# PREFACE

With its grounding in the "guiding pillars of Access, Equity, Equality, Affordability and Accountability," the New Education Policy (NEP 2020) envisions flexible curricular structures and creative combinations for studies across disciplines. Accordingly, the UGC has revised the CBCS with a new Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP) to further empower the flexible choice based credit system with a multidisciplinary approach and multiple/ lateral entry-exit options. It is held that this entire exercise shall leverage the potential of higher education in three-fold ways– learner's personal enlightenment; her/his constructive public engagement; productive social contribution. Cumulatively therefore, all academic endeavours taken up under the NEP 2020 framework are aimed at synergising individual attainments towards the enhancement of our national goals.

In this epochal moment of a paradigmatic transformation in the higher education scenario, the role of an Open University is crucial, not just in terms of improving the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) but also in upholding the qualitative parameters. It is time to acknowledge that the implementation of the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) National Credit Framework (NCrF) and its syncing with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) are best optimised in the arena of Open and Distance Learning that is truly seamless in its horizons. As one of the largest Open Universities in Eastern India that has been accredited with 'A' grade by NAAC in 2021, has ranked second among Open Universities in the NIRF in 2024, and attained the much required UGC 12B status, Netaji Subhas Open University is committed to both quantity and quality in its mission to spread higher education. It was therefore imperative upon us to embrace NEP 2020, bring in dynamic revisions to our Undergraduate syllabi, and formulate these Self Learning Materials anew. Our new offering is synchronised with the CCFUP in integrating domain specific knowledge with multidisciplinary fields, honing of skills that are relevant to each domain, enhancement of abilities, and of course deep-diving into Indian Knowledge Systems.

Self Learning Materials (SLM's) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. It is with a futuristic thought that we now offer our learners the choice of print or e-slm's. From our mandate of offering quality higher education in the mother tongue, and from the logistic viewpoint of balancing scholastic needs, we strive to bring out learning materials in Bengali and English. All our faculty members are constantly engaged in this academic exercise that combines subject specific academic research with educational pedagogy.We are privileged in that the expertise of academics across institutions on a national level also comes together to augment our own faculty strength in developing these learning materials. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders whose participatory zeal in the teaching-learning process based on these study materials will enable us to only get better. On the whole it has been a very challenging task, and I congratulate everyone in the preparation of these SLM's.

I wish the venture all success.

**Professor Indrajit Lahiri**
Vice Chancellor

# Netaji Subhas Open University

**Four Year Undergraduate Degree Programme**

**Under National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) & Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes**

**Course Type:** Discipline Specific Elective (DSE)

**Course Title:** Popular Literature

Course Code: NEC-EG-04

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UG: NEC-EG-04

# Course Title: Popular Literature
# Course Code: NEC-EG-04
# Syllabus

## Module 1: Understanding Popular Literature 1



## Module 2: Understanding Popular Literature 2



## Module 3: Texts of Popular Literature



## Module 4: Critical Thoughts on Popular Literature

# Module-1

# Unit-1 □ The Rise of Popular Literature: History and Rationale

*Structure*



## 1.1.1 Objectives

The objective of this segment is to define 'Popular Literature', introduce the learners to the concept of 'Popular Literature' in multiple cultures and locate 'Popular Culture' in the socio-political spaces all around the world.

## 1.1.2 Introduction

Although we now have a separate branch of literature known as 'Popular Literature', this division was not always there. For a very long time all literature was divided into the new ones and serious literature and the classics. We will read about the Classics right after we define Popular Literature. But when, for instance, the works of William Shakespeare were performed, they were definitely considered as popular. But it was during this time that the distinction began. With the printing press publishing more and more books the demand for material that will sell increased. Authors now could make money and a lot of writings came to the public sphere. Before the invention of the press there were only manuscripts, and these manuscripts had to be carefully and laboriously copied. The hardship of that

work–you must remember that this was done under candlelight with quills and on not very smooth paper–ensured that only the best texts be copied or preserved. There was an automatic critical selection as it was mostly the religious establishments that had the capacity to do widespread copying. Thus, only the 'safe' texts were chosen, they were given the rank of serious literature. The secular entertainers were left out. But the printing press changed all that. It also roughly coincided with an expansion of education. The reading public was larger and they demanded more reading material. A good case in point is the pirated publication of Shakespeare's plays: the Quartos. They were printed surreptitiously because there was demand.

Since then a lot of literature, both old and new, have been published in every age. Some of them have survived, some have not. It is definitely difficult, in fact quite absurd, to assert that only the Classics survived and the popular disappeared. Some of the popular texts, which did not turn into Classics, still may manage to surprise the critics. In academic studies, we limit ourselves to Classics. But amongst the common readership, entertainment remains the most significant benchmark. However, the rationale or simple logic behind not accepting older texts for this study is that they are no longer popular. A book like Delarivier Manley's *The New Atlantis* (1709) was extremely popular at the time, but will be of hardly any interest to the modern reader. It is of limited academic interest and does no longer feature among the accepted list of Classics. But there are many books which are still in the popular imagination–most of them have been given the Classic status, but some still remain strictly in popular imagination. Having said all that let me clarify that there is a world of difference between popular literature and *Popular Literature*. The first signifies anything that was popular, but the second points to a formal set of books and works. So before we go any further, the idea of Popular Literature should be properly examined.

## 1.1.3 What is Popular Literature

As the name suggests, Popular Literature is that which succeeds in obtaining a large audience. Even though the so called high brow literature can gain popularity, it is never limited within the ambit of Popular Literature as it also enjoys critical and canonical acceptance. In general, Popular Literature is rarely non-fiction. It is always concerned with fantasy of some kind. Authors of Popular Literature, such as Dan Brown, often manage to create an illusion of factuality while creating plots that are entirely imaginary or has an imagined spin on a historical or quasi-historical theme. The authenