaped by the dominant ideological structures of her time we can appreciate the inner tensions and conflicts in her poetry. In a way it can be said that Sarojini's poetry was a rich and complex text, which reproduced the contradictions and debates of her age. Gosse, her first critic and also her literary mentor, gave her the choice between being a "machine-made imitator" and a "genuine Indian poet of the Deccan". James Cousins, one of her earliest critics accused her of 'illogic' and 'excess'. Lotika Basu, went further and criticised her poetry as 'inauthentic' and 'unrealistic'. In her book on *Indian English Poetry* she made quite a caustic observation:

"In Mrs. Naidu's treatment of Indian subject she does not give a realistic picture of India; She merely continues the picture of India painted by Anglo-Indian and English writers, a land of bazaars, full of bright colours and perfumes and peopled with picturesque beggars, wandering minstrels and snake charmers.... She is more intent on drawing an interesting picture of India than on representing India as it is. It is this, which makes her verses rather disappointing... Mrs. Naidu has failed in becoming a true interpreter of India to the West" (Basu 94-95).

It had been a commonplace assumption that Sarojini's poetry was imitative of British romantic poets. There is no doubt that her poetry bears the stamp of British lyricism. Sarojini herself identified Sir Walter Scott as the model for her juvenile poem *Mehir Muneer*<sup>4</sup>. Gosse mentioned the influence of Shelley and Tennyson. Many later critics have located her sources in the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites. Yet the exact nature of these varied influence have never been worked out, nor exacting scholarship has ever backed such claims. To achieve a definite conclusion on the question of the influences on Sarojini, her poetry needs to be worked out with more precision and accuracy.



Padmini Sengupta in her illustrative writing commented: Sarojini wrote highly colourful poems in English, but they were the poems of India. She "lived and exulted in living in India" (77). If she had not felt the 'throbs of drums and cymbals', the 'lilt of folk songs'; if she had not heard the 'street vendors cries' and had she not sensed the 'boatman's simple way of life floating across the blank river'; if she had not lived with 'the glamorous, the exotic beauties of the secluded *Purdah-Nashin*' world, she could never have produced such exquisite lyrics. It was this romantic world of India which she presented with delight to the English reader. She was proud of India. She adored serving and loving her land in which she rejoiced and this beloved land she would interpret abroad. India was a conquered country when Sarojini was writing. She wished to raise the status of her motherland before other nations. She lavished in praise of her motherland and deliberately curtailed the faults and shortcomings that it had. The ugly reality and sordid attitudes of life were never her inspiration. She once said: "England had reached greatness because they never admitted their faults. Why should we, when we still had to build up our country into a free and forceful land?" (*Sarojini Naidu* 78). This proves Sengupta right when she remarked, "No one ... could have been more national or patriotic than Sri Aurobindo or Sarojini Naidu, to quote but a few Indo-Anglian poets" (79).

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### 2.3 □ Influence on Sarojini : Contradictory criticisms

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Again it is interesting to note that when in England, at the age of sixteen, Sarojini moved freely not only in the company of Symons, Gosse and other poets and critics of the day, but with many of the members of the 'Rhymers Club'. There she perhaps learnt to be 'word perfect'. From there she certainly acquired "the verbal and technical accomplishment, the mastery of phrase and rhythm, without which she could not have translated her visions and experiences into melodious poetry" (Iyengar *Indian Writing In English* 209). Many of her poems are pilgrimages, visions and dreams to the realms of love, faith, patriotism and freedom. These were spontaneous and intensely passionate experiences of the poet written at the mystic moment when she wrote 'short swallow-flights of song' and where she was most successful. She did not strive to form a

consecutive sequence of poetic thought. When she tried to form any philosophical plan, as in 'The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love', striving to intermingle the divine and human love of a woman offering herself in utter self-denial, she did not convince the reader. It is more persuasive to argue that Sarojini's poetic range was, as she herself acknowledged, essentially limited. She had command over a small territory and a particular lyrical style. She never attempted anything really ambitious. Later other things claimed her time and attention; poetry was lost to oratory. In a letter to Arthur Symonds<sup>5</sup>, Sarojini wrote:

*I am not a poet really. I have the vision and desire, but not the voice. If I could write just one poem full, of beauty and the spirit of greatness, I should be exultingly silent forever; but I sing just as the birds do, and my songs are as ephemeral* (quoted in *The Golden Threshold* 10).

It had often been remarked that Sarojini's poetry is superficial, that it lacked a philosophical content. True, the vivid portraiture of human reality that many poets of her age so often drew is not present here. The words in T.S Eliot. Eliot's *Gerontion* are conversational, that really take the reader into his confidence. Such pictures Sarojini seemed to have failed to depict even in her dialogue with death. Sarojini's flight songs too are always somehow never quite real in life. The poet herself contributed to such an impression by her deliberate emphasis on 'fleeting' and 'momentary'. I presume nowhere else in Indian English poetry such celebration of mutability and transience can be found. The image of the singing bird, soaring up or fluttering on its broken wings recurred in her poetry and this is where she excels. Again, in the light of *alankara shastra*, which deals with the key aspects of classical Indian aesthetics or the 'beautiful form' in Indian poetry, we can identify Sarojini as primarily a poet of ornamentation and beautiful forms. "Every line, every idea, every image is embellished elaborately in her poetry" (Paranjape 17). Of course this leads to the problem of 'excess' that I shall discuss subsequently.

Sarojini Naidu's celebration of the 'fleeting present', evident in her 'spring poems', is an important group of poems in her oeuvre after her love songs. It is here she sorts the problems of 'transience' and 'immortality'. For her transience is the proof of immortality because even death is transient. Salvation for Sarojini is here and now, in life on earth, not in repudiation or denial of the world of senses.

But in its excess of enthusiasm towards a compact style, she had gone to the extreme of eliminating romantic expressions from her poetry. The dissolution of the centre through a keen sensual experience was her idea of emancipation. Her senses were her source of ecstasy and life was the stimulant; often she forced both the stimulants and the senses beyond their capacities in her attempt to reach her 'high'. In this she was not just a romantic, but also a believer in the cult of sensibility. She believed in the soul, not one which was transcendental and which could only be recreated through a repression and denial of the senses, but a soul, which worked through the senses. This is possibly why it was said, that a "particular verbal mode of expressing romantic sensibility had ended with Sarojini Naidu and her generation ... the neo-symbolists have evolved their own characteristic idiom for expressing 'romantic' sensibility" (Gokak xxxv'-vi). The capacity to feel, to experience, to be one with life was crucial to her. And she compulsively sought for a heightening of this capacity repeatedly and feverishly almost like an addict. Hence, the element of exaggeration and excess in her poetry for which she received enormous adverse criticism.

As a poet and a philosopher Sarojini Naidu is often compared to Sri Aurobindo. Both Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu had spent their impressionable years in England when the 'Decadent' poets dominated the scene. Sarojini Naidu modelled her poetic style on these lines and followed to her very last days. Her poems are full of jewelled phrases. But Sri Aurobindo very soon outgrew the manner and blazed a new trail in poetry that many were to follow. This could be the reason why modernist critics were inclined to club them together and also dismissed them with identically facile gestures. Sri Aurobindo was an intellectual and philosophical poet. "He was a prophet of Life ... He believed in the inevitable transformation of humanity into a race of higher beings and worked for it" (Gokak xxxi). He used his poetry as a vehicle for this well-thought-out ideological project and wrote several books of poems. He wrote long poems like *Savitri*, a poem of over 24,000 lines, as he had so much to say through the poem. Sarojini in contrast had so little to say that she wrote very little and mostly in the lyric mode. Nor did she intend to write grand or profound poems meant to be classics. This does not mean that Naidu was a superficial poet, or that she did not have any philosophy to convey through her poetry. On the contrary, her very refusal to philosophise was itself a part of her philosophy. The spontaneous and cyclic renewal of vegetal life to

Sarojini seemed to contain the answer to the riddle of life. Actually, 'transience' was not the problem, but the solution for Sarojini. 'Transience', in contradiction, is the proof of immortality because even death is transient. Sri Aurobindo commenting on her poems said (in 1935): "Her work has a real beauty... Some of her lyrical work is likely, I think, to survive among the lasting things in English literature and by these, even if they are fine rather than great, she may take her rank among the immortals" (*Indian Writing in English* 223)

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## 2.4 □ On Sarojini's Books of Poem—with reviews

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Sarojini's most appreciated collection of poems was *The Golden Threshold*<sup>6</sup>. The poems in it belong almost wholly to two periods: 1896 and 1904. The poems included in it are on a wide range of subjects. One of them is an invocation to India; another is addressed to the Buddha. Some of the poems are personal others are philosophical or reflective. There is a wide range of nature poetry. Several pieces in this volume show Sarojini's deep feeling for the Islamic tradition in Indian culture. But the majority of poems in this volume are about the people of India engaged in their daily vocations.

Arthur Symons who was responsible for the publication of this book said: "As they seemed to me to have an individual beauty of their own, I thought they ought to be published" (*Paranjape Prose and Poetry* 5). In his introduction to the book Symons wrote: "Her poetry seems to sing itself, as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves". The Glasgow Herald praised, "The pictures are of East, it is true; but there is something fundamentally human in them that seems to prove that the best song knows nothing of East and West". The Manchester Guardian paid a glowing tribute: "It is a considerable delight to come across such genuine poetry as is contained in *The Golden Threshold*. Its simplicity suggests Blake, it is always musical, its eastern colour is fresh and its firm touch is quick and delicate" (All the reviews are collected from Tilak Raghukul Sarojini Naidu, *Selected Poems* 23). This made Sarojini a celebrity in both India and England. Never before had a book of poems by an Indian caused such a stir abroad. First published in 1905, it was reprinted in quick succession in 1906, 1909, 1914 and 1916. That such a young Indian girl

could produce a best-selling book of poems in an adopted language was definitely a remarkable accomplishment. Her famous poem 'To a Buddha seated on a Lotus' was included from this book in "*Oxford Book of English Mystic Verse*", including her in the list of the greatest of English poets. The 'Modern Muse' reprinted the above poem. The Review of Reviews wrote: "This little volume should silence for ever the scoffer who declares that women cannot write poetry" (*Indian Writing in English* 214). *The Golden Threshold* remained as Sarojini's best and most popular book and she never quite exceeded what she achieved in it.

J.B. Yeats called her a 'pure romantic'. True, her world was of romance rather than the stark realities of life. Although she had made use of many poignant customs and tragic events in her second volume of poems, there was always something unrealistic about her lyrics. Nevertheless "she possess[ed] her qualities *in heaped measures*", observed *The Bookman* (*Indian Writing in English* 217). The reviewers greeted the second volume of poems, *The Bird of Time*, as enthusiastically as the earlier volume. "She has more than a profusion of beautiful things", wrote Edward Thomas in the Daily Chronicle. The Yorkshire Post acknowledged: "Mrs Naidu has not only enriched our language but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, the mysticism and the glamour of the East" (*Indian Writing in English* 217). It is interesting to observe, Edmund Gosse, who was apprehensive of her first volume of poems, wrote the introduction to *The Bird of Time*, published by William Heinemann in 1912<sup>7</sup>. He remarked that there was discernible in it "a graver music" than in the earlier volume. John Lane also published it simultaneously in New York.

The poems in the volume were songs of 'life' and 'death'; the dualities of life and death. Life was often brightly painted, but death's shadows crept or lingered. There were love-songs as well as elegies. 'Spring' inspired her to song, but even as she thrilled at the thought of the festival of spring, her compassionate heart rued the plight of the Hindu widow who had no part in the festive ceremonials. The Book was reviewed widely as Sarojini by then was an established poet. Gosse in his introduction wrote: "If the poems of Sarojini Naidu be carefully and delicately studied, they will be found as luminous in lighting up the dark places of the East as any contribution of any savant or historians" (Tilak 24). *The Bird of Time*, "like Galsworthy's *Cethru* is impartial and sings gay and sad songs alike...of life and death,

joy and pain and the music is 'graver', but yet no chord has snapped" (Iyengar 217). A much later critic, Paranjape, commented: "Her readers in England expected both beauty and oriental glamour from her and she did not disappoint them". (*Selected Poetry And Prose* 6)

The change in note, however, became sharper in Sarojini's Naidu's third collection, *The Broken Wing*. William Heinemann published this book in 1917. The book was dedicated "to the dream of today and hope of tomorrow" (Tilak 25). Both the hope and dream were about the future of India. At the same time some of the pieces in the collection conveyed her personal losses, disappointments and longings. 'In Salutation to My Father's Spirit' (who died in February 1915) was one such poem. The title of the book was taken from a remark made by G.K. Gokhale. Surprised at the tone of sadness in Sarojini's poems he exclaimed: "why should a song bird like you have a broken wing?" Her reply to Gokhale is contained in the opening poem of the collection, *The Broken Wing*:

*Shall spring that wakes mine ancient land again  
Call to my wild and suffering heart in vain?  
Or Fate's blind arrows still the pulsing note  
Of my far-reaching, frail, unconquered throat?  
Or a weak bleeding pinion daunt or tire  
My flight to the high realms of my desire?  
Behold! I rise to meet the destined spring  
And scale the stars upon my broken wing!*

She believed that 'Fate's blind arrows' would not silence her 'unconquered throat'. And she was determined to scale the stars and meet the spring in spite of a 'weak, bleeding pinion'. Yet the poems in the book were strewn with suggestions of a sudden distress that had overwhelmed the poet. Or else, why the poet should give such an account of herself? Even the coming of 'Spring' gave no solace to her. This was the last collection to be published in her lifetime. She lived for another thirty-two years, but as a poet she ceased to be. It was not because she suddenly realised that one should

write in one's mother tongue and that she did not have the requisite mastery of it. Nor was it because she realised that her poetic language was quite unequal to the demands made upon it by a real poetic inspiration. It was not even because of her entry into politics, for she had been in it for over ten years without damaging her poetic inspiration. In Europe, the first wave of modernism was beginning to gather momentum. There was about to be a cataclysmic change in the poetic fashion. Sarojini was swept aside by this tide. There was considerable criticism of her limitations too as a poet. Dr. Shankar Mokashi Punekar even went to the extent of saying, "For a practising poet, to write on Sarojini Naidu with an old-world enthusiasm is a business liability" (*Indian Writing in English* 223).

Yet, Naidu did not stop. She continued writing her verse from time to time even when she was in the thick of India's struggle for independence. These lyrics were collected and edited by her daughter Padmaja Naidu and were published twelve years after her death by Asia Publishing House in 1961. When this last book of poems, *The Feather of the Dawn* was published, modernism was the ruling mode in Indian poetry. The poet Nissim Ezekiel panned the book among others and Sarojini had been 'consigned to oblivion'. He wrote: "The English encouraged by Gosse granted Sarojini Naidu a season or two of favour and then dropped her irrevocably into oblivion" (*Sarojini Naidu: Nightingale of India* 59). Thus we can say that her reputation was at its highest from 1905-1907 and declined afterwards. In India she continued to have a following until her death. But in the 1950s when modernism took over Indian English poetry, her reputation as a poet dipped to the lowest.

Much before the modernists had put Sarojini's poetry to the "back lobby", Lotika Basu had despised her verses as 'inauthentic', 'unrealistic' and 'disappointing'. Her further criticism, "Talented and with not a little of the gift of the true poet, ..." (*Prose And Poetry II*) was even more spurning. But the poet, who was living then, seemed to be far too satisfied with her already tried out and over-exhausted forms of writing. Where she tried her new style and technique, it was not a success. Her themes, after a while became cut and dried, and her ornate adjectives, though reached a height, resembling to a point those used by early Sanskrit poets, were over emphasised with almost uncontrolled effusion. Most of her poems had repetitive, formulaic structure. The stanzas were almost identical in form and rhyme scheme; only the images and words were changed. Such a structure was found in the 'roundel', a literary form popular in the poetry of the 1890's England. Its key features that included a simple rhyme scheme and refrains, were found in many of Sarojini's poetry. Similarly, one

could find in her poetry the penchant for mood, music and dreamy ephemerality, which was common in the 1890s poets who were reacting to the high seriousness and moral questioning of the Victorian poets.

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## 2.5 □ Sarojini's Favourite Poets of The West

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To name a few of the poets of the 1890s were, A.C. Swineburn, W. B. Yeats, Edmund Gosse, Edwin Arnold, William Watson, Arthus Symons, John Davidson. With no hesitation it can be said that save for Yeats and Swineburn, most were considered as minor poets. "They were all associated with the Decadents, a group of French and English writers of the late nineteenth century, whose work is marked by an over-refinement of style, cultivated artificiality and abnormality of content. Sarojini imbibed her aesthetics from them. She never changed her style and was to all appearances, indifferent to the storm of modernism that swept across Europe in the 1920s" (*Paranjape Letters* xxv). Yet, she was not unaware of Yeats and his greatness as a poet. Sarojini identified his genius very early and had even written a poem, "Alul"<sup>8</sup>, on him. In a letter to Yeats, she congratulated him on his success in England. She called him "the most subtle and delicate poet of modern Britain" (November 16, 1912). Again it is interesting to observe the role she played, although inadvertently, in the creation of literary modernism. She helped Ezra Pound in his acquisition of the famous 'Fenollosa Papers'<sup>9</sup> in 1913, which we all know is the source of many of his ideas about the central ity and function of the image of poetry. When Pound was invited to the house of the 'Indian Nationalist Poet Sarojini Naidu', she helped to arrange the meeting between Mrs. Fenollosa and Pound during which the former handed over the papers to the later in her presence.

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## 2.6 □ Conclusion : General

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Thus situated, Sarojini's poetry became a rich and complex text reproducing the contradictions and debates of her age. The general tendency was "to denigrate Sarojini Naidu as no poet at all, or rather as a bad poet" (Iyengar 223). This was perhaps because she did not write like Eliot, Pound or Yeats or like Rabindranath Tagore or Sri Aurobirido. True Sarojini's poetry occupied a very limited realm of lyricism and was deliberately ephemeral thematically. Her indisputable metrical felicity and technical



ma'stery had not prevented some of her poems sounding like childish jingles. But the wide array of opposing and sometimes complimentary forces that permeates her poetry made her verses a rich subject of study under the banner of Indo Anglian poetry. Thus, "while it is easy not to take seriously the adoring and cloying praise of her contemporaries and admirers, it is equally necessary not to swing to the other extreme in dismissing her out of hand" (*Selected Poetry And Prose* 4).

As Paranjape puts it, Sarojini's poetry mediates between the 'forces of the English poetic tradition and her Indian sensibility'; between 'the politics of nationalism and the aesthetics of feudalism'; between 'the overwhelming power of modernity and the nostalgia for a threatened tradition'; between 'the security of a comfortable patriarchy and liberating power of the women's movement'. Thus Sarojini's verses undoubtedly displayed both resistance to and cooptation by the dominant ideology of her time, which was colonialism. But unluckily Sarojini was unable to liberate her poetry from these contradictions. Unlike Tagore, her work remained mired in them. This made Sarojini a particularly soft target to the modernist. To them not only did she represent a dead aesthetic, but also her romanticism was of a 'particularly meretricious kind'. At the same time she was condemned of her low intellectual range, compared to Rabindranath Tagore or Sri Aurobindo.

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## 2.7 □ Assessment

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Nevertheless, I feel Sarojini Naidu, both in her own right and as a representative of her times, deserves to be remembered and studied. She was one of those whose greatness is most difficult to identify and substantiate. In her life converge some of the dominant cultural, social and political currents of pre-independence India. As one of the principal aides and followers of Mahatma Gandhi, she was constantly in the limelight and probably the best-known Indian woman of her time. She also had an international presence as India's cultural ambassador and spokesperson of the freedom movement. Her unusual energy that contributed to an extraordinary public presence was both dynamic and catalytic. And as a poet, like a true woman of India, she represented herself and the experiences of her fellow Indians. Her India was more artificial, exotic and picturesque, but less mysterious, alien or fraudulent than any account by an Anglo-Indian poet. She knew her India better than a foreigner. Even if the poetic programme and its aesthetics were borrowed, the control over the representation was in native land. Her poetry illustrates both a collusion with and a resistance to the dominance of

the 'metropolitan aesthetics'. The inner tensions and conflicts in her poetry are well appreciable.

The praises, undoubtedly, had become lukewarm after the onslaught of the 1950s; yet her poetry throughout has remained, popular. And amongst the whole generation of poets and poet-makers she has remained one of the most widely-anthologised and studied of Indian English poets. A closer look into her poems will give a wider impression about Sarojini Naidu as 'a poet of contradiction'.

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## 2.8 □ Notes

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1. It is interesting to note that much of her verse dates back to the period before her involvement with the Congress party.
2. Look, poem 'Suttee' of Sarojini Naidu. In the poem the widow is distraught "Love must I dwell in the living dark? ... Shall the blossom live when the tree is dead? Sati (widow immolation) seems the only real answer.
3. Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen worked together for ten years and created a strong cult out of the Brahma religion which Raja Ram Mohun Roy had started in 1828; but Keshub Chunder's teachings were based more and more on Christian ideals and forms and emerged as a separate branch from the original Brahma Samaj. Keshub Chunder Sen's branch was called the 'Naba Bidhan'.
4. Sarojini's poetic career began when she was just eleven. Arthur Symons quotes her in his Introduction to *The Golden Threshold*: One day, when I was eleven, I was sighing over a sum in algebra; it wouldn't come right; but instead a whole poem came to me suddenly. I wrote it down. From that day my 'poetic career' began. At thirteen I wrote a long poem a la "*Lady of the Lake*"— 1300 lines in six days. (When published in 1893, it came to be known as "*Mehir Muneer*").
5. This letter is quoted in Symon's introduction to *The Golden Threshold*.
6. This is the first major collection of Naidu's poems. Its title is taken from the name of Sarojini's home The Golden Threshold, in Hyderabad.

7. Read introduction to *The Bird Of Time*, 4-5; can also refer to Paranjape's introduction to *Selected Prose And Poetry*.
8. 'Alul', is an unpublished poem. Available in Sarojini Naidu Paper, Nehru Memorial Library. The poem dated 15 may 1896, is enclosed in a letter to Govandarajulu. She explains, "It is about Yeats... Alul is the name of a mystic dreamer like Mr. Yeats himself..." The poem: He is a Druid-Child of mystic dreams/ In the dim twilight of deep Celtic woods/ He maketh music in wild, wayword moods/ Of fairy fantasy by starry streams. / He bears a red rose twined on his lyre/ His eyes are dark and prophet-like with fire, Alul his name — of fays I did inquire.
9. See *J. J. Wilhem, Ezra Pound in London and Paris: 1908-1925* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990).

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## 2.9 □ Village Song : An Analysis

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- Honey, child, honey, child, whither are you going?  
Would you cast your jewels all to the breezes blowing?  
Would you leave the mother who on golden grain has fed you?  
Would you grieve the lover who is riding forth to wed you?
- 5     Mother mine, to the wild forest I am going,  
       Where upon the *champa* boughs the *champa* buds are blowing;  
       To the koil-haunted river-isles where lotus lilies glisten,  
       The voices of the fairy-folk are calling me, O listen!
- Honey, child, honey, child, the world is full of pleasure,
- 10    Of bridal-songs and cradle-songs and sandal-scented leisure  
       Your bridal robes are in the loom, silver and saffron glowing,  
       Your bridal cakes are on the hearth: O whither are you going?
- The bridal-songs and cradle-songs have cadences of sorrow,  
       The laughter of the sun today, the wind of death tomorrow.
- 15    Far sweeter sound the forest-notes where forest-streams are falling;  
       O mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy-folk are calling.

A considerable analysis of Sarojini Naidu in the previous section only contributes towards further specific study of her poetry that focus on her personality and the force that created the impact that she was remembered for. She recognised her own role in public life as that of bringing a poetic flavour to the otherwise drab business of social and political work. Conversely, she was perhaps the most effective purveyor of the sublime, transforming public speaking into poetry. It was with *The Golden Threshold* in 1905 that Sarojini's career as a poet took off. This book of poems received fine notices in British press although she herself described her verses as "my poor casual little poems,... which seem less than beautiful" (Naidu, Sarojini 129).

It is said that the best of Sarojini's poetry is the result of her folk inspiration. Poems of this genre are characterised by directness, immediacy, simplicity and lilting melody. 'Village Song' is one such folk poem included in the collection, *The Golden*

*Threshold.* It is a representation of a pretty guileless life of a village girl in harmony with nature. It can be said that the social order in which she lives is an extension of the natural order. She intently feels that her correspondence with nature will make her life more serene and carefree and refuses to experience the superficiality of the artificial grandeur of this worldly life. In such a moment of dejection she enjoys and praises the music of the 'forest-streams' more than the 'bridal-songs' and 'cradle-songs' and takes refuge in the lap of nature. She discovers that the suffering, which marks human life, does not interrupt nature's marvellous rhythm. In terms of logical consistency it may seem self-contradictory to praise the harmony between man and nature and also to bemoan the deficiencies of human life which nature can correct. But Sarojini is not disturbed by this consideration. She experiences a deep feeling of kinship and communion with nature.

A close reading of the poem would explain the context and subtext or implication of this poem. Such an approach would clarify the absences in Sarojini's text as an example of overwhelmingly harsh reality of colonialism which the poem seeks to repress and as if banish outside itself. It is as if the poet prefers not to confront reality.

Naturally in this poem 'Village song' integrated into the Folksongs<sup>1</sup> of the collection, a fascination for social customs and prejudices can be observed. Not just the subject, the language too reflects her aesthetic predilections or her fondness for visual effect. The more ornate, more latinized, more exotic more unusual words or phrase like 'honey', 'whither', 'cadences' 'fairy-folks', is preferred over the simple, functional and ordinary. This leads to a heightening of sensuality in the imagery until every sense is stimulated into excess. Visually, the images of the village girl tend away from clear daylight and sharp focus to hazy, dream-like, blurred states of experience.

The choice before the adolescent girl is between two versions of romanticism. One is the more domestic and less exotic choice of a sequestered and luxurious married life; the other is the more exotic and romantic escape to the 'wild forest' where the 'fairy-folk' are calling her. Predictably, the girl chooses the latter. So the mother seeks to counter the romantic escape-world imagined by the girl with a romantic picture of the world she inhabits. But the daughter keeps to her own decision and explains her

own irresistible fidelity to the charm of the fairy world. In other words the relationship between human life and the moods of nature are hinted in the poem "in a sort of delicately evasive way, at a rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the East, finding expression through a Western language... [but] there is an Eastern magic in them" (Symons introduction to *Golden Threshold*. 23 Naravane). There is a common stream of life, a rhythmic power, which animates both nature and man. And the continuity between the natural and the human is expressed in many ways in this poem and human ideals are projected upon natural phenomenon. These projections do not remain distant. They come close and close and the poetess seem to participate in their life. For her nature can correct the deficiencies of human life, as there is a deep communion between the soul of nature and the soul of the girl, a representation of human being as a whole. For Sarojini, the life of nature reveals accord rather than discord, beauty and love rather than distortion or strife. The poem 'Village Song' therefore becomes an example of Naidu's aesthetics of excess.

Thus the theme 'the search of the finite for the infinite' finds its validation and explication in the form of a dialogue between the mother and the daughter in the poem 'Village Song'. The daughter wants to escape from the sorrow and suffering of the real and the present into the romantic world of nature as for her "The laughter of the sun today, [is] the wind of death tomorrow". But the mother requests her repetitively as the more "urgent and intimate need" of the sensitive maiden's personality cannot be understood by her who nurtures her own sense of loss and separation, and it is here the poem starts. She asks her where she is going throwing away all her jewellery into the wind that is blowing. Would she leave her mother alone who has fed her on 'golden grains' with all her love and affection? Would she 'grieve' or break the heart of the lover who is coming on horseback to marry her?

Honey<sup>2</sup>, child, honey, child, whither are you going?

Would you cast<sup>3</sup> your jewels all to the breezes blowing?

Would you leave the mother who on golden grain<sup>4</sup> has fed you?

Would you grieve the lover who is riding forth to wed you?

The daughter however would not give in. Sickened with the harshness of the mundane world she is determined to go away to the beautiful forests, where the 'koils' sing all day through and where the sweet scented 'champa' flowers and the 'lotus' and 'lilies' in their full bloom are shining in all their beauties. The fairies are calling her to this

beautiful forest. She pin her ears back and being enticed to their call she invites her mother as well to listen.

Mother mine, to the wild forest I am going,  
Where upon the *champa* boughs the *champa* buds are blowing;  
To the *koil* haunted<sup>5</sup> river-isles where lotus lilies glisten<sup>6</sup>,  
The voices of the fairy-folk are calling me, O listen!

Nevertheless, the mother continues her attempts to counter the escape world of her daughter and tries to tempt her to her own world of fulfilment. The world is full of pleasures, there are sweet lullabies and sweet marriage songs and there is also plenty of leisure and fragrance of sandalwood. The bridal dress, bright and beautiful, in 'silver' and 'saffron' colours is being prepared; the delicious, gorgeous 'bridal-cakes' are also ready. So she asks her not to go away leaving behind all these pleasures, causing intense sorrow to her mother and to her would be husband.

Honey, child, honey, child, the world is full of pleasure,  
Of bridal-songs and cradle-songs and sandal-scented leisure<sup>7</sup>.  
Your bridal robes are in the loom, silver<sup>8</sup> and saffron glowing,  
Your bridal cakes are on the hearth: O whither are you going?

The daughter is not to be stopped yet. The calls of the fairies are much more powerful. It is fascinating to her than all the worldly grandeur. She frankly tells her mother that the pleasures of this world are short-lived. 'Bridal songs' and 'cradle songs' have an undercurrent of sorrow, and the pleasures she refers to are all fleeting. The sunshine of joy is darkened in no time by the blind wind of death. The songs of the forest, in contrast, are sweeter and are far more lasting. So she must go for the fairies are calling her and enjoy the sweet music of the birds and the streams.

The bridal-songs and cradle-songs have cadences<sup>9</sup> of sorrow,  
The laughter of the sun today, the wind of death tomorrow<sup>10</sup>.  
Far sweeter sound the forest-notes where forest-streams are falling;  
O mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy-folk are calling.

It may seem in vain to look for sustained excellence in this lyric with continuous repetition. A decline in quality becomes naturally obvious. In such a brief poem of four stanzas recurrence of same images makes the poem a little dull than persuasive. Moreover, it is said, this deficiency is not 'compensated by profundity of thought'. Sarojini was perhaps aware of this deficiency and that is why she described her own poems as 'ephemeral'. Nonetheless, she has succeeded in capturing the simplicity, rhythm and the spirit of a folk song. At the same time a symbolic significance and a rich texture having layers of meaning, in between the dialogues, gives a vivid and forceful expression of the human heart for the remote, the distant and the unfamiliar world, which is not subject to the fluctuations of the human joys and sorrows, which is eternally beautiful and sweet. This the poet does with her exceptional metrical skill, which immediately impresses a reader to appreciate.

Thus it can be said that the 'Village Song' is a highly reflective poem of a sensitive mind. Its roots are predominantly affective or sentimental rather than cognitive. But there is nothing in the poem that can lead us to question her sincerity or suspect that she has been deliberately exaggerating. She expresses her sentiments with true intensity and passion. "Her India may be more artificial, exotic and picturesque, but less mysterious, alien or dishonest than any account by an Anglo-Indian poet" (Paranjape 12)

Of course there are many critics of Sarojini who take for granted that a poet who is enchanted by the rhythmic flow of Indian life is dwelling in an unreal world, which does not correspond to the realities of Indian life. It would be untrue to say that Sarojini was unfamiliar with the actual life of the Indian people. Having spent a lot of time in rural areas she acquired first-hand knowledge of every aspect of Indian life including the sufferings of the Indian people. She also saw and felt, behind all poverty and superstition and backwardness, the calmness and simple beauty of Indian life, its amazing continuity and assimilative power. If Sarojini Naidu's poems reflect the gentle and enchanting sides of India's life and landscape, it is "not because she was ignorant of the harsher side but simply because her creative powers were quickened by the former than the latter" (Narvane 134).

Closely reading Sarojini's poem, 'Village Song', a central psychological impulse or a fancy for the 'other' world can be observed as in Pre-Raphaelite poetry and the aesthetic effects of that impulse. Such exegesis also enables us to understand more



fully the emotional response Sarojini's poetry generates within the reader, as did the Pre-Raphaelite poetry. These crystallize into a distanced perception of the poem as a thing of beauty, which makes use of the sensations and experiences of quotidian reality primarily to withdraw from that reality and create an estranged and static world of art. Of course Sarojini's ruse was no solution; everyone knew that her India was too romantic, too pretty to represent the Indian reality as they knew it. Her India though backward and underdeveloped, has managed to resist the machine age. What Sarojini tries to do is to offer an entry into this unspoiled India. It would be too painful for her to portray India with all the horrors of its poverty, inequality, disease and suffering; if only they were glossed over, then a very attractive image of India would emerge—traditional, vibrant, vivid, colourful and joyous. Moreover, in a period of exponential social and technological change, she could see vanishing before her eyes a way of life that the West had already lost and now pines for. Thus she attempts at offering to Indians a picture of themselves, which they can be proud of. Something that might salvage some of their crippled self-respect as a colonised and humiliated people<sup>1</sup>. In this even if the poetic programme and its aesthetics are borrowed, the control over the representation is in native hands. It remains faithful to the form and spirit of Indian Folk song characterised by directness, immediacy, simplicity and lilting melody.

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### 2.9.1 □ Structure and Style

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In this poem 'Village Song'<sup>12</sup>, the poet's intoxication of love and joy of life is deeply fused together with the more "urgent and intimate need of the poet-soul for a perfect sympathy with its incommunicable vision, its subtle and inexpressible thought" (Iyengar 211). This the poet does by dramatising the tension between the mother's traditional view of life and the daughter's romantic view of individuality by adopting the folk-idiom, with its concern for social gradation and ritual, to contrast with the highly subjective flavour of the daughter's impulsive temperament.

As a folk lyric 'Village Song' fits naturally into the background of action and sentiment, germane to the racial consciousness. But the mother's sense of loss is outweighed by the "more urgent and intimate need" of the maiden. For Naidu was not the woman to give way altogether to the gnawing regrets or paralysing despair. She

sensed beauty of nature in its entire colour, in odour, in song and in its rhythmic movement. The panorama of Indian villages fascinated her without end. Hence the girl's thirst for the eternal beauty is reproduced with the lilt and atmosphere of the folk songs with the sentiment and imagery perfectly fitting into each other. At the same time profound awareness of her tradition is tackled with the right rhythm and the internal and terminal rhymes. In fact the appositeness of the sentiments and imagery, admirable poise, economy and an ear and eye for striking rhythm make the poem of four stanzas an evocative one. There is no room for obscurity or profundity here; simplicity and directness are sovereign, and the appeal is for the unfading and the undying.

Again, Sarojini's command over English prosody in this poem is amazing. Even Paul Verghese, who is otherwise critical of her, admires her metrical dexterity and craftsmanship. Tilak observes, "Sarojini [is] a great metrical artist with a delicate ear" (76). This is true of 'Village Song' where she has used the dactyle<sup>13</sup>, a metrical foot of three syllables, the first accented and the others unaccented to express the girl's urgency to leave her mother as the 'fairy-folk' are calling her to the land of eternal beauty. But the 'romantic-sentimentality' for which Sarojini is often criticised and the over-opulent imagery in the poem like the lover who is riding forth to wed 'bridal cakes', 'sandal-scented leisure', 'bridal robes ...silver and saffron glowing' blurs the visionary focus and the meaning tend to lose in a cloud of words. Thus the glorification and romanticization of the girl's desire and the mother's description of the world she inhabit becomes suspect in this folksong. They become picturesque, frozen in various thoughts of attraction of the girl's land of escape. This repeated image of her fascination with calls of the fairies leads to a heightening of sensuality in the imagery until all her senses are stimulated to excess, leading to a loss of their effectiveness. Similarly, the repetition of words like 'honey' leads to a loss of meaning at first and then the sound value gradually loses its power of moving us.

Yet this heightening does not veil the symbol of the 'finite's longing to lose itself in the infinite'; the representation and significance of the girl's soul yearning to celebrate the endless variety of nature in all its colours and intoxicating beauty. This is maintained by a visual fluidity of form with a simple rhyme scheme<sup>14</sup> delicately woven into the texture, and tone of the folk song. Like the symbolists Sarojini believed in the soul, but a soul which worked through the senses not one which was transcendental or one which could be reached through a repression and denial of senses. Her response to

nature was frankly sensuous as she feels a genuine delight in nature. The magnetism of the girl's soul towards the nature's beauty, to seek refuge in the nature's bounty is what Sarojini deeply nurtured. Thus a simple and spontaneous outpouring of her excitement is natural. As expected there is a heightening of reality, but no falsification or distortion of it. Over all, it can be said that as far as the text, context and the form is concerned, the poem '*Village Song*' proves Sarojini not only as a romantic, but also as a believer in the cult of sensibility.

"It was the desire of beauty that made her a poet; her 'nerves of delight' were always quivering at the contact of beauty. Her desire, always, was to be 'a wild free thing of the air like the birds, With a song in my heart'" quoted Arthur Symons in his introduction to '*The Golden Threshold*'. But the desire to describe the abundance of nature repetitively with vivid images and colourful beauty reaches such a height of contravention that at times it fails to produce the evocative effect for which they are intended. Again her fondness for uncommon or archaic words like 'honey', 'whither' in the '*Village Song*' in place of simple and familiar ones that might have served just well, gives a feeling of the unreal

This is perhaps because the Pre-Raphaelites had a considerable bearing upon Sarojini<sup>15</sup>. With the Pre-Raphaelites the sensory and even the sensual become idealized, image becomes symbol and physical experience is superseded by mental states as we are thrust deeply into the self-contained emotional worlds of their varied personae. In '*Village Song*' the "real" world, its events and sensations are dwelt upon but ultimately abstracted. It is because life for Sarojini, is not a riddle to be solved; it is a miracle to be celebrated and sung. Its endless variety excites her, its colours dazzle her and its beauty intoxicates her. Thus her response to it is immediate and there is no scope for artificiality. "In this, no doubt, is her weakness, but in this is also her strength. In this is the secret of her perennial youthfulness", observes P.E. Dustoor(88).

Locally and generally the structure of this poem with its central image patterns of sound and sight is dialogic, but there is a dialectical pattern interspersed in it. Contraries proliferate- from the opening word 'Honey' to the opposites like 'grieve' and 'wed', to 'bridal-songs' and 'sorrow', to 'laughter' and 'death'. These include oppositions between despair and hope, meaningless natural phenomena and meaningful

symbol, hope and fear, silence and sound, mourning and jubilation, light and darkness, that give strength to the poem. It is interesting to note here that all dialectical oppositions are implicitly synthesized as the inner and outer music are harmonized at the end of the stanza, 'O mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy-folk are calling'.

The movement of the poem as a whole is from the external to the internal, but finally to the eternal that incorporates and reconciles both. A marriage of mind and nature thus occurs by the end of the poem, where imagery of the 'forest-notes', 'forest-streams' symbolizes not only the unity of the external world, but also the unification of the internal with the external. The poem's multifarious oppositions are undercut and unified finally by the musical harmonies in which they are expressed. The girl's soul, the 'internal', is unified with the 'external', the 'nature' and thereby her craving for the perpetual joy is achieved. It needs to be observed here that the 'Village Song'<sup>16</sup> reaches a height of sublimity, with a dexterous tackling of rhythm and tone, theme and structure thus deserving an exclusive place of its own.

'Village Song' is a subtle showpiece of Sarojini's rare characteristic of technical procedure and her thematic concern that interact effectively. But, this distinctiveness, this embodiment, is unfortunately missing in the other two poems I shall discuss below.

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### 2.9.2 □ Questions :

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1. Describe 'Village Song' as an exceptional poetic creation of Sarojini Naidu.
2. The relationship between human life and the moods of nature are hinted in the poem "in a sort of delicately evasive way, at a rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the East, finding expression through a Western language... [but] there is an Eastern magic in them". Explain with reference to the poem 'Village Song'.
3. The mother's sense of loss is outweighed by the "more urgent and intimate need" of the maiden. Critically analyse the statement.
4. 'Village Song' is a subtle showpiece of Sarojini's rare characteristic of technical procedure and her thematic concern that interact effectively. Discuss elaborately.

5. Describe the unity of Nature and village life in 'Village Song'.
6. Why Sarojini Naidu is still remembered today.
7. Write in short : Sarojini's Poetry in initiative of British romantic poets.

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### 2.9.3 □ Notes

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1. Folk Songs: 'folk songs' are sung in the glory of the common folk particularly in the rural setting; Sarojini Naidu presents beautiful and colourful pictures of every aspect of life of the Indian village folk by fusing together several visual impression.
2. Honey: Sweet or dear.
3. Cast: Throw away.
4. Golden grain: Nourishing food.
5. Koil-Haunted: Frequented by koil birds known for their sweet songs. *Koel* or *Koil* has a special place in Sarojini's poetry. When the 'spring' comes and the mango trees put forth their first blossom, the entire Indian landscape seems to resound with the call of this bird. Hence, Sarojini a sensitive admirer of the sight and sound of nature could not but incorporate such a wonderful feeling in her 'nature poems' or 'folk poems'
6. Lotus lilies glisten: The flowers shines in their full bloom. The unique flower comes first in the hierarchy of Indian flowers. It has been celebrated in Indian poetry, myth and legend since time immemorial and has acquired a far-reaching symbolic significance. It is a symbol of purity and sanctity. Sarojini was deeply fascinated by the associations of the 'lotus' in Indian mythology and art, and this enthrallment is reflected in many of her poems. It is interesting to note that Sarojini's own name denotes 'lotus plant' or 'a lake abounded in lotuses'. Lotus is also a symbol of fortune.
7. Sandal-scented leisure: Leisure passed in fragrant bowers of sandal-wood.
8. Silver: Glittering white, symbolising joys of marriage, but there is a patch of black in it, perhaps denoting that silver with all its shine is not as pure as the shine of a full blossomed Lotus.

9. Cadences: Rhythm; a note of; an undercurrent of.
10. The laughter of ...today, the wind of death tomorrow. The maiden is aware of the fleeting nature of human joys. Life is bright and beautiful at one moment like the sun, but darkened by the shadow of death the very next moment.
11. To escape the oppressive and overpowering advance of the machine age seemed to be the compelling challenge before Victorian poetry. The poetic medievalism of the *Pre-Raphaelites* was one way of meeting the same need as the search for fresh locales and topics in Browning and Tennyson. In this search of its 'Other', a convenient place for Europe to look was in its vast colonial spaces. But for the natives themselves such a search for Europe's 'Other' was no doubt a cul de sac; for there was no such mysterious soul of India. In fact any such notion of it was itself merely a projection or construction from the keen reality of its absence. In a way it can be said that Sarojini's poems were setting a trap, which was to give to the West the picture of India that the West wished to see. In doing so Sarojini subtly but certainly complicated the apparently simple relationship between of the colonised and the coloniser. But with a good motive too, because she knew her India more than a foreigner would. Her India albeit more artificial and exotic, is less mysterious, dishonest or alien than of any Anglo-Indian poet
12. Ms dt 1896 in NA. entitled, "A Folk Song of the Deccan". Last two stanzas added on 14 December 1903.
13. A dactyl is an element of meter in poetry. In quantitative verse, such as Greek or Latin, a dactyl is a long syllable followed by two short syllables. In accentual verse, such as English, it is a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.
14. Rhyme Scheme : aabb, aabb ...
15. It has been a common place assumption that Sarojini's poetry is imitative of British romantic poets. There is no doubt that her poetry bears the stamp of British lyricism, albeit the exact nature of this influence has never been worked out. The result is a plethora of possible and suggested influences, often not confined to the romantic poets. Sarojini herself identifies Sir Walter Scott as the

model for one of her early poems. Gosse, her literary mentor and first critic, mentions the influences of Shelley and Tennyson. Tumbull speaks of Swineburn among other possible influences. Later critics have located her sources in the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites and of the 1890s. Thus there is a deep problem in evaluating the influence and source in Sarojini's poetry. Most of the poets she mentions in her letter are practically unavailable in India. To get a clearer picture of how sensibility was shaped in her formative year in England, we will have to read these poets in their original and then compare with Sarojini.

16. It is said that the '*Village Song*' is a folk version of the poet's *Nilambuja*. This fantasy written in 1902 remained unpublished for many years. It was later included in *The Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu*, published by G.A. Nateson & Co. from Madras in 1919. This fantasy is distinctly autobiographical and deserves greater attention than it has received. A brief outline of *Nilambuja* will give interesting glimpses into Sarojini's mind and heart, apart from the fact that it contains some beautiful images.

There is a beautiful lake, shining like a 'fire-opal', surrounded by a range of onyx-coloured hills. On the shore of this lake a young woman walks alone. She is slender, ethereal, mysterious, decked in splendid jewels. Her face is illumined by a strong yet indefinite passion, as she walks with a 'slumberous rhythm'. Her leisurely gait seems to convey the cadence of the water. Gradually she moves away from the lake and passing through a luxuriant garden enters a courtyard. Overlooking a courtyard there is a decorated chamber in which several girls, dressed in flimsy silks, are reclining indolently on soft cushions. The air is redolent with the fragrance of incense and vibrant with sounds of music and dance. The denizens of the gem-studded chamber invite the lovely visitor. But she ignores them and walks on.

A corridor, and then a steep stairway, lead her to another room with open windows. Here the life of nature has not been shut out. It is a pleasant but simple room, with subdued colours and soft lights, serene and soothing. The young

woman finds it much more attractive than the magnificent chamber she has left behind. Another vision follows. She finds herself in a temple built for the worship of the goddess of Mystery and Dreams." Here she meditates. She hears inner whisperings, which she vaguely recognises as longings for knowledge, beauty and human compassion. But she also becomes aware of the evanescence of earthly things. She feels within her a burning passion for the Eternal, the Imperishable. The vision breaks. She discovers herself to be a mortal woman with earthly wants. She is sad and sheds tears for the vanished dream of transcendent bliss. What remains is loneliness.

The fantasy shows that even when Sarojini was enjoying the normal life of a contented housewife and was engaged in useful social activities, her imagination continued to transport her to a world of dreams and fancies. But it is not a world of passivity or idle bliss. High ideals and altruistic impulses jostle with love of solitude and hunger for the 'Beyond'. (The outline is taken from Naravane).



## 2.10 □ If You Call Me : An analysis

If you call me I will come  
    Swifter, O my Love,  
Than a trembling forest deer  
    Or a panting dove,  
Swifter than a snake that flies  
    To the charmer's thrall . . .  
If you call me I will come  
    Fearless what befall,  
If you call me, I will come  
    Swifter than desire  
Swifter than lighting's feet  
    Shod with plumes of fire.  
Life's dark tides may roll between  
    or Death's deep chasms divide—  
If you call me I will come  
    Fearless what betide.

'If You Call Me', a passionate and rapturous offering of the self to the lover, is a highly reflective poem of Sarojini Naidu where a fascination for the 'sweetness of sorrow' in love and the 'pleasure of pain' reign supreme. The beloved offers her all, for true love implies total self-surrender, and there is an apparent glorification of the beloved's suffering to lose oneself in the Infinite. Such is the paradox of love, that the pleasure of separation is as great as the joy of union. The theme of this poem that love rests on duality, though it seeks unity, is tackled with care with all the charming simplicity and lilting music of a Love song. Again the swiftness of its rhythm wonderfully harmonise to the desire of the beloved for a swift reunion with the lover. But all her efforts are self-generated and the liberating recognition from her lover never comes.

This love poem' is included in Sarojini Naidu's last collection of poetry, *The Broken Wing* (published in 1917 albeit most of the poems were written during the preceding two years). The volume concludes with a series of poems on Love, entitled 'The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love, a trilogy of lyric sequence of twenty-four poems with eight in each of the three parts: The Gate Of Delight, The Path Of Tears and The Sanctuary. These sub-titles allude to the three parts of the temple according to classical Hindu architecture: the *torana* -the entrance-way, the *pradakshina-patha*- the

circumambulatory passage-way and the *garbha-griha*—the inner-sanctuary.

This sequence is said to be Sarojini Naidu's most sustained attempt at defining the various facets of love. Such an approbation of religious symbols for profane love is common in Indian love poetry. The three sections suggest architecture for the sequence resembling that of a temple in which a pilgrim progresses from the gate to the sanctuary. But the tripartite structure is denied in the poems themselves, which do not seem to show any progression at all. I would like to add to the discussion by quoting Dustoor's commentary on this love sequence to give an overall view of the trilogy:

"It reveals a sensitive and passionate spirit, and what is more, strikes a note unfamiliar to readers of English poetry. It is not merely the hyperboles and conceits in it are in the tradition of Oriental rather than English poetry— unless we choose to recall the poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth century English Metaphysical poets. What I have in mind is rather the spirit and inspiration of Sarojini Naidu's love poetry... [which] could have been written only by a woman, brought up in the Hindu way of life and in the tradition of Hindu love-poetry, religious and secular" (78).

Tilak adds further: "The secular relation between two earthly lovers is raised to the level of the relation of God and Man, to that of the Quest of the finite for the infinite, and thus comes within the province of mystic contemplation" (35). This definitely enriches the tradition of Indian love poetry.

'*If You Call Me*' is the fifth section (lines 56-71) in the first part of the series, *The Gate Of Delight*. It is a passionate and ecstatic submission of the self to the lover as is seen in the Indian love poetry, where suffering is never viewed in a wholly negative light as the sheer opposite of joy. But the poem does not show any morbid enjoyment of agony as is generally observed in the Indian poetic tradition:

If you call me I will come  
Swifter, O my Love,  
Than a trembling<sup>1</sup> forest deer  
Or a panting<sup>2</sup> dove,  
Swifter than a snake that flies  
To the charmer's thrall<sup>3</sup>...  
If you call me. I will come  
Fearless what befall<sup>4</sup>.

If you call me, I will come  
Swifter than desire,  
Swifter than the lightning's feet  
Shod' with plumes of fire.  
Life's dark tides<sup>6</sup> may roll between,  
Or death's deep chasms<sup>7</sup> divide—  
If you call me I will come  
Fearless what betide<sup>8</sup>.

Here the speaker seems to be trying desperately to revive a moribund or dead love. The section proclaims an undying and lofty love for her lover who remains unmoved. The speaker is severe on herself, often fearless in the hope of drawing the lover's attention. "If you call me, I will come/ Fearless what befall". If her lover calls her she would go to him more swiftly than a frightened deer of the forest running away from the hunter or a dove, which is 'breathless' and 'panting' because of its long flight in the sky. She would come to him more swiftly than does a snake at the call of the snake-charmer. If he calls her, she would come fearlessly, whatever may be the consequences, or whatever may happen to her. Hers is a total surrender to the will of his lover; fear of consequences does not come into her calculation. She is perhaps saying this in the hope of response from her lover. But there is no progression from devotion to the ecstasy of fulfilment or a union with her object of love.

The urgency of the speaker 'if you call me' becomes sadder and rises to a higher scale with repetitive insistence in the next paragraph. The speaker seeks to sacrifice herself completely, to subordinate herself totally to the lover. If her lover calls her, she would fly to him, swifter than desire or thought, swifter even than the lightning that rushes across the sky wearing shoes of feathers or of fire. No obstacles would be able to prevent her. Dark oceans of misfortune may flow in-between them or the wide gulf of death may separate them, even then she would not stop. She pleads again if he calls her, she would come to him without any fear of consequence, or care for the obstacles and difficulties that may beset her path. Here is a love which can brook no delay or difficulty; but to no response.

The relationship portrayed here, if at all, is an unequal one. One may even go so far as to suggest that it documents the death of a relationship. It seems that the poem is stipulated for the sake of its metaphors and similes and that too gets boring after quite a while. They may adequately convey the rapture of the beloved for which the poet yearns. But it fails to evoke the effect for which they are intended. They remain as mere colourful pictures fusing together several visual impressions. In this connection Lotika Basu's observation is to be noted. She says:

"One gets rather tired of the brilliant metaphors and similes. They introduce an element of artificiality... that wither and die..." (75).

Truly, throughout this lyric, there is an excess or exaggeration of emotion. The speaker is ready to endure any upshot in the hope of drawing her lover's attention. She is even ready to sacrifice herself completely. But the insistence and repetitiveness of this assertion suggest that the surrender is an ideal not a reality; perhaps, it is, even a ruse or strategy to compel some sort of response from the lover. Moreover a sudden inclusion of alliteration almost at the end of the second stanza along with the repetitions strike a false note as it fails to bring a change of pace in harmony with her thought and emotion. The immediacy, the urgency, the intensity, rather suffers a loss of meaning.

The saddest aspect of this section is the sense of ultimate helplessness of the speaker. The beloved offers her all, but all her pains are self-limited and the acknowledgment of the lover never draws closer. It is futile to look for any depth or penetration. The lyric in this sequence is no doubt an expression of passionate feeling, but the idealisation of Love that the poet attempts does not come out successfully beside the sentimentalisation of pervasive masculine domination and the abject surrender of womanhood which she seems to advocate them.

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### 2.10.1 □ Structure and Style

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The poet in this lyric, as in the whole sequence, is bold and forthright to express the sincerity and intensity of her passion. She succeeds as well in conveying her willingness to sacrifice her 'all' for her Love, save for the criticism that caused quite a stir when it was first published. It is also to be noted here that its catchphrase,

*If you call me, I will come*, has been repeated four times in such a brief poem. Could be the repetitions along with the bold and direct method called for all sorts of rumours which were quite damaging. It went to the extent of saying that the lyrics were the outpouring of a sexual passion that had not found fulfilment in her life.

Most of words used in the poem are monosyllabic and this definitely contributes to the musicality of the song. Her passion carries her along, leaving her no time for ornamentation. The intensity of the poet's passion and the urgency of her desire are suitably conveyed by the swift moving rhythm of the lines resulting in a lyric much simpler, much less ornate than the other lyrics in this sequence.

The flavour may be distinctly Tagorean as Sarojini Naidu's epigraph from Tagore suggest: "My passion all burnt as the flame of Salvation/ The flower of my love shall become the ripe-fruit of Devotion". But the lyric fails to achieve the unification of souls that Sarojini craved for. Salvation through renunciation of the world is not for Tagore, who would rather relish the world through his senses and suck its sweetness, as it were, to the last point, but without relinquishing the highest aesthetic mode. Whereas Naidu tries to form a philosophical plan- she strives to intermingle the human and the divine love of a woman offering herself in utter self-denial and do not convince the reader. Rather there is a definite tendency towards 'hedonistic self-abandon' and escape from reality. Many a critic commented that it sounds more 'rhetoric' than 'poetry'. Gokhale remarked: "It is no doubt a brave and beautiful speech" (Iyengar 219).

In fact it is almost like an invocation. A static meditation of the speaker on her desire that is not fulfilled, on the quest for the unattainable, that perpetuates in action and reinforces the cultivation of sad state of mind. The poet yearns over and over again to be one with the 'Love' but is not been able to achieve. The lyric shows that "prayer... is the proper tribute to love, that love is the partial in search of the complete ... [and] in the process there is much suffering and purgation of self through suffering" (Tilak 30). Here a Pre-Raphaelite twist can be observed.

In Pre-Raphaelite poetry the 'real' world, its events and sensations, are dwelt upon but ultimately abstracted. In reading this verse we become increasingly attentive of the mediating mind of a speaker, the poet who is not imitating the external world but distilling emotional and spiritual essences in artefact. The poem lingers in the all-consuming chambers of the mind, which, for her creator becomes a palace of art. But there is a heightening of sensuality in the imagery until every sense is stimulated to the limit suggesting a tendency towards escaping from reality. Not only this, her

many hyperbolic expressions in such a brief poem as well as her adjectival and metaphorical excesses only dilute the emotions and make the poem seem artificial and rhetorical.

On the whole, it can be said that *'If You Call Me'*, a short lyric in two stanzas of eight lines each, focuses well on the impossibility or transience of promised fulfillment in this world. The speaker's ultimate sense of inadequacy or unworthiness to achieve her desired fulfillment harmonises well with the 'irregular' rhyme scheme<sup>9</sup>. Again the rapidity of its rhythm balances with the desire of the beloved for swift reunion with her Love. The vicissitudes of the poet's 'pilgrimage of love' alarm us into awed attention. But the glow, the surrender, the recoil, the despair, the acceptance, with no reaction or resentment makes the poem stagnate in itself. Nevertheless the 'sustained passion' of the lyric along with its intermittent subterranean rumbling, evocation of broken images and again, the sharp rendering of naked truth bestows *'If You Call Me'* a significant place of its own. Not to speak of love is impossible, as the form and the words of the poem demonstrate, the articulated absence generates a powerful presence, reviving the cares, hopes, and fears of love's past spring. The speaker's refusal to be blank and silent rather suggests that 'Care', 'Hope', 'Fear', and 'Love' itself exist in a perpetually autumnal state of dissolution, but because 'Fear' of losing 'Love' (the inspiration for art) never ends, 'Hope' of its continuance or recovery is always present.

Readers of this poem may immediately observe the work's dominant irony that its deeply serious theme, the absence of love, seems counteracted by the lightness of its rhymes and meter. But that apparent theme is also belied by the poem's close on the accentually stressed, rhyme-words "befall" and "betide". The bottom-heaviness of the two-stanza reinforces the effect, as does the irregular metrical alteration between trochaic and iambic feet: the metrical flights of the first stanza of this poem about mortality are slowed almost to stasis by the increased line length of the second stanza. Here transience is not even artistically transformed into permanence. Rather the exotic imagery and brilliant metaphors and similes undercut the present terseness of the poem; and the simplicity and bare beauty of the poem is lost; thus making the poem stagnate in itself.

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## 2.10.2 □ Questions

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1. 'Her poetry illustrates both a collusion with and resistance to the dominance of the metropolitan aesthetics'. Justify with reference from the poem 'If You Call Me'.
2. 'If You Call Me' sound more 'rhetoric' than 'poetry'. Would you agree to the statement? Explain.
3. 'Sarojini's poetry is a rich and complex text reproducing the contradictions and debates of her age'. Analyse critically.
4. Describe the dominant irony in the poem. "If You Call Me".
5. What does 'Hope' denote in this poem?

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## 2.10.3 □ Notes

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1. Trembling: timid and so trembling with fear. The beloved is as timid as a fear stricken forest deer. Here the urgency to meet her Love is supreme; She is so anxious that she is trembling and yet she would run more swiftly than a frightened forest deer running away from the hunter.
2. Panting: breathing hard. She would not mind 'panting' like a dove that had taken a continuous flight, and yet would seek for her Love.
3. Thrall: bondage; charm cast over it She would fly to her Love swifter than a snake at the call of its charmer.
4. What befall: whatever may happen.
5. Shod: shoes, wearing the shoes of flaming feathers or of fire she would rush across the sky, to her Love, swifter even than the lightning.
6. Dark tides: hardships and misfortunes. No matter whatever insurmountable obstacles and difficulties may beset her path she would not stop.
7. Death's deep chasms: the deep gulf caused by death may separate them but she would not stop her search.
8. Betide: happen. The poet is fearless of whatever happens; she will fly if only the Love calls her.
9. Rhyme scheme: the second line rhymes with the fourth and the sixth with the eighth in both the paragraphs.

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## 2.11 □ Caprice : An Analysis

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You held a wild flower in your finger-tips,  
Idly you pressed it to indifferent lips,  
Idly you tore its crimson leaves apart...  
Alas ! it was my heart.

You held a wine-cup in your finger-tips,  
Lightly you raised it to indifferent lips,  
Lightly you drank and flung away the bowl...  
Alas! it was my soul.

'Caprice', a short lyric of eight lines, is undeniably one of Sarojini Naidu's striking poems. The lyric is a plea for greater sympathy and consideration in human relationship that has its significance in our social associations particularly love. Although not considered amongst the better ones, the lyric reflects our whims and our indifference, which often cause so much pain and suffering to others. It has almost the same theme of 'missing love' as in 'If You Call Me'. It is a desperate yearning to meet her 'Love' irrespective of any consequence in 'If You Call Me', while in the love-lyric 'Caprice' we are shown how maidens' hearts are broken by those unworthy of their love.

'Caprice' is included in the section *The Peacock Lute* in Sarojini Naidu's third book of poems *The Broken Wing*. We know that there was considerable criticism of her limitation as a poet when this volume was published, as there was a cataclysmic change in poetic fashion in Europe with the onset of the first wave of modernism. Yet, I feel that Naidu as a lyric poet and writer of songs is essentially an artist not to be neglected. Indeed, some of her shortest lyrics are incontrovertibly among her best. The poem 'Caprice', leaving aside its provocative theme, is a lyric-short simple and musical. It is the verse-pattern that has a distinct musical quality, the rhythm that has the cadence and liquidity of songs that are most characteristic of her and are favourites of most readers.

This liquidity is sustained in 'Caprice' by the emotional intensity and exultation, which are features of good lyrics. It is said that a 'lyric proper is the product of a swift, momentary and passionate impulse coming from without for the most part, suddenly



awaking the poet into a vivid life, seizing upon him/her and setting him/her on fire'. It may be a short lived one, but the poet is possessed by the intensity. Here, Naidu's emotional fervour is at its height to express her grievance against her Love who had broken and crushed her tender heart. He has caused suffering to her merely out of his 'caprice' or lack of concern. So she is unable to hold her passion and erupts using simple imagery to come out of it in one breath:

You held a wild flower<sup>2</sup> in your fingertips,  
Idly<sup>3</sup> you pressed it to indifferent lips,  
Idly you tore its crimson leaves<sup>4</sup> apart...  
Alas ! It was my heart.  
You held a wine-cup in your fingertips,  
Lightly<sup>5</sup> you raised it to indifferent<sup>6</sup> lips,  
Lightly you drank and flung away the bowl...  
Alas ! It was my soul.

The lyric shows that love for Sarojini is not so much the source and object of desire as of memory. Love as memory can be the source of bliss as well as of pain. It is this suffering that the poet communicates in 'Caprice'. Love for the poet is like a 'tyrant', for the delight it brings is evanescent but the trail of memory and yearning it leaves behind is painfully permanent. It is this agony and craving for her Love and the pain of being rejected that Naidu tries to convey in this poem through several vivid images.

The images of 'wild flower', 'crimson leaves', 'wine cup' are beautifully presented in graphic picture fusing together with visual impression. Yet in the treatment of the theme of love we find nothing but superficialities. The idealization of love that she attempts does not come out successfully. It seems to be only a sentimental release or outburst of her pain that she had carefully nurtured all along.

In the poem Naidu compares her delicate heart with the uncared—for wild flower. Just as one may indifferently kiss a flower and then break its petals and fling it away, the lover also has crushed and broken the tender heart of the poetess. Merely out of his caprice or vagary he has caused suffering to her. The visual impact is stirring but not sustained. It is not powerful enough to match the intensity of her suffering. Her unfulfilled desire is shifted towards blaming her Love: 'Idly you pressed it to indifferent lips/ Idly you tore its crimson leaves apart...' She again compares her soul to a wine-cup. The wine is drunk and the bowl hurled, as if it is of no more concern to him. Her love too has been rejected out of his sheer whim. The company of the wine bowl to

a man is momentary, but Sarojini feels human relationships cannot be so momentary. It is this anguish that the poet tries to convey in the poem 'Caprice'. Thus the imagery of a wine bowl here becomes unrealistic in proportion and contradicts the aesthetic need of the poem. The idealism she intends to portray here through the images seems to be of a particularly meretricious kind. In this way perhaps, through these fleeting images she is trying to satisfy her own passion, her own hunger for love. Putting the blame on her Love she is trying to console her own sorrow, her own wounds and suffering in love.

This may apparently show Sarojini's inclination towards the Pre-Raphaelite love poetry, wherein gestures of renunciation appear to be inevitable sometimes compulsive. But the resulting melancholy and ethereal final effects that the dialectic of desire and renunciation convey in the poetry of Christina Rossetti and Swinburne is not fulfilled in here. The powerful impression of artistic goals, values and procedures found among the Pre-Raphaelite poets is not achieved. In the love poems of the Pre-Raphaelites, there is certain asceticism; passion itself speaking a chastened language—the language, generally, of sorrowful but absolute renunciation. This motive, passion remembered and repressed, condemned to eternal memory and eternal sorrow, is missing in Sarojini's poem 'Caprice'. She is too quickly back in the world and its preoccupations. It is perhaps because Sarojini imbibed her aesthetics from the 'Decadents'<sup>7</sup> whose works are marked by an over-refinement of style, cultivated artificiality and abnormality of content. Putting the blame on her Love she fails to attain the exigencies of renunciation that shape the poetry of Morris, Swinburne and Rossetti.

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### 2.11.1 □ Structure and Style

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It is said that Sarojini never quite excelled in understanding or revealing human nature. And here it is clothed in dreamlike vagueness of flower petals and wine glasses. Nevertheless, the swift outpouring of her anguish or her grievance against her Love attune well to the simple rhyme scheme<sup>8</sup> in 'Caprice'. It glosses the intensity of the poet's passion suitably conveyed by the swift moving rhythm of the lines; thus resulting in a lyric much simpler. Concurrently, the rare union of simplicity with sophistication

of epigrammatic terseness makes the poem quite graceful; like 'Idly you tore its crimson leaves apart...' or 'Lightly you raised it to indifferent lips'. But, the diction steeped in sensuous warmth often leading to excess makes the poem quite superficial. This could be because the English romantics like Keats and Shelley and the Pre-Raphaelites<sup>9</sup>, like Swineburn and Rossetti had a substantial influence upon Sarojini. But she could not exercise their influence to the fullest. The poet seemed to be far too satisfied with her already tried out and over-exhausted forms of writings and where she tried her new style and technique, she did not succeed.

Naturally most of her poems in this collection have a repetitive, formulaic structure, 'Caprice' being one of them. The stanzas are almost identical in form and rhyme scheme; only the images and words change. Such a structure was found in the 'roundel', a literary form popular in the poetry of the 1890s. Its key features, including a simple rhyme scheme and refrains, are found in many of Sarojini's poetry. Similarly, one can find in her poem 'Caprice' the penchant for mood, music and dreamy ephemerality, which were common in the 1890s poets, who were reacting to the high seriousness and moral questioning of the Victorian poets.

In spite of all tapestry and decor of different genres, the resemblances and differences that outline Sarojini's poem 'Caprice' has an "individual beauty of its own". 'Caprice', with the entire abruptness has its own peculiar charm and beauty. The words are carefully chosen both with reference to their sense and sound. And this very care for the music and melody of words predisposes her to the use of sonorous words. The lyric has a bird-like singing quality and sing as if by some natural magic of its own. But the use of adjectival and symbolic excess simultaneously weakens the emotions making the poem seemingly artificial.

The limitations of her craftsmanship thus become obvious. 'Caprice' downplays the intellectual aspect of human personality. At the same time it celebrates life with all its emotions and sensuality. In doing so certain words are repeated so frequently that they tend to lose their effectiveness. Words like 'idly', 'lightly', 'alas', each are repeated twice in a poem of eight lines. This evokes a loss of meaning; a loss of intensity at first; and then even the sound value gradually loses its power of moving us. She uses couplets to stress on the need of love in human relationship. It displays her technical skill but the aesthetic purpose is not attained.

For Sarojini, cruelty is better than indifference and she would enjoy being a victim of his harshness. Thus we see in 'Caprice' an apparent glorification of the beloved's suffering and a preoccupation with pain and affliction. It is fully solipsistic; its speaker is distant from any possible action to resolve her impassioned mental state. Rather, her inwardness is only enhanced during the psychological events portrayed in the poem. Sarojini, at this juncture skilfully makes use of iambic couplet at the end of both the stanzas to expose the futility of endurance and focus on the impossibility of promised fulfilment in this world. It seems she is compelled to dwell on lost possibilities, on memories, on painful and poignant states of feelings. In the process the aesthetic purpose is lost and the focus is shifted. It is reinforcing unequal love and therefore continues to blame the lover for his indifference. She fails to portray the need of love in true human relationships, the intended purpose of the poem. It ends in justifying the disclaim.

The rhymed last two lines, the 'split couplets', one iambic pentameter and the other iambic dimeter, at the bottom of both the stanzas undoubtedly add to the heaviness of the poem already projected. But the couplet commonly used as an emotionally intensive unit, do not add power to the whole; it is nothing more than a mere tapestry. The rumination of the speaker remains static on the quest for the unattainable; only that it reinstates her loneliness, anxiety and cultivation of her melancholic state of mind. "A human being does not stand out as a living person with his or her manifold facets of an individual ... They are effervescent fantasy clothed in flowery epithets and similes" (Sengupta 96).

However, 'Caprice' cannot be denied its individual submerged beauty. Her subdued pain caused by the rejection by her Love leaves her no time for ornamentation. This makes the lyric simple and spontaneous. In the expression of her sentiment, her wrecked heart illustrated by the broken petal of a flower or even the rejected wine glass one can observe a perfect management of rhythm and internal rhymes. It cultivates a tone of languorous melancholy, fully exploiting the elegiac potential of its materials. Overall, the mournful tone, and the mood of 'aesthetic withdrawal' give the lyric 'Caprice' a beauty of its own.

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### 2.11.2 □ Questions

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1. 'Naidu compares her delicate heart with the uncared-for wild flower' Establish in what relation a wild flower is compared to the poet's heart? Critically analyse the given line with reference to the poem 'Caprice'.
2. 'It is the verse-pattern that has a distinct musical quality, the rhythm that has the cadence and liquidity of song'. Do you agree? Explain.
3. 'Her subdued pain caused by the rejection by her Love leaves her no time for ornamentation. This makes the lyric simple and spontaneous'. Analyse critically with reference to the poem 'Caprice'.
4. Discuss in short the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite on Sarojini.
5. Limitations of Sarojini are obvious—write a short critique.
6. Explain any two of images used in the poem caprice: (i) 'wild flower', (ii) 'crimson leaves', (iii) 'wine cup'

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### 2.11.3 □ Notes

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1. Caprice: whim. The title 'Caprice' proves fitting as the lyric goes because it sings the indifference, the lack of concern of her Love that has caused so much pain and suffering to the poet.
2. A wild flower: is always uncared for; it grows in the wilderness without any one's care and dies without any sympathy. So is the love of the poet which is neglected and abandoned by her Love. Wild flower symbolises the delicate heart of the beloved.
3. Idly: casually. Just as one may unconcernedly kiss a flower and then break its petals and fling it away, so also the lover has crushed and broken the tender heart of the poetess.
4. Crimson leaves: red or cerise coloured leaves. Here it denotes the red or pink coloured petals of the wild flower, which is her heart.
5. Lightly: without due consideration or flippantly. Just as one may carelessly pick up a wine bowl and fling it without any concern.
6. Indifferent: apathetic or unsympathetic. Here the poet feels that the lips/ kisses of her Love are as apathetic as the indifferent lips on wine glass.
7. It is difficult to work out the exact nature by which she is influenced said Paranjape

8. Rhyme scheme: a a, b b; a a, c c.
9. Pre-Raphaelite: Throughout the Pre-Raphaelite love poetry, a dialectic of desire and renunciation is at work thematically. Whether a depicted passion is visceral or idealized, its object and therefore any fulfilment of desire are almost always unattainable. As a result, the finest poetry of Christina and Dante Rossetti, of Morris and Swinburne, are essentially elegiac: melancholy poetry of intense unsatisfied longing, of unrealised potential and of loss. The emotional malaise characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite poetic personae prompts most of them eventually to renounce the quest for fulfilment in this world in favour of attaining it in a concretely envisioned afterlife or in some surrogate form (usually a dream) or in art itself. Thus, the Pre-Raphaelite love poem often becomes a self-conscious emblem of accomplished perfection of the ideal itself and of the sense of fulfilment that its contents may nevertheless describe as impossible to attain. Art in this way achieves transcendence "outside" the mutable world. Even in the most sensual Pre-Raphaelite poems, such as Swinburne's *Anactoria*, where the poet Sappho speaks, the poetic enterprise assuages the longings of personae who often are themselves artists. Ironically, this school of poets whom James Buchanan labelled "fleshly" usually depicts desires and pleasures of the flesh only in order ultimately to expose their futility except as passports to a superior and transcendent ideal realm and as inspirations for art, in which the torturous ardour of human passion come most attractively to fruition. Pre-Raphaelite poetry thus often focuses on the impossibility or transience of promised fulfilment in this world, but also, as an unexpected corollary, on a speaker's or central character's ultimate sense of inadequacy or unworthiness to achieve a desired fulfilment.

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### 2.11.5 □ A Biographical Chronology

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- 1879, 13 February : Sarojini Chattopadhyay was born in Hyderabad, Deccan, the eldest of eight children of Aghornath Chattopadhyaya and Varada Sundari.
- 1890 : Begins her poetic carrier at the age of eleven, when instead of doing an algebra sum, she writes a poem.
- 1891 : Passes Madras Matriculation Examination in the First Division, a feat that makes her famous. (Educated at home by governess)

- 1892 : Writes *Mehir Muneer*.
- 1893 : *Mehir Muneer* a poem in three cantos by "A Brahmin Girl" printed by Srinivasa Varadachari and Co., Madras.
- 1894 : Falls in love with Dr. Govindurajulu Naidu, later to become her husband. (Though of an old and honourable family, he was not a Brahmin. The difference in caste roused opposition, not only on the side of her family, but also of his).
- 1895 : She was sent to England, against her will. Receives a special scholarship plus a passage from the Nizam of Hyderabad.
- April : Leaves for England. Becomes the ward of Miss Manning and attends lectures at King's College, University of London. Meets Edmund Gosse and starts sending him letters and poems.
- 1896 : Joins Girton College, Cambridge University, Meets Arthur Symons and members of the Rhymer's Club. Writes several poems, some of which will be later published in *The Golden Threshold*.
- September : Visits Burgdorf in Germany.
- October : *Songs* by S. Chattopadhyay published privately in Hyderabad; contains poems written from 1892-1896.
- 1898 : Falls ill. Visits Switzerland and Italy.
- September : Returns to India.
- December Marries Dr. Naidu in Madras in a Brahma ceremony with Vee-Rasalingam Pantulu officiating as the minister.
- 1901 : Birth of Jayasurya; starts travelling and speaking in public.
- 1902 : Birth of Padmaja
- 1903 : Birth of Randheera
- 1904 : Birth of Leelamani.
- 1905 : *The Golden Threshold* published by Heinmann, London. 'Partition of Bengal'. Plunges into public life, championing the Cause of Hindu-Muslim unity.



- 1906 : Speaks at the annual session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta.
- Addresses the Indian Social Conference in Calcutta on "The Education of Indian Women".
- 1908 : Awarded the Kaiser-e-Hind gold medal by the Government of India.
- 1912 : *The Bird of Time* published by Heinmann, London.
- March : Addresses the Muslim League in Lucknow.
- May : Leaves for England of her ill health.
- 1912-1914 : Often meets Gokhale in London.
- 1914, 8 August : Meets Mahatma Gandhi.
- World War I breaks out. Assists Gandhi in the war effort.
- October : Returns to India.
- Fellow of Royal Sopiety for India.
- 1915 February : Both Aghorenath and Gokhale die; publishes a tribute to the latter in *The Bombay Chronocle*. Virtually leaves Hyderabad, Setting herself up in Taj Mahal hotel Bombay.
- 1916 : Varada Sundari dies.
- Meets Jawaharlal Nehru at the Lucknow session of the Congress Publishes the "Soul of India".
- 1917 : *The Broken Wing* published by Heinmann, London.
- Campaigns for the abolition of indentured Labour.
- December : Leads a delegation of women to Lord Chemsfold and E.S. Montagu asking for educational, social and political rights for Women.
- 1918 : *Feast of Youth* was published.
- 1918-1919 : Works for women's franchise through various forurrts.

- 1919 : Campaigns against the Rowlatt Act.
- July : Leaves for England as member of the India Home Rule League .Returns her Kaiser-e-Hind medal in protest against the Jallinwala Bagh massacre.
- 1920 : Speaks extensively on Punjab and the Khalifat movement in England.
- 1921 : Returns to India after travelling through Sweden, Switzerland and France.  
Campaigns for Gandhi's non-cooperation movement all over India.
- 1922 : Gandhi's famous trial and conviction; writes on it in *The Bombay Chronical*. During his imprisonment, tours the country spreading the gospel of Khadi. Visits Malabar after the Moplah rebellion. Visits Sri Lanka and lectures throughout the island.
- 1923 : Sides with the "No-Change" (Gandhian faction) in the rift in the Congress.
- 1924 : Visits Kenya and South Africa, lecturing extensively.
- 1925 : Succeeds Gandhi as President of Indian National Congress; the first Indian woman to occupy the high office and the second woman ever after Annie Besant. She chaired the summit of Congress in Kanpur.
- 1927 : Helps in the founding of the All India Women's Conference.
- 1928 : The AIWC delegate to the Pan-Pacific Women's Conference at Honolulu.
- May : Sails for America with the message of the non-violence Movement from Gandhiji.
- 1929 : Returns to India after a successful tour of the USA. and Canada
- November : Leaves to preside over the East African Congress.
- 1930 : President of the AIWC.
- May : After the arrest of Gandhi she took the helms of his movement, leads the salt satyagraha at the Dharasana Salt Works.

- 16 May : Arrested and sent to jail.
- 1931 January : Released from jail.
- September : Accompanies Gandhi to the Round Table Conference in London.
- 1932 January : Returns to London; sets sail for Cape Town. Joins the Indian Delegation to South Africa. On her return, becomes "acting President" of the Congress because all the leaders were arrested.
- 22 April : Arrested; interned at the Arthur Road jail, Bombay, with Kasturba Gandhi and Mira Behn; transferred to Yeravada where Gandhi was imprisoned.
- 8 August : Communal Award announced on 8 August.
- 20 September : Gandhi commences his fast upto death against the communal award; nurses Gandhi and oversees his appointments.
- 1933 April : Released from jail.
- 1934 August : Addresses the Women's India Association in Madras.
- 1935, 4 March : Presides over the All India Music Conference, Delhi.
- 1936 : Is removed from and brought back into the Congress Working Committee by Nehru.
- 1937 : Visits Gandhi at Sevagram, near Wardha.
- 1938 : In Calcutta for months; visits Allahabad.
- 1939 April : Chairs the special session of the Congress which saw election of Rajendra Prasad as President after the resignation of Subhas Chandra Bose.
- 1940 October : Arrested along with Gandhi and other leaders
- December : Released.
- 1942, 9 August : Arrested along with Gandhi and interned in the Aga Khan Palace, Pune, after Gandhi's "Quit India" speech of 8 August.

- 1943, 21 March : Discharged from prison upon contracting malaria; retires to Hyderabad.
- 1943-1944 : Assists in the relief efforts in Hyderabad for the victims of Bengal Famine.
- 1945 May : Randheera, her youngest son, dies.
- 1947, 23 March : Presides over the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, and delivers the Presidential Address.
- 15 August : India becomes free.
- July-November : Officiates as the Governor of United Provinces in place of Dr. B. C. Roy.
- November : Continues as Governor because of Roy's resigning post.
- 1948, 30 January : Gandhi assassinated; offers a moving tribute on his death; accompanies the ashes to Allahabad with other national leaders.
- 1949, 28 January : Presides over the convocation on the occasion of Silver Jubilee of Lucknow University.
- 2 March : Dies at 3.30 a.m.

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## Unit 3 □ Toru Dutt : Poems

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### Structure :

- 3.1 Introduction : Toru Dutt, a phenomenal poet of Colonial India
  - 3.1.1 Notes
- 3.2 Lakshman : An Analysis
  - 3.2.1 Structure and Style :
  - 3.2.2 Questions :
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### 3.1 □ Introduction : Toru Dutt, a phenomenal poet of Colonial India

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The earliest Indian writers in English wrote at a time when there was no such category as 'Indian Writing in English'. Toru Dutt (1856-1877) was one such prodigy. A handful of English poems testify to her position at the source of this tradition that was not yet quite a tradition. At a time when Indian writing in English was seen to be largely synonymous with fiction, and fiction with the novel, it is worth remembering this figure. She and her creative work stand at the confluence of languages and tradition. She was born in Bengal, educated in France and Cambridge, and returned to Bengal to write quite a few of her poems. In a climate in which most of Dutt's contemporaries and

predecessors were writing of historical figures and events, or turning to English literary conventions for their models, Toru Dutt took up a form, the sonnet, that came to her from the English language and opened it on to a vista such as the English language had not known before. She delved into the treasures of English and French literatures in which she was educated, and acknowledged without reserve her debt to the countries which inspired her. Simultaneously she placed her country on the international map of letters.

Toru was writing in a period of Indian History that was overshadowed by Macaulay's Minute<sup>1</sup> on Indian Education and Lord William Bentincks ruling of 1835, promoting European education among the 'native' and channelling all educational funds towards the use of English education alone. The learning of English was compulsory for all educated India. This further helped to promote the 'hours of idleness' in the field of Indo-Anglian poetry. But Toru Dutt, a sensitive poet, realised that her own Indian background was precious and that she would have to commingle it with her earner knowledge of French and English. She turned from time to time to the *Sheaf* either to revise it or to add a piece or two in anticipation of a possible second edition. And yet she was already feeling the "need for roots".

Soon, she plunged into learning Sanskrit with the help of her father on November 23, 1875 and by September 6, 1876 she wrote to Mary Martin : "I hope I shall be able to bring out another '*Sheaf* not gleaned in French but in Sanskrit fields..."<sup>2</sup> (Iyengar 59). Toru had indeed learned Sanskrit; she laved in Ramayana, Mahabharata and Sakuntala and translated a few tales from the original Sanskrit into English verse. In spite of her ill health was planning companion '*Sheaf* gleaned in Sanskrit Fields'. She was determined to probe into India's Classical Literature and in a letter to Mary<sup>3</sup> she expressed her eagerness to read the glorious epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana in the original. She wrote: "I shall be quite a Sanskrit Pundit when I revisit old Cambridge. Ah! I so long to be there" (Sengupta Padmini 10). But this did not happen. She could not visit her old place of love. She might have had she lived longer.

Here a mention must be made that Toru often expressed her fascination, her longing for the freedom of life abroad. But she quickly reverted to her Indian environment as Sanskrit to her was as old and as grand a language as Greek, *The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* posthumously published

in 1878), which were rated to be 'the most mature of her writings' are on Indian themes. In this regard H. A. L. Fisher wrote:

"...this child of the green valley of the Ganges has by sheer force of native genius earned for herself the right to be enrolled in the great fellowship of English poets" (*Indian Writing in English* 73).

Yet, the celebrated Indo-Anglian poet Toru Dutt, whose work invariably found place in syllabi, was usually presented as a brilliant, protected, upper-class child poet, who died early of consumption. Rarely did students learn that, like her uncle Ramesh Chunder Dutt, she was a nationalist and a passionate republican; that she was widely read in the history and literature of the French Revolution, or that she translated speeches made in the 'French Chamber Of Deputies' around the time of the Revolution for Indian nationalist journals. Having set foot on French soil at the early age of 13 (along with her parents and sister Aru), she learnt French with remarkable ease and speed. During her brief stay at Nice, Toru absorbed and deeply appreciated the French romantic literature and became an ardent lover of France.

Before the winter of 1869, when Toru with her parents, had sailed for Europe, she was entirely in Kolkata between their two homes in Rambagan and *Bagmari*. She was especially fond of the *Bagmari* Garden House and her sonnet on it is among her best poems.

...Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze  
On a primeval Eden, in amaze".

However, Toru's idyllic childhood in the land of her birth was to mature abroad. Govin Chunder was determined to give his children the advantages of foreign travel and education, and Toru and her sister Aru were the first Bengali girls to cross the 'Black Waters'. They adored France, and next to their love for India, mostly France inspired them. The French also claimed Toru later as a French woman; she too acclaimed herself in her diary that she was an 'indomitable and steadfast French woman'.

Toru, besides being a poet, was a translator of poetry. Her intimacy with the French language and the French symbolist poetry palpably informs her poems, and the French poets she translated into English with her sister Aru are to be found in the book, *A Sheaf Glean'd in French Fields*. Translation and creative practice and the connection between these two are found in her

sonnet *Baugmaree*. It is said to be the first artistically satisfying sonnet in Indian writing in English that occupied the space between translation and transformation. Dutt took this form, 'sonnet', from the English language. But the sort of similes she used in her poems, in which a colour is compared to sound, was unusual in English poetry of her time. It showed Dutt's readings in the poetry of the French symbolists. She poised between English and French in her vision of a Bengal landscape — to resolve the awful contradiction between the world which she wanted to write about, the world of the 'quiet pools' over which the 'seemul leans' and the (English Language she had to write in. The need therefore, is to examine the West's reception of Toru Dutt as a nineteenth-century Indian woman poet writing in English in the colonial period.

The dominant critical tendency, Alpana Sharma Knippling argued, was to categorise Toru Dutt either as a "true daughter of India" or as "imitative of western poetic trends", and this was a flawed position as it was not possible to locate her either as "colonial" or "anti-colonial" (Knippling 216). Knippling went further for a more nuanced perspective where Dutt was regarded as inhabiting an in-between space, resisting both patriarchy and colonial oppression. The kind of poetry she was writing, the different realities she used in her poems to teach her own voice did not exist in English; it was only to be found in French. The odd similies composed of unlikes, 'red' and startling like a 'trumpet's sound', reminds us of the simultaneous coming together and breaking apart of languages that made that incursion possible.

It became possible, for her mind was unclouded by narrow national or linguistic inhibitions or mental barriers. She delved into the treasures of English and French literatures, and acknowledged the wealth of both. This exposure, however, did not lead her to bring that wealth to the service and development of Bengali poetry, as it had in the case of her elder contemporary, Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873). The failure to follow in the footsteps of this major poet and write in Bengali should not, however, be regarded as a flaw in Toru's patriotism. In fact Toru Dutt pioneered the Indian Women's English literary tradition in the mid-nineteenth century, and was the harbinger of a new era in Indo-Anglian literature or Indian writings in English.

The prose and poetry of this early genius developed a dynamic postcolonial view of the author and her writing. Struggling to emerge within and from the medium of her writing, autobiographical in content or



confessional in narrative technique, was a young woman's voice tussling to negotiate the cross-cultural complexities resulting from the Indian-European encounter. The extraordinary space that Toru Dutt occupied between translation and creative practice illuminates the emergence in her writing of the colonial modernity.

And how far does this formative colonial literary identity prefigure the present Dutt points towards an influential poet of a later generation, A. K. Ramanujan, Ramanujan, a master of the line and the image' in his English poetry, was also a translator of Kannada and ancient Tamil verse. Kaiser Fluq, while probing the *Dutt Family Album*, remarked : "They are generally disparaged as imitative writers, merely of historical interest. But the youngest writer produced by the family, Toru Dutt is a talent of a different order — the appellation "genius" in its fullest sense may not inappropriate for her. She deserves an essay all to herself.

A glance at Toru Dutt's use of language is enough to show the difference between her style and that of her predecessors. The poems her father and her uncles wrote all belonged to a recognisable school of nineteenth-century poetry. Toru Dutt's poetry transcended that school, evolving a separate identity. Her ballads on legendary or historical themes proved her 'a good craftsman in verse'. Her feeling was impeccable, and her eyes and ears were alike trained for poetic description or dialogue. In the placid Sanskrit narrative, the appearance of a god or goddess was a normal thing. In an English poem however, the words need wings of a sort to impose that willing suspension of disbelief or even induce that momentary surge of belief without which the poem would fail in its prime purpose. It was here that Toru outshone her predecessors with the possible exception of Henry Derizio.

In her poem Savitri, when Satyavan is dead and Savitri is holding anxious vigil by his side, Yama appears before her. Yama is the God of Death, but he is also the Lord of Dharma. He is the great upholder of Law and not only the Lord of the Kingdom of Shadows as in Romesh Chunder Dutt's poems. A quick look at both the brief extracts from the original poems would show the difference.

Toru's description of Yama's approach  
She saw a stranger slowly glide  
Beneath the boughs that shrunk aghast.  
Upon his head he wore a crown

That shimmered in the doubtful light;  
His vestment scarlet reached low down,  
His waist, a golden girdle dight.  
His skin was dark as bronze; his face  
Irradiate, and yet severe;  
His eyes had much of love and grace,  
But glowed so bright, they filled with fear.

Romesh Chunder Dutt's description of Yama's approach :

In the bosom of the shadows rose a Vision dark and dead,  
Shape of gloom in inky garment and a crown was on his head,  
Gleaming Form of stable splendour, blood-red was his sparkling eye,  
And a fatal noose he carried, grim and godlike, dark and high!

It becomes clear that Toru's Yama is both 'Death' and 'Dharma', whereas Romesh Chunder's Yama is only the 'Dark God'. Here his careful art failed. The difference was in the manner in which her language addressed her experience and in her vision that radiated beyond the boundaries within which most of the nineteenth-century poetry in English was confined. Her awareness of her own 'Indianness' was not restricted to Indian historical themes and the reworking of Indian legends. The mythological content of her poems did not exist extrinsically, but was integrated with her consciousness, her memory. In her poetry observed Chaudhuri, We confront for the first time a language that is crafted out of the vicissitudes of an individual life and a sensibility that belongs to modern India" (*The Dutt Family Album and Toru Dutt* 69).

In *The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, the alchemy of change becomes obvious. When Indo-Anglian writing was more imitative than necessary, the poems took a great stride from a barren imitation to authentic and inspiring writing. She was no longer attempting vainly to compete with European Literature on her own ground, rather she turned to the legends of her own race and country for inspiration. Thus, "Genuine lyric poetry and lyrical narrative poetry, both of the Romantic and Victorian type, came fully into their own...with the generation of Toru Dutt" (Gokak xx). From French and English interests she became more and more engrossed in Indian themes. She was an Indian at heart, in her imagery, in her thinking and in her

personality. Nevertheless, she was an ardent lover of France and England<sup>4</sup> and a connoisseur of the languages of both these countries. She therefore fitted into an international world happily and welded the Christian religion into her Hindu background; here perhaps she laid her richest claim with her serene faith in Christ. At the same time she turned to Hindu mythology avidly because she felt a deep respect for Hindu Gods, heroes and heroines, as she so frequently reiterated. This perhaps made Gosse remark in his introductory memoir: "Toru's *Ballads* breathe a Vedic simplicity of temper and are singularly devoid of littleness and frivolity" (Toru Dutt 11).

The poet in her mythological verses, like *Savitri*, *Lakshman*, *Prahlad*, seemed to chant to herself those songs of her mother's race to which she turned with great pleasure.

Her Christian faith did not conflict with her attraction or addiction to the "deep magic" of the Hindu epics, any more than a modern Greek poet's Christianity conflicts with his fascination for the Homeric myths. She was now an Indian poet writing in English; she was "autochthonous". She was one with India's woman singers, no room now for artificiality or stimulated hothouse efflorescence. Toru by now had rooted herself in her own land, and she pleasingly responded to the heartbeats of the antique racial tradition. As children, she and her brother and sister had heard the stories of the Hindu epics and Puranas, stories of mystery, miracle and local tradition from the lips of their own mother. Later exploration in the original Sanskrit had given Toru a keener poetic edge to the stories and legends. They seemed to answer to a profound inner need for links with the living past of India, and she cared little if Christian or sceptic cavilled at her. This perhaps made Sengupta remark: "No modern Oriental has given us so strange an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic as is presented in the stories of *Prahlad* and of *Savitri*, or so quaint a piece of religious fancy as the ballad of *Jogadhya Uma*" (Sengupta 10).

Overtly it can be said, Toru's precocious craftsmanship was amazing; she interplayed the culture of her land with that of England and France. And at the age of eighteen she made India acquainted with the poets of France in the rhyme of England and blended in her three souls and three traditions. No more she competed with her European contemporary and conscientiously turned to the legends of her own race and own country for inspiration. Toru, an English woman by education,

a French woman at heart, a poet in English and a prose writer in French was now a true Hindu by race and tradition.

*The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* proved Toru as a landmark in the history of the progress of culture in the mid-nineteenth century. For the first time it revealed to the West the soul of India through the medium of English poetry. In fact, scholars are profuse in their praise of this work for its finely knit verses full of vigour and variety. "Toru was one of those leaders of literature who at a time when Bengal was held in low esteem in Europe, raised it high among the nations of the West. In days when Bengali's were losing heart and despairing of themselves and their country, she turned deliberately from the paths of foreign song to write of the stories of her own motherland" (Das 21). But she died an untimely death, merely at the age of twenty-one, in the full bloom of her genius<sup>5</sup>.

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### 3.1.1 □ Notes

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1. Thomas Macaulay, the British statesman and historian, was the principal architect of English education in India and the important spokesman for literary studies in Britain. A reader might enjoy the following extract from a toast proposed in 1846 in Edinburgh by Macaulay: "To the literature of Britain, to that literature, the brightest, the purest, the most durable of all the glories of our country... to that literature which has exercised an influence wider than that of our commerce and mightier than that of our arms; to that literature which has taught France the principles of liberty and has furnished Germany with models of art... to that literature before the light of which impious and cruel superstitions are fast taking flight on the banks of the Ganges... To the literature of Britain, men! And wherever the literature of Britain spreads may it be attended by British virtue and British Freedom!" (Viswanathan Gauri *Oxford Literary Review* 9 1987, pp2-26 from Thomas Macaulay, *Miscellaneous writings* Vol.3 pp398-399).
2. The letter was written in 6 September 1876.
3. Mary Martin, was Toru's lifelong friend and the recipient of most of her letters. They met at Cambridge.
4. In France and England, Toru and her elder sister Aru, under the fostering care of their parents were able to live an isolated and free life. Toru loved France

second to India, and England she wished to settle in because she felt women were allowed more freedom there than in India. Most of the women in Bengal in the middle of the nineteenth century were very much in purdah and Toru often felt the restrictions hampered the freedom she so appreciated when abroad. 'The free air of Europe and the free life there, are things not to be had here'. Toru wrote in a letter recalling her days in England". " we cannot stir out from our garden without being stared at or having a sun-stroke". In England the nameless pressure of the ancestral place was withdrawn, and both the sisters matured in that atmosphere.

5. **The Century Magazine for January 1884 states:** Toru was born in 1856 and died in 1877, only 21 years of age. Yet in her short life she accomplished one of the greatest literary feats of modern times. She spoke the native language of Calcutta, but before she was 18... she acquired a perfect mastery of French, English, German and Sanskrit. In 1876 she published a book entitled *A Sheaf Gleaned In French Fields*. The book contained one hundred and sixty six poems, being original compositions in English, or almost literal translations from the foremost of French poets, Victor Hugo, Alfred Musset and others... This remarkable person was no doubt a genius, but her life was passed in the most exhausting labour and the esteem and variety of her studies; each being pursued with the utmost diligence and thoroughness, at last undermined her health and destroyed her life... George Eliot, George Sand and Madame de Staël did not exhibit such a remarkable energy of genius at the age when this Indian girl closed her life. This was perhaps the most remarkable piece of work that was accomplished in so short a time. She reproduced these French poems with absolute fidelity to the original, and at the same time expressed herself in English as well as though it had been her vernacular life. This was perhaps the most remarkable piece of work that was accomplished in so short a time. She reproduced these French poems with absolute fidelity to the original, and at the same time expressed herself in English as well as though it had been her vernacular.

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### 3.2 □ Lakshman : An Analysis

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'Hark! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!  
It is,—it is my husband's voice!  
Oh haste!n, to his succour fly,  
No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice.  
He calls on thee, perhaps his foes  
Environ him on all sides round,  
That wail,"— it means death's final throes!  
Why standest thou, as magic-bound?

Is this a time for thought,—oh gird  
Thy bright sword on, and take thy bow!  
He heeds not, hears not any word,  
Evil hangs over us, I know!  
Swift in decision, prompt in deed,  
Brave unto rashness, can this be,  
The man to whom all looked at need?  
Is it my brother, that I see!

Ah no, and I must run alone,  
For further here I cannot stay;  
Art thou transformed to blind dumb stone!  
Wherefore this impious, strange delay!  
That cry,—that cry,—it seems to ring  
Still in my ears,—I cannot bear  
Suspense; if help we fail to bring  
His death at least we both can share.'

'Oh calm thyself, Videhan Queen,  
No cause is there for any fear,  
Hast thou his prowess never seen?  
Wipe off for shame that dastard tear!  
What being of demonian birth  
Could ever brave his mighty arm ?

Is there a creature on the earth  
That dares to work our hero harm ?

The lion and the grisly bear  
Cower when they see his royal look,  
Sun-staring eagles of the air  
His glance of anger cannot brook,  
Pythons and cobras at his tread  
To their most secret coverts glide,  
Bowed to the dust each serpent head  
Erect before in hooded pride.

\* \* \*

He call for help! Canst thou believe  
He like a child would shriek for aid  
Or pray for respite or reprieve —  
Not of such metal is he made!  
Delusive was that piercing cry,—  
Some trick of magic by the foe;  
He has a work,—he cannot die,  
Beseech me not from hence to go.

For here beside thee, as a guard  
'Twas he commanded me to stay,  
And dangers with my life to ward  
If they should come across thy way.  
Send me not hence, for in this wood  
Bands scattered of the giants lurk,  
Who on their wrongs and vengeance brood,  
And wait the hour their will to work.'

'Oh shame! And canst thou make my weal  
A plea for lingering! Now I know  
What thou art Lakshman! And I feel  
Far better were an open foe.  
Art thou a coward ? I have seen  
Thy bearing in the battle-fray

Where flew the death-fraught arrows keen,  
Else had I judged thee so today.

But then thy leader stood beside!  
Dazzles the cloud when shines the sun,  
Reft of his radiance, see it glide  
A shapeless mass of vapours dun;  
So of thy courage,—or if not,  
The matter is far darker dyed,  
What makes thee loth to leave this spot?  
Is there a motive thou wouldst hide?

He perishes—well, let him die!  
His wife henceforth shall be mine own!  
Can that thought deep imbedded lie  
Within thy heart's most secret zone!  
Search well and see! One brother takes  
His kingdom,—one would take his wife!  
A fair partition!—But it makes  
Me shudder, and abhor my life

Remain here, with a vain pretence  
Of shielding me from wrong and shame,  
Or go and die in his defence  
And leave behind a noble name.  
Choose what thou wilt,—I urge no more,  
My pathway lies before me clear,  
I did not know thy mind before,  
I know thee now,—and have no fear.'

She said and proudly from him turned,—  
Was this the gentle Sita? No.  
Flames from her eyes shot forth and burned,  
The tears therein had ceased to flow.  
'Hear me, O Queen, ere I depart,  
No longer can I bear thy words,



They lacerate my inmost heart?  
And torture me, like poisoned swords.

Have I deserved this at thine hand?  
Of lifelong loyalty and truth  
Is this the meed? I understand  
Thy feelings, Sita, and in sooth  
I blame thee not,—but thou mightst be  
Less rash in judgement. Look! I go,  
Little I care what comes to me  
Wert thou but safe,—God keep thee so!

In going hence I disregard  
The plainest orders of my chief,  
A deed for me,—a soldier,—hard  
And deeply painful, but thy grief  
And language, wild and wrong, allow  
No other course. Mine be the crime,  
And mine alone,—but oh, do thou  
Think better of me from this time.

Here with an arrow, lo, I trace  
A magic circle ere I leave,  
No evil thing within this space  
May come to harm thee or to grieve.  
Step not, for aught, across the line,  
Whatever thou mayst see or hear,  
So shalt thou balk the bad design  
Of every enemy I fear.

And now farewell ! what thou hast said,  
Though it has broken quite my heart,  
So that I wish that I were dead—  
I would before, O Queen, we part  
Freely forgive, for well I know  
That grief and fear have made thee wild,

We part as friends,—is it not so?  
And speaking thus,—he sadly smiled.

'And oh ye sylvan gods that dwell  
Among these dim and sombre shades,  
Whose voices in the breezes swell  
And blend with noises of cascades,  
Watch over Sita, whom alone  
I leave, and keep her safe from harm,  
Till we return unto our own,  
I and my brother, arm in arm.

For though ill omens round us rise  
And frighten her dear heart, I feel  
That he is safe. Beneath the skies  
His equal is not,—and his heel  
Shall tread all adversaries down,  
Whoever they may chance to be.—  
Farewell, O Sita! Blessings crown  
And peace for ever rest with thee!

He said, and straight his weapons took  
His bow and arrows pointed keen,  
Kind,—nay, indulgent,—was his look,  
No trace of anger there was seen,  
Only a sorrow dark, that seemed  
To deepen his resolve to dare  
All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed,  
As out he strode with dauntless air.

The handling of Indian myth in Indo-Anglian poetry may be judged by perusing Toru Dutt's ballad on 'Lakshman' that capture some of the beauty, mystery and simplicity of ancient legend. Albeit the recent movement towards a compact style shorn of superfluous ornaments had an impact on Toru, in this stately poem of *The Ancient Ballads and the Legends of Hindustan* she displays with an epic grandeur a sublime narrative style that is both simple and

transparent. It has on the whole been healthy. It has elicited a more exacting loyalty of words to idea, image and impulse.

In 'Lakshman', as in her other mythological poems, Toru is mainly interested in the telling of the ancient tale. It is not a mere tale or fertile imagination of the poet; but a part of the consciousness of her childhood, when she had heard the stories of the Hindu epics from the 'lips of her own mother'. It is thus with a very sure instinct, Toru in these immortal stories uses the right material for the expression of her own maturing poetic powers. Her woman's imagination weave myriad coloured picture and she embarks upon her work.

It is a difficult situation to give the colloquy of Sita and Lakshman a mystic action and a local habitation. But with the childhood faith of the 'pure eternal feminine', Toru has almost accomplished it. Toru scores through the simple sufficiency of her clear understanding of the tragedy. The Ballad breathes a Vedic simplicity of temper and is especially devoid of modesty. Here sophistication certainly would have failed, but her radiant simplicity has succeeded. In the poem, Sita is portrayed as obstinate, foolish and cruel whereas Lakshman is wise, gentle and understanding. Against his wishes he leaves her alone in the forest:

"Farewell, O Sita! Blessings crown  
And peace for ever rest with thee"

He said, and straight his weapons took,  
His bow and arrows pointed keen,  
Kind,— nay, indulgent, — was his look,  
No trace of anger there was seen,  
Only sorrow dark, that seemed  
To deepen his resolve to dare  
All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed,  
As out he strode with dauntless air.

(lines 167-176)

Lakshman, most loyal of the four brothers<sup>1</sup>, leaving Sita alone against his better judgement because she would not see any reason, and so leaving her a prey to Ravana, is almost like 'a perfect Greek tragedy', observe many critics. Toru achieves this certainly because of her excellent craftsmanship. Her sensation for words is unimpeachable and her observation and eye are alike trained for poetic description or dialogue. She has developed this

masterly skill from her childhood and imbibed so deep a love for the ancient ballads of India, is perhaps due to her mothers' gentle influence in home, her songs and gift of story-telling. Once Toru wrote to Mile Clarisse Bader, her French friend:

"When I hear my mother sing, in the evenings, the old songs of the country, I weep almost always" (Sengupta 19).<sup>2</sup>

An examination of the poem 'Lakshman' will reveal Toru's genuine urge and her profound inner need for links with the 'living past of India'. The poem is a simple conversation between Sita and her brother-in-law, where Sita takes rather an unfair advantage of her staunch guardian's noble nature. She even goes to the extent of insulting Lakshman:

"Oh shame! and canst thou make my weal  
A plea for lingering! Now I know  
What thou art, Lakshman! And I feel:  
Far better were an open foe.  
Art thou a coward? I have seen  
Thy bearing in the battle-fray  
Where flew the death-fraught arrows keen,  
Else had I judged thee so today. (65-72)

What makes thee loth to leave this spot?  
Is there a motive thou wouldst hide? (79-80)

He perishes — well, let him die!  
His wife henceforth shall be mine own!  
Can that thought deep imbedded lie  
Within thy heart's most secret zone!  
Search well and see! One brother takes  
His kingdom,— one would take his wife!  
A fair partition!— But it makes  
Me shudder, and abhor my life" (81-88).

The theme is derived from the Ramayana. Sita, deeply moved by the beauty of a golden deer roaming about the hermitage, pleads with her husband (Rama) to get it for her. Rama goes in pursuit of the deer in spite of the

forebodings expressed by Lakshman who guesses that the golden deer is Maricha in disguise sent by Ravana<sup>4</sup>. After a long pursuit Rama sends an arrow, which fells Maricha. While dying he cries out in Rama's voice for help. Hearing the agonised cry, Sita mistakes it for Rama's voice. She could not hold herself and insist on Lakshman to rush to help Rama. Toru Dutt's poem, 'Lakshman', begins at this point :

"Hark ! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!

It is, — my husband's voice!

Oh hasten, to his succour fly,

No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice.

He calls on thee, perhaps his foes

Environ him on all sides round,

That wail, — it means death's final throes!

Why standest thou, as magic-bound? (1-8)

However, Lakshman remains unmoved, as he has been instructed by Rama not to leave the hermitage and to give protection to Sita. Moreover, Lakshman knows that Rama is fortified against death and is invincible; he tries to calm Sita and make her understand that no creature on earth would dare to "work our hero harm". Even the 'lion', the 'pythons' and 'cobras' glide to their most 'secret converts' at his tread—.

"The lion and the grisly bear

Cower when they see his royal look,

Sun-staring eagles of the air

His glance of anger cannot brook,

Pythons and cobras at his tread

To their most secret coverts glide,

Bowed to the dust each serpent head

Erect before in hooded pride.

Rakshasas<sup>5</sup>, Danavs<sup>6</sup>, demons, ghosts,

Acknowledge in their hearts his might,

And slink to their remotest coasts,

In terror at his very sight

Evil to him! Oh fear it not,  
Whatever foes against him rise!

Banish for aye the foolish thought,  
And be thyself, — bold, great, and wise" (33-48).

Yet, Sita would not move an inch from her decision; she clings to her fixed thought and charges Lakshman with being a 'coward'.

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### 3.2.1 □ Structure and Style :

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The conversation is so normal and to the point that it immediately attracts the reader's attention. Toru's sympathy with the humble becomes obvious right away. The urgency of Sita's desire to bring back her husband Ram is suitably conveyed by the swift moving rhythm of the lines resulting in a lyric simple and less ornate than the original verses in Sanskrit. This has indeed brought forth a more demanding loyalty of words to idea, image and impulse; this the poet achieves perfectly in this poem. The long poem 'Lakshman', with hundred and seventy-six lines does not seem to be monotonous at all. Rather one line of the conversation leads to another in a lyrical rhyme<sup>7</sup> that leads to the epic grandeur of the poem. A rugged grace of diction and spirited rhythm are uniformly observed in the poem. But, the flowery phraseology of the Sanskrit poets, their magnificence in the descriptions of the grandeur of Gods and kings are lacking in 'Lakshman'.

It is not that Toru was not able to produce the profusion and splendour in her descriptions, but she intentionally declines from such usage of magnificent diction for she has shortened and modernised her poems to suit a foreign reader. Nevertheless some critics feel that Toru was not able to produce the rich Sanskrit language in English. "The old Ballads and Legends have lost all their plaintive cadence, all the natural charm they bore when wrapped with the full-sounding music of the Sanskrit... The imagery, the scenery has even lost its own colour and profusion and ornamentation. The warmth of expression and sentiment has of necessity been toned down by the very use of Language, which even had it been in the plastic hands of Toru Dutt, could never have afforded her the delicate touch and colour which she found in the French". (Sengupta 84) At the same time, as we analyse her

poems today, more interesting formations emerge and proves the young poetess' prowess to synthesise Indian lore and different formations of English poetry. I would like to quote a few stanzas from her long poem 'Lakshman':

"And now farewell! What thou hast said,  
Though it has broken quite my heart,  
So that I wish I were dead —  
I would before, O Queen, we part,  
Freely forgive, for well I know  
That grief and fear have made thee wild,  
We part as friends,— is it not so?"  
And speaking thus he sadly smiled.

"And oh ye sylvan gods<sup>b</sup> that dwell  
Among these dim and sombre shades,  
Whose voices in the breezes swell  
And blend with noises of cascades,  
Watch over Sita, whom alone  
I leave, and keep her safe from harm,  
Till we return unto our own,  
I and my brother, arm in arm.

For though ill omens round us rise  
And frighten her dear heart, I feel  
That he is safe. Beneath the skies  
His equal is not,— and his heel.  
Shall tread all adversaries down,  
Whoever they may chance to be.  
Farewell, O Sita! Blessings crown  
And peace for ever rest with thee!" (145-168)

We have here part of the narrative poems that reads as well as any nineteenth century British lyric; its metric competence almost impeccable, its narration, dialogue all so immaculately clear. Besides, her management of the versification, the eight-line octosyllabic quartets, is adroit enough. In her description of the difficult situation Toru rises to the occasion and with the

gift of radiant simplicity succeeds in managing occasional unpleasantness with great dexterity.

Given the colonial context and British criticism of the position of women in our society, one need hardly point out that Sita's virtue closely matches the strangely convoluted Victorian myth of sexual purity in women. The Victorians laid great stress on sexual restraint and moral uprightness in women. The familiar logic of the myth runs somewhat like this proposition: 'a pure woman excites no sexual response' is evident in lines: We part as friends, — is it not so? That grief and fear have made thee wild, (149-150) / And oh ye sylvan gods... Watch over Sita, whom alone / I leave, and keep her safe from harm, (153-158) / And peace forever rest with thee! (168). There is another aspect to the construction. For the Victorians, women, like the Indians, were really children. Only, white women were not "half-devil, half-child" like the Orientals were, but "half-angel, half-child". Sita the real, uncorrupted Indian woman is like her white counterpart, child-like and angelic. Her purity is "God's purity". Her genuine love and devotion for Ram depicted impeccably gives a serene picture of her flawless relation with Lakshman and her devout faith in her husband Ram<sup>9</sup>.

Here Toru is claiming for her Sita the very sexual refinement, the purity, held as always, in the virtue of women, that the British insisted Hindu society lacked. The effort obviously is to rebut the negative image the British projected, and redeem if not the present, at least the past. The poet's main anxiety to project Sita as a 'pure woman', and Lakshman as a devout brother and a humble brother-in-law has been achieved and efficiently controlled in forms; which otherwise would have lost its sharpness in the use of ornate phraseology. In fact what has been so efficiently controlled is the poet's imagination, her longings. Sita's straining for freedom and power to rescue her husband Ram, despite her confinement within a "magic circle" is the limit the poet sees as habitable space.

No doubt Toru Dutt stands out in the assessment of contemporary critics as the major talent of Indo-Anglian literature. 'Lakshman' is definitely a befitting poem with sensitive descriptions, lyricism and vigour that compels attention. "It is unquestionably and movingly articulate, and disgrace neither the original nor the language in which they are now rendered" (Iyengar 70). One is overwhelmed by the rugged beauty that graces the poem even when Sita charges Lakshman with being a 'coward'.



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### 3.2.2 □ Questions :

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1. Examine Toru Dutt as the 'major talent of Indo-Anglian literature' from the poem 'Lakshman'.
2. Do you think Sita took advantage of Lakshman's humble nature? Analyse with reference to the poem 'Lakshman'.
3. Do you agree that 'Lakshman' loses its grandeur due to lack of flowery phraseology of the Sanskrit poets? Analyse the poem critically.
4. Toru Dutt's gift of 'radiant simplicity succeeds in managing occasional unpleasantness with great dexterity'. Justify with reference to the poem 'Lakshman'.

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### 3.2.3 □ Notes

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1. Four brothers: Ram, Lakshman, Bharat and Satrugnah.
2. The quotation is different to some extent in other texts, albeit the meaning remains the same.
3. Maricha: One of the Rakshasas in the epic Ramayana.
4. Ravana: King of the Rakshasas of Lanka. Sita was abducted by him.
5. Rakshasas: Black ape-like creatures of Lanka in the Ramayana.
6. Danavs: giants.
7. Rhyme: ababcdcd.
8. Sylvan gods: Gods of woods and forest.
9. Here the impact of Victorian poetry is being felt on the Indo-Anglian scene.

### 3.3 □ Our Casuarina Tree : An Analysis

Like a huge Python, winding round and round  
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars  
Up to its very summit near the stars,  
A Creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound  
No other tree could live. But gallantly  
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung  
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,  
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;  
And oft at nights the garden overflows  
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,  
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.  
When first my casement is wide open thrown  
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;  
Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest  
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone  
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs  
His Puny offspring leap about and play;  
And far and near kokilas hail the day;  
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;  
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast  
By that hoar tree; so beautiful and vast,  
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificance  
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:  
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,  
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,  
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!  
Blent with your images, it shall arise  
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!  
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear  
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?  
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,  
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!

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

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

'Our Casuarina Tree', a well-known poem of Toru Dutt is a consummate self-revelation of her almost mystic affinity with trees. In the poem Toru traces the already captured moment of her childhood 'beneath the tree' and unburden her most intimate joy and sorrow that she associates with the tree she humanises. The poem gives a sketch of her days spent in Kolkata between her two homes in Rambagan and Baugmaree.

Toru, a lover of nature, especially loved the garden house in Baugmaree, and the tree in this garden house she contemplates is the Casuarina Tree that she immortalises. The tree gave them her affectionate shelter in those days of her childhood when she with her brother and sister played joyfully beneath it. But now her brother is dead and her sister no more, Toru fears that when

her 'days will be done' the Tree will be all alone like them in their grave[s]. So she desires to 'consecrate a lay unto thy honour' and hopes 'May'st thou be numbered when my [her] days are done'.

Thus she fondly describes the majestic beauty of the tree and sings the burden it bore in the poem, 'Our Casuarina Tree'.

Like a huge python; winding round and round  
The rugged Trunk, indented deep with scars  
Upto its very summit near the stars,  
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound  
No other trees could live. But gallantly  
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung  
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,  
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;  
And oft at nights the garden overflows  
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,  
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose. (1-11)

It is only someone who has closely observed these beautiful trees as 'gorgeous beings' and treasured them could have noted with such accurate detail the exotic appeal, the fragrance and the song that will never die. It is not only the 'magnificence' of the tree, along with it the poet's association is more impressive that makes the poem truly memorable. The poet's pining for the scenes of her native land and reliving the memories of her childhood finds its fullest expression here. 'Our Casuarina Tree' reminiscences her happy childhood and her connection with the tree under which she played gleefully 'with love intense'. At the same time she could hear 'the trees lament' from an 'unknown land' and a 'dirge-like murmur' blend with her joyful memory and 'hot tears blind [her] eyes'. Perhaps Toru's sad memory of the early death of her brother and sister, who are left alone in the grave, remind her of the loneliness of the tree in an 'unknown land'.

But not because of its magnificence  
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul;  
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,  
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,

For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!  
 Blent with your images, it shall arise  
 In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!  
 What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear  
 Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?  
 It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,  
 That haply to the unknown land may reach. (23-33)

These are the core lines of the poem that recapture the past and immortalises the moments of time so recaptured. It is more than a poetic evocation of the tree. The lines become more significant and revealing as they evoke the poet's inner vision of the sublime beauty along with her nostalgia for the past.

Beauty and tragedy and fatality had criss-crossed in the life of the young poet. It is said the suffering and the dark image of incomprehensible fatalities<sup>1</sup> that were her shadow companion, make her poems appreciable. Many critics even think that Toru's poetry is appreciated because it is closely associated with her sad life. Could be this is why Toru is so often called the Keats of Indo-English literature for more than one reason — her meteoric rise, the sensuous quality of her poetry and her premature disappearance from the literary firmament. Toru died, like John Keats, of consumption and the end came slow and sad.

One wonders if her poetry was in piety of her life. But Toru's sustained faith in 'love [that] never dies, and there is no parting known'<sup>2</sup> helped her to live with many a sorrow; and yet she hopes "May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse" for 'dear' was 'the Casuarina to [her] soul', whom 'she loved with love intense'. 'Our Casuarina Tree' has proved this in its last line that hope of an eternal and ever happy life prevails beyond the weary days on earth. So we can say that the Casuarina tree is "both tree and symbol, and in it are implicated both time and eternity" (Iyengar 72). It makes one think whether Keats's theory of "Negative Capability"<sup>3</sup> had an influence on her. Uncertainties had almost ruled Tom's life but she calmly lived with them, without fancying for facts or reasons. Rather she lived a life of exhausting labour, pursuing her studies with utmost 'diligence' and 'thoroughness'. By then she had already overcome, the dark waves of life and the poems she had written at this stage are undoubtedly the most matured ones. She no more gave way to fine and discordant echo of music that welled in her mind

that were often spoiled by 'hypercritical ear' and 'queer mark of expression'. And "Our Casurina Tree" included in her *Miscellaneous Poems*, "needs no apology for its rich and mellifluous numbers. It is difficult to exaggerate when we try to estimate what we have lost in the premature death of Toru Dutt" (Arnold 432).

Needless to mention, Toru, the young genius, a noble admirer of France and England was a faithful Indian at heart. Although she has given an imported name 'Casuarina'<sup>4</sup> to her tree, in her use of imagery and in her thinking she returned to her 'idyllic childhood' in the land of her birth. Even 'in distant lands' she could hear the 'wail' of the tree of her land 'far, far away'.

When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith<sup>5</sup>  
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore  
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,  
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon  
And every time the music rose — before  
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,  
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime  
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime. (37-44)

The poem is one of the earliest instances of the effective use of memory in Indian poetry in English. In the description of the Casuarina tree like 'a huge Python, winding round and round...' and in the description of the virgin beauty of the Bengal landscape, she proves her craving, her love for her land, which is India—

... far and near *kokilas*<sup>6</sup> hail the day;  
And to their pasture wend our sleepy cows;  
And in the shadow, on the broad tank<sup>7</sup> cast  
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,  
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed (18-22).

Along with this description of the serene beauty of Bengal and the nostalgic celebration of the Tree in her garden house Toru reminds us of the *Yew-trees*<sup>8</sup> of the Barrowdale valley. In fact the 'Fraternal Four' of the Barrowdale valley, of which Wordsworth writes in his *Yew-trees*, is the imagery

that suggested this theme to Toru. The poet even goes to the extent of quoting from "Yew-trees": "Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton, / And Time, the shadow;" and she does it almost perfectly. Yet again, while in the distant lands of France and Italy she remembers 'Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime' like 'deathless trees' those in Borrowdale<sup>9</sup>.

The incursion of the Casuarina tree into the Bengal landscape is for her and for all of us an important one. All these suggest the simultaneous coming together and breaking apart of languages that make that incursion possible. True, "Our Casuarina Tree was better than anything written up till then by an Indian in English Language" (Choudhury Rosinka 67).

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### 3.3.1 □ Structure and Style

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'Our Casuarina Tree' is perhaps the first satisfying example of those texts in Indian writing in English that occupy the space between translation and transformation. In its transition from one of the five senses to another, from the visual to the auditory, from the 'crimson clusters' to the sweet songs of birds and bees, the analogy rehearses the poems own act of translation; its movement from English to her country home and back again. The incorporation of the local word 'kokilas' in the frame of a Wordsworth-like poem<sup>10</sup> illustrates her spontaneous outpour of thoughts and desires, and this finds its reflection in her simple and transparent frame of language that startles us with its resonance — 'And far and near *Kokila's* hail the day'.

It opens the way to further such usage in Indian writing in English. There cannot be any denial that the *Ballads* brought Toru home to rest in a world of her own. The *Ballads* that undoubtedly form the most matured of her writings constitutes Toru's chief legacy to posterity. And 'Our Casuarina Tree' that immortalises the recaptured past is what E.J. Thomson says: "the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner" (Sengupta 86).

The use of imagery in the poem where the auditory and the visual becomes one is an unfaltering reminiscence, her persistent recollection of her likings for French literature. T. S Eliot in one of his essays said that the kind of poetry he needed to teach him the use of his own voice did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French. The same could be said of Dutt in her desire to find her voice in English and exploring new territory

and a variety of languages and literary traditions. These transactions are still not understood and perhaps can never be understood.

In her vision of the Casuarina tree, Toru poised between English and French, and returned to her enthralling childhood in Bengal. These transactions are so impeccably versed and fit in so perfectly into the structure of the poem that one could undeniably say Toru Dutt achieved "the concretisation of something as amorphous as nostalgia in her best-known poem, *Our Casuarina Tree*" (Parthasarathy 32). The tree so recalled is a symbol, a representation of time and perpetuity and a commemorative tree, the memory of which blinds her eyes with 'hot-tears'.

The memory of the recaptured tree is beautifully versed in five stanzas; each stanza with eleven lines, form with the rhyme scheme<sup>11</sup> often used by Keats himself. Again, Keats's poetry is characterised by an exuberant love of the language and a rich, sensuous imagination. This is almost true of Toru. At least certain aspects get revealed as we scan through the stanzas. The first stanza is an objective description of the tree; the second connects the tree to Tom's own feeling of it at different times; the third associates the tree with Toru's memories of her lost brother and sister; the fourth gives a human shape to the tree, for its lament is a human recordation of pain and disappointment; and the fifth stanza resolves as it were the immortality of the tree.

In the organisation of the eleven-line stanzas, the finish of the individual stanzas and the poem as a whole, '*Our Casuarina Tree*' can claim its place as a superb piece of writing; in its mastery of phrase and rhythm and in its music of sound and ideas, the "poem alone can number her with the deathless English poets of her time" (Sengupta 86). It reveals both the unique loveliness of the Indian scene and the freshness of vision with which it is perceived. Rightly, Gokak remarks: "Indianness of theme, utter authenticity and consummate self-revelation reach their high water-mark of excellence in Toru Dutt's '*Our Casuarina Tree*' (xxiii).

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### 3.3.2 □ Questions

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1. *Our Casuarina Tree* is perhaps the first satisfying example of those texts in Indian writing in English that occupy the space between translation and transformation. Do you agree? Analyse with reference to the poem.



2. In her use of imagery and her thinking she returned to her 'idyllic childhood' in the land of her birth. Examine the statement critically, referring to the poem.
3. *Our Casuarina Tree* is "the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner". Do you think the appreciation is correct?
4. Casuarina tree is "both tree and symbol, and in it are implicated both time and eternity". Explain with reference to the poem.

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### 3.3.3 □ Notes

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1. The early death of her brother Abju, and her sister-friend Aru and several death threats that the poet experienced at an immature age pressurised her so often, could be the reason why Toru was so advertently apprehensive of life in earth — our transient life in earth, where 'Fear' overshadowed the 'hope that is trembling' and those times of her 'happy prime'.

Toru's letter to Mary Martin at Cambridge reveal her childlike joy in life with her intellectual maturity. They speak of 'flowers' and 'birds' and of her 'artistic vision', scholarly pursuits and also of her 'morbid illness'.

2. The line is taken from a sonnet written by Govin Chunder on the death of his son Abju. Toru had a similar faith and hence quoted.
3. Negative Capability: "*I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason*" John Keats.
4. Casuarina: The name 'Casuarina' is derived from the Latin word '*casuarius cassowary*', from fancied resemblance of the branches to the feathers of the bird.
5. Water-wraith: a dead spirit, remembered from "*The Braes of Yarrow*" by John Logan (1748-1788) and William Wordsworth's "*Yarrow Visited September, 1814*".
6. Kokilas: Koels (plural), "A cuckoo of the genus *Eudynamis*, especially the *E. honorata* of India". It is also sometimes termed as "the nightingale of Hindustan".

7. Broad tank: used for storage of drinking water.
8. Yew-Trees: In 1803 William Wordsworth may well have sat under this tree and taken notes for a poem entitled Yew Trees, certainly the lines show a good observational understanding of the yew's main features and they express the timelessness and indestructible qualities of these old trees.

Wordsworth refers to the "fraternal four" in the poem but only three are left today; one was blown down in a storm in 1883. There is another old yew directly below, by the river. The biggest tree is hollow enough to stand inside and its roots seem to be gracefully enveloping the shattered rocks around it.

9. Borrowdale: the Borrowdale valley and lake, near Keswick, Cumbria, in the Lake district, of which Wordsworth writes in "Yew-trees", the poem that suggested Toru the theme of "*Our Casuarina Tree*".
10. Wordsworth-like poem: One based on the "real language of men" and which avoids the poetic diction of much eighteenth-century poetry. Toru's spontaneous outpour of thoughts and desires are reflected in her simple and transparent frame of language.
11. Rhyme scheme: abba,cddc,eee.

### 3.4 □ The Lotus : An Analysis

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Love came to Flora asking for a flower  
That would of flowers be undisputed queen,  
The lily and the rose, long, long had been  
Rivals for that high Honour, Bards of power  
Had sung their claims. 'The rose can never tower  
Like the pale lily with her Juno mien'—  
'But is the lily lovl'ier?' Thus between  
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.  
Give me a flower delicious as the rose  
And stately as the lily in her pride'—  
But of what colour?'—'Rose-red,' Love first chose,  
Then prayed,—'No, lily-white,—or, both provide';  
And Flora gave the lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,  
And 'lily-white',—the queenliest flower that blows.

'The Lotus' is one of the last few poems of Toru Dutt included in the *Miscellaneous Poems*, published at the end of the *Ancient Ballads And The Legends Of Hindustan*. It is naturally a sophisticated rendition of Toru, when she has overcome all the contradictions she encountered- religious, social or personal. She is now delving deep into her inner vision simply writing poems in her seclusion as by now she has already contracted consumption. She is no more tussling to negotiate the cross-cultural complexities resulting from the Indian-European encounter. No longer does she wish to compete with her European contemporaries or even attempt to compete with European Literature on her own ground. 'The Lotus' is one such poem that exemplifies her precocious craftsmanship and a reflection of her fertile, uninterrupted imagination, uninhabited by the growth of the intellectual reform or the religious reorganisation that took place in the nineteenth century India. In her hands, Gokak observe — "Genuine lyric poetry, both of the Romantic and Victorian type, came fully into its own..." (Gokak xx). In the annals of Indo-Anglian poetry this sonnet of Toru, 'The Lotus', along with few other poems, occupy a distinctive place of its own.

Love<sup>1</sup> came to Flora<sup>2</sup> asking for a flower  
 That would of flowers be undisputed queen,  
 The Lily and the rose, long, long had been  
 Rivals for that high honour. Bards of power  
 Had sung their claims. 'The rose can never tower  
 Like the pale lily with her Juno<sup>3</sup> mien'—  
 'But is the lily lov'ier?' Thus between  
 Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's<sup>4</sup> bower.  
 'Give me a flower delicious as the rose  
 And stately as the lily in her pride'—  
 'But of what colour?'— 'Rose-red', Love first chose,  
 Then prayed,— 'No, lily-white,— or, both provide';  
 And Flora gave the lotus<sup>5</sup>, 'rose-red' dyed,  
 And 'lily-white',— the queenliest flower that blows.

The poem describes the exquisiteness of flowers Lotus, Rose, Lily, one that outlives the beauty of the other in its 'queenliest' form, and yet a search for the 'undisputed' queen of flowers as "Love came to Flora asking for a flower/ That would of flowers be undisputed queen". The God of 'Love', Cupid, comes to Flora, the Goddess of flowers, asking for a flower of nonpareil beauty. But what flower of unequalled beauty could Flora give? Here the intricacy of the poem rises to an inconceivable height as Flora desires to win over the heart of 'Love' from Psyche, the beloved of Cupid. For this, thoughts debate each other in Flora's mind. She contemplates, like the 'lily' the 'rose' will never be as great in plumage and as towering as the Goddess Juno. But again, can the 'lily' beat the 'rose' in a battle of beauty? The praises of honour of each flower rivalled one another in the shelter of Flora's mind and 'rang the strife in Psyche's bower'. Psyche is a maiden (in Roman myth) who becomes the wife of Cupid and is made immortal because of her love- 'true love' for Cupid. So to win his love Flora has to give him a flower of 'undisputed' grace.

The 'lily' and the 'rose', for long are 'Rivals for that high honour', being the queens of flowers. 'Bards of power' have sung their enticing beauty forever. So it is difficult for Flora even being a goddess of flowers, to conceive of a flower as gorgeous as rose and as queenly as lily; and the colour 'Rose-red' that 'Love first chose', or 'lily-white' or both. But Flora's love for Cupid is

proved. 'Lotus', the sovereign of all came to be. Both 'rose-red' and 'lily-white' that emerge as the pink Lotus, 'the queenliest flower that blows', is Flora's gift of love. It is undoubtedly an exquisite creation of Toru that remains unmatched in the English poems of Indo-Anglian literature. It reveals her unique freshness of vision that makes the poem almost unparalleled.

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### 3.4.1 □ Structure and Style

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In '21The Lotus', Toru unburden her intimate joys and sorrows in 'a simple and transparent style' that gives a liveliness to the poem all its own. Structurally a Petrarchan sonnet<sup>6</sup>, 'The Lotus' is a sure representation of multiculturalism, an amalgamation of various traditions and myths. It is a unique poem in which the Hindu faith, the Buddhist faith, the Greek and the Roman mythology all merge into one. It proves her craftsmanship that is so neat and yet so complex and again so transparent that it could render an exquisite finish to the poem.

It is known that the form 'sonnet' had come to Toru from the English literary tradition. But the wonderful ensemble in the poem has opened a new vista unknown to the English language before. The sort of rhetorical expression that Dutt uses in this poem in which she compares a colour to taste: 'Give me a flower delicious as the rose...' 'But of what colour?'— 'Rose-red',... 'No, lily-white—', shows her knowledge of French symbolist poetry<sup>7</sup>. Again the incursion of the mythological figures that runs so smoothly in the poem calls for appreciation. It does not iimp' at all and at the same time is almost inspired. As the poem goes it seems so simple, yet the litany to Flora, 'asking for a flower that would of flowers be undisputed queen' makes the poem all the more complex. Till the eighth line the graceful beauty of lily and rose are suggestive. From the ninth line there is a sudden intrusion of the auditory:

'Give me a flower delicious as the rose  
And stately as the lily in her pride'—  
'But of what colour?'— 'Rose-red', Love first chose,  
Then prayed,— 'No, lily-white;— or, both provide'.

Again the thirteenth and the fourteenth line are suggestive of the greatness of Flora's love.

And Flora gave the lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,  
And 'lily-white',— the queenliest flower that blows.

A turning point, "volta", occurs between the octave — the first eight lines, and the sestet — the next six line:

...Thus between  
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.

The first three lines of the sestet reflect on the theme and the last three lines bring the whole poem to a close. Flora creates a flower and gives 'Love' the pink Lotus, 'the queenliest flower that blows'. On the whole it can be said that Toru is successful in crafting the Petrarchan style in her sonnet 'The Lotus'. It is an expression of her passionate desire, her immediate sensations of human experience and the inner life, through the subtle and suggestive use of highly metaphorical language, in the form of symbols. Not a barren imitation, it is a manifestation of the inner vision, her authentic inspiration that could only be suggested. "To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create," said Mallarme, the great French symbolist. And this sonnet of Toru is essentially the same. It is intensely personal; it leans more heavily on oblique suggestions and evocations than on overt statements.

The transaction of symbolic colours and varied literary traditions blend so well in this verse of fourteen lines that in spite of redundant use of adjectives for which Toru is often criticised to keep up with the rhythm and unnecessary use of punctuations — commas, dashes and semi-colons, the poem definitely shows a growth in the literary tradition of 'Indian Writing in English'. The unique beauty of Lotus has acquired a symbolic significance in the poem. It suggests purity of Flora's love for Cupid. Lotus is a symbol of purity and Flora's love for Cupid is as unique and as pure as the Lotus. With a wonderful combination of a highly metaphorical language and an explicit Petrarchan style of versification 'The Lotus' has attained a place of distinction. It is a poem, which is intense and complex, with condensed syntax and symbolic imagery and yet creating music through words. It leaves us baffled as we wonder what level Toru and her poetry could have attained had she lived longer.

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### 3.4.2 □ Questions :

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1. Describe 'The Lotus' as a manifestation of Toru's inner vision, 'her authentic inspiration that could only be suggested'.
2. 'The Lotus' is 'truly a Petrarchan sonnet'. Justify the statement analysing the poem.
3. The poem 'definitely shows a growth in the literary tradition of Indian writing in English'. Justify analysing the poem 'The Lotus'.
4. 'She is no more tussling to negotiate the cross-cultural complexities' It is a genuine lyric poetry that occupy a place of its own. Explain drawing reference from the poem 'The Lotus'.

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### 3.4.3 □ Notes

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1. Love: In this sonnet 'Love' suggest the Roman god of love, son of Venus; it is identified with the Greek god Eros.
2. Flora: Roman goddess of flowers and spring.
3. Juno: Wife of Jupiter in Roman myth; queen of the gods and goddesses of marriage: identified with the Greek goddess Hera, wife of Zeus.
4. Psyche: In Roman myth is a maiden who becomes the beloved of Cupid and is made immortal.
5. Lotus: Water lily, Egyptian and Asian. Associated in Hindu and Buddhist thought with meditation and spiritual health.

This unique flower has been a persistent motif in Indian poetry, mythology and sculpture since very ancient times. Apart from the beauty of its petals and the variety of its colours — white, pink, red, light blue, the lotus has acquired many symbolic associations. It suggests purity. Born in a muddy pool, it remains clean, unsoiled. Water does not cling to the petals or leaves of a lotus flower.

The lotus is equally important in the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha is shown meditating upon a lotus-throne.

6. Petrarchan Sonnet: The Petrarchan sonnet, also known as the Italian sonnet, originated in Italy in the 13th Century and was associated with the Italian poet Petrarch. Francesco Petrarca is usually credited with having introduced lyric poetry in Europe. Petrarch's "Canzonieri," a sequence

of poems including 317 sonnets, established the sonnet as a major form in European poetry. It is a sonnet in its classic form and tends to split into two sections, known as octave (eight line stanza) and sestet (six line stanza). The octave has two quatrains, rhyming a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a; the first quatrain presents the theme, the second develops it. The sestet is built on two or three different rhymes, arranged either c-d-e-c-d-e or c-d-c-d-c-d or c-d-e-d-c-e; The first three lines reflect on the theme and the last three lines bring the whole poem to a close, but without a final rhymed couplet. The octave usually presents an idea, raises an argument, makes a proposition, or poses a problem. A turning point occurs between the octave and the sestet, and the sestet develops out of the octave by illustrating the idea in the octave, varying it, responding to it, or solving the problem it poses.

Rhyme scheme in *The Lotus* is almost similar: abba, abba, in the octave and cdc, ddc in the sestet. Only the last two lines do not match with the original alternatives. Perhaps this was an intentional trial.

7. French symbolist poetry: The Symbolist poetic movement originated with a group of French poets in the late 19th century. The underlying philosophy of the symbolists was a conviction that the transient objective world is not true reality, but a reflection of the invisible Absolute. The movement was a revolt against the realistic and naturalistic poetic styles of the day, which were designed to capture the transient. Their poetry also emphasized the importance of the sound of the verse, creating music through words.

The movement reached its peak around 1890, and its popularity declined at the beginning of the next century. The influence of Symbolism on later movements however is vast. The experimental techniques devised by these poets enriched the technical repertoire of modernism, particularly the works of W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens. Free verse, the creation of the symbolists, is now the dominant form of contemporary poetry. Any attempt to define the Symbolist movement and its influence inevitably loses itself in a welter of detail. One can say that these late nineteenth-century French poets were revolting against fixed forms and inert molds; that they were attempting to express an inner ideal reality rather than the objective world; that they



deliberately blurred sense impressions and sought correspondences where none had been observed before.

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### 3.4.5 □ A Biographical Chronology

- 1856, 4 March : Toru Dutt was born at Rambagan, 12 Manicktala Street, (now Romesh Datta Street) Kolkata. She was the youngest of the three children of Govin Chunder and Kshetramoni.
- 1862 : The family embrace s Christianity.
- 1862-1869 : Studies at home along with Abju and Aru, under the guidance of a private tutor. Of course Govin Dutt himself took a part in their education and carefully supervised their studies.
- 1865 : Toru's Elder brother Abju dies. The sisters cling closer together than ever before. They read Paradise Lost repeatedly and generally lost themselves in literary studies.
- 1869 : They left for Europe with parents and sister Aru. They reach England and take a furnished house. Then they stay in France where Toru and her sister Aru start going to a French school at Nice.
- 1870 : *The Dutt Family Album* published.
- 1871 : Comes Back to England. The sisters start attending "High Lectures for Women" in Cambridge and make friends with Mary Martin, who was Toru's life-long friend and the recipient of most of her letters.
- 1873 September : The family returns to their city house in Rambagan and their garden residence at Baugmaree.
- 1874, 23 July : Toru's elder sister dies of consumption. Toru writes to Mary Martin "Lord has taken Aru from us .. It is a sore trial for us, but His will be done".
- 1875-76 : Toru determined to make a "sheaf of poems for her native culture starts to learn Sanskrit. Although darkened now and then by the memory of a lost brother and of a lost sister and though ill herself, she writes her Ancient Ballads and Legends at this time.
- 1876 March : *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* published. Kolkata: Saptahik Sambad, Bhowanipur. (It is a translation of poems from French to English; of the 165 pieces, 8 were by

- Aru. Toru has also added notes on the French poets represented in the volume).
- 1877, 30 August : Toru dies of consumption. Buried at CMS Cemetery, Kolkata.
- 1878 : The second edition of the *Sheaf* reprinted; edited by Govin Dutt..  
A novel *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden*, published; Kolkata: Bengal Magazine between January-April.
- 1879 : A novel in French *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers* published; Paris. (It was hailed as "an extraordinary feat, without precedent" and compared to *Vathek* of Beckford).
- 1880 : The third edition of the *Sheaf* published; with a foreword by Arthur Symons. London: Kegan Paul.
- 1882 : *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* published; with an introduction by Edmund Gosse. London: Kegan Paul.
- 1927 : *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* reprinted. Madras: Kalidas.
- 1969 : The third edition of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* published. Allahabad: Kitabstan.

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## Unit 4 □ Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

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### Structure

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### 4.1. □ Objectives

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In this unit we shall deal with three poems by Nissim Ezekiel, arguably the most important of the post-Independence poets in Indian English. He is also a very strong influence on the next generation of poets and possibly the most recognised and respected abroad. You have to study his 'Marriage', 'Night of the Scorpion' and 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.'. Taken from three different published titles, they represent different facets of Ezekiel the poet.

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### 4.2. □ Introduction : The Problems of Indian English Poetry

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When Indians, growing proficient in English under British colonial rule first began to use the language creatively, most of the first generation of Indian English writers turned to the writing of poetry. Numerically as well as qualitatively, the poets of the 19th century score over the fiction writers, if not the writers of non-fictional prose, which reached very great heights. Some writers, like Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore doubled as poets and prose writers. And yet even after a century and a half of its existence, there

are still articulated and unarticulated questions about the standard, and even the *raison d'être* of English poetry written by Indians.

Poetry, it has to be conceded, much more than any other literary genre, depends on the exploration of the vital spirit of a living language in order to come alive, to be worth anything at all. Can genuine, truly living poetry be written in a situation where the poet does not have the rhythm and nuances of the spoken speech in his ears. D. H. Lawrence has said that all creative art must arise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place. P. Lal in his Introduction to *Modern Indian Poetry in English* says, "It is essential that we write about life and values around us—what we see and what we feel, what gods and goddesses excite our conscious and subconscious". And, while strongly criticising the derivative, imitative, often mushy style of earlier poets, Lal conceded that "Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo—whatever their weakness—have this great strength in common, that, in varying degrees, they have Indian responses to life and things."

But the problem—a major one for all Indian creative writers who write in English lucidly summed up by Raja Rao in the oft-quoted extract from his Foreward in *Kanthapura* ("One has to convey in a language not one's own, the spirit that is one's own.") is even more potent for poets. Two major literary critics have raised questions about first, the authenticity, and second, the Indianness of Indian English poetry. Buddhadeb Bose, the well-known Bengali poet and academic wrote the entry on "Indian poetry in English" in the *Concise Encyclopaedia of English* and *American Poets* edited by Stephen Spender and Donald Hall (1963). I quote below excerpts from it.

"...what circumstances led to this inconceivable loss of a mother tongue, or whether they had abjured it voluntarily, cannot be ascertained; but this section (i.e. Indians who write in English) has in the present day produced a new group who are assiduously courting the muse of Albion....To the question, "why in English?" They give various answers, one of them being that English is an Indian language—which it is not—another being that English entitles them to a larger audience. The fact is that the larger audience. The fact is that the "Indo-Anglians" do not have a real public in India, where literature is defined in terms of the different native languages, and their claim can be justified only by appreciation in England or the United States...As for the present day Indo-Anglians, they are earnest and not without talent, but it is difficult

to see how they can develop as poets in a language which they have learnt from books and seldom hear spoken in the streets or in their own homes, and whose two great sources lie beyond the seven seas. A poet must have the right to change and recreate language, and this no foreigner can ever acquire. As late as 1937 Yeats reminded Indian writers that "no one can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue".

P.Lal, in his 'Introduction' to *Modern Indian Poetry in English* challenged Bose's critique and also his preference for 19th century poets like Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu over the present day Anglian poets. In writing what he called a "credo" for modern Indian English poetry he retorted that, 1) A poet could use a vital language (implying any vital language) he felt free to choose to write in (2) Poetry must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience. free propaganda and imitation.

But the question posed by Bose refuses to go away. David McCutcheon (*Indian Writing in English*, Writers Workshop 1969) has argued that there is nothing striking by way of Indianness in India-Anglian Poetry, on account of a serious and genuine lack of a well-established tradition:

"Now times have changed. The profession of English today receives British Council and U.S. invitations to lecture or research in British or American Universities, and even at home he may find many a companion: But it is still inevitable that Indian poets writing in English should be largely conditioned by English sensibility... If they were fluent enough to absorb the vernacular tradition, it is unlikely they would write in English. In spite of a certain desire to be Indian (or to be 'themselves' as they would say), they are bound by the fashions of the modern west. They have absorbed Eliot, Walter de la Mare, just as their 19th century predecessors followed Byron and Tennyson—and now they are absorbing Thom Gunn. To this they would retort with a good deal of truth that the vernacular writers are equally dependent on the west... And in fact modern Bengali poetry has been strikingly influenced by such European poets as Baudelaire, Valery, Eliot, Rilke. As for the younger generation of Bengali poets, since the visit of Allen Ginsberg their inspiration lies with the Beats."

In his review of modern Indo-Anglian poetry, McCutcheon goes on to say:

"There is little that is specifically Indian in the background and imagery; the rivers and mountains are all generalised, and 'international flowers are preferred...The predilection for apples, which few Indians can see growing, let alone live with suggests literary sources. The themes and attitudes too are modern European. Alienation and resentment, of a hatred machine age...this is the modern world...increasingly standardized in every country."

V.S. Naipaul draws conclusions similar to McCutcheon's in *An Area of Darkness* when he declares that "Shiva has ceased to dance" in India. One of the Indo-Anglian poets, Ka Na Subramanyam, rather surprisingly, expresses the poem I quote below ('Situation', *The Time of India*, June 12, 1980).

Introduced to  
the Upanishads  
by T.S. Eliot;  
and to Tagore  
by the earlier Pound;  
and to the Indian  
dance by  
Bowers;  
and to Indian  
art by  
what's his-name  
and to the Tamil  
classics by  
Danielou  
(was he Pope?)  
Vociferous in  
thoughts not  
his own;  
Eloquent in  
words not  
his own.  
(The age demanded)...

The controversy remains unresolved. But in the meanwhile a very respectable number of poets defy the questions and write poetry in English. Some among

them are bilingual , creating poetry in English and also their native tongue. Read Kamala Das's 'An Introduction' for poet's reply to these polemics.

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### 4.3. □ Periodization

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One of the main complaints critics like McCutchion or Buddhadeb Bose made against Indian English literature in general and poetry in particular was the absence of a literary tradition which contemporary practice of the craft of writing can be based on, and with reference to which it can validate itself. As literature goes, Indian English literature is still very young. Still, primarily motivated by post independence academics, a periodization i.e. dividing the literature of around two centuries into phases or time-slots has been achieved. Even here we shall notice, that there is a certain parallel to literary movements taking place in the West. But there is always a time lag. For example, the shift to modernist idiom that happened in the west in the 1920s, begins to be noticed in Indian English poetry only around the 1950s. However this kind of delayed follow up is characteristic not only of Indian English poetry. We can see it happening in other colonial or postcolonial literatures as well.

Makrand Paranjpe, in his edited anthology, *Indian Poetry in English* has suggested three major period divisions or phases of this poetry: i) 1825-1900, the 19th century he names "Colonialism". Elsewhere he has also called it the 'protonationalist phase'. Starting with Derozio and including Toru Dutt and others, it corresponds to that period in Indian History when nationalism was being gradually consolidated, ii) The period 1900-1950 Paranjpe calls "nationalism" or the 'nationalist phase'. In this period we have Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu Tagore, etc. Noticeably, the poets were all engaged in battle against colonial rule. iii) 1950-1980. This period Paranjpe calls "Modernism". This is the post-nationalist phase in which poets like Nissim Ezekiel not only retreat from large public themes like nationalism, into individual and private agonies, but also sneer at the style and manner of the earlier poetry and show a greater consciousness of craftsmanship. P.Lal, in the "Introduction" earlier referred to, castigated Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri' as "Slushy verse" "greasy, weak-spined and purple-adjecived "spiritual" poetry, and said that such nebulosity is pernicious for Indian poetry in English, which has to establish roots in rocky ground." Paranjpe calls the phase from 1980 to the



present "Postmodernism", inaugurated by Vikram Seth we begin to see a new diasporic consciousness dominating Indian English poetry. From the 1960s, an interesting shift came about. Instead of being dominated by the hitherto monolithic tradition of British poetry, contemporary American poetry began to interest and influence the new generation. Allen Ginsberg, during his sojourn in India helped to build a bridge between the American cultural underground and the Indian avant-garde. There are many similarities between Beat poetry and the poetry of some Indo-Anglian poets like Prithvi Nandy and Arvind Mehrotra. The latter's 'Bharatmata : A Prayer' is an interesting Indian beat poem:

"I am so used to your cities with a chain reaction of suburbs where whole families live in bathrooms and generations are pushed out of skylights and the next one sticks out its head like a tapeworm through frozen slut."

Several poets, notably Shiv Kumar and Kamala Das were inspired by American confessional poetry to venture to subjects which were disturbing and considered taboo so far. Nissim Ezekiel, an elder poet, was also influenced to relax into free verse and began experimenting with "found poems", "poster poems" etc. Increasingly, since the 60s, the prosody of Indian English poetry has followed the modes of American free verse as it has developed since the appearance of the Black Mountain School. The organic line, dictated by the breath, determines the prosodic texture, not the counting of syllables and accents. In the free verse of poets A.K. Ramanujan, R. Pathasarathy, A. Kolkatkar etc, as in American free verse, the image is all-important.

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#### 4.4 □ Indian English Poetry—Pluses and Minuses

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During the 1960s polemical battle with Buddhadeb Bose, P.Lal circulated a questionnaire among fellow poets, inviting response to Bose's critique, which he later published in the Writers Workshop 1969 edition of *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. The questions deserve our attention :

- 1) What are the circumstances that led to your using the English language for the purpose of writing poetry?

- 2) What are your views on the "Indo-Huglian" background?
- 3) "Do you think English is one of the Indian languages?"
- 4) Do you feel that you have a "real public in India?"
- 4) Do you feel that you have a "real public in India?"
- 5a) In your opinion, is it essential that a good poet should change and recreate the language?
- b) How do you think a poet acquires—assuming—that the needs to acquire—"the right to change and recreate language"?
- (c) Can an Indian poetry in English discharge the function of changing and recreating? One interesting point that emerged from the polemics was the all-India character of Indian English poetry. In 1960, Lal had argued in the second issue of the Writers Workshop journal, *The Miscellany*, that poetry language is bound to be regional, only the writing in English can acquire an "Indian" character. Meenakshi Mukherjee, in her "In Search of Critical Strategies" (essay in *The eye of the Beholder*, London 1983) argues:

"What it means to be an Indian is not a question that troubles the Marathi or Bengali writer very much...The need to define oneself and analyse the specific elements of one's cultural identity is usually the consequence of coming in contact with another culture. The writer in the Indian languages does not often have an exposure to another culture with sufficient intensity to worry about the problems."

While both Lal and Mukherjee are overstating their case, The growth of Indian English poetry can certainly consider its accessibility to a pan-Indian and the overseas Indian readership as an important factor. Other factors are the active sponsorship of Indian English Literature by the departments of English in various Indian universities. This resulted in the inclusion of Indian English poets in the academic curriculum and the proliferation of voluminous dissertations on them. The quality of writing of the major poets, their ability to respond with sensitivity and intelligence to the changing cultural milieu in India have helped too. The growing urbanization had led to the English Language, often sprinkled with a good deal of vernacular words, becoming the language everyday use, in the workplace and at home, of the upwardly mobile Indians. English, to all intents and purposes, seems to have evolved

from a language of colonial rulers to the language of the modern Indian urban upper class.

However, while Indian English poetry appears to be firmly established, in contrast with 1950s, when Ezekiel published his own poems, P.Lal worked almost singlehandedly with his Writers Workshop poetry publications, and Dom Moraes published his poetry in England, it comes a poor second in comparison with the vast body of Indian English fiction and its much market. The picture becomes clear if we take a look at the magazines scenario. In the 1950s, *The Illustrated weekly of India*, under the editorship of an Irishman, C.R. Mundy provided a forum for contemporary poetry. Nissim Ezekiel founded *Quest* in 1955, which helped to make Indian English poetry part of contemporary culture. The six issues of *Poetry India* (1966-67) edited by Ezekiel marked a high point of Indian English poetry publication. In contrast, at the present moment no major magazine regularly publishes poetry. Publishers are not interested in bringing out slim volumes of poetry. Oxford University Press's India branch is almost alone in regularly publishing poets, although the number of copies is much smaller than for fiction. Clearing House of Mumbai has been recently bringing out a number of excellent volumes of poetry.

Leela Gandhi points out in her preface to Ezekiel's *Collected Poems* (oup), "Poetry never quite qualified qua genre (unlike novel of non-fictional prose) for the realist work of narrating the nation". Gandhi means by the last phrase that novels and non-fiction prose writing can address important socio-political issues in a way which is not within the purview of poetry. A cultural inheritance works in us which suspects Indian English poetry as much for being poetry as for being written in English. Ezekiel himself, and many other modern poets react against the nationalist critique (for eg what Buddhadeb Bose says) by developing the view that flight from blood, birth, family and nation allows for the germination of more cosmopolitan affinities, without excluding country: We shall discuss this concept in the context of Ezekiel's poetry more elaborately.

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#### 4.5. □ Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004)—Life and Career

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Nissim Ezekiel was born in Mumbai, in a Jewish family(Bene-Israel). The Bene-Israelis are a small community who speak mainly in English, with a mixture of local

language Marathi. He studied at Wilson college, Mumbai, did his M.A. from Bombay University. Then he went to the University of London to read Philosophy. After his return to India he became a journalist, serving in the editorial staff of several journals including *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Poetry-India* and was the founder-editor of *Quest*. He served in the Indian Chapter of PEN and worked for short periods in advertising and broadcasting. Later he took up a teaching job, first in Mithibai College, Mumbai, and then in the Department of English, University of Bombay, from where he returned as Professor. He continued journalistic work side by side with his teaching, as a regular columnist for *The Times of India*, and was active translator, playwright, reviewer.

Ezekiel is considered a poet's poet in Indian English Poetry, since after his return from London he was instrumental in ushering modernism in Indian English poetry with the publication of his first collection, appropriately named *A Time to Change* (1952). Ezekiel carefully nurtured many of the poets centred in Mumbai. Noteworthy among them are Dom Moraes, Adil Jussawala and Gieve Patel. Bruce King, in his *Modern Indian Poetry in English* says, "Of the group of poets attempting to create a modern English poetry in India, Nissim Ezekiel soon emerged as the leader who advised others, set standards and created places of publication." Other Publications of Ezekiel are—*Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1958), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *Poems* (1974), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-day Psalms* (1982)

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#### 4.6. □ Ezekiel's Achievement—A Survey

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While it is broadly true that when Ezekiel returned to Mumbai from London he brought back a poetics that challenged the lyrical romanticism that had been the prevailing mode of pre-independence Indian English poetry, and replaced the mystical obscurantism of poets like Sri Aurobindo, Ezekiel's modernist affiliation is also a little exaggerated. Many poems in *A Time to Change*, for example the title poem itself and *Something to Pursue* reflect a deep religious sensibility. There is much formal verse in this volume—a strict adherence to rhyme schemes and prosodic rules. Indian English poetry's transition from romantic to modern was not a sudden leap, nor was Indian modernism a single, simple, monolithic phenomenon. It was a slow-developing complex of many attitudes and idioms.

The important elements Ezekiel introduced are—a precise use of language, well-crafted images, an ironic stance and an urbanity. His ears are finely honed to the nuances of the English language. He also introduced a whole new range of subjects to Indian English poetry, turning its focus away from nature, spirituality, Indian myths and rural life. His non-Hindu/Muslim a certain lack of native roots because of his Judeo-Christian background, helped to foster the spirit of modern cosmopolitanism in his writings. In shifting the focus of poetry to the sparwling, teeming metropolis of Mumbai, in being a Bombay poet first and an Indian poet afterwards, Ezekiel added a dimension to Indian modernism. This led to whole new movement in Indian English poetry and the poets with close links to it are sometimes referred to as the Bombay School.

It *A Time to Change* shows a religious preoccupation cropping up through motifs of redemption, rebirth, the concern with spiritual wholeness, in the next volume, *Sixty Poems* we still find moral concerns couched in a plainness of style. In *A Poem of Dedication* he uses the Biblical *Ecclesiastes* imagery of seasonal change as an expression of the organic :

Both poetry and living illustrate  
A time to act, a time to contemplate.

In *The Third* he has developed a more personal manner. The rhymes begin to play on clichés, idioms and sayings. There is the modern use of odds and ends of colloquial speech. T. S. Eliot's influence is evident. Ezekiel also learnt from Yeats the art of writing poems of personal experience while standing at a distance. The poems show a personal of mature wisdom, although at the time Ezekiel was only 35, The problem and disappointments of marriage become a major theme along with physical temptation and an awareness of repressed deep emotions.

Always the body knows its nakedness.  
The first baptism is not in water  
But in fire.

*The Unfinished Man* with its title from Yeat's poem has some of Ezekiel's best poetry. The title indicates a shift in his poetic manner—from intellectual equipoise to a time

of incompleteness, a sense of personal purgatory. Its ten poems make a sequence about the discontents of an apparently settled life. The poet persona asks whether he is—

...among the men of straw  
who think they go which way they please?

(*A Morning Walk*)

The last poem, Jamini Roy offers the painter as an example of someone who found a solution to

Adult fantasies  
Of sex and power-ridden lives.

The poet suggests that an art of assent, rather than hostility, and rising above one's self to give voice to the people might be an answer to an artists (poet's) dilemma—

He started with a different style  
He travelled, so he found his roots.  
His rage became a quiet smile  
Prolific in its proper fruits.

The *Unfinished Man* is remarkable its self-scrutiny and polished craft. the verse is regular, obeying the rules of traditional metre. Variety is created by various juxtapositions of ideas and images. P. Lal, in his foreword said, "...The banal line, so clear and pure that it is almost prosy, hides, in Ezekiel's hands, angel's wings under its deceptive stone. No tinklings, no gongs; the English language used nobly, surely, flowing in subtle music, flashing in bright, disciplined image.

The vision desired in *Jamini Roy* seems to emerge in *The Exact Name* (1965). The poem *Philosophy* rejects the intellectual analysis which destroys the reality of experience. *The Night of the Scorpion* shows a new direction, dealing with commonplace Indian reality. The poems use more unrhymed verse, become poetry of the speaking voice.

After his break with Writers Workshop Ezekiel did not publish a new volume for 11 years. The next phases of his work represented by the collection *Hymns in Darkness Latter-Day Psalms. Background, Casually (HID)* is a verse autobiography tracing what he thought to be main stages of his life. Long by Ezekiel's standards, this 75-line, poem in 3 parts portrays his uneasy relationship with

India, his home. He goes to a Catholic school, is despised by Christian classmates and doesn't get on well with Hindus or Muslims either; The Sojourn abroads, with Philosophy, poetry and poverty for companion"; Not making much of a success, he returns home, descends into the inevitable drudgery of marriage and earning a living. There gradually emerges a sense of acceptance of his limitation,—a reconciliation that is half ironic and half stoical :—

"The Indian landscape sears my eyes.  
I have become a part of it.

... ..  
I have made my commitment now,  
This is one: to stay where I am.  
My backward place is where I am.

According to Ezekiel's biographer R.Raj Rao, he went to the Rotterdam Poetry Festival in 1978 without any books, and so his only reading matter was a copy of the Gideon Bible in his hotel room. The Bible psalms gave him another source of poetry. *The Latter. Day Psalms* shows Ezekiel's increasing interest in his Jewish origin and heritage. But they also show his impatience with older forms of belief. "How long are we to rely/ on those marvellous things/ in ancient Egypt", or, "Is the Lord my shepherd/ Shall I not want?" With all the references to his Jewish heritage and Nazi holocaust (mass killing of Jews), Ezekiel, in his last poems still remains a postmodern man tumbling towards a provisional sense of identity.

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#### 4.7. □ Marriage : An Analysis

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Lovers when they marry face  
Eternity with touching grace.  
Complacent at being fated  
Never to be separated.  
The bride is always pretty, the groom  
A lucky man. The darkened room  
Roars out the joy of flesh and blood.  
The use of nakedness is good.

I went through this, believing all,  
Our love denied the Primal Fall.  
Wordless, we walked among the trees,  
And felt immortal as the breeze.

However many times we came  
Apart, we came together. The same  
Thing over and over again.  
Then suddenly the mark of Cain

Began to show on her and me.  
Why should I ruin the mystery  
By harping on the suffering rest,  
Myself a frequent wedding guest?

Published in *The Unfinished Man* the poem is on one of the recurrent themes in Ezekiel's poetry. While the focus is on the problems and disappointments of marriage, the subject primarily urban, sense of a lack of commitment. I have already mentioned in Section 1.5 above that the 10 poems in *The Unfinished Man* form of sequence. They are thematically related, as each poem takes up the themes of discontent, failure and lack of will. 'Marriage' should be read alongside two other poems which come immediately before it, — 'Event' and 'Commitment'. 'Commitment' ends with a reference to men who "failed to count the growing cost/Of ceshly jobs or unloved wives." — in other words who opt for the socially accepted norms of life. 'Event' distinguishes between what is actually felt and acting according to ideas of what should be felt. The woman pretends to intellectual interests while she offers sex, because she thinks that is what he expects, while he is aware that both of them are living in "day-dreams...Reflections of the cheated mind."

'Marriage' sarcastically traces the progress of marriage from the paradisaical complacency of lovers who assume that marriage is a gateway to heaven, to their fall from grace. In *The Unfinished Man* Ezekiel continued the interesting stylistic development he had first shown in *The Third* — the poet persona is someone watching himself, as if he were a case study in bad faith. The persona is confessional, but in a distanced manner, almost, or fully ironic,



and not with the immediacy or candid *revelation* manner of Kamala Das. He approaches close to emotional turmoil, frustrated desire, but they are still carefully mediated by the art of poetry.

**Stanza 1 :** The couple, like Adam and Eve in a primal paradise, start their journey from a world of innocence. Surrounded by, and the centre of ceremonies and festivities, they think with a touching innocence that their love will last for ever. The marriage service, in all religious marriages, incorporates words to the effect that marriages are made in heaven, that the wedded couple are united for ever, to death and beyond. The couple believes the entire myth in their inexperience.

**Stanza 2 :** "The bride is always pretty", "the groom a lucky man"—these observations are obviously the trite, facile and socially polite comments compliments usually made by outsiders or onlookers like the wedding guests (see also the reference in the last stanza). The rest of the second stanza ventures into one aspect of the reality of marriage. The physical pleasure of consummation, in its initial stage, is heady and intoxicating. The "joys of flesh and blood" "roar" the massage of pleasure. The verb conveys the strength of the pleasure.

**Stanza 3 :** Notice the shift in tense. The first 2 stanzas use the simple present as if the statements in them represent eternal, immutable truths. Here the poet's persona directly enters the narration of experience. It is no longer a generalized, accepted version of things. The entry of the poet's persona and the past tense verbs introduce a strong note of doubt and self-analysis. The experience of marriage is individualized. The poet's persona had also believed that they had found on uncorrupted and incorruptible love. "Primal fall" refers to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve's act of disobedience of the Divine Command (Book of genesis). As punishment they were expelled from paradise. According to Christian theological doctrine, the love that existed between the first man and first woman in their state of primal innocence was forever vitiated for their descendants as a result of the Fall. The lovers in 'Marriage' believed that they could "deny" the curse attendant on the children of Adam and Eve. The "walk along the trees" image invokes the garden of Eden, and the adjective "immortal, like the noun "eternity" in stanza 1 suggests

the lover's touching but deluded faith that their love will transcend time and decay.

**Stanza 4 :** It begins with a sexual innuendo, with a pun on the word "come" which also means reaching climax of sexual pleasure. The pleasure and excitement of sex in marriage (stanza 1) is followed by satiation. The repetitiveness of diurnal routine turned the relationship into a lifeless bondage. Rather than a sense of intimacy and unity, the sexual act results in separateness and monotony. The "mark of Cain" means the mark visible on a murderer because in the Bible story God put a mark on Cain after he had murdered his brother Abel (The Bible, *Book of Genesis*).

**Stanza 5 :** The end of stanza 4 runs into the beginning of stanza 5. The mark on Cain is to be seen both on the poet and his wife, since both are guilty of killing their love.

Then suddenly, in stanza 5, line 2 the poet persona shifts ground. In all his poems on marriage, one can sense that personal experience is being turned into poetry, but Ezekiel never wholly gave himself over to the confessional mode. He prefers to remain guarded, ironic, distant, analytical. Cryptically, with a touch of ironic humour, the poet refuses to reveal the agony of living in a loveless, dead marriage. Why should he ruin the mystique of marriage, he asks, taking an almost saturnine pleasure that other couples would be duped to undergo the same experience and be doomed. He, like others in society will conceal or at least suppress his personal agony, and at other weddings where he himself is the wedding guest, will utter the same tired clichés that the guests at his weddings had spoken (st. 2)

**Versification :** The verse of 'Marriage', as in the other poems of *The Unfinished Man* has a highly formalistic, rhymed, stanzaic style. The rhythm is a fairly regular 4-foot iambic, with little variation. The lines rhyme in couplets. The stanzas are syntactically self-complete except for the 4th, which runs onto the 5th. The verse is closed rather than open. The formal, structural closeness suggests an enclosing on emotions and channelling them towards well-thought, disciplined judgment. The last lines which pose a question and leave it unanswered, suggests that the dilemma of marriage does not have a ready solution. Though the terseness, wit and irony mark the poem, Ezekiel

shows how to avoid the excesses of romanticism when writing about the self and its concerns, making art based on autobiographical experience.

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#### 4.8. □ Night of the Scorpion : An Analysis

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I remember the night my mother,  
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours  
of steady rain had driven him  
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.  
Parting with his poison-flash  
of diabolic tail in the dark room—  
he risked the rain again  
The peasants came like swarms of flies  
and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times  
to paralyse the Evil One.  
With candles and with lanterns  
throwing giant scorpion shadows  
on the sun-baked walls  
they searched for him : he was not found.  
They clicked their tongues.  
With every movement that the scorpion made  
his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.  
May he sit still, they said.  
May the sins of your previous birth  
be burned a way tonight, they said.  
May your suffering decrease  
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.  
May the sum of evil  
balanced in this unreal world  
against the sum of good  
become diminished by your pain.  
May the poison purify your flesh  
of desire, and your spirit of ambition,  
they said, and they sat around  
on the floor with my mother in the centre,  
the peace of understanding on each face.

More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,  
more insects, and the endless rain:  
My mother twisted through and through  
groaning on a mat.  
My father, sceptic, rationalist,  
trying every curse and blessing,  
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.  
He even poured a little paraffin  
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.  
I watched the flame feeding on my mother.  
I watched the holy man perform his rites  
to tame the poison with an incantation.  
After twenty hours  
it lost its sting.  
My mother only said:  
Thand God the scorpion picked on me  
and spared my children.

This is one of the most famous and oftenest anthologised pieces. In most of Ezekiel's poems, The city of Mumbai is a metonym for the modern Indian experience. He rarely goes outside the surrounds of the city. 'Scorpion', published in *The Exact Name* (1965), is a rare example of his venture outside habitual urban tesrsrain. Reading the poem at the University of North London in 1989, Ezekiel said that the incident narrated in it happened when he was about twelve years old. Obviously, it is an account of his parents' response to his mother being stung by a scorpion. The poem, one of the best examples of the commonplaces of Indian life made into art, was written in 1964, when Ezekiel was a visiting professor at Leeds University, England. The expatriate or exile always remembers more vividly a traditional world in contrast to the present. 'Scorpion' avoids the distanced self-consciousness, philosophical reflectiveness and formality of manner we find in the poems of *The Unfinished Man*. The free verse seems meant for oral delivery and the poem's beginning, without any hint of the tangential or the roundabout, immediately approaches the childs perspective - "I remember...". The poetry is created in a mundane reality as observed, known, felt, experienced, rather than by distancing the experience through intellect.

By juxtaposing the peasants, simple and superstitions with his 'sceptic, rationalist' father, Ezekiel shows the confrontation of two belief-systems in contemporary India. R. Partha Sarathi has pointed out that the poem evokes "superstitions practices that we still haven't outgrown". The poem first narrates the peasants' responses to the event (lines 8-33). The feel of Indian traditional ritual is conveyed through the incantatory rhythm repetitive phrases. "May he..." "...They said". the peasants identify the scorpion with evil "The Evil one". The repetitions enforce the ritualistic pattern of their activities : "May he sit still..." ; "May the sins..." ; "May the sum of evil...". Their speeches are all reported speech—"they said". His father's actions too are reported : "My father...put a match to it". The reported speeches and the past tense of the action verbs—"poured", "put", "twisted" put the event and the child's view of it within a historical frame of the mature narrator looking back while moving back and forth between past and present. The mature poet keeps out of the way except as a narrator providing the context—"I watched the flame...", "I watched the holy man..." A fine dramatic situation is created by contrasting the peasants' buzzing talk, clicking tongue, his mother's groans and twists, his father's frenzied activity, using every possible remedy including "powder, mixture, herb and hybrid".

After a day the poison is no longer felt, and in a final irony, his mother in contrast to the previous feverish activity centred upon her, makes a typical "motherly" comment : "Thank God the Scorpion picked on me/and scared my children," The "Thank God " is doubly ironic as it is a commonplace expression in speech, in contrast to all the previous religious and superstitious activity (The peasants incantation; the holy man's rites). However in spite of its ending, the poem is not about maternal devotion, or about the glory of Jewish or Indian motherhood .

The poem may be read on two planes. It is without doubt a fine dramatic rendering of Indian reality closely observed and narrated. The tone is enigmatic, non-judgmental. The neutral verse leaves a range of possible attitudes open. The circumstantial details (Ten hours of rain; sacks of rice stored; flash of tail in the dark room), and visually bright details (candles, lanterns, more candles, more lanterns, throwing giant scorpion shadows. The far flame his father lights by pouring paraffin; auditory details (buzzed the name of God, clicked their tongue etc) give a precisely realized verse account of a specific personal experience.

Another plane on which the poem operates has a wider and more general meaning relevant to contemporary India. It is a powerful, though sympathetic depiction of the conflict between rationality and superstition between two different belief systems coming into dialogue during a family crisis. The superstitious faith of the Hindu villagers influence his Jewish, modern father, because even as the villagers provide a chorus of commentaries on the consequences of a scorpions sting, which even embraces the afterlife, his father tries "every curse and blessing" along, with medicines. The poem can thus be read as a dramatization of an encounter between secular Indian rationalism and pre-modern Hindu faith.

Unlike the more formal poetry in *The Unfinished Man*, Ezekiel's new interest in Indian reality is expressed through a different versification. It is unrhymed, with line lengths shaped by natural syntactic units, and a rhythm created by the cadence of the speaking voice, in a long verse paragraph, rather than in stanzaic structure. It is poetry to be spoken and heard rather than to be printed and read.

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#### 4.9. □ Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. : An Analysis

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

You are all knowing, friends,  
what sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.  
I don't mean only external sweetness  
but internal sweetness.  
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling

even for no reason  
but simply because she is feeling.  
Miss Pushpa is coming  
from very high family.  
Her father was renowned advocate  
in Bulsar of Surat,  
I am not remembering now which place.

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

Coming back to Miss Pushpa  
She is most popular lady  
with men also and ladies also.  
Whenever I asked her to do anything,  
She was saying, 'Just now only  
I will do it.' That is showing  
good spirit. I am always  
appreciating the good spirit.  
Pushpa Miss is never saying no.  
Whatever I or anybody is asking  
she is always saying yes,  
and today she is going  
to improve her prospect,  
and we are wishing her bon voyage.

Now I ask other speakers to speak,  
and afterwards Miss Pushpa  
will do summing up.

Bruce King, in his *Modern Indian Poetry in English* points out that the group of poems which Ezekiel called "very Indian poems in Indian English" are full of what appear to be parodies of language-use errors by Indians speaking English have often been misunderstood as satire of the Gujrati-influence English often used in Bombay by Indians who were educated, but not at the premier English medium schools. These speakers usually work in the various commercial establishments in and around Bombay. Then English syntax is modelled on the syntax of the vernacular, often resulting in hilarious usage errors. The use of the present continuous in place of the simple present is one of the commonest pitfalls of "doesi angrezi". Such poems may easily raise the hackles of readers who would feel that Ezekiel, as part of the Indian Elite who can speak a better version of Queen's English, is poking fun at them.

Interestingly, although most educated Indians since introduction of colonial rule aimed to speak and wrote the standard, approved English and more recently aim to speak standard American English, there has been little attempt by Indian poets to use local varieties of English in the way Nigerian and Caribbean writers of senior literatures mis dialact, patois, or traces of supposedly sub-standard English with the mainstream English. Only Kamala Das unceremoniously uses Malayalam—influenced English. In Indian English and vernacular fictions, characters with incomplete English are often figures of fun. This group of poems by Ezekiel, may be seen as a step towards using local speech in serious verse. He never expressed it studently, but in late verse, these in the Hymns of Parknas for example, there is a distinct tilt towards social concern as he tries to take up the practical, mundane, factual modes and mores of modern India.

In 1989, when he was invited to read his poetry to a group of student in London, he gave an account of how he began to writh these "Indian English" poems. They began initially as a by product of his work as a dramatist. A friend had told him that all the characters in his play spoke as he did. Then he began to listen to the voices of people in the streets and to record their speech in verse. So the "Indian English language" in these poems operates as a dramatic site. It is a stage peopled by a number of dramatic figures, each of whom speaks his speech, though, unlike in drama, the



different characters do not interact or engage dialogically. Often, the poems are a sort of dramatic monologue. As in the dramatic monologue format, a situation is created, a character speaks and from this speech the reader understands the situation, the characters own identity and the reactions and responses of the characters who do not speak. Read the following extract from 'The Professor'.

How many issues you have? three?  
That is good. These are days of family planning  
I am not against.

'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S'. is one of the best known poems in the group. written in the form of a farewell speech, reveals in a mood of parody and gradually reveals the character of the speaker. As in all the poems of this group, language reveals the speaker's mind and social context. Cliches, trite expressions, unintended puns, are the devices used to imply hypocrisy, pretence, limited opportunities and social confusion.

The occasion is a farewell for Miss Pushpa, an office colleague, who "is departing for foreign". The rambling style typical of such speeches is tellingly employed. There is little logic in the speaker's thought process and the typical Indian pretensions and hypocrisies come out clearly. The speaker does not have any precise information about Miss Pushpa and has not bothered to find out. He is uncertain when she is leaving, hence the vague "two three days", a literal translation from the vernacular. The height of hilarious nonsense is reached in the second stanza as the speaker speaks of "(not only external sweetness but internal sweetness", and reduces his poor target into practically a *moron* through his language, since Miss Pushpa "is smiling and smiling/ even for no reason". Possibly Pushpa smiles because she is linguistically better equipped than the speaker and is secretly amused, or because she is compelled to be polite.

In the third stanza there is the typical Indian snobbery about family lineage. The speaker begins to talk about Pushpa's family as if he knows its members intimately. But his shakiness about where Pushpa's father used to live is a subtle pointer to his insincerity.

Stanza four is replete with absurdities. Since the speaker veers completely away from Miss Pushpa and into his own memories of a visit to Surat,

where he stayed with a family acquainted with his uncle. He remembers the cooking was good.

The poor fellow does not understand that his inept compliments take on a naughty double meaning when he praises Pushpa :“ Pushpa Miss is never saying no/whatever I or anybody is asking”. After a good deal of rambling he comes suddenly to the relevant point and informs his audience that Pushpa Miss is “going to improve her prospect /And we are wishing her bon voyage.” The poem shows, with a fine comic zest, the laxity and shallowness of own social behaviour, expressed in the way we speak and respond to situations. the poem comes to a fitting end, with the intrusion of officialese into a social occasion. Poor Miss Pushpa! not only is she constrained to smile and endure, compliments which are confusing and ambugous, sheis also requied to do the “Summing up” as at the end of an official meeting.

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#### 4.10 □ Questions

##### Essay-type :

- (a) What was Buddhadeb Bose’s objection against Indians writing poetry in English? Was he justified?
- (b) How has Indian English poetry evolved from the 18th century to the present times?
- (c) what are the indications of modernism in Modern Indian poetry in English? What role did Ezekiel play in the transition to modesnism?
- (d) Trace Ezekiel’s development as a poet, with reference to the poems you have read.

##### Short-answer type :

- (e) Which English or American poets influenced Ezekiel?
- (f) What are P Lal’s arguments for Indian English poetry?
- (g) How does Ezekiel blend dramatic elements in his lyrics?
- (h) How does Ezekiel defict contemporary reality in his poem?

## 4.11 □ References

- (1) *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English* by P.K.J. Kurup (Atlantic Publishers)
- (2) *Modern Indian Poetry in English* edited by P. Lal
- (3) *Contemporary Indian Poetry : (Writers Workshop)* edited by Kaisen Haq (Ohio State University Press)
- (4) *Modern Indian Poetry In English* by Bruce King (O.U.P)
- (5) Nissim Ezekiel's *Collected Poems* (O.U.P)

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## Unit 5 □ Kamala Das

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### Structure :

- 5.1. Objectives
- 5.2. Introduction
- 5.3. Biography
- 5.4. Works
- 5.5. Her Poetry
- 5.6. Imagery
- 5.7. Post-colonial, feminist poet
- 5.8. My Grandmother's House : An Analysis
- 5.9. The Dance of the Eunuchs : An Analysis
- 5.10. The Looking Glass : An Analysis
- 5.11. Questions
- 5.12. Recommended Reading

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### 5.1 □ Objectives

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The objective of this unit is to explore Kamala Das's contribution to Indian English poetry and to feminist writing. It will also provide insight into Kamala Das's uniquenesses as a poet.

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### 5.2 □ Introduction

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Kamala Das' verse ushered in a new age in Indo-Anglian poetry. Considered by all as one of modern India's foremost poets, she writes in a new voice bringing within the ambit of poetry a new domain and a new idiom. In a distinct departure from the conventional myth and folklore terrain, lyrical and romantic song, she presents hitherto uncharted territories and inchoate areas of feminine life and sexuality with honesty and candour in a voice that is often harsh and "unpoetic". With this "aggressively individualistic" poet we move into a world far removed from the world of Toru Dutt or Sarojini Naidu. As Eunice de Souza has rightly pointed out that Das has "mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms".

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### 5.3 □ Biography

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Kamala Das was born into a family of poets and had her early initiation into the world of poetry through her mother, the famous Malayalam poet, Balamani Amma, and her maternal grand-uncle, Nalapat Narayan Menon, a well-known Malayalam scholar and writer. Apart from her mother, Das acknowledges the influence of the "matrilineal ethos" of the Nairs in shaping her personality and her creative career.

Born on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1934, in Malabar, Kerala, she spent her childhood in Calcutta. Being the only girl among five siblings she did not have any formal school education but was taught by tutors and governesses at home.

When she was only fifteen years old, she was married off to her uncle, K. Madhava Das, in the Nair tradition. This marriage proved to be a turning point in her life. Bound into unimaginative and loveless domesticity, she turned to writing to express her nascent desires. Her autobiography *My Story* (1975) details her experiences within the confines of the marriage. This book has been translated into many Indian languages. From this autobiography we come to know of her complex relationship with her husband that veered between fond indulgence and extreme brutality. She felt a sense of rejection and betrayal in his close relationship with another man and this created a rift in their marital relation.

She was awarded the Chimanlal Award for fearless journalism. She also made a brief foray into the world of politics in 1984 but was defeated and voiced her disaffection with public life quite openly. In 1999 she converted to Islam and was called Kamala Surayya. As in her life, so too in her verse, she always firmly expresses her ideas fearlessly and with complete candour that has often mired her in controversies but has still not daunted her will for truth, sincerity and honesty.

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### 5.4 □ Works

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Her writing career began with the publication of her first short story collection in Malayalam called *Mathilukal (Walls)* in 1955. She uses the pseudonym, Madhavikutty, for her works in Malayalam, while she publishes her English writings under her own name. Her first collection of English poems *Summer in Calcutta* was published in 1965, followed by *The Descendynts* (1967), *The*

*Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *The Anamalai Poems* (1985) and *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996). She has also published a novel and a collection of short stories in English.

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### 5.5 □ Her Poetry

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Kamala Das poems are essentially articulations of the self. They are born out of a need for articulating the self. The poems are autobiographical in nature and confessional in tone. "I must exude autobiography," she says. Subjects as varied as love, death, nostalgia for a happy past are treated robustly. But, overall, there is a foregrounding of love and women's sexuality in her poetry. For the first time we have an unbridled and sensuous view of the female body in her verse. She explores the many facets of women's sexuality and critiques the patriarchal acceptance of women as essentially passive and submissive. She, in effect, subverts the picture of the eternal Indian woman. "Dress in sarees, be girl,/ Be wife they said."

Women's repressed lives in unfulfilled marriages are often the central idea in her poems. Das feels that being a woman means certain "collective experiences" which Indian women, subject to years of patriarchy, have always suppressed. These feelings of love, loss, yearning and sexual urges, she advocates, are normal for all women and should be brought out into the public sphere and not be locked up in a private world of misery. Das is forthright in her criticism of this patriarchal world that treats the woman as an object of lust rather than an entity.

"these men who call me  
Beautiful, not seeing  
Me with eyes but with hands"

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### 5.6 □ Imagery

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Images of Kamala Das' verse, drawn from everyday life are common-place but her inusiveness and irony colour and make them vibrant and suggestive, Iyengar says the images of Das are "icy, stony, steely and dark". The modernist sensibility of the poet is borne out by such images as the heart that is "an empty cistern, waiting through long hours, to fill itself. Though she articulates

women's physical presence yet the body is always seen as the location of exploitation.

"The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me."

Recurrent references to "heat and dust", decay and loss are symptomatic of the general sense of enervation that afflicts modern life where love is elusive and is only translated or substituted by lust.

"... oh yes, his  
mouth, and ... his limbs like pale and  
Carnivorous plants  
Reaching out for me, and the sad lie.  
Of my unending lust."

In her world, as Iyengar points out, "the calm of fulfillment eludes forever. Love is crucified in sex, and sex defiles itself and again and again." This feeling of frustration in love is reiterated in the poetry of Das. The world is barren and life is like the "half burnt logs from funeral pyres". Loneliness, frustration, sterility are important concerns of her poetry and are expressed in vivid, often concrete and visual images. Even the rain in this world is devoid of its life-giving, nurturing, sustaining function.

"...a meager rain that smells of dust in  
Attics and the urine of lizards and mice."

We have definitely moved many light years away from the lilting sound of the Palanquin Bearers.

Das' rebellion against a hostile society prompts her to articulate unbridled passion, unembarrassed and unabashed physicality. Hence her poetry is marked by extreme eroticism. Concrete images of human anatomy abound in her poetry. Her feminist leanings are clearly signified when the male body is presented as repulsive. The man is always an "old fat spider weaving webs of bewilderment" while his "mouth is a dark cavern" and his embrace is compared to a snake's. The woman is perpetually unfulfilled and her heart is a "cistern waiting to fill itself."

Das writes in a characteristic manner with language that is clear, straightforward and hard-hitting. Her language is effortless and smooth

flowing. She uses everyday language, without making an effort at choosing particular words. She says :

“Write without  
A pause, don't search for pretty words  
Which dilute the truth.”

Her aim is to convey her feelings and she writes in the throes of emotion. Hence, her poems are vibrant and hard-hitting, marked by colloquialisms and conversational ease. They are intensely subjective and help in expressing the intensity of her emotions. Often the lexical choice is highly visual and has a pictorial quality as in the presentation of the “fiery Gulmohar”.

Another feature is the repetitive quality of the vocabulary she uses. Repetition helps in foregrounding and focusing. Words like “heat” and “hot” are repeated. Sometimes phrases or whole lines are repeated.

“It will be all right, it will be all right  
It will be all right between the world and me.”

This incantatory repetition brings out the irony of the resolution that is being hinted at. Kamala Das, lines often are fractured with ellipsis (...) symbolically presenting the poet's own fractured world that left her in such despair and yearning—suggesting a chasm between aspiration and reality. A fracture, a break between desire and reality creates a deep longing in her.

The overtly erotic content of her verse has often shocked her reading public but the hard-hitting images have thrown into relief the story of “Everywoman” crushed under the weight of a male dominated society.

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## 5.7 □ Post-colonial feminist poet

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As a post-colonial poet Kamala Das also focussed attention on her nationality, location and her choice of language. She is confident of her nationality. “I am an Indian, very brown.” At the same time she vociferously challenges the world to question her choice



of language for creative expression. "I speak three languages, write in / Two, dream in one." She throws down the gauntlet at her detractors.

"Don't write in English, they said."

With firm conviction, she validates her choice — "The language I speak is .../ All mine, mine alone." This is the voice of a postcolonial poet, reveling in her freedom, a consciousness that has found selfhood.

In her brief against patriarchal oppression of women and her desires, she voices feminist concerns that were the order of the day. She presents the woman's body and explores the entire gamut of physical sensuality from the woman's point of view. For the first time someone speaks of gifting him all her "endless female hungers." In this way, she gives voice to hitherto suppressed and "silenced" areas of women's experience. Traditional male, androcentric worldview has always presented women as essentially passive, without sexual desires. Kamala Das reveals the other' picture, so far silenced in society.

"It is I who laugh, it is I who make love  
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying  
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,  
I am saint. I am the beloved, the  
Betrayed.

One can find encapsulated in these lines a resonance of her life.

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### 5.8 □ 'My Grandmother's House' : An Analysis

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There is a house now far away where once  
I received love. That woman died,  
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved  
Among books I was then too young  
To read and, my blood turned cold like the moon  
How often I think of going  
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or  
Just listen to the frozen air,

Or in wild despair, pick an armful of  
Darkness to bring it here to lie  
Behind my bedroom's door like a brooding  
Dog... you cannot believe, darling  
Can you, that I lived in such a house and  
Was proud, and loved... I who have lost  
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to  
Receive love, at least in small change?

'My Grandmother's House' was published in Kamala Das' first anthology of English poems *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). There is a wistful and nostalgic note that permeates this poem. She had spent a part of her childhood in this abode of peace, her grandmother's house. This 'house'<sup>5</sup> has a special place in her poetry. This nostalgic mood resonates through other poems in this volume. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is another expressing a deeply felt yearning for "the past, for a state of joyfulness the poet did not find in her adult life, crushed under the weight of a traditional male-dominated society.

The home is associated with love, affection and joyfulness in contrast to the vacuous present where there is no love.

In this poem she reminds her husband that once she was also the object of love and affection. In her grandmother's house she had felt secure and protected. The poem, thus, is an expression of her intense longing to be back at that home which signified nurture and sustenance, a house that supported creativity.

The house is almost made into an entity. It epitomizes innocence, happiness and all things positive, things that are associated with childhood.

In this short poem, Das reveals her desperation and frustration with her present life. There is also a wistful air in the question "that she too had lived in such a house and was proud and loved..."

The whole presentation reads almost like a fairy tale by reminding the reader that once upon a time, in the past, the poet had led a happy life but that is all gone now.

The loss of her grandmother also led to the loss of+ [ the protection provided by the house. Now she leads a life of abject poverty, a poverty of love and affection and begs for crumbs from strangers. The image of begging and the dog highlight the misery of her present existence.

The confessional tone is brought out in the reference to her life. In the poem the poet addresses the spouse. The use of the word "darling" denoting affection adds an appropriate note of familiarity but it also manages to convey a tentative note to the entire relationship. The word "least" in the last line suggests her desperation. While the theme of lovelessness in the domestic sphere is very much a part of Das' world, the note of wistful yearning is equally characteristic.

The image of the snake is also a recurrent motif in Das' poetry. The dilapidated house, closed windows overrun by vegetation is where the slithering snakes embrace books. The snake's embrace is suffocating, life-threatening. The sexual overtone can hardly be ignored. In "the Stone Age" she refers to the lover's hand as a "hooded snake".

The evocative quality of the line "pick an armful of darkness" is extremely impressive. A sense of deep and brooding melancholy hangs over the entire visualization where there is a preponderance of darkness, death, blood that is cold, windows that do not see and air that is frozen which conveys to the reader the poet's state of mind. Hence it is said that Das' poetry is intensely autobiographical.

Though on the surface it seems that Das has an acute obsession with love, at a deeper level it just reveals a woman's insecurity in a society where she is just an object rather than an agent.

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### 5.9 □ 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' : An Analysis

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It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came  
To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals  
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling  
Jingling... Beneath the fiery gulmohur, with  
Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced and  
They dance, oh, they danced till they bled... There were green  
Tattoos on their cheeks, jasmines in their hair, some  
Were dark and some were almost fair. Their voices  
Were harsh, their songs melancholy; they sang of  
Lovers dying and or children left unborn....  
Some beat their drums; others beat their sorry breasts  
And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy. They

Were thin in limbs and dry; like half-burnt logs from  
Funeral pyres, a drought and a rottenness  
Were in each of them. Even the crows were so  
Silent on trees, and the children wide-eyed, still;  
All were watching these poor creatures' convulsions  
The sky crackled then, thunder came, and lightning  
And rain, a meagre rain that smelt of dust in  
Attics and the urine of lizards and mice....

'Dance of the Eunuchs' was the first poem of her first anthology *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). In this startling presentation of the barren world of the eunuchs, the poet symbolically represents the frustrated and sterile world of her own life. Though the eunuchs dance with great verve and excitement, it hides a world that is both loveless and sterile.

All through the poem one sees barrenness and sterility. The dance of the eunuchs and their frenzied movements hide a sterile world. Their whirling movements lead to bleeding and not to ecstatic fulfillment. They are "thin in limbs and dry" while their voices are "harsh". The songs that they sing are "of lovers dying and of children left unborn" So everything in their world reflects aridity, hopelessness and futility. The colourful costume belies a colourless inner world. The oppressive heat adds to the general sense of futility and frustration. The thunder and lightning leads to "meager rain" and not to a downpour with healing properties. Hence, there is lack of productivity all around.

Through a series of suggestive images the poet symbolically presents the gap between the external vivacity of the lives of the eunuchs and their inner vacuity.

Through the use of various words, repeated in an incantatory manner, Das conjures up a world of frustration and sterility. The image of the dance of the eunuchs is itself ironic. They dance at festivals but have no happiness in their lives. This reveals the perception of the poet regarding her own frustrated and fractured life. Her marriage at a tender age and her experiences thereafter, had left her yearning for love and fulfillment. The words are repeated to create a hypnotic spell. The skirts are "going round and round" and the anklets are "jingling" yet the entire performance is not the gay abandon of happiness but the frenzied "convulsions" of a fractured soul in search of happiness.

The final image is also of rain sans its life giving powers but which smells of "dust in attic rooms and the urine of lizards and mice".

The depth of the poet's misery is thus presented through this starting image of the marginalized eunuchs' performance.

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### 5.10 □ 'The Looking Glass' : An Analysis

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Getting a man to love you is easy  
Only be honest about your wants as  
Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him  
So that he sees himself the stronger one  
And believes it so, and you so much more.  
Softer, younger, lovelier. Admit your  
Admiration. Notice the perfection  
Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under  
The shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,  
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he  
Urinate. All the fond details that make  
Him male and your only man. Gift him all,  
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,  
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your  
Endless female hungers. Oh yes, getting  
A man to love is easy, but living  
Without him afterwards may have to be  
Faced. A living without life when you move  
Around, meeting strangers, with your eyes that  
Gave up their search, with ears that hear only  
His last voice calling out your name and your  
Body which once under his touch had gleamed  
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute.

'The Looking Glass', published in Das' second anthology *The Descendants* (1967), is once again a criticism of the androcentric world where women are mere playthings and objects of sexual gratification for the men. All through

her life the woman must please the man, without expecting any emotional fulfillment from him.

In an ironic tone Kamala Das highlights the role women have to play. Feminists have pointed out how the male dominated society conditions women to think in binaries where the man is strong and powerful while the woman is gentle and soft.

The most trenchant criticism of this male dominated society is revealed in the lines "Gift him all / Give him what makes you woman" and the irony lies in the list of qualities that constitutes womanhood. The list contains "the scent of / long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts". So 'womanhood' is entirely placed in the physicality of the object "woman" and does not connect to emotions or thought. Woman, thus, becomes merely a biological category robbed of any other identity.

The "looking glass" reflects the image of the man and woman. But the perspective of the woman is coloured by her gender. She must revere the "god like" perfection of the man and offer her own physical attributes as a devotee to her God.

The whole poem presents a strategy on the part of the woman to win her man in a rather witty and playful manner. But the love portrayed is not one of mutual reciprocation or of the union of the souls but rather a situation of lust assuaged

The poem stands out because of the series of startling and unconventional images. It begins with a premise that "getting a man to love you is easy". But then the premise is qualified. To get a man to love the woman, she has to be his devotee, admirer and also to present him as 'superior'. This is definitely the traditional patriarchal stereotype that Das is trying to unsettle through her ironic lines.

The tone of the poem is conversational. The informal quality is highlighted by the typical trait of using ellipses to denote the emotional quotient of the utterance. The masculine body is presented as a visual. The image of the 'walk across the bathroom floor' is a visual frame. But the woman is "scent" and "sweat" and "warmth of menstrual blood" —all tactile or olfactory images.

In this poem Das is extremely unconventional and "unpoetic". She speaks of bodily functions that had been hitherto taboo in love poetry. Herein lies her modernity.

The poem may be divided into two sections. In the first part the woman is told to offer her all in order to get her man. In the second part, a dismal picture is drawn of her life bereft of the presence of the man. The woman's body without the lustful presence of the man is compared to "brass" which is not gleaming but is dull, as life would be dull and listless for the woman in the absence of her man. Kamala Das shows great boldness in using such unconventional comparisons.

The central image of 'The Looking Glass' is used to reflect the reality of the woman's condition. Instead of a narcissistic pleasure at seeing herself reflected, the woman is more concerned at worshipping the superiority of her man, and, making sure that her image does not overshadow his.

Thus in 'The Looking Glass' once again Kamala Das reiterates her criticism of a traditional society which robs the woman of both identity and agency. Being a woman is associated with endless wanting and endless waiting in this society, and Das' acknowledged agenda remains freeing her from this stereotypical mould.

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### 5.11 □ Questions

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1. Assess Kamala Das's Contribution to Indian English poetry.
2. Kamala Das voices feminist concerns in her poetry. Discuss with reference to the prescribed poems.
3. Analyse Kamala Das's use of imagery in any two of her prescribed poems.
4. Comment on the poetic features of any one of the prescribed poems.
5. Are Kamala Das's poems autobiographical? Give reasons for your answer.
6. In what sense is Kamala Das a poetcolonial writer.
7. Examine the structure of 'The Looking Glass'.
8. Comment on the title The Dance of the Enochus.
9. Bring out the confessional element in The Grandmother's House.

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## 5.12 □ Recommended Reading

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Das, Kamala. *My Story*. Orient Paperback, 1975.

De Souza, Eunice. *Nine Indian Women Poets*, OUP, 1997.

Gokak, V. K. (ed.) *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry*. New Delhi Sahitya Akademi, 1970.

Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*, Asia Publishing House, India, 1973.

Tharu, Susie and Lalita, K. (ed). *Women Writing in India*. New Delhi : OUP, 1995.

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## 5.11 □ Questions

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1. Analyse Kamala Das's Contribution to Indian English poetry.

2. Kamala Das's use of feminine imagery in her poetry. Discuss with reference to the selected poems.

3. Analyse Kamala Das's use of imagery in any two of the selected poems.

4. Comment on the poetic texture of any two of the selected poems.

5. Are Kamala Das's poems autobiographical? Give reasons for your answer.

6. In what sense is Kamala Das a postcolonial writer?

7. Examine the structure of 'The Looking Glass'.

8. Comment on the title 'The Dance of the Sanguine'.

9. Bring out the contextual element in 'The Gambler's Blues'.



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## Unit 1 □ Red Oleanders : Rabindranath Tagore

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### Structure :

- 1.1 Date
- 1.2 Text : Original and Translation
- 1.3 Criticism of Modern Acquisitive Society
- 1.4 The Ramayana Myth Retold
- 1.5 Man-Woman Relationships : A Play of Love
- 1.6 Characterisation
- 1.7 The Red Oleander : the Central Symbol
- 1.8 Experimentation with Form : Towards a Modern Indian Theatre
- 1.9 From *Raktakarabi* to *Red Oleanders* : Problems of Translation/  
Transculturation
- 1.10 From Page to Stage : Problems of Performance
- 1.11 A Select Reading List
- 1.12 Questions :

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### 1.1 □ Date

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*Raktakarabi*, the Bengali original of *Red Oleanders*, was first published in the literary journal *Prabasi* in 1924 (Aswin issue of the Bengali year 1331). But as an individual playtext it was published only in December 1926 (12 Pous 1333) by Jagadananda Roy for Visva-Bharati Granthalaya. Interestingly, by then, the English version—*Red Oleanders*—was already available in print, first in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* (vol II no. ii, 1924), and then as a published playtext (in 1925). The play was already being discussed in circles close to the author by 1923, with Tagore desiring to fine-tune the play before its official release in print. By May 1923, he had invited Amiya Chakrabarty to Shillong to listen to an early draft of the play (vide *Chithipatra*, Calcutta : Visva-Bharati Granthan Vibhaga, vol.11, 1978, p. 33). In fact he had even wished to hold the printing of the play in abeyance till it had been performed: "It would be convenient if the play *Yakshapuri* was printed in the *Falgun* or *Chaitra* issue rather than the *Puja* issue of *Prabasi*. I would prefer to have it released only after performance" (letter to Ramananda Chattopadhyay, *Chithipatra*, Calcutta : Visva-Bharati Granthan Vibhaga, vol.12, 1986, p. 86: my

translation). This play, *Yakshapuri*, was later renamed *Nandini*, and finally *Raktakarabi*, which in its English version became *Red Oleanders*.

*Raktakarabi/Red Oleanders* comes rather late in the corpus of Tagore's dramatic compositions. After his early operatic ventures in *Valmikipratibha* (1881) or *Kalmrigaya* (1882), he had imitated the Shakespearean model in *Raja o Rani* (1889) and *Visarjan* (1890). Then there was a period of lull in his serious playwriting. When he makes a return with *Sarodotsav* (1908) and *Raja* (1910), it is with a radically different crop of plays. He had eschewed the Western models of dramaturgy, and was exploring the theatrical potentials of the indigenous resources of our folk traditions. He had in the meanwhile expressed his views in the brief prose tract "Rangamancha" (1903). Interestingly, it was during this period of withdrawal from serious playwriting (1890-1907) that he had been engaged in other activities—notably, in the founding of a seat of learning at Santiniketan in the model of the Indian *tapovan* that would offer a viable alternative to the British models being imitated by other Indian institutions (c. 1901), and in his brief engagement with active politics during the movements against the British move to partition Bengal (1905). His plays, beginning with *Sarodotsav*, then, may be read as attempts made to break free from the Western models, to return to the indigenous roots, and create a new model for the 'modern' Indian theatre. *Raktakarabi/Red Oleanders*, too, is a part of this agenda.

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## 1.2 □ Text : Original and Translation

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As was Tagore's habit, he subjected this play also to a relentless process of revisions and modifications, that have resulted in no less than ten surviving versions of the play, apart from the English translation. The first draft names the heroine as 'Khanjani'; the second draft repeats this name, but cancels it to introduce the name 'Nandini', as well as a third name 'Sunanda'. The red oleanders flower has no mention in the first manuscript, briefly appears in the second, and steadily grows in importance through the subsequent drafts. In this context, Kshitimohan Sen quotes Tagore to Pramathanath Bisi in a letter: "There was a pile of scrap iron near my room, covering a small oleander plant under it. It was not noticed in time, and later could not be located under the dump. A few days later, I was struck by the sight of a slender oleander stem pushing its way up through the iron pile with a red flower in

bloom. The redness was like that of blood spilt by cruel hands and yet greeting the world with its pleasant salutation. It seemed to say, 'I am not dead, you could not kill me'. This sight stirred in me a creative urge. I could not be satisfied with the names *Yakshapuri* or *Nandini* for this play, so I have decided to call it *Raktakarabi*" (Pramathanath Bisi, *Rabindranatya Prabaha*, Calcutta : Orient Book Company, 2 vols, vol. 2, 1958, p. 158: my translation).

English versions of other plays, whether translated by Tagore himself or by a different hand (but always with his approval), usually followed the Bengali version by several years. So the Bengali *Visarjan* of 1890 became the English *Sacrifice* as late as in 1917, while *Raja* (1908) was translated as *The King of the Dark Chamber* and *Dakghar* (1912) as *The Post Office*, both in 1914, by Kshitish Roy and Devabrata Mukherjea respectively, but under the close supervision of the author. By contrast, the Bengali *Raktakarabi* was soon followed by the English *Red Oleanders*: both were initially published in literary journals in 1924; subsequently when each was published as an individual playtext, the English publication (1925) preceded the Bengali counterpart (1926) by a year. With this play, Tagore seems to have been anxious to have the translated version (done by himself) presented before a Western readership as quickly as possible.

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### 1.3 □ Criticism of Modern Acquisitive Society

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*Red Oleanders* is a complex creation, bringing together several thematic strands in a coherent dramatic pattern. The locale of the play, Yaksha Town (originally *Yakshapuri*), serves as an abstraction of an acquisitive society that thrives on its exploitative agenda. Those belonging to the lower rungs of the social ladder labour to mine the wealth from the bowels of the earth to satisfy the material comforts of their social superiors. The nerve centre of this system is the unseen ruler, the King, who resides behind a complex mesh, feasting on the youthful energy it continuously exploits and turns to waste. The system is propelled by the Governor and his team of lackeys, some using brute force, others the mesmerising effects of religious chants. This materialistic urban civilisation, the bane of a post-industrialised society, turns a blind eye to the sufferings of others in pushing ahead its own covetous schemes of self-aggrandisement. What Tagore finds disturbing is the "spirit of organisation" that informs this acquisitive agenda, and which seeks to pass itself off in the

name of modern utilitarianism. He locates in this "an organised passion of greed", which unfortunately "is stalking abroad in the name of European civilisation" ("*Red Oleanders: Author's Interpretation, Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, 1925). Though he admits that this is not the only image of Europe, yet because it is the dominant one currently available, he sounds the caveat against its menacing ascendancy:

... it only assumes a terrifying bigness, its physiognomy blurred through its cover of an intricate net-work—the scientific system. It barricades itself against all direct human touch with barriers of race pride and prestige of power. The impersonal pressure which, from its aloofness, it applies to our living soul, is enormous ever narrowing our prospect of growth, smothering the power of initiative in our mind. (ibid.)

Against this organised system, Tagore posits the human individual: "... the personal man is not dead, only dominated by the organised man". This "personal" human entity enters the play in the persona of the protagonist Nandini, and also her absent lover Ranjan. Their capacity to express the naturalness of life—to love, to laugh, to sing, and, finally, to resist—is seen as a major threat by the proponents of the exploitative system. If the system continuously seeks to dehumanise the individual, the likes of Nandini and Ranjan laboriously strive to frustrate that end. Analysing the conflict that he has encapsulated in this play, Tagore went on to remark in the same essay:

Nandini is a real woman who knows that wealth and power are *maya*, and that the highest expression of life is in love, which she manifests in this play in her love for Ranjan. But love-ties are ruthlessly molested by megalomaniac ambition, while an acquisitive intellect plies its psychological curiosity, probing into the elusive mystery of love through vivisection. (ibid.)

In yet another English commentary, published much later, with the title "*Red Oleanders: An Interpretation*", and comprising "Notes on a talk given by Rabindranath Tagore and transcribed by Leonard K. Elmhirst during the

Poet's visit and stay in Argentina, November-December, 1924", we come across statements like:

The habit of greed—greed for things, for power, for facts, with all the ramifications that greed is able to set up between man and man—is arrayed against the explosive force of human sympathy, of neighbourliness, of fellowship and of love, the force which we may term good. Good is here arrayed against the dehumanising force of mammon, of selfishness, of evil; of that which separates us from our fellows against that which cements us together, of that which, because it divides us, is untruth, is a lie.

(*Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, Nov 1951-January 1952)

Interestingly, in a picture postcard Tagore sent to Dinendranath from America, he wrote: "Consider the picture carefully—a kerosene lamp—the fuel is at the bottom and the smoke is near the top. The lords of this place are in much the same condition— they remain smothered in their own smoke, cut off from the light of the sun. *King Bali* was the ruler of the nether world— *Vishnu*, in his incarnation of the dwarf (*Vamana*) subjugated him. He made himself small to vanquish the giant. The time is at hand. Those who had remained small till now have reached out with mighty hands to grasp the riches of the giants. The giants, tremulous under the threat, have strengthened their fortifications. But that will not hold out any more." (Rabindra-Bhavana archives, *Visva-Bharati*: my translation).

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#### 1.4. □ The *Ramayana* Myth Retold

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In resisting the might of the Western capitalistic society with its overriding materialistic agenda of the West, Tagore takes recourse to the mythical story of the Indian *Ramayana*. The acquisitive system, as a many-headed Hydra, recalls the ten-headed twenty-armed *Ravana* of that epic. Though the multiple heads and arms are not immediately visible in Tagore's modern version, they represent, in abstraction, the multiple avenues of exploitation. Aware that a ten-headed twenty-armed superhuman would not be acceptable to his contemporaries, Tagore extracts the abstraction of the *Ravana*-identity and relocates this in the context of the twentieth century discourse of materialistic utilitarianism. He justifies his strategy in giving a

prominent place among the *dramatis personae* of his play to an apparition which now so powerfully occupies the imagination of a vast world consisting of non-Western races.... It is intensely real; its hot breath is upon us; its touch is all over our shrinking soul. It is the principal hero to-day in the drama of human history; and I trust I have the right to invoke it in my own play, not in the spirit of a politician, but of a poet, possibly a lyrical poet.

(*"Red Oleanders: Author's Interpretation"*, 1925).

In fact, in his recycling of the myth, Tagore invests the exploitative agency with a schizophrenic consciousness that preys upon itself; in his version, *Ravana* and *Vivishana* are rolled into one:

The ancient poet, having the luxury of seven chapters at his disposal, allotted separate spaces to *Ravana* and *Vivishana* in Lanka. But he hinted at their sameness, they were siblings. Evil and its nemesis had been reared together in the same nest. Within the brief span of my play, the present counterpart of *Ravana* combines in himself the entities of both *Ravana* and *Vivishana*, and so inflicts destruction upon himself.

(*Probasi*, Baisakh 1332/ May 1925: my translation)

Tagore interprets the function of *Sita* in *Valmiki's* epic as harbouring potentials for the destruction of the mighty bastion of *Ravana's* power; *Nandini* is made to play out an equivalent role in eroding the male-dominated oppressive system of *Yaksha Town*. Remembering how in *Valmiki* a woman interrupts *Ravana's* mighty rule and ensures his overthrow by the army of monkeys, Tagore adds: "here, too, a woman arrives and there are indications that the modern apes [sub-humans] will vanquish the modern giants [super-humans]." (*ibid.*: my translation). Interestingly, in identifying *Nandini* with the archetypal woman, Tagore seems to hark back to the ancient vegetative metaphors drawn from the world of nature: she is clothed in a "grass-green robe" (in the original Bengali she is draped in a sari coloured green like the unripe corn), and joins in the harvesting song of autumn. Later, in his "Paschim Yatri Diary" (1929), Tagore went on to describe *Nandini* as "the bearer and nourisher of life"; in the 1924-lecture in Argentina, she is likened to the butterfly "armed with no sting, equipped with no power to gather or to store, but clothed in beauty, loving the light of day and life". In fact, some

of the other characters also pine for an idyllic past now lost in the drudgery of Yaksha town. Chandra reminds the others of feast days and fast days, associated with rustic rituals; she longs to return home, where the "villages are preparing for their harvest festival"; even her similes are drawn from that rustic way of life ("like husks to grains of corn", "as the grass is weeded with a hoe"). That simple vegetative life has receded into the dim past with the onslaught of modern urban sophistication. In fact, Tagore locates that simple pastoralism in indigenous Indian culture and associates the urban acquisitive trends with a Europeanness that we have chosen to adopt. In his reading of Valmiki he sights precisely these 'signs', and, in turn, attempts to foreground them in his own play:

*Dasanan* [an epithet of *Ravana*] had wrenched away *Sita* from the bosom of the green-as-grass *Rama*: is that a tale of the ancients or the moderns? Is that the narrative of the ancient sage or a modern poet, like myself? Even in those early days did the owners of the gold mines drag by the hair the simple farmers contented with their green-hued pastoral living?

(*ibid.*: my translation)

Whether in using the symbol of *Ravana* for his King, or in drawing analogies between the roles of Valmiki's *Sita* and his *Nandini*, or in reading conflicts between a traditional vegetative culture and an exploitative acquisitive civilisation both in the ancient epic and in his own drama, Tagore keeps returning to archetypal patterns well recognised by all and sundry. Even in his subsequent analysis (of the play) in English, Tagore took the help of a fairy tale familiar to the Western readers that enabled him to continue with the same analogy: "The world has become the world of Jack and Giant—the Giant who is not a gigantic man, but a multitude of men turned into a gigantic system" ("Red Oleanders: Author's Interpretation", 1925). However, what is significant is that he is not interested in repeating the myth for its own sake. He recycles it in a manner that would make it conducive to modern articulations. He even goes on to suggest, tongue-in-cheek, that the ancient poet has stolen a tale that rightly belongs to him and his times because of its 'modern' ramifications: "None would believe that the golden kingdom of Lanka could have attained such unthinkable heights in those early times.

That this is a symbol of the present is attested by several thousand evidences today." (*Probasi*, 1925: my translation). Tagore does not seem contented with merely reusing the ancient myth, but would claim it for his very own.

This recycling/appropriation of the myth, therefore, entails a 'politics' of interpretation, designed to critically diagnose the malady of modern civilisation, particularly as available in the West. However much he may eschew the role of the politician in preference of that of the lyrical poet, the play does emerge as a 'political' discourse, not only in opposing the recent trends at rapacious accumulation of capital and heartless engineering of profits, but also in offering a critique of this trend in the West by a poet of the East.

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### 1.5 □ Man-Woman Relationships : a Play of Love

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The focal point of resistance is built up around the woman protagonist of the play, Nandini. In presenting Nandini as the pivot around whom the male characters revolve Tagore achieves a number of purposes. First, much of the dramatic conflict can be read in terms of man-woman encounters. Tagore regards man as an incomplete entity, while there is stasis and fruitfulness in the woman: "The god of creation has denied man's nature the final stroke of the brush; man must necessarily remain incomplete. The nature of woman dwells in stasis. She does not have to wander around in unknown regions for her fruition.... The might of man yearns for the beautiful through all his unfinished aspirations. The stasis flowers in the grace of the woman; the stasis fructifies in the benefaction of the woman; the stasis finds its melody in the beauty of the woman. ... This idea finds expression in my play *Raktakarabi*." (*Paschim Yatrir Diary, Rabindra Rachanabali*, 12, pp. 220-21).

The ultimate representation of male dominance in the play is the King. But, despite his formidable exploitative powers, he is likened to the vast desert that constantly pines for the touch of life in the tiny blade of grass. As Tagore had explained: "...when men make use of men and leave out this elemental touch of kindness, by which alone we may live in harmony with our surroundings, they crush and mutilate not merely their victims but the humanity which is in themselves." (as reported by Elmhirst, "Red Oleanders: An Interpretation"). This is the tragic nemesis of the King of *Red Oleanders*. Nandini represents that life, that "elemental touch", which the residents of *Yakshapuri* have denied themselves. But at least they can open their hearts to



the sparkling flame of life in Nandini; even the King is able to recognise this in her, which inspires him at the end of the play to destroy his own barricades and join forces against the Governor to tear down the system he himself had constructed. The King-Nandini encounters are the supreme moments of man-woman confrontations in the play, in the course of which we see the mighty man-made edifice of power collapsing before the woman's supremacy in her love. Tagore, as noted by Elmhirst, explained Nandini's role in bolstering this spirit of love against the oppressive male dominance encapsulated in the mechanistic system of *Yakshapuri*: "Into a loveless world, a world where men have ceased ever to be civil, a world of 'foreign investment', comes Nandini, the embodiment of that light that is beauty and love." ("Red Oleanders: An Interpretation", published 1952)

Second, the play may be read as a play of love, with Nandini providing the necessary life-force to those—primarily, the men—around her. The other woman in the play, Chandra, and occasionally some men like Gokul, regard her with suspicion, but the rest of the community is under the spell of her infectious buoyancy. As cited above, Tagore considered Nandini "a real woman" for whom "the highest expression of life is in love, which she manifests in this play in her love for Ranjan" ("Red Oleanders: Author's Interpretation", published 1925). In his 1924-lecture on the play in Argentina Tagore observed: "Nandini then is this touch of life, the spirit of joy in life. Matched with Ranjan, the spirit of joy in work, together they embody the spirit of love; love in union, union in love, a harmony before which the discord of greed is scattered as under a spell" ("Red Oleanders: An Interpretation", published 1952). While Nandini remains obsessed with her love for Ranjan, the other men in the play desire her company in their own distinctive ways. The King wishes to caress and crush her at the same time, betraying his intolerable envy for Ranjan. Bishu opens his heart to her in his soul-stirring near-confessional songs—she is both the object of his sorrow and the inspiration of his dreams. The Professor is both curious and fascinated by the redness of the flowers she wears on her person. Phagul holds her in deep respect, but also desperately wants to understand her. Kishor, with his adolescent infatuation, is ready to lay down his life for her—and he finally does so. Even, the Governor, with all his opposition, feels both threatened and intrigued by her presence; he decorates his spearhead with the garland she had offered him.

Finally, the love that Nandini represents is not merely restricted to romantic love, between the woman and her partner. Her love is of a more inclusive nature that exudes that "elemental touch of kindness". She is like the radiant sunbeam shining upon all and sundry, inviting them to join her in the celebration of life. And they cannot but respond to her call. She is the embodiment of that life-giving spirit that has rekindled the author's faith "to pour all my heart into painting against the background of black shadows—the nightmare of a devil's temptation—the portrait of Nandini as the bearer of the message of reality, the saviour through death" ("Red Oleanders: Author's Interpretation").

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## 1.6 □ Characterisation

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In presenting his characters in this play, Tagore categorises them into two broad classes: the oppressors and the oppressed. The socio-political fabric of *Yakshapuri* thrives on this division. The former class is headed by the King, the initiator of the system, which is pushed ahead by the network of the governors, the priests, the officers, and even the intellectuals. The oppressed include the miners, whose human identities have been effectively razed even as they have been reduced to mere numbers, like 47V (Phagulal) and Ng69 (Bishu): "we have become numbers, with numbers on our doors, our telephones, our cars, our factories, our restaurants, our votes, and our tickets at sports or theatre. Even as worshippers we are card indexed" ("Red Oleanders: An Interpretation", published 1952).

Yet in a remarkable dramaturgical twist, Tagore assigns names to the oppressed miners, while the oppressors are mentioned only by their class-designations. So, the miners comprise individuals like Bishu, Phagulal, Chandra, Kishor, Gokul, Gajju. Even the zombie—like creatures, who emerge as waste from the king's inner chamber, are identified by Nandini by their respective names: Anup, Upamanyu, Shaklu and Kanku. But their social superiors are given no individual names to boast of. They are merely representatives of their classes: the King, the Governor, the Deputy Governor, the Preacher, the Professor, the Headman. If they have reduced the miners to mere numbers, the author reduces them to mere class-designations; this is Tagore's way of getting back at the oppressors by denying them individual identities.

In the midst of them all stands Nandini: she is both an individual, and the archetypal woman. The term 'Nandini' indicates both. This is equally applicable to 'Ranjan'—the name denotes both an individual and the general spirit of conviviality. We may recall Elmhirst's report of Tagore's Argentina-lecture: "Nandini then is this touch of life, the *spirit of joy in life*. Matched with Ranjan, the *spirit of joy in work*, together they embody the spirit of love" (my italics).

Yet, it is also important to remember that, for Tagore, Nandini (or for that matter, Ranjan) is not merely an abstraction, but a real flesh-and-blood entity: "Nandini, the heroine of the play, has definite features of an individual person. She is not an abstraction, but is pursued by an abstraction, like one tormented by a ghost. And this is the drama. Nandini is a real woman who knows that wealth and power are *maya*, and that the highest expression of life is in love..." ("*Red Oleanders*: Author's Interpretation"). It would not do therefore to relegate these characters—or even the play at large—to a realm of mere symbols and metaphors. They have their real passions, real aspirations, and real sufferings—made all the more real by the coarse reality of the world around them. To read the play only in terms of symbols and metaphors would run the risk of overlooking the very real crisis at hand—the all-devouring tentacles of a greedy exploitative society, threatening to snuff out the joys of human existence. This reality is so overwhelming in its crudity that it required the recycling of the mythical tale of the multi-headed *Ravana* for its effective—and pleasurable—communication.

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### 1.7 □ *The Red Oleander* : the Central Symbol

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The red oleander flower that gives the name to the play—in the Bengali and English versions—acts as a central symbol around which the meaning of the play is built up. The genesis of the play was also closely associated with Tagore's memories of an oleander plant fighting for its survival against a pile of hard lifeless iron. Kshitimohan Sen, in a letter to Pramathanath Bisi, quoted Tagore as saying: "There was a pile of scrap iron near my room, covering a small oleander plant under it. It was not noticed in time, and later could not be located under the dump. A few days later, I was struck by the sight of a slender oleander stem pushing its way up through the iron pile with a red flower in bloom. The redness was like that of blood spilt by cruel hands and yet greeting the world with its pleasant salutation. It seemed to say, 'I am not

dead, you could not kill me'. This sight stirred in me a creative urge. I could not be satisfied with the names *Yakshapuri* or *Nandini* for this play, so I have decided to call it *Raktakarabi*" (Pramathanath Bisi, *Rabindranatya Prabaha*, Calcutta : Orient Book Company, 2 vols, vol. 2, 1958, p.158: my translation).

Not only in the use of the name, the red oleander took on the role of a central symbol in the play. It symbolised the very spirit of life, embodied in its protagonist, fighting against the dehumanising forces of modern urban civilisation. In effect, the flower becomes identifiable with Nandini herself: "Ranjan sometimes calls me Red Oleander. I feel that the colour of his love is red,—that red I wear on my neck, on my breast, on my arms." Kishor pledges to fetch the flowers for her; the Professor makes an effort to understand the meaning of its colour; to Gokul the flowers make Nandini look "like an ominous torch with a red flame"; the King, on the one hand, pines for the "tint" of the oleanders to "build a dream out of it", and, on the other, feels as though his "evil star has appeared in their shape". These several responses to the red oleanders, in fact, reflect the men's responses to Nandini, who decks herself with those flowers. Their redness is directly identifiable with the power that Nandini wields; if Gokul sees her as an ominous torch; the Professor relates her choice of the flower with her choice of destiny ("I don't know what event you have come to write with that crimson tint"); and the King locates the "red fire" within her which he is desperate to "extract".

That Tagore was painstakingly constructing the meaning of his play around this central symbol of the red oleanders, and that this symbol in many ways represented the function of Nandini herself, is evinced by what he said during his Argentina visit, as reported by Elmhirst. The relevant section is quoted here at length from that lecture given in 1924:

To the gardener of a northern clime the oleander is a flowering shrub, which, because of the character of its foliage and the simple beauty of its red blossoms, well repays careful attention and its place inside the heated greenhouse. In more temperate regions the oleander finds its welcome in the open garden, and will lavish its splendour within the courts of palace or monastery, whilst in India it flourishes of its own accord over jungle and plain. It has the same flower, the same nature, the same principle of growth, but according to temperature and environment it finds devotion from one, appreciation from another, and

only cursing and bitterness from the poor cultivator who, as its spread from the hedgerow and invade his scanty plot, must set to work with his *kodali* and root it out. In his struggle for livelihood he is concerned with the underground ramifications of the root system, and with his eyes upon the soil he lacks either the time or the energy to glance at the spray of red blossoms that hangs immediately over his head.

Into a world where men have sacrificed every simple human relationship and are grubbing for what they can get, out of each other, out of the soil, out of books or the exploitation of souls, where the beauty of human sympathy is forgotten, the oleander sheds its flower, and, with a shock, some with protest, some in anger, some in response to a deep echo within, cast away their tools and according to their several abilities realize that beauty of life which dwelt among them, but which they had allowed to grow out of reach.

("Red Oleanders : An Interpretation : Notes on a talk given by Rabindranath Tagore and transcribed by Leonard K. Elmhirst during the poet's visit and stay in Argentina, November-December, 1924". *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, November 1951-January 1952).

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## 1.8 □ Experimentation with Form : towards a Modern Indian Theatre

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When Tagore returned to his major plays in 1908, after a temporary phase of hibernation (1890-1907), he appears to have outgrown his initial efforts to imitate Western dramaturgical models. Beginning with *Sarodsatsav* (1908), he seems to be in search of an adequate theatrical form that would be conducive to the needs and aspirations of contemporary India. In short, he was trying to create a new model for the 'modern' Indian drama. For this, neither the classical Sanskrit drama nor the Western models then being imitated on the Bengali public stage could serve his purpose. For this, he turned to the traditional forms of Indian folk theatre(s). In *Rangamancha* (1903) he had already declared his avowed preference for the *yatra* : "The performance of *yatra* leaves no yawning gap between the spectator and the performer..." (my translation); he went on to reiterate this position almost thirty years later in the preface to *Tapati* (1929): "In our country, during a *yatra*-performance, overcrowding may have constricted the audience-

accommodation, but there were no restraints upon the imagination of the viewers" (my translation). In between came the rich harvest of his mature plays, in which he experimented with the rich potentials of folk theatre semiology. Yet, he never meant to revive the folk traditions to make them into mere museum replicas. He was trying to breathe fresh life into the Bengali theatre, the growth of which was stunted under the overwhelming influence of the coloniser's theatrical practices. The use of songs in his plays, for instance, may originate from, but do not replicate, the traditional styles for use of songs in drama. They bring memories of the folk theatre but move beyond in serving manifold purposes within Tagore's dramaturgical scheme: at times they create the ambience, at times they become extensions of the dialogue itself, at times they add to the narrative. Sankha Ghosh, the noted Tagore scholar, gives a detailed discussion of the varied ways in which Tagore uses songs in his plays (see, *Kaler Matra o Rabindra Natak*, Calcutta : Dey's Publishing, 1969 ; rpt. 1985, pp. 22-33, 133-157). This eagerness to break free of the shackles of Western realistic theatre then dominating the stage—in London, and in Calcutta—perhaps gained impetus after Tagore shifted base to Santiniketan: the open-air ambience at Santiniketan was particularly favourable for effective use of indigenous elements, and performances at that place could be effortlessly inscribed with 'signs' borrowed from folk traditions. Experiments at Santiniketan, therefore, gave momentum to Tagore's urge to move in a new direction, and affected both the writing and the production of his plays: the search for the 'modern' Indian theatre had begun.

*Raktakarabi/Red Oleanders* is one of the most significant achievements in this direction. In the casting of the narrative, the art of characterisation the use of stage scenography, the deployment of the songs, Tagore's experimentation with the dramaturgical form is all too evident. The single stage setting, dominated by the net before the royal palace, represents an abstraction of *Yakshapuri*; without any effective change in the scenography, the locales create and dismantle themselves effortlessly: from the Nandini-Kishor exchange outdoors, to the vicinity of the Professor's quarters, to the portals before the palace where Nandini converses with the King behind his mesh, to the den of Phagulal and Chandra into which enters Bishu, only to be drawn away by Nandini who gambols down the village path. Scene after scene, episode after episode unfolds before us, yet the visual 'sign' of the net always remains in view. The effortless movement from locale to locale, without

the clutters of the realistic stage trappings, is a lesson from the open-air performance of the folk theatre. Yet, unlike the folk form, there is an aesthetic suggestion of the abstraction of the place, in the uninterrupted presence of the net before the King's door. Tagore has taken a suggestive cue from the indigenous resources but has not replicated them mindlessly; his use of folk theatre semiology has been geared towards claiming a new theatrical form for contemporary Indian theatre. *Raktakarabi*, like several other plays of this phase, is inscribed with several such 'signs' borrowed from folk origins but used to rescue Indian theatre from the pitfalls of Western realistic practices and win for itself a form conducive to the articulations of the contemporary 'crisis in civilisation'.

It is this newness in form and content that marks out *Raktakarabi/Red Oleanders* as a 'political' discourse. On the one hand, it is a scathing attack on the contemporary capitalistic society, particularly as available in its European manifestation. On the other, in promoting indigenous theatrical semiology, it marks a resistance to mindless borrowings from the West, though without any pretensions at either replicating or commodifying the folk elements. In effect, ideologically, culturally, theatrically, the play carves out for contemporary Indian theatre a distinctive anti-colonial stand, trying to claim a distinctive voice for the theatre of the colonised, thereby envisioning a 'modern' Indian theatre.

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### 1.9 □ From *Raktakarabi* to *Red Oleanders* : Problems of Translation/Transculturation

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If several of Tagore's dramatic compositions (like many of his non-dramatic works, too) had to wait for some years, sometimes even decades, to find a translated version in English, the passage from *Raktakarabi* to *Red Oleanders* took a significantly short span. The Bengali *Visarjan* of 1890 found an English equivalence in *Sacrifice* only in 1917; *Raja* (1908) and *Dakghar* (1912) were both translated in 1914, as *The King of the Dark Chamber* and *The Post Office* respectively. Also, while *Sacrifice* was done by the author himself, the other two translations, of *Raja* and *Dakghar* (though published in Tagore's name), were by other translators working under his close supervision. Yet, when *Raktakarabi* became the auto-translated *Red Oleanders*, the English

rendition came so close on the heels of the Bengali original that it almost makes one wonder if Tagore had been working on the two versions almost simultaneously. As noted earlier, when the two versions appeared as individual playtexts in print, the publication of the English *Red Oleanders* (1925) preceded that of the Bengali *Raktakarabi* (1926) by a year. Initially, they had been both published in literary journals—*Raktakarabi* in *Probasi*, *Red Oleanders* in *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*—in the same year (1924). By October 1925, Tagore was taking pains to explicate his interpretation of the play in English (“Red Oleanders: Author’s Interpretation”, *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1925). Even earlier, during his 1924 visit to Argentina, he had lectured on the play, as has been noted down by his travel companion, Leonard Elmhurst. Tagore, right from the initial stages of composition of this play, seems to have been anxious about its English version and its reception overseas. The transition from *Raktakarabi* to *Red Oleanders* seems to have mattered considerably to the author.

Whenever Tagore translated his own compositions, the result was less of a translation and more of a transcreation. He took liberties with the original version to ensure its acceptability among the receivers (readers/viewers) in the target language. This amply explains why Sisir Kumar Das prefers to call Tagore’s translated/transcreated works “The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore” (published by Sahitya Akademi). Much of this transcreation has gone into the making of the English *Red Oleanders*. A few instances from the text may be cited here. The reference to *Pous* in the song becomes *Autumn* in the English rendition; “*Pouser roddur*” is metamorphosed into the “September sun”. *Pous* is December in the Bengali calendar, which is more of winter than autumn. But Tagore draws the equivalence on the premise of the harvesting season: much like autumn in the West, the months of *Agrahayan-Pous* constitute the harvesting period in Bengal; so the English version of the song mentions the “basket” of Autumn “heaped with com”. In the original, Nandini is dressed in a “*dhani ranger kapar*” (paddy-coloured garment); in the English version this becomes a “grass-green robe”: the colour of the green paddy is translated into that of the green grass, though Nandini’s association with greenness (and, so, with freshness/youthfulness/vivacity) is retained. Again, though Bishu good-humouredly keeps calling Chandra his “*beyan*” (the mother of one’s son-in-law/daughter-in-law), perhaps because the Western audiences



would find such a form of address strange, he shifts to the familiar—and safe — “friend” in the English version. Similarly, “*morov*” of the Bengali original is simply the “headman”, while “*kotal*” is the “police”; “*Ma Lakshmi*” (as an apostrophe) becomes the innocuous “good woman”; “*para*” (locality) appropriates “parish” in English, though without the connotations of a Christian diocese; “*Maranchandir brata*” is the culturally-neutral “fast day of the War Goddess”; “*madal*” is metamorphosed into “drums” and “*sarengi*” into “guitar”.

In these instances, Tagore was trying to recast his original to appropriate the cultural register of the target readers/audiences in the West. However, there are also occasions where he tries to familiarise the Western audiences with the cultural nuances embedded in the original. So, the bird “*Neelkantha*” is mentioned as a “blue-throat”, with an added foot-note describing it as “a bird of good omen”. Similarly, “*Rahu*” becomes the “Shadow Demon”; “*namabali*” is explained as the “wrap printed with the holy name”; “*pranami*” is the “votive fee”; and “*Kurma avatar*” is annotated as the “incarnation of the sacred Tortoise of our scripture, that held up the sinking earth on its back”. He goes to the extent of making near-literal translations of proverbial statements available in Bengali, though they may sound somewhat strange in the target language: the reference to “*chenra kalapata*” and “*bhanga bhanr*” is rephrased as “Man despises the broken pot of his own creation more than the withered leaf fallen from the tree” and the Sardar’s contemptuous “*saras esechen baker dalke naach sekhat*” is reworked through the Governor’s “heron come to teach paddy birds how to cut capers”. Here Tagore is inscribing his translation with culture-specific ‘signs’ to familiarise his target readers/audiences with the cultural ambience of the original.

In moving from one cultural register to another, from the familiar to the strange, from fidelity to the source culture to adaptability to the target culture, what Tagore ultimately achieves is a work of ‘transculturation’. The source and the target cultures criss-cross at several points in his translation/transcreation, to achieve a unique blend of the two. The text of *Red Oleanders* reaches out to the overseas readers, trying to acquaint them with cultural nuances of an Eastern society and yet not rendering it so esoteric as to be beyond comprehension. In its translated/trancreated/transcultured form, therefore, *Red Oleanders* is and is not *Raktakarabi*.

## 1.10 □ From Page to Stage : Problems of Performance

Tagore, like any true dramatist, had desired to stage this play, as performance always is the acid test for any dramatic composition. In fact, he had wanted to delay the publication of the play till it had been performed. He had written to Ramananda Chattopadhyay, the editor of *Probasi*: "It would be convenient if the play *Yakshapuri* was printed in the *Falgun* or *Chaitra* issue rather than the *Puja* issue of *Probasi*. I would prefer to have it released only after performance" (*Chithipatra*, Calcutta: Visva-Bharati Granthan Vibhaga, vol.12, 1986, p. 86: my translation). There had been several sessions of reading of the play—by the author himself—dating back to 1923: "During the summer vacation, while in Shillong, respected Gurudeva has written a play. He read this play at the *asrama* on two days. It is called *Yakshapuri*" (*Satiniketan Patrika*, *Asar* 1330/June 1923); "During the autumn recess, on the day of *Vijaya dasami*, esteemed Gurudeva read his play *Yakshapuri* before all the inmates of the *asrama*." (*ibid.*, *Aghraayan* 1330/November 1923). He had several candidates in mind for the role of Nandini—Reba Roy, Amita Tagore, Ranu Mukherjee. Yet, ultimately, for reasons that remain unspecified (though, according to many, the prime reason was the unavailability of a capable actress willing to take on the role) he did not stage the play: "I had gradually started preparations for the staging of *Raktakarabi*. But several hurdles have come in the way, so that I have to abandon my plans." (Letter to Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis, *Desh*, 30 Pous 1367/January 1960, p. 818).

Though Tagore was unable to produce *Raktakarabi* himself, he did witness a performance of the play. This was a fund-raising event in aid of the earthquake victims of Bihar, staged by the Tagore Dramatic Group, with their headquarters at the residence of Prafulla Tagore. On 15 March 1934, Tagore wrote to Nirmalkumari Mahalanabis in a letter: "A notice has come from the house of Prafulla Tagore that their *Raktakarabi* performance would begin on 26 March. They desire my physical presence..." (*Desh*, 23 September 1961, p.694), but informed her in a subsequent letter (dated 20 March) that "the performance of *Raktakarabi*... has been postponed indefinitely" (*ibid.*, p.695). And in a letter to Hemantabala Devi, dated 7 April 1934, he declared: "On returning to Jorasanko yesterday, tired after the *Raktakarabi* performance, I was pleased to

receive your gift of fruits and sweets" (*Chithipatra*, vol. 9., 1964, p.227). This performance of the play, therefore, took place on 6 April 1934 at the Natya-Niketan theatre, directed by Prabadhendunath Tagore. The programme-note included an analysis of the play written by Abanindranath Tagore. Rabindranath himself took care to edit this: "I have retouched the introduction you had written. This would help to explain the meaning of the play." (published in *Visva-Bharati Patrika*, Kartick-Chaitra 1383/ November 1976-March 1977, p. 103). What was most intriguing was that the role of Nandini was played not by any woman, but by a young man by the name of Jagamohan Mukhopadhyay (see Rudraprasad Chakraborty, *Rangamancha O Rabindranath: Samakalin Pratikriya*, Calcutta : Ananda, 1995, p.196). After Tagore's death, of course, the play was produced at Santiniketan and elsewhere.

However, the definitive production of *Raktakarabi* seemed to arrive on the Bengali stage with Bohurupee's production of the play in 1954, under the direction of Sambhu Mitra, with Tripti Mitra in the role of Nandini. Though traditionalists cried themselves hoarse over Mitra's interpretation of the play, perhaps Tagore would have applauded the production had he lived to see it. Not only was Mitra able to lay his finger accurately on the 'modern' crisis of a materialistic civilisation that Tagore encapsulates in the play, but his presentation also attempted to rescue Tagorean drama from the stigma of unperformability. As Sankha Ghosh expounds:

The performance of *Raktakarabi* by Bohurupee was a historical event. This performance established, on the one hand, the dramatic robustness and invigorating stageability of the play, and, on the other, proved that poetry and life were not necessarily segregated components.

(*Kaler Matra O Rabindra Natak*, p. 104: my translation)

The production was a milestone achievement in Bengali theatre on several counts, not least of them being that it, once for all, shattered the misconception that Tagore's plays were only to be read in the privacy of the closet not to be performed on the stage. Subsequent productions of *Raktakarabi* have usually tended to bring back memories of the Bohurupee production. This still remains the definitive production of the play in Bengali theatre till date.

Productions of the English version, *Red Oleanders*, have been attempted outside India on occasions. A recent performance was given by a new theatre company, Myriad Productions, in London on 7 July 2006. The artistic director

of the company, Kevin Rowntree, who has an Indian mother, has expressed the desire of travelling to India with the production, which showcases a multinational cast with Nandini played by an Israeli actress, Shani Perez; Bishu by a Japanese Sadao Ueda; while a Mauritian, David Furlong, takes on the roles of Phagulal, Gajju and a headman; a Syrian-Italian, Aiman Zahabi, is the Sardar; and Sally Okafor, the daughter of a Nigerian father and a Punjabi mother plays the King, Kishore, Gokul, Gossain and another headman. There is even a Bengali actress among the players, Chandana Banerjee, who doubles as Chandra and the professor. The text of the play uses the translation of Tagore, the one made subsequently by Ananda Lal, and portions reworked upon by members of the company.

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## 1.11 □ A Select Reading List

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### Primary sources :

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### 1.12 □ Questions

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1. To what extent is *Red Oleanders* a landmark achievement in modern Indian drama? Discuss.
2. Comment on the transition of the Bengali *Raktakarabi* into the English *Red Oleanders*. Does this transition throw any light on Tagore's approach to translation?
3. Examine Tagore's protest against the modern utilitarian civilisation in *Red Oleanders*.
4. In *Red Oleanders* Tagore depicts the exploitative use of power, and its ultimate collapse, in an acquisitive society. Do you agree? Discuss.
5. Consider the significance of the function of Nandini in the play.
6. "Nandini is a real woman who knows that wealth and power are *maya*," Tagore once wrote. Examine the validity of this statement in the light of your reading of the play.
7. Analyse *Red Oleanders* in terms of man-woman relationships.
8. "The King of Red Oleanders is both *Ravana* and *Vibhishana*, and hence a split personality." Discuss.
9. Examine Tagore's recycling of the *Ramayana* myth in *Red Oleanders*.
10. Show how the red oleander functions as a central symbol in the play.

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## Unit 2 □ Silence ! The Court is in Session

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### Structure :

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Trends in Marathi Drama
- 2.2 Brief Outlines of Some Marathi Plays
- 2.3 Vijay Tendulkar : The Playwright and His Works
- 2.4 Themes of Some of Tendulkar's Plays
- 2.5 Act-wise Synopsis of Silence! The Court is in Session (1967)
- 2.6 The Author's Concerns
- 2.7 Characters
- 2.8 Tendulkar's Dramatic Art
  - 2.8.1 Dialogue
- 2.9 Conclusion
- 2.10 Annotations
- 2.11 Questions

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### 2.0 □ Objectives

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To introduce you to Marathi Theatre in general and to give you some idea of the kind of plays that were /are being written, appreciated and performed in Maharashtra. To acquaint you with the life and works of Vijay Tendulkar, the eminent Marathi playwright.

To analyze Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (Shantata/ *Court Chaloo Aahe*) with which he not only shot to fame but almost changed the complexion of contemporary Marathi Drama.

To evaluate Vijay Tendulkar as a dramatist with a mission.

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### 2.1 □ Trends in Marathi Drama

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It is difficult if not impossible for any book on Indian Regional drama to either exclude or else make no more than a passing mention of Theatre in Maharashtra. In fact, like drama in Bengal, Marathi plays in Maharashtra have continued to attract the audience despite the challenge thrown by one

of the world's most flourishing film industries in Mumbai. Rather, versatile film actors still take special pride in counting themselves as a part of Marathi theatre and some like Arvind Deshpande and Lakshmikant Berde were as much film personalities as stage actors. To other successful film actors such as Amol Palekar, Dr. Sreeram Lagu, Mohan Agashe, theatre continues to be a passion.

This history of Marathi Drama, that has come a long way from the folk dance forms Tamasha and Powada, may be traced back to more than a century and a half, beginning in 1843 with Vishnudas Bhave's Sanglikar Natak Mandali to be more precise. Others to add to the effort were the Mumbaikar Natak Mandali, Amarchand Wadikar Natak Mandali, and Chaulwadi Hindu Natak Mandali. In 1868 Vinayak Kirti's prose drama "*Madhavrao Peshwa*" that did not have a single song or dance, marked a welcome break from the musical plays that preceded it including Bhave's *Sita Swayamvar*. However, continuing interest in mythological subjects is evident in the plays of Balvant Pandurang, Appasaheb Kirloskar, and Govind Ballal between 1880 and 1900. For the very prominent social slant in drama, Marathi theatre is indebted to Ram Ganesh Gadkari whose *Ekach Pyala*, more a propaganda against alcoholism, appealed to the audience and in a way, proverbially speaking, paved the way for new arrivals, including the play of Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Elkunchwar.

In her book, *A History of Marathi Theatre*, Shanta Gokhale writes of yet another divide, of the co-existence of the Mumbai-based professional theatre catering to the demands of the educated urban middle-class and the experimental theatre also described as the 'other' or 'parallel' theatre that threw a stiff challenge to mainstream drama. In the early fifties, one may say, theatre-lovers of Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur watched performances that were not only new and striking but were also sending signals loud and clear that the pre-independence conventional plays were no longer relevant and had to go. Society had travelled far ahead. Vijay Tendulkar, whose play I propose to read and analyze, has been a part of this *movement* that has slowly but successfully erased distances between everyday reality and the fictive world of drama and continues to do so by presenting a slice from life, as it were, before an audience keenly aware of the human experiences, the tensions and the complications brought on stage by men and women actors.

Marathi drama, of which Vijay Tendulkar is more than an integral a part, boasts of impressive variety. Almost everything from historical plays to social, tragedies to musicals and black comedies has found an audience and encouraged by this response playwrights and producers have experimented freely and most enthusiastically. Khadilkar's *Kichakvadh*, a political play banned by the British, Vasant Kanetkar's *Raygadala Jevha Jaag Yete*, a historical drama, Jaywant Dalvi's *Sparsha*, a social play, Vidiyadhar Gokhale's *Suvanatula*, a musical comedy on a mythological theme, Satish Alekar's black comedy *Mahanirvan*, Ratnakar Matkari's *Lokakatha 78*, based on a real-life incident, G.P.Deshpande's *Udhavasta Dharmashala*, a powerful political play, have all been well received by either the public or the critics or both.

In the field of social drama in particular, Vijay Tendulkar scores above many of his predecessors and contemporaries for his intense involvement with and treatment of issues of common concern, of subjects that, irrespective of the success of the play, have compelled the audience to think afresh. That most of his plays, based solidly on human relationship with its many disturbing shades, have been widely acclaimed and both translated and performed in different states, bear evidence to the impact created by this Marathi dramatist. It may be of interest to mention that his *Ghasiram Kotwal* alone has had over six thousand performances.

Like Bengali and Tamil/Kannada playwrights Marathi dramatists too have been most strongly influenced by the West. Apart from direct translations or adaptations, there are many Marathi plays where the Western colour is too prominent for the playwrights' comfort. Of the earlier dramatists, both Khadilkar and Gadkari appropriated Shakespearean themes and Mama Warkerkar looked upon Shaw and Ibsen as a perennial source of inspiration. Even post-independence playwrights like Anand Kanekar and V.R. Shirwadkar (the latter a Jnanpith award recipient), for instance, have borrowed quite freely from Goldsmith, Galsworthy, Oscar Wilde and of course Shakespeare. Arun Naik has experimented well with *Macbeth* and *Othello*. P.L. Deshpande has turned to Russian plays at times. A very strong and obvious influence has been that of Absurdist drama as well. Vijay Tendulkar, like Sambhu Mitra and Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay of Bengal and Girish Karnad and Cho Ramaswamy of the South has always been an avid reader of Indian and Western plays and also a compulsive theatre-goer who has often watched up to three plays a day with keen academic curiosity. It is but natural for him to have been deeply influenced by his Western counterparts and his *Kanyadaan* is more than a strong reminder of this practice. The similarities between *The*



*Dangerous Game*, the dramatized version of Friedrich Durenmatt's novel, and *Silence! The Court is in Session* are too many to be overlooked despite many obvious differences.

It is common knowledge that generally it is the younger writers who attempt a conscious breakaway from the mainstream and not only search for but also find other channels that ensure a more uninterrupted flow of their dramatic talents. It is but natural for the younger generation of playwrights to use the theatre not only as the proverbial vehicle for thoughts or as a medium of self-expression but also as a highly effective measure of registering protests and questioning existing inert systems. Fortunately for them, Marathi theatre has always welcomed experimentation, some rather bold; it has uttered the unutterable and ventured into territories others have feared to tread and the intelligent and responsive audience has taken so kindly to such unconventional plays that even Prof. Sadanand Rege's *Gochi* directed by Amol Palekar, a play that confused many, has had seventy-five performances. Achyut Waze's *Chalre Bhoplya Tunuk Tunuk* with a pumpkin at its centre and Satish Alekar's *Mahanirvan* with a rotting corpse created an effect that was frighteningly new. For a better understanding of continuing trends I have included brief outlines of some interesting Marathi plays, some social, others experimental and so on.

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## 2.2 □ Brief Outlines of Some Marathi Plays

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Prof. Sadanand Rege's *Gochi* is a play about Daddy, Mummy and brats. Problems multiply as Daddy is suddenly not to be found. The search for the missing man continues till he is found in the company of two grave-diggers at work. There is a peculiar disorientation as neither can Mummy remember details of her life with her husband nor can the man return. There is a strange mix-up and the audience finds that the brats become the grave-diggers. For this technique of sudden transformations and puzzling appearances it would do well to read the synopsis of a more contemporary play *Yada Kadachit*.

Santosh Pawar's *Yada Kadachit*, better described as "Kalyug's Mahabharat", redefines more than just the Kaurava-Pandava relationship and adopts a new perspective altogether thereby upsetting established notions and images. It's a world gone crazy for Ravana makes an entry into Draupadi's

*swayanvar* and Gandhari instead of Sita longs for the golden deer and then instead of Ravana Virappan arrives. Here Pandavas invite the Kaurava's to a game of dice and the latter are faced with the long term exile. The good and the bad have changed places and so Gaudi Bhai, Lord Krishna, decides to come to Duryodhana's aid. To complicate matters further Mahatma Gandhi makes an appearance with his principle of *ahimsa*.

Mahesh Elkunchawars trilogy *Wada Chirebandi/Magnatalyakathi/ Yuganta* takes the audience into the lives of the Deshpandes, a land-owning Brahmin family in Dharangaon. In *Wada Chirebandi* the head of the family has passed away leaving behind a mixed bunch. Along with the mother there are the brothers Bhaskar and Sudhir, their wives and children and the siblings Prabha and Chandu. This play is concerned with the interaction of these members. Naturally, the second play *Magna Talyakathi* introduces us to the next generation which is again a peculiar mix of Bhaskar's son Parag, a transporter of contraband goods, and daughter Ranju interested only in films and Abhay, Sudhir's son, who is in the US studying medicine. This man returns in *Yuganta* not as a successful doctor but as one who has left behind a broken home. There is no future for this childless man and he is comforted by his cousin Parag who has a son to whom he can give no more than a land that will yield nothing.

Satis Alekar's *Mahanirvan* is a black comedy that in its own strange way tries to dispel the horror of death and all conventional ideas attached to it. Bhaurao cannot be cremated though he is now a stinking, rotting corpse. His dutiful son tries his best to cremate his father just the way he had wanted to and for that he comes in direct conflict with the authorities and civic rules. There is *keertan* in the house while the corpse rots and the dead man's wife finds a "ghostly lover".

Shankant Shigvan's *Mumbai Bandh* is a side-splitter like the hilarious film *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* and here too the problem is a corpse. In this musical comedy the hero's father-in-law chooses a wrong time to die. He expires suddenly in the middle of a Mumbai Bandh. How to take the body to the crematorium is the question that disturbs the relatives and the characters find themselves in peculiar situations on account of their failure to dispose off one lifeless body.

Tendulkar's plays are too important for our purpose to be clubbed with the ones mentioned. Hence I have reserved special space and will take them up at a later stage. It is time now to turn to our playwright –Vijay Tendulkar

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### 2.3 □ Vijay Tendulkar : The Playwright and His Work

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Vijay Tendulkar was born to write. Or else how does one account for the fact that in 1934, at the tender age of six, he wrote his first story and at the age of eleven in 1939 not only wrote a play but went ahead and directed it and thereafter also acted in it. It took him a few more decades to earn the most prestigious title Playwright of the Millennium and today no discussion on Marathi drama is quite complete without an account of Tendulkar's plays and the issues they bring on stage.

To say that Vijay Tendulkar is a prolific writer is to say the least for in about fifty years time he has written nearly thirty full-length plays, seven collections of one-act plays, six collections of children's plays, four collections of short stories, three of essays besides seventeen film scripts and a novel. Even if the general reader is not so much acquainted with Tendulkar's novels and short stories, he knows *Shantata! Court Chaloo Aahe* (1967), *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Kamala* (1981) and is acquainted with *Gidhade* (1971), *Kanyadaan* (1983) to name a few. He is also the script-writer of *Nishant*, *Aakrosh*, *Manthan*, *Ardha Satya*, some of the most sensitive and critically-acclaimed noncommercial Hindi films. The eleven plays for children, short stories, novels, critical essays, all show his remarkable insight into human nature as well as his proficiency as a writer. He is an accomplished translator and his love for the theatre is evident from the fact that he has translated Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure*, Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* and also Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. His own plays too have been translated into many languages and one of the most popular is *Shantata! Court Chaloo Aahe* which in English reads *Silence! The Court is in Session*, in Hindi *Khamosh! Adaalat Jaari Hai* etc.

Tendulkar is the proud recipient of prestigious awards and honors including the Maharashtra State Government Reward, Sangeet Natak Academy Award, the Filmfare Award, Padmabhushan, Saraswati Samman, the Kalidas Samman, the Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar, and the Jansthan Award. The latest recognition, for lifetime literary achievement, was the Katha Chudamani Award.

It is common knowledge that despite his popularity and success, he continues to be a controversial playwright. To Tendulkar no subject that concerns human beings is

without dramatic possibilities. Extremely close to reality, Tendulkar's plays have been further enriched by his personal experiences which include even his early years in a Bombay chawl. He was, he admits, acquainted with the woman who was later to be his Mitra in *A Friend's Story*. The hard-hitting *Gidhadhe* is, by his own admission, a successful attempt at a catharsis after a family turmoil. No subject is taboo for our playwright whose *Ghasiram Kotwal* faced a ban and plays like *Sakharam Binder* raised quite a few eyebrows. Yet, as a dramatist, Tendulkar is too powerful and his presence in the world of Marathi Drama is still too much of a necessity for him to be either ignored or blacklisted.

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## 2.4 □ Themes of Some of Tendulkar's Plays

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*Gidhadhe* or *The Vultures* left many in the auditorium in a state of shock with its raw violence, sensationalism and the sexual overtones. The audience is brought in contact with a family that violates every code of conduct possible. Lust, greed, avarice, incest, the members stop at nothing. Sibling relationship too is not without a taint and even the very human and restrained Rama, wife of Ramakant, is involved in an extra-marital affair that is surprisingly warm and comforting. Against this is the daughter Manik's gross sensuality and the revolting greed of the brothers Ramakant and Umakant, sons of a degenerate father. Nothing is left untouched and a stunned audience is made to witness the beating of a father by his sons and an abortion forced on a sister by her own brothers. As the name indicates, the audience is in the midst of vicious vultures.

*Ghasiram Kotwal*, as stated, was banned for quite a while for its anti-Brahmin slant, its distortion of history and the maligning of Nana Phadnavis. Tendulkar has of course taken liberties with history and centralized a character that had little or no role to play in the times of Nana Phadnavis but he was, it must be remembered, not interested in writing a historical play. His play has human corruption at its centre and is about power used and misused. Though Tendulkar reverts to the form of the musical

in this play there is little to dispel the shadows that thicken. The Nana-Ghasiram interactions, the attempted sexual assaults and the fall of the Kotwal all reveal the intricacies of power games, not confined to any specific age or society.

*Sakharam Binder*, a book-binder by profession, is a Brahmin with a difference. An exposé of the double standards of the moralistic middle-class, Sakharam is involved in relationships that turn more complicated as the play progresses. Champa, Laxmi, Fauzdar Shinde, they appear one after the other and relationships get more and more complex. As always, sexuality, virility are important issues and the man-woman relationship is the backbone of the play in which Sakharam kills the sensual Champa for her physical intimacy with Dawood Miyan. This attraction is to Sakharam an insult to his manhood. Tendulkar's interest in unconventionally bold themes is further emphasized as Sakharam is shown as a man with no faith in the institution of marriage and yet ready to answer the call of the flesh. He has charted his own rules and is happy living with women who have either been abandoned or else have deserted their husbands. With no strings attached they flit from man to man and he from one mistress to another. However, it is interesting to see how some of these women like Champa and Laxmi bring about changes in the Binder's nature.

*KAMALA* as the name indicates, is about the young Kamala whom Jaisingh Jadav, a journalist, has bought to prove that women are still commodities to be acquired in exchange of money. Based on a real-life incident, the Indian Express reporter A. Sarin's mission of buying a woman to expose a racket, this play takes a serious turn and raises questions about the position of women, wedded and housed and women bought and kept. The audience is shocked into a stunning realization when the illiterate, innocent Kamala asks the wife Sarita about her status and her words are "How much did he buy you for?" Matters get complicated and Jaisingh finds the adventure turning sour. At the heart of the play is the theme of exploitation of women and also the contrast between Jaisingh Jadav's sensational and Kakasaheb's committed journalism.

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## 2.5 □ *Act-wise Synopsis Of Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967)

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### ACT I

The play opens in a "completely empty" hall that seems to await arrivals. Slowly men and women trickle in to rehearse for a "show". The first to enter are Samant and the heroine Miss Leela Benare, a teacher, strict yet loving and conscientious, as she describes herself. The others include Rokde, Ponkshe, the Kashikars, Sukhatme, Karnik etc. The character they wait for is Prof Damle who does not make an appearance. The assembly is in good humour and the men and women sing, crack jokes and talk loudly and enthusiastically as they get ready for the "fake" show. For a touch of novelty Sukhatme, Ponkshe and the others decide to hear "a new and imaginary case" and place Miss Benare, then off-stage, in the witness box. Leela Benare stiffens visibly when she hears of the decision but it is too late for a new option. The Act ends with Kashikar, dressed in a judge's costume, announcing Leela Benare's trial on charges of infanticide.

### ACT II

The Court is not yet in Session but there is a great deal of activity. Orders are placed for *beedis*, *masala pan* and there is much of smoke blowing and *pan* spitting. It is obvious that the characters, perhaps with the exception of Miss Benare, are in a relaxed mood waiting for the fun to begin. When the trial begins Benare, who makes a valiant effort to look calm and composed, pleads not guilty. The trial is on and soon one senses a movement in an unexpected direction. One is reminded of Miss Benare's mention of a "slander" and then the placing of a hand unconsciously on her stomach and the hushed whispers of Karnik about something concerning Benare's life. As the fake witnesses talk under oath, fact and fiction get uncomfortably entangled. A story, damaging for Leela Benare, takes shape. It seems that she had visited Damle one night, cried when he had tried to shake her off and then accused him of being responsible for the deaths "of two living beings" A distraught Benare attempts to leave but there is no escape and this act ends with Sukhatme, the lawyer-actor, calling her into the witness box.

### ACT III

Miss Benare is now almost an object on display and the characters present are only too eager to pull her reputation to shreds. She counters it all with a silent defiance refusing to take oath, answer or speak in self defence. Strangely, in this 'game', she is questioned about her single status, her age and other personal details. Rokde speaks of an unpleasant incident that ended with his slapping her face. Ponkshe asks publicly why Benare carries a bottle of Tik-20 in her bag and even as colour drains from her face, Benare hears Ponkshe telling the judge that she had confessed that she was pregnant. Like a swarm of flies attracted by the stench of a rotting carcass, the others question Ponkshe for details. Helplessly Benare reminds him of the promise of secrecy that he had made but the secret is out that the child in her womb was sired by the much-married Damle whom she adored. Since she was against infanticide and needed a "father's name" for the baby, she, it seems, had tried to entice both Ponkshe and Rokde to marry her. The sordid details about Leela Benare's personal life reveal incest, attempted suicide and threats to her career. School authorities wish to dismiss a teacher who has indulged in pre-marital sex. She is considered a polluter of a *clean* society and even the judge steps down to speak about her desperate attempts to save her career. In the dying moments of the play Benare speaks. It is a long speech where she expresses her desire to live and enjoy life and also questions why she should be stoned in public for her behavioural pattern in her "private life". Her confession is followed by severe admonition and the sentence that she may live but the unborn child has to be destroyed. As Benare cries out in protest, the audience is shocked into awareness that the entire trial was "fake" and that the fun is over as it is time for the real show. Benare is shaken and the others reiterate that it has all been a game after all and it was all "untrue". The play ends with Leela Benare, alone on stage a green home-made parrot in hand, listening to her own voice singing a "sparrow song".

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### 2.6 □ The Author's Concerns

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Quite like Bernard Shaw, Tendulkar would perhaps not have moved his little finger to the ink bottle to write simple entertainers. He is more of an iconoclast using, like Shaw, his plays as platforms from where to deliver his manifestoes and each play,

though not overtly didactic, does address the audience, compelling each member to listen and listen attentively. As already mentioned, throughout his career as a dramatist Tendulkar has used his plays as eye-openers, revealing unspoken truths, exposing what many have been too inhibited to touch and hitting hard as and when required. And with *Shantata! Court Chaloo Aahe* or *Silence! The Court is in Session* he has given Indian. Regional Drama a new meaning and a definite mission.

*Silence! The Court is in Session* begins with a play within a play. Amidst some fun and frolic that bring defences down a deceptively simple "game" is on but when realization dawns the shock is so difficult for the audience to absorb that the total impact of the play is perhaps stronger than expected. A simplistic description of *Silence! The Court is in Session* would be to call it the axing of Leela Benare but to an interested reader it is obvious that there is much more to it than actually meets the eye. Through the mock-trial that indicts Miss Benare, the playwright hits out at a society, at a system more tarnished than its present victim.

Issues under consideration are matrimony, extra-marital affair, pre-marriage pregnancy and of course infanticide, voluntary and forced. Human failings, meanness, idle curiosity, slander, character assassination, the audience sees it all as the play progresses. By Act II it is evident that notwithstanding repetitions of "fake", "mock", "game", "show", "fun", things are much more serious than even the characters themselves realize. It is a woman's reputation that is at stake, it is her career that is also at stake, it is a man's irresponsibility that goes unnoticed and it is the fate of an unborn child that is being so callously decided. Not one, perhaps with the exception of the bashful Samant, is really interested in protecting a woman accused of immorality, not one is seriously interested in summoning the man equally guilty, if not more. Prof Danle can make an unmarried woman pregnant but why should anyone go after him. He is not present and the matter ends there. Prof Danle, let us not forget, is a man after all.

The gender war, as always, is an unequal fight with men outnumbering women and in this case pitting against her collectively. Apart from a few sympathetic lines from a Ponshe or Samant, there is nothing or no one to stand by Benare. But Tendulkar has always allowed his women to speak, to impress and even to fight and defeat. It would do well to remember that he has generally been quite fair to his



women characters and in this play he has created history of sorts by allowing a woman to fight her case with her head high. Leela Benare gets the longest speech and that to at the end of the play when the audience is all attention and quite keen to hear her story. Benare's speech hides nothing and spares none and the accusations that she hurls against men and the society they represent remind us of the fact that Tendulkar was shaping himself up into a writer who would some years later write many more experimental plays and scripts of 'parallel cinema' like Shyam Benegals's *Nishant* and the Marathi *Umbartha (The Threshold)*, a film on women's activism in India.

By now it is apparent that in this play men do not sparkle. Neither Kashikar nor Karnik nor Ponshe, Rokde or Sukhatme does anything to win audience sympathy. Rather, they degenerate into gossiping women, peering and probing in the hope of uncovering a woman's festering wound and holding it up to view. Each time they get into their costume, Tendulkar reminds, as it were, that all their attitudes, all fake and made-up, remain as long as the costumes do. This, ironically draws attention to the powerlessness of the group desperately trying to appear powerful. The Kashikars lead a barren life, deprived of parenthood. Rokde, Ponshe and Karnik are actual failures and only in the "imaginary" game they are falsely endowed with power. On the other hand it is the victim Miss Benare who is well-placed and has tasted success.

Yet another matter of importance is the relation between an individual's personal and professional life. Miss Benare is to lose her job because of her "promiscuous" nature. Children are not safe in her hands. But she, on behalf of all facing such charges, argues vehemently. Why should there be a dismissal if a teacher discharges her duty with all sincerity and does not allow the shadow of her personal life to come anywhere close to her professional life? There is no satisfactory answer to this. There perhaps cannot be one. Miss Benare is forcibly made to pay. She cannot be allowed to spoil the future generation or give birth to the illegitimate child, "a memento" of her sins. The playwright, it is evident, is out to expose a biased society and not for nothing do critics describe his plays as "cruel" plays that attack and attack ruthlessly. Is Vijay Tendulkar then the "angry young man" of the theatre? Perhaps. Mark his own statement "As a social being I am against all exploitation and I passionately feel that all exploitation must end."

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## 2.7 □ Characters

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Tendulkar has always taken pride in his characters and in his own art of characterization and not without reason. His men and women, to use a cliché, come alive not just as actors but as full-blooded human beings no different from those in the audience. His characters are not replicas of men and women he has known but what he has seen or heard he has stored and there they have remained waiting to be recollected according to necessity. Sakharam Binder he has not met but he had once been told about a man shirking marriage but savouring each of his many relationships with female victims of unhappy unions. When moulded, finely shaped and let loose his men and women move with a life force of their own, with an individuality that sets them apart from the others. Leela Benare's sexuality may be a reminder of Champa's but Benare is Benare and Champa can never be Benare and vice versa. Tendulkar's characters are powerful and even the less significant Ponkshe and Rokde leave an impression. Prof. Damle is heard of but never seen. Yet, when bits of conversation relating to him are put together and then topped by the 'terrifying laughter' that rings clear, there emerges the picture of an unpleasant, lustful, irresponsible being, a typical Indian male used to exploiting a woman.

### MISS LEELA BENARE

As intended, Tendulkar's characters come to life on entry. Within minutes of their first appearance the cringing Samant and the seductive Leela Benare arrest attention. With the passage of time one comes to realize that it is Benare who needs to be watched. She is no weakling. She may literally be pushed into the witness box but soon one is left in little doubt that though she stands pathetically exposed before a host of men waiting to hurl accusations, though she takes out a bottle of Tik-20, she is neither as powerless as she may seem nor as defenceless as the men may want her to be. Rather, reminding us somewhat of Ibsen's Nora, Benare, as Samik Bandopadhyay puts it in his introduction to Tendulkar's *Collected Plays in Translation* is not

at an acquiescent receiving end, but at a point of conflict where as aggressive — transgressor of the sexual mores of her community, she challenges the executors of power in absentia

The many shades in Benare's character are as apparent as her changing expressions and actions. Her act of wiping her face, the attempt to unlock the door and leave, the effort made to crack jokes and appear unaffected, the sudden stiffening, the loss of colour, the tears and the appeals make her a perfectly three-dimensional character who plays two roles at the same time. She is an actress aping an accused and she is a social victim surrounded by men waiting to nail her to her cross. Her private life is made public and the sordid details no longer remain her secret. Fortunately, Leela Benare does not degenerate into a whore and carries on the 'fight' single-handed with no assistance, not even from Mrs. Kashikar.

Tendulkar, with his dislike of any kind of social injustice and his honesty as a dramatist, comes to Benare's aid and gifts her a nearly ten-minute long speech with which she strikes at the conscience of a tainted society. It's a philosophical/social/personal speech to say the least that comes with the force of a whiplash to make the social pundits smart. Leela Benare talks about man's strange attitude to life, his love for it, and his disappointment with it. She speaks of her spinsterhood, her own follies as well as of an old infatuation, an incestuous relationship with her uncle, her mother's brother. But along with this, as Tendulkar's mouthpiece, as a representative of all maligned women she pronounces, "My private life is my own business...That can't be any one else's business;...". Tendulkar empowers the accused and with her new-found courage Benare raises another important question. Why should she be dismissed from her job as a teacher when she has been teaching with total sincerity and dedication? How can her shortcomings as a woman affect her teaching and that too when she has taught her students nothing but "beauty" and "purity"?

Tendulkar allows his men to reveal Benare's secrets, to present her as a Jezebel. But suddenly, at one point, he surprises his audience by elevating her to a new height. Leela Benare talks of the attractions of the body, of the errors committed purely for physical pleasure and then ends her speech with the reminder that her body that has been responsible for her slips is now a sacred receptacle for another living being. It is now the body of a mother determined to shelter a child. Social stigma she can endure but not the verdict that the baby in the womb has to be aborted. Ironically, within seconds, it is not Benare but Kashikar, the judge, and the others who stand guilty of intended infanticide.

Men may reduce Leela Benare to tears but they fail in their attempt to destroy this woman whose inner strength shields her from the attacks from without. She is no Kamala nor even Sarita. She is Leela Benare. The encounter is so real that only when Kashikar announces that it is time for the real show and rebukes Rokde for not noticing the time and Mrs. Kashikar says with tenderness, "How sensitive the child is!" that the audience remembers with a shock that it has all been "Just a game". Or has it been so? Leela Benare is not sure. Drained of emotion she sits motionless while the others leave for the actual preparation. Only Samant cannot leave and just before Benare stirs and hears her "sparrow song" he places a green parrot, meant to be a gift for a child, in her hands with "respect". Benare has earned it.

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## 2.8 □ Tendulkar's Dramatic Art

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After a highly successful career spanning more than half a century, Tendulkar no longer needs to prove himself. But let us not forget that *Silence! The Court is in Session* is one of his earlier plays, written when he was still in the process of fashioning himself. Let us also remember that it was the theme, the treatment, the language of this play that gave Tendulkar a place from which he has still not been dislodged.

Readers of Synge's *Riders to the Sea* will remember how Maurya hallucinates and there is a tragic mixture of present and past misfortunes. Tendulkar goes a step ahead in this play by mixing the real and the fake. This is a strange occasion where the serious dims the comical and tears and laughter are made to co-exist not as in life but due to this peculiar intertwining of the actual and the fictive. It is a funny world that the audience is lead into. A student who has failed his Inter-Science examination is here a scientist and witnesses are picked up at random. The judge has to pull on a wig hurriedly before pronouncing the statement. *An Oxford English Dictionary* is the *Bhagavad Geeta* used for oath taking.

The play disturbs. So many questions are left unanswered and it goes to the credit of Tendulkar that when the mock-trial ends the audience is still dazed, quite unable to respond even to Mrs. Kashikar's kind words. The spectators would rather be with Leela Benare, even though not fully certain whether things in her life are just as bad as they just appeared to be. Is she pregnant? Perhaps. She did touch her stomach in Act I. Has she defiled her

self? Perhaps. She did mention "slander". Is the culprit Prof Damle? Perhaps. But he goes scot-free may be since he is too powerful to be touched and she is too much in love to even allow any one to call him a "scoundrel".

What is this play then about? Is it all about a mock-trial that suddenly becomes real to all or does the pain of the real touch only Benare while the others forget, for weren't they play acting? Doesn't Kashikar, the honourable judge, say, "It would hardly be true, would it?" The take trial is over, the "new and imaginary case" has been done with and, as is implied, men and women so long locked in a moral battle will go on with the real show, their minds cleared of the Benare affair. But will the audience succeed in forgetting? Perhaps not. Tendulkar wants us to remember and we do.

One may marvel at Tendulkar's use of most simple symbols and his choice of words that may go unnoticed if the audience/reader is not alert enough. This is no comedy, we know for sure. Is it a black comedy, a problem play, a farce? It is difficult to answer for because of its thematic content and Tendulkar's off-beat treatment, the play can be any one of these or all of them. But whatever be the category there is a bleakness that is only too noticeable. The characters enter an empty hall, the bolts are rusty, doors cannot be opened making Benare's intended escape quite impossible, there is the suffocating smell of bidis and a lot of pan spitting. The witness-box that is carried in restricts movement, the heat in the room is overpowering. Even the parrot, the only bright-coloured object in the room is fake. But amidst reminders of pain, swollen fingers, puffy eyes, heartless laughter, muffled sobs, is the bright and pure image of the mother towering over the moral squalor. And above all hours the symbol of the "game" that mimics life and disturbs it.

Though an early play, one wonders at the maturity with which Tendulkar, then quite new to his art, handled this difficult subject, steering the play clear of melodrama. He avoids excess and uses interesting ways to create the oppressive atmosphere. There is little order in the hall. Men and women need to be handled with authority and they have to be told, Silence! The Court is in Session. Borrowing from old Marathi musicals, Tendulkar makes liberal use of songs and snippets from what sounds like a nursery rhyme. Benare sings of a "sweetheart", but her longing remains a longing. In her sparrow song sung in Act I the parrot asks the former "why her

eyes are so red?" At this point it means little. The song draws attention and a new dimension is added to it when in the closing moments of the play Leela Benare, red-eyed, parrot in hand, lies motionless listening to the refrain.

The three-act structure gives the play the desired speed. There was a sense of hurry when the play opened but as secrets begin to pile upon secrets, inquisitive men and women lose all sense of time. Reality knocks just before the curtains come down.

The play is a social satire, one of the most effective ever, yet one without the bitterness one generally associates with such plays. It is evident that Tendulkar is highly critical of the male characters, some of whom like Kashikar even speak of their "love for social work" while they close in on Benare. These members of welfare societies turn into predators as they smell blood. But *Silence! The Court is in Session* is very different in tone from, say, *Kanyadaan* where a Dalit's anger degenerates into brutal viciousness. In this play, Tendulkar is happy using a pointer to mark areas that are foggy and require immediate attention. Hence, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, despite its heavy content, moves unhindered and ends neither with a rejection nor with a collapse. Nothing is actually lost if the characters wish to forget the rehearsal.

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### 2.8.1 □ Dialogue

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Nothing happens in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. There is hardly any physical movement apart from a few exits and entries, spitting and mopping of faces. Rokde, as he says, slapped Benare, Benare was engaged in a verbal tussle with Damle, Samant did overhear the not-too-pleasant argument but all that is merely reported. Tendulkar, like many others before and after him, in India and in the West, relies far too much on dialogue. Words do not scare him, rather he considers it one of his strong points to put suitable words in the mouth of his characters who may be the Dalit Arun Athvale of *Kanyadaan* or the smart Jaisingh Jadav of *Kamala* or the men and women participants of the mock-trial in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Tendulkar gives his characters, each one of them "a personal way of speaking" which breathes life into them and gives them real-life individuality. So Samant's hesitant tone is so different from Benare's and Rokde's from Kashikar's and when assisted by each character's own gait, gesticulation etc. these words gain further power. The

play then gives the audience the desired illusion of reality. So when after all the allegations, the charges, Benare says with sudden determination, "Yes, I have a lot to say" and then stretches to loosen her arms, she visibly gathers steam to let loose all that has remained within so long, corroding her inside. Tendulkar uses language as a tool further sharpened by gestures, movement etc. Much credit goes to Priya Adarkar, for her successful translation of the play.

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## 2.9 □ Conclusion

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*Silence! The Court is in Session.* It is a command for the actors on stage to get to work. It is a warning to the audience to sit up for the trial has begun. At the centre is Leela Benare, apparently vulnerable for her positioning. Through a series of encounters and counter-encounters the play reaches a point from where it could have travelled beyond. Action is stalled at the end and the very artistic use of light intensifies a sense of mystery. As the mock-trial goes on with Benare trying to defend herself, many more characters are unknowingly exposed. The strange mixture of the serious and the trivial, of the real and the fake further complicate issues making this short drama highly complex and one of Tendulkar's most challenging and open-ended plays.

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## 2.10 □ Annotations

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### Act I

*What an excellent housewife the poor woman is!*: Benare pities Mrs. Kashikar for her uninteresting life.

*The grass ...dead*: A nursery rhyme. The emphasis is on the word 'dead'.

*Our feet tread....and spend....*: A poem by Mrs. Shirish Pai from which Tendulkar got his Leela Benare.

*Tukaram*: A much-revered Marathi sage.

*Ganapati*: Lord Ganesh.

*I'm not yet...those books*: Here Benare is referring to the Bible and the Geeta.

*Capstans*: A brand of cigarettes.

*Pan: Betel-leaf.*

*Infanticide : Killing of an infant, a new-born child.*

## Act II

*Gavel : The hammer used mainly by an auctioneer or a chairman to signal absolute silence.*

*The dignity....at all costs : There is total absence of order since it is a fake trial. Order has to be restored.*

*Contempt of Court : Violating the order of a court or being disrespectful to a judge.*

*He's been a buffoon: Rokde has been behaving like a fool.*

*I don't know. ...Adam: Prof Damle is totally unknown to Samant.*

*Would anyone cry....own house? The woman in tears had to be an outsider for no one cries so cautiously in one's own house.*

*...the whole fabric.....soiled these days: Society is no longer clean these days.*

*It holds water: It seems acceptable.*

*The bolt's.....outside: It indicates that there is no escape for Miss Benare.*

## ACT III

*Marry off the girls.....full stop: This is the attitude of men. Girls should be married off young for that will put an end to immorality in society.*

*Benare made overtures to him also: Miss Benare tried to entice him also.*

*Tik-20: A strong pesticide at times consumed to commit suicide.*

*Order!...the dock!: Miss Benare is being ordered to return to the box.*

*Throw your life.....fit to throw away. Our attitude to life is strange. If one attempts suicide and fails one realizes the value of life but when one tries to hold on to it , life seems worthless.*

*I taught them beauty.....my only comfort? Miss Benare fails to understand why her conduct in her personal life should affect her career adversely. She has been a*



sincere teacher who has never allowed her personal frustrations to interfere with her teaching and she has taught her students all that is good and beautiful.

*She worshipped.....body*: Miss Benare fell in love with Prof Damle for his intellectual superiority but to him she was no more than a physically attractive woman.

*But now.....smeared in sin*: Benare's past records too are not clean.

*The accused has plotted. ....religion*: By her sinful actions Miss Benare can destroy the rich Indian heritage and culture.

*There's great joy... that's failed*: It is wonderful to be alive.

*I felt like smashing. ....spitting on it*: Benare hits out at men who get involved with women and then run away because of their lack of courage.

*He wasn't. ...was a man*: Her 'god' had feet of clay. He was a man who only saw her body.

*Hence not only today's.....your misconduct*: Miss Benare should not be allowed to teach for she will corrupt little children, the future citizens.

*She's taken it really to heart*: Mrs. Kashikar pities Miss Benare for taking the imaginary case so seriously.

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## 2.11 □ Questions

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1. "Tendulkar is a playwright with a mission." Discuss with special reference to *Silence! The Court is in Session*.
2. Write a note on the theme of Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Is it relevant today?
3. Comment on Tendulkar's art of characterization with particular reference to *Silence! The Court is in Session*.
4. "*Silence! The Court is in Session* is an entertaining social satire." Discuss.
5. "Leela Benare struggles but never gives up." Is this an acceptable statement? Give reasons for your answer.
6. Attempt an evaluation of Tendulkar as a playwright.
7. Critically analyze Act III of *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

8. Would you call *Silence! The Court is in Session* a comedy? Give reasons for your answer.
9. "*Silence! The Court is in Session* concerns itself with significant social issues." Discuss.
10. "Tendulkar's plays do not entertain. They instruct". Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

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## Unit : 3 □ Girish Karnad : Tughlaq

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### Structure :

- 3.1. Date and Text
- 3.2. Context of the modern Indian drama
- 3.3. Historical play or political allegory?
- 3.4. Existentialist play
- 3.5. Characterisation
- 3.6. Recurrent motifs in the play:
- 3.7. *Tughlaq* and 'Transculturation'
- 3.8. A brief stage history
- 3.9. A Select Reading List
- 3.10. Questions

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### 3.1. □ Date and Text :

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*Tughlaq*, Girish Karnad's second play after *Yayati*, was written originally in Kannada in 1964. This was later translated into English by the author himself at the request of the noted theatre personality Alyque Padamsee in 1970. Karnad himself declares that he "was persuaded to translate it into English by Alyque Padamsee, who later produced it for the Theatre Group, Bombay" ("Author's Note", *Tughlaq*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975, vi). Subsequently the play has been translated into different Indian languages as well.

Though *Tughlaq* - or for that matter - all Karnad's plays should be considered first as products of Kannada theatre, because most of these (*Tughlaq* included) were translated by the author himself into English, they are considered also as important contributions to Indian drama in English (translation). Not only has this helped to bridge gaps between regional theatres by providing a common meeting-point, but has other implications as well. On the one hand, English by now has outgrown its stigma of being merely the coloniser's language and has been so inducted into the Indian set-up that

Indian English itself warrants legitimation. On the other, when British English today has to contend with Englishes produced outside Britain, Indian English holds a place of its own in the changed scenario. In this context, the availability of major regional achievements in English translations only strengthens the position of writings in English produced in India. Karnad's translations of his own plays - *Tughlaq* among them - constitute a major effort in this direction.

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### 3.2. □ Context of the modern Indian drama

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Karnad belongs to that 'new' generation of Indian dramatists who arrived around the sixties, with their urge to create a modern Indian drama. This was a pan-Indian phenomenon, with several dramatists bursting upon the scene in different corners of the country around the same time. Each of them felt that the aspirations of the contemporary generations of post-1947 India needed new dramaturgical forms for adequate articulations. Translations of Western masters, undertaken by many theatre practitioners, were not serving the purpose adequately. Indian drama needed to reinvent itself, both in form and content. It was this impetus that informed the plays of this 'new' crop of Indian dramatists - Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, K.N.Panikkar in Malayali, Girish Karnad in Kannada. The search for contemporary Indian drama had begun, and the first generation of the sixties was succeeded by others who followed their footsteps: G.P. Deshpande and Bhisham Sahni (in Hindi), Satish Alekar and Mahesh Elkunchwar (in Marathi), Mohit Chattopadhyay and Manoj Mitra (in Bengali), to name a few.

With the ancient Sanskrit drama having receded into the dim past and the folk theatre being confined to the margins, what had been traditionally postulated as *theatre* was largely Western importation. So, when a search for an authentic Indian theatre was undertaken in the colonial period, it usually tended to produce museum replicas of classical Sanskrit theatre. This was a way of reacting against the Western influx, which dominated the theatre scene. Though Michael Madhusudan Dutt had recycled a *Mahabharata*-episode in his play *Sharmistha* (1856) to fit it into the Western tragic form, though Vishnudas Bhave had blended folk theatre forms like *Yakshagana* and *akhyani* with the modern proscenium theatre (1843), these examples of 'hybridity' did not always prove sufficient to rescue the Indian mindset from blindly equating

the 'ancient' with the Indian and the 'modern' with the Western. Even the pathbreaking experiments of Rabindranath Tagore - to use an Indian theatre semiology to encapsulate modern anxieties (as done by European masters) - went largely unheeded.

After 1947, as a post-Independence generation tried to come to terms with the reality around them, a fresh search for an authentic Indian theatre was under way. This generation was aware of the double-edgedness of the reality in which they lived: on the one hand, they realised, they could not remain insular to global events; on the other, they were alerted to the regional specificities that surrounded them. The generation of Tendulkar, Sircar and Karnad had received a Western education, often hailed from urban backgrounds, and yet were also aware of the rustic moorings. All this awareness went into the making of their plays even as they tried to express the yearnings of their generation. Even when they returned to myths or legends or folk-tales, they were recycling these for modern consumption, as in Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal*, or Mohan Rakesh's *Ashar ke ek din*, or Bhisham Sahni's *Madhavi*. Karnad also, in several of his plays, explores ancient myths, legends, folk-lore, or even history, all the time contemporarising them to study his own times: while *Yayati* and *Agnivarsha* draw upon episodes from the *Mahabharata*, *Hayavadana* recasts a tale from *Vetal Panchvinshi*, and *Tughlaq* and *Nagamandala* draw upon chapters from ancient Indian history.

While these dramatists related to developments across the world, and expressed anxieties shared by modern existence, they were also firmly entrenched in their regional contexts. It is important to remember that they were writing in their particular regional languages first; the translations into other languages, including English, came later. Their plays, language-specific/culture-specific codes, were the rich harvests of modern regional theatres of different parts of India; it was under their guidance that these regional theatres were making progress. Modern Indian theatre, therefore, could no longer be considered a homogeneous entity, as in the years before Independence. Necessarily spanning across the multi-lingual/multi-cultural diversity of the Indian society, it comprised the entire spectrum of the several regional/*bhasa* theatres: the Marathi theatre, Bengali theatre, Hindi theatre, Oriya theatre, Kannadi theatre, Malayali theatre, Punjabi theatre, Gujrati theatre. These modern Indian dramatists, then, had to carefully poise themselves between

the global and the local, forging out of this delicate balance the theatre idioms of the modern Indian theatres.

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### 3.3 □ Historical play or political allegory?

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Karnad recaptures in *Tughlaq* an eventful phase of early Sultanate India as he makes Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq - one of the most controversial rulers of the period - the protagonist of the play. The action of the play begins around 1327 and spans the next five years of Muhammad Tughlaq's reign.

This phase of Tughlaq's reign is etched with his idealistic/eccentric measures, for which he is much misunderstood and ultimately branded as "mad Muhammad". Some of these measures include his overt secular policies in treating all his subjects equally, irrespective of their religious following ("without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed"); his decision to transfer his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad - politically, because Daulatabad is more centrally located ("Delhi is too near the border and ...its peace is never free from the fear of invaders") but, more important, because ideologically it furthers his patronage of the Hindu community ("Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom"); his economic vision in his attempt to inscribe money with a new value concept by minting copper coins ("A copper coin will have the same value as a silver dinar...It's a question of confidence. A question of trust!"). With each of these steps Tughlaq makes a bid to carry his generation into a new enlightened era ("They are only cattle yet, but I shall make men out of a few of them"). He is prepared to redefine the boundaries of religion and its interrelations with politics ("Yes, there is dirt and sickness in my kingdom. But why should I call on God to clean the dirt deposited by men?"; "Generations of devout Sultans have twisted their minds and I have to mend their minds before I can think of their souls."). Yet, all his efforts were misunderstood, even grossly abused, jeopardising all his attempts to move beyond the delimiting boundaries of the contemporary socio-economic-political determinants. By the end of the play, we see Tughlaq not only having to retract all his steps but, in the process, losing control over his sanity and on the verge of madness. What started out as idealistic vision is mired in the

crude reality of everyday existence and dismissed as the eccentric policies of a mad king.

This treatment of a historical character in the context of his period was undertaken by Karnad for a specific purpose. He recognised certain contemporary signs in the history of Tughlaq and saw the dramatic possibilities of using this as a framing device to talk about his own times. As he once declared himself (in *Enact*, June 1971):

What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. ... within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction - the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel, (as cited by U.R. Anantha Murthy, "Introduction" to the English translation of the play by Karnad, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, viii)

This "twenty-year period" that Karnad refers to corresponds to the two decades of Nehruvian idealism when, as Prime Minister, Nehru was trying to steer India into a new socio-economic-cultural era after Independence. But much of Nehru's idealistic visions went awry frustrated by the socio-economic-political realities of an emergent nation. As experts in the field have pointed out, Nehru's "industrial planning was geared to a purely foreign technology which was incongruous with the country's economic and social conditions" (Amiya Rao and B.G. Rao, *Six thousand days*, Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1974, 32). His socialist model in a democratic context was incomprehensible to the Rightists and inadequate to the Leftists. His brand of secularism, which advocated that the State should have nothing to do with religion, was soon misinterpreted to mean that the State should encourage all religions. Even as these idealistic designs crumbled in the face of the socio-political realities, there was a growing sense of disillusionment that gripped the nation towards the end of that "twenty-year period" of Nehru's rule. Karnad's *Tughlaq*, written in 1964, foregrounds that mood of discontent and disenchantment, and accurately encapsulates the spirit of the age. To quote Anantha Murthy, "it

is a play of the sixties, and reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country" ("Introduction", *Tughlaq*, vii-viii). In doing this, the play problematises the reading of history and ultimately emerges as an astute political allegory of its times.

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### 3.4 □ Existentialist play

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Scholars have noted existentialist traits in Karnad's *Tughlaq*. Affinities with Camus' play *Caligula* have been particularly identified. The protagonists of both these plays are caught in a godless universe, in which they are left to carve out their own paths through odds and impediments. In the course of this, they increasingly lose sight of the idealistic visions they had started out with, and retaliate with a startling ferocity on the world around them, which they hold responsible for stifling their visions. Faced with this bleak situation, in which they are grossly misunderstood and despised, even by ones who had once been close, both protagonists desperately try to cling to their own convictions and retain their faith in their own abilities. If *Caligula* is faced with the threat of assassination at the end of his career, *Tughlaq* increasingly loses grasp over his sanity. In fact, even as their faith seems to desert them, both are plunged into meaninglessness where the thin borderline between idealism and eccentricity, cruelty and compassion, sanity and insanity seem to dissolve away. Yet, in the face of such an abysmal void, they try to comprehend the meaning of their existence - even if it be in death or in madness.

Right from the start, *Tughlaq* dispenses with traditional notions of religion and divinity. He has no use for a religion that cannot serve the cause of the people. Aware that religion has been repeatedly used to break the spirits of men, he sets about to right the wrong perpetrated: "Generations of devout Sultans have twisted their minds and I have to mend their minds before I can think of their souls". He admits there are shortcomings in his realm but insists, "why should I call on God to clean the dirt deposited by men?" At the same time he does not hesitate to take liberties if that would further his cause, though religious leaders like Imam-ud-din warn him that he is guilty of "scores of transgressions" from the tenets of Islam. *Tughlaq* is prepared to induct teachings and ideas from non-Islamic sources (like Greek



culture) if that would help him to expand his horizons: "I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran." He can even intermingle religion and politics to get rid of impediments like Imam-ud-din, tame insurgents like Ain-ul-Mulk, trap the conspiring nobles in their own scheme of striking during prayer, or invite an obscure Abbasid to make a public display of his piety. In brief, out of each adverse situation he tries to carve out a path for himself, not always caring for religious propriety, political niceties, or even personal relationships. Not only does he astutely remove Imam-ud-din or the nobles, but must also sacrifice Shihab-ud-din, whom he trusted, and his stepmother, whom he loved, for a greater political vision. His impatience transforms itself into his ruthlessness, so much so that by the end of the play he stands alone, hated and deserted by all. He even begins to have doubts about his earlier convictions: "I have been chasing these words now for five years and now I don't know if I am pursuing a mirage or a fleeing shadow". Finally he can only fall back upon what fate seems to have in store for him - his madness - and there he finds a companion, his God: "all I need now is myself and my madness - madness to prance in a field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence. But I am not alone, Barani. Thank Heaven! For once I am not alone. I have a Companion to share my madness now - the Omnipotent God!"

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### 3. 5. □ Characterisation

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The characterisation in the play calls for special attention. This is all the more necessary when we realise that Karnad has used this particular phase of Indian history to comment upon the contemporary times. Yet, at the same time, he has to show a certain amount of allegiance to the historical data, retaining some of the more well-known historical facts about Muhammad Tughlaq's reign. He has to sift through the historical material at his disposal - selecting, adopting, adapting this material to suit his own purposes. Karnad's play, therefore, has to do a kind of tightrope-walking, carefully balancing a certain degree of fidelity to the historical source with an artistic autonomy that requires of him to digress from and/or rework upon his sources to create a piece of dramatic composition. This dexterous balancing so informs the characterisation in the play that multiple facets of the same character are often simultaneously available.

The central figure of Tughlaq, with ambivalences writ large upon him, is a supreme example of this. Questions are raised about him that are never conclusively answered. The very first scene shows how a large section of the people suspect him of patricide, though there are also several others who rubbish this view and are prepared to support and endorse his idealistic schemes. He guesses that his stepmother harbours the same suspicions, and rebukes her in the second scene. Yet, in Scene X, in a moment of dramatic crisis, he blurts out that he has been responsible for the killings of his father and his brother: "I killed them - yes - but I killed them for an ideal". Even this frenzied confession, from one who by then is tottering on the verge of insanity, does not conclusively prove anything. Neither are we sure of how to respond to his dealings with Sheikh Imam-ud-din - those of an idealist or a wily politician? Similarly, the way he traps Shihab-ud-din and the conspiring amirs at their own game is another instance of his astute political agility. His brutal killing of Shihab-ud-din brings out the ruthlessness he is capable of, yet he almost lovingly stabs him with "But I like you too much"; and immediately after, to pre-empt any trouble from Shihab-ud-din's father, he can think of having Shihab-ud-din declared a martyr who died defending the sultan during an attempt on his life. At the end of the day, we are left wondering whether Karnad has depicted Tughlaq as a hero, or an anti-hero?

That of course, has been Karnad's design. Tughlaq, as the representative of the modern man, in a world that bears close resemblances to the world of the existentialist, can hardly be made into a tragic hero. With its contemporary reading of historical processes, the play problematises the characterisation of its protagonist by having the character riddled with ambivalences. His idealism and his eccentricity are the two sides of the same coin, and we are never quite sure when one passes into the other. His several schemes - the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, the introduction of the copper currency, the patronage of the persecuted Hindus - are abandoned half-way, corrupted and frustrated by the harsh realities of everyday experience. Is his idealism lacking that sense of pragmatism without which it soon dwindles into mere idiocy?

If we are hesitant to pass this harsh judgement on Tughlaq, Karnad himself has created a figure through whom the inadequacies of Tughlaq are foregrounded. Aziz, through the entire length of the play, acts as a foil to

Tughlaq, frustrating each of his designs with his devious distortion of them. The sultan's grand proclamations to mete out equal justice to his Hindu and Muslim subjects are grotesquely parodied by Aziz in disguising himself as a Hindu Brahmin who seeks justice for being wrongly oppressed by the State. Tughlaq's introduction of the copper currency is ruthlessly battered by those who flood the market with counterfeit coins, foremost among them being Aziz. Aziz buys lands in a famine-stricken region to collect State subsidies and even exploits the ordinary people on their way to Daulatabad. He murders Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, the descendent of the Arabian Khalif, to impersonate him, thereby making a travesty of Tughlaq's attempts to seek the blessings of the Khalifat and publicly reinstate prayers in his kingdom. Through each action, Aziz makes a mockery of all of Tughlaq's lofty idealistic plans, exposing their inherent lapses. In serving as Tughlaq's foil, even his nemesis, Aziz becomes more of an abstraction of the reality that impinges upon the sultan's grand idealism and turns it into a grotesque parody.

Not only Aziz, but the other characters, too, who move in and out of the world of Tughlaq, ultimately help to give further meaning to the character of the protagonist. Tughlaq's political manoeuvres, sharpened by the astuteness of the wily Najib, play the cat-and-mouse game with adversaries like Ain-ul-mulk or Imam-ud-din or even Shihab-ud-din and the conspiring nobles. His awareness that he has a special role to play in history is whetted, on the one hand, through his encounters with religious leaders like Imam-ud-din and, on the other, through his companionship with the historian Barani whom he considers one of his closest friends. If Tughlaq's political measures are guided by Najib, and his intellectual thirst satiated by Barani, his emotional cravings find a mooring in his stepmother, with whom he shares a complex impassioned relationship: he loves her intensely, but ultimately sacrifices her to his political idealism when she confesses that she has killed Najib. By the end of the play, with Najib murdered, Barani alienated, his stepmother executed by his own orders, and the entire kingdom dubbing him "mad", Tughlaq finds himself alone in a world where his idealism is the other name for insanity. Cut off from the rest of humanity, he stands by himself trying to comprehend the meaning of his existence; his affinities with the existentialist modern man is firmly established by then.

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### 3.6. □ Recurrent motifs in the play:

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Though the play makes use of historical material, though it allegorises the contemporary political situation through its use of history, Karnad takes recourse to motifs and symbols that recur through the play to expand its horizons and enhance its structural pattern. One such motif that we meet early in the play and which keeps coming back over and over again is that of disguise, physical and moral. In the very first scene, immediately upon Tughlaq's grand proclamations of Hindu-Muslim amity in his kingdom, we meet the Brahmin who has won the case against the sultan in the court of the Kazi; yet we are soon let into the secret that the Brahmin is no Hindu at all but the Muslim washerman, Aziz, in disguise. Significantly, this truth is held back from Tughlaq till the very last scene of the play. But it is made evident from the very first use of disguise how this motif, through its repeated use, will encapsulate the discrepancies between what is and what *ought to be*, between the dream and the reality, the idealism and its parody, the world of Tughlaq and that of Aziz. Aziz's incessant adoption of disguises and assumption of identities - all the time parodying Tughlaq's idealistic measures - climax in his killing of Ghiyas-ud-din and passing himself off as one of the Abbasid dynasty.

Adoption of disguises run rampant among the other characters as well, wittingly or unwittingly. On the one hand, Sheikh Imam-ud-din is clueless about Tughlaq's sinister plans when the latter requests him to don identical garments to go and meet Ain-ul-mulk: the similarity in physical appearance was intentionally foregrounded, which resulted in Ain-ul-mulk mistakenly killing Imam-ud-din in place of the sultan. On the other, Ratan Singh consciously promotes before Shihab-ud-din his disguise of a trusty ally yet all the time secretly betraying him to Tughlaq. The amirs pretend to be eager courtiers while all the time they wield the sword to kill Tughlaq during prayers. For that matter, Tughlaq keeps changing his own stances like a chameleon, in keeping with his political manoeuvrings: his handling of the amirs at court and effortless foiling of their attempted coup, his encounter with Imam-ud-din to advance his political game-plan, even his final trapping of Aziz provide supreme examples of Tughlaq's dexterity at adopting disguises and identities. In the

face of such incessant use of disguises by major and minor characters alike, the borderline between the worlds of dream and reality, of idealism and ruthlessness, of Tughlaq and Aziz increasingly become blurred till, in the final impression, mask can no longer be distinguished from face, sanity from madness.

This preoccupation with disguise - in major and minor characters - may be related to the prevailing atmosphere of political intrigues in the play. Each plays his/her little game, often from behind assumed/pretended identities. In this context the other important motif that gains prominence is that of the game of chess. The very second scene shows Tughlaq playing the game all by himself, engaged with solving "the most famous problem in chess", which even famous players had not been able to solve. His encounters with Ain-ul-mulk, on the one hand, and Imam-ud-din, on the other, almost remind one of the same game. In fact, Tughlaq's wily handling of the situation is akin to killing two birds with one stone; the moves, prompted by the cunning Najib, and carried forward by the astute ruler himself, have all the unmistakable touches of one expert at the game. It is also significant that as the play progresses and Muhammad increasingly loses control over those around him as well as himself, he is no longer shown to be engaged in this game, which requires a high level of mental alertness. His mental agility, so evident in his political manoeuvrings in the earlier half of the play, gives way to frenzied tyranny ("Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now") and ultimately to moods of despair, vacuity and even madness. The change is perceptible not only to Tughlaq himself ("How can I become wise again, Barani?": Sc 8) but also to others: "It was a man wandering alone in the garden. He went to a heap [of counterfeit coins], stood there for half an hour, still as a rock. Then he dug into the heaps with his fists, raised his fists and let the coins trickle out.... He does that every night - every single night - it's like witchcraft" (Sc 12). By then, all his moves have been checkmated by the likes of Aziz.

Even as Tughlaq makes this journey from intellectual vigour to vacuous insipidity, from idealistic vision to frenzied madness, prayer - another recurrent motif - assumes new significations. Early in the play, Tughlaq is shown to emphasise the importance of prayer ("the Sultan never misses a prayer": Sc 1; "The Sultan, as you know, is a fanatic about prayer. He has made it compulsory for every Muslim to pray five times a day:" Sc 5); yet, at the same time, a substantial part of his subjects suspect that he had arranged for the assassination of his father and brother during a procession at prayer-

time. Subsequently, when the nobles, led by Shihab-ud-din, attempt to kill him during prayer, he pre-empted their move by having them apprehended by Hindu soldiers (Sc 6). At the end of that assassination attempt, he feels that "prayers too are ridden with disease, and must be exiled"; so he prohibits prayer in his kingdom: "There will be no more praying in the kingdom, Najib. Anyone caught praying will be severely punished" (Sc 6). Again, with his idealistic plans collapsing around him and himself tottering on the verge of insanity, Tughlaq tries to reinstate prayer in his kingdom by publicly welcoming Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid to conduct prayers in his realm. Ironically, by then, the real Ghiyas-ud-din has been murdered and supplanted by the impostor Aziz; Tughlaq's desperate bid to reinstate prayer is frustrated by Aziz's machinations. The play concludes with Tughlaq dozing through the Muezzin's call to prayer, at the end of which he wakes up with a start and hardly knows himself: "He looks around dazed and frightened, as though he can't comprehend where he is" (Sc 13).

In the subtle handling of these motifs - many of which operate as stage images - Karnad adds to the dramaturgical texture of the play. As the historical play of a medieval Sultan is recycled into a political allegory of the dramatist's own time, these motifs/images help to expand the scope of the play and give it a wider panoramic perspective.

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### 3.7. □ *Tughlaq* and 'Transculturation'

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Written originally in the Kannada language, the play collapses together the socio-political environments of the medieval Sultanate Delhi and the post-1947 India, particularly under Nehruvian rule. The social/political/cultural parameters of Tughlaq's India are therefore redefined in the post-Independence context. Not interested in merely regurgitating the story of the medieval sultan, Karnad inscribes this with significations more immediately available in his own India. A socio-cultural transition has therefore been made, even as the story of Tughlaq has been retold in our own terms.

Also, even as Karnad undertakes to translate the play into English himself, he is overlaying it with a further deposit of 'transculturation'. The narrative now does not remain restricted to merely medieval Sultanate Delhi, nor only to Karnad's contemporary India, but reaches out to a larger English-speaking world - in other parts of India or even overseas. The relationship between English (the erstwhile coloniser's language, and even today

associated with elite cosmopolitan culture) and the original play in Kannada (a regional language) is anything but simple. The conscious choice of the English language in which he chooses to translate the regional play is a deliberate one, perhaps prompted by several considerations. To make this possible, Karnad has had to make the Indian/Kannada cultural specificities available in the English language. To start with, Karnad had to appropriate the cultural nuances of the Sultanate era of medieval Delhi in Kannada; and, now, he has to recycle them in the English idiom for a wider English readership.

Consequently, on the one hand, Karnad deploys culture-specific terminology that points in the direction of Tughlaq's Sultanate period: not only are common Islamic names used ("Muhammad", "Shihab-ud-din", "Imam-ud-din", "Ghyas-ud-din", "Aziz", "Azam", "Ratan Singh") but also the more familiar Anglicised versions of some non-Islamic names are rendered into the less familiar Arabic equivalents (so, "Sukrat" for Socrates, or "Aflatoon" for Plato); official designations are retained ("Kazi-i-Mumalik", "Khalif", "Ain-ul-Mulk", "Vizier", "Sheikh", "Ulema", and, of course, "Sultan"); references to "Mecca" or "Kaaba" or even the poetry of Rumi (Sc 8) reinforce the Islamic ambience; the Muezzin's call to prayer reverberates through the play (Scenes 6, 13); the Islamic customs of taking an oath on the Koran (Sc 6), or imposing (or not imposing, in the case of Tughlaq) the *jizya* tax on the Hindus (Sc 1), or stoning to death an adulteress (Sc 10) are recalled; the elaborate ritual of prayer (*namaz*) is carried out on stage, though punctuated by the amirs' attempt to assassinate Tughlaq (Sc 6). On the other hand, Karnad has, on occasions, reverted to more acceptable English renditions, perhaps keeping in mind his target readership: "Allah" is therefore used alongside the English - more correctly, Judaic-Christian - "God" (Sc 2, 3, 6, 10, 13) or even "the Lord" (Sc 5); Tughlaq is often called/ referred to as "Your Majesty" / "His Majesty" (Sc 2, 3, 6, 8, 13).

These repeated oscillations between the several cultural registers - medieval and modern, Arabic and Indian, Indian and English - provide for the cultural density of the play, which, in turn, makes it a remarkable sample of 'transculturation' in modern Indian theatre.

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### 3.8 □ A brief stage history

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Since Karnad wrote *Tughlaq* in 1964, the play has been successfully performed not only in Kannada, the language in which it was originally written, but also in other Indian languages as well as in English. It was Alyque Padamsee who first produced the play in English for the Theatre Group in Bombay in 1970. The first staging of this production was at the Bhulabhai Auditorium, Bombay, in August 1970. It was at Padamsee's request that Karnad translated the play into English.

*Tughlaq* was produced for the National School of Drama Repertory around 1979-1980, directed by the then Director of the National School of Drama, Ebrahim Alkazi. In this version, done in a Hindi heavily interlaced with Urdu, Manohar Singh played Tughlaq, while Uttara Baokar was cast as the Stepmother. The original site for the performance was the Purana Quila (Old Fort) in New Delhi; the production subsequently toured different parts of the country.

In Calcutta, the play was directed by Sekhar Chatterjee for his group Theatre Unit, and by Salil Bandyopadhyay for Theatron; in the latter production the stage/film star Santu Mukherjee performed the role of Tughlaq for sometime. Earlier, sometime in the 1970s, a production of the play was initiated by the collective effort of several groups of Calcutta, in which no less than Sombhu Mitra, the doyen of the modern Bengali stage, played Tughlaq, Keya Chakravorty took on the role of the Stepmother, while Rudraprasad Sengupta was the historian Barani; this production was directed by Shyamaland Jalan.

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### 3.9 □ A Select Reading List

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### 3. 10. □ Questions

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1. Examine Karnad's treatment of history in his play *Tughlaq*.
2. Would you agree that *Tughlaq* is more a political allegory than a historical play? Justify your view.
3. *Tughlaq* fails because he cannot grow from a visionary idealist into a realist statesman. Comment.
4. Analyse *Tughlaq*'s passage from visionary idealism through tyrannical despotism to frenzied madness. How do you account for this change?
5. Would you agree that Karnad plays off irony against tragic dignity in his treatment of the character of *Tughlaq*? Substantiate.
6. Consider Karnad's use of the motifs of prayer, disguise or the chess-game in the play.
7. Examine the role of Aziz as a foil to *Tughlaq*.
8. Examine the importance of the Aziz-Azam sub-plot in the play.
9. What role is played by the other minor characters? Do they contribute to the understanding of the character of the protagonist?
10. Examine Karnad's art of characterisation in the play.
11. To what extent is Karnad justified in his use of violence in *Tughlaq*? What purpose does this violence serve in the dramaturgical structure of the play?
12. To what extent may *Tughlaq* be considered as an existentialist character? Analyse.
13. Examine the elements of transculturation in the play.
14. In what ways does Karnad's *Tughlaq* contribute to the modern Indian drama? Discuss.

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## Unit 4 □ Mahesh Dattani : Final Solutions

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### Structure :

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Title and Theme
- 4.3 Plot Outline
- 4.4 Characters and Characterization
- 4.5 Stage Technique
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Select Bibliography

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### 4.1 □ Introduction :

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Mahesh Dattani is acknowledged in both India and in the West, to be the most important, and probably the most skilled, dramatist writing in English in India today. He has been conspared to such great playwrights of the past like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. A writes of both stage-plays as well as radio-plays (besides beings a writer of film-scripts), Dattani is concerned primarily with social issues such as patriarchal, communalism and gender. A resident of Bangalore, educated in school and college in the same city, Dattani's first performed play was a comedy with serious undertones named *Where There's a will*. The first staging of this play in 1988 was followed by the performance of Dattani's next play *Dance like a Man* in 1989. This was followed by *Twinkle Tara* (latest renamed *Tara*) in 1990, and by *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991). *Final Solutions* was Dattani's fifth play and was first performed at Bangalore in July 1993. Many other productions of this play have ben staged since then, including one in a Hindi translation. For his "brilliant contributions to Indian drama in English," Dattaini was given the Sahitya Academy award.

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### 4.2 □ Title and Theme :

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The title of Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* obviously carries a deeply ironic implication. This is because the term "Final Solution" was originally used by Hitter to refer to his moustrous plan of killing and totally

exterminating all the Jewish people in Germany and Europe. Dattani clearly sees a kind of reflection of Hitler's racial hatred in the communalism that is present in the Indian society today. As a play, *Final Solutions* is a powerful indictment of the communal passions that occasionally threaten to split our country into two. Yet, the drama is not entirely pessimistic, for at its end is revealed the fact that the fires of communal passion are ignited less by the instinct of religious faith than by secret economic and political motivations. Additionally, Dattani shows through the characters of the Hindu girl Smita and her friend the Muslim youth Bobby that a new generation is coming into being that can rise above narrow-mindedness and petty religious fanaticism. Two incidents in the play illustrate this; the first, when Smita "thrusts" upon Javed, another Muslim young man, a puja-room pot to fill with water meant for worshipping a Hindu deity, and the second when Bobby deliberately picks up the image of the Hindu God Krishna in the puja room and declares: "He does not burn into ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying He has been contaminated! ... He smiles at our trivial pride and our trivial shame." It is in gestures like these actions that seek to cross the borders of religions and in sentiments such as Bobby's "if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed," that Dattani holds out the promise of "final solutions" to the problem of communal disharmony between peoples of different religions in India.

Yet, it would not be right to see *Final Solutions* as a play about communal tensions only. Certainly the action of this drama takes place over the few hours (from night to the next morning) that two young Muslim boys (Javed and Bobby) take shelter in the home of a Hindu girl (Smita) to escape from a Hindu mob pursuing them during a communal riot. But, significantly enough, the play also shows that the narrow-mindedness of men and women, their ignorance and sense of guilt, can often build prisons of the mind from which there is no escape. *Final Solutions* is thus ultimately, a kind of psychodrama which regards religion, at least in its organised and institutional form, as productive of malaises psychological and personal, social, political and economic.

### 4.3 □ Plot Outline :

*Final Solutions* is a stage-play in three acts. The play opens with a kind of a flashback scene in which we see (and hear) a fifteen-year old bride, Daksha, reading out what she has written in her own diary. This flashback goes back to the late 1940s, and we simultaneously see (and later hear) Daksha as she is nearly fifty year on, in the present, as a grandmother now known by the name of Hardika. Also on stage, perhaps at the back, are present a Mob/Chorus carrying sticks with a Hindu and a Muslim mask at either end. These masks cover the faces of the members of the Mob/Chorus as they assume Muslim or Hindu identities or faces alternatively throughout the action of the play. Daksha/Hardika's reminiscences over, the Mob/Chorus wearing Hindu masks introduces the theme of communal tension as they speak of the overturning of a chariot (a "rath") carrying images of Hindu Gods and of the knifing of a Poojari.

The scene then shifts to the living room of the Hindu family of Ramnik Gandhi (whose mother Hardika is), and to his daughter Smita who talks about a curfew having been imposed, and about rumours of the bombing of a Muslims girls' hostel. Ramnik also tries to talk over the phone with the father of one of his daughter's Muslim friends to reassure him about his child's well-being, but is cut off by the man who probably did not wish to speak to a Hindu. The Chorus once again speak out, this time with Muslim masks on, in accents of puzzlement, incomprehension and sorrow, about being misunderstood by their Hindu compatriots.

The next important incident in the play is the confrontation of the Muslim youths Javed and Bobby by the Hindu Mob/Chorus and their pounding on Ramnik Gandhi's door, which is eventually opened by Ramnik to allow them to find shelter inside his house. The Mob/Chorus shout outside demanding that the young men be given up to them, but Ramnik resists till they go away. But inside the house, Ramnik's wife Aruna regards the youths with condescension and only very unwillingly offers them some water to drink.

Act II begins with the Mob/Chorus again before shifting to Ramnik Gandhi's living room. The various prejudices in the minds of the different members of the family are gradually revealed, even as the truth tumbles out that Javed is a professional rioter, hired to instigate communal disturbances.

The Third Act of *Final Solutions* opens with the Mob/Chorus once

again, this time in a Muslim incensation. Ramnik offers Javed a job in his shop, an offer that Javed refuses, and Bobby explains why Javed had turned into a communalist. He had once tried to deliver a letter to a Hindu man, but had been insulted and rebuffed. In a parallel episode, Dakoha in a flashback speaks of having visited the home of a Muslim friend as a young girl. She had been welcomed on her first visit, but on a later visit had been insulted by the same Muslim family. This had turned her into a Muslim-hater all her life. As a strict Hindu wife, Smita's mother Aruna too regards the Muslim youths with suspicion, if not even hatred. Only Ramnik appears to be sympathetic, but this is before the shocking truth about Ramnik's father and grandfather's doings is revealed— that in an earlier riot during the Partition of the subcontinent, they had deliberately set fire to the shop owned by a Muslim family so that they could buy it at half its actual price. This is the climax of the play—a revelation that shames Hardika, Ramnik's old mother, and prods her on to ask and to hope that the two Muslim boys will come back to this home again.

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#### 4.4 □ Characters and Characterization

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What makes *Final Solutions* one of the best plays in the English language written in contemporary India is Dattani's art of characterisation in particular. Each character in the play is a complex creation, psychologically and socially appropriate to the situation in which she/he is to be found. Ramnik Gandhi, for instance, has a multi-layered personality, aspects of which we are privileged to see as the play progresses. Right at the beginning of the play when he opens the door to the two Muslim young men even in the face of familial opposition, he emerges as a liberal minded man who is above religious prejudice. He even prevents the Hindu mob from entering into his house and dragging out the youths, saying : "If you break the door, you will kill me." He also gets his wife to offer them glasses of water, and later gives them milk to drink. Yet, despite his conscious liberalism, Ramnik cannot escape from harbouring certain deep seated prejudices about the Muslim faith. When Javed turns down Ramnik's offer of a job, and speaks of the provocation of the Hindus, Ramnik bursts out with: "You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence. Your

faiths is based ..." He stops himself before completing the last sentence, but his innermost feeling about Javed's religion has been revealed, and this rips off the mask of the professed liberalism that Ramnik had laid claim to.

However, it is important to note too that Ramnik is a man haunted by a sense of guilt. His grandfather and father had burnt down the shop of a Muslim family in order to be able to buy it at a low price. It was the memory of this crime that had led him to protect Javed and Bobby, for he had hoped that this deed would soon somehow atone for the wrong-doing of his elders.

Like Ramnik, though perhaps at a slightly simpler level, Javed is a type-character. He represents one strand in the sentiment of many Indian Muslims. Having been humiliated in front of an admiring crowd of younger boys by a sectarian Hindu man, having dropped out of school and therefore not having the benefit of a complete education, Javed had been easily enlisted as a stone-throwing rioter and rabble-rouser. He is always conscious of being the member of a minority community – that is, as a marginalized man and his fear of marginalization leads to his assertion of his Muslim identity. He thus imagines himself as a jihadist, a warrior in a holy war against the brute majority all around him.

Of the other characters, Aruna, Smita and Bobby are simpler, though no less interesting characters. Aruna is a typical housewife who has internalized the rites, rituals and customs of the religion she has been born into without any questioning. She has none of (and knows nothing of) her husband's guilt complex and is happy enough within the small circle of domesticity that surrounds her. Smita, her daughter, however is completely different. As a representative of a new India, she is above religious bigotry and has no inhibitions about even being attracted towards the Muslim youth Bobby. In her own house, she adopts a stance of quiet submissiveness in a gesture of solidarity with her mother who too is a subject under patriarchy. Smita's freedom from religious bias is reflected also in Bobby who is humane and understanding, tolerant and broad-minded. It is he who performs the "final deed" in the play by touching the image of the Hindu god in Aruna's puja-room, and it is he who profers the "final solution" to heal the split between the Hindus and the Muslims in our country when he says: "The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate."

The last, but certainly not the least, important character in the play is that of Daksha/Hardika. In both her selves as a young girl-bride and an old woman, a mother-in-law, mother and grandmother, Daksha/Hardika embodies aspects of both communalism as well as patriarchal oppression. As a young married girl, Daksha had not only been forbidden to sing the songs she liked, but also had been confined to her room and beaten up for daring to visit the home of a Muslim girl, her friend. Not knowing that it was their shop that had been burnt down, she had been hurt and humiliated by their unwelcoming behaviour, and this had turned her against the community for ever. It is only at the end of the play that she learns the truth, and she wonders if "those boys will ever come back."

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#### 4.5 □ Stage Technique

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*Final Solutions* is marked by a number of technical stage-devices and conventions used innovatively by Mahesh Dattani. The first of these is the use of the Mob/Chorus. A theatrical convention that goes back in time to the Greek classical drama, the chorus had also been used by the twentieth-century American dramatist Eugene O'Neill, and by the Anglo-American poet and playwright T.S. Eliot. Dattani, however, seems to have taken his inspiration from O'Neill, particularly in his use of a masked chorus. That the members of the chorus are the same but for the Hindu and Muslim masks they put on alternatively, is a powerful way of suggesting the sameness of the mob-mentality of Hindus and Muslims alike. It is also a subtle way of suggesting that behind their religious "faces", all men are the same.

The use of the flashback technique is also another of Dattani's accomplishments. Both time and space are elided by this device, as we see Daksha and Hardika simultaneously on the stage, each representing a different time and space before us. The difference is represented materially on the stage, too, for there are two levels – one with a table-top desk and an oil lamp suggesting the 1940s and Daksha's space, the other with a kitchen and a puja-room indicating Ramnik Gandhi's house in the 1990s. There is also a horse-shoe or crescent-shaped ramp on the stage, with its ends sloping down to the stage level. It is on this third theatrical space detached from the two other

levels that the action of the Mob/Chorus takes place. Unlike the actions of the other characters which are naturalistic, the action of the Mob/Chorus is stylized or ritual-like. Dattani gives specific instructions about this, for he intended the choric action to be a kind of formalized background against which the main action of the play could be played out.

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#### 4.6. □ Questions :

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1. Write a note on the appositeness of the title of Mahesh Dattani's play *Final Solutions*.
2. Consider *Final Solutions* as a play probing the issue of communalism in India today.
3. Comment on the rôle and function of the Mob/Chorus in *Final Solutions*.
4. Show how Dattani uses innovative stage devices and techniques to embody his ideas in *Final Solutions*.
5. Critically evaluate Dattani's art of characterization with reference to any two characters in *Final Solutions*.
6. Would it be right to describe *Final Solutions* as a "Thesis Play"? Give reasons for your answer.
7. "Dattani's plays hark back to Ibsen and Chekhov for both realism and other stage techniques and dramaturgy" – Discuss.
8. "Dattani's plays are very contemporary and avantgarde in their dramaturgy" – Discuss.
9. Comment on Dattani's use of symbols and symbolism in *Final Solutions*.

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মানুষের জ্ঞান ও ভাবকে বইয়ের মধ্যে সঞ্চিত করিবার যে একটা প্রচুর সুবিধা আছে, সে কথা কেহই অস্বীকার করিতে পারে না। কিন্তু সেই সুবিধার দ্বারা মনের স্বাভাবিক শক্তিকে একেবারে আচ্ছন্ন করিয়া ফেলিলে বুদ্ধিকে বাবু করিয়া তোলা হয়।

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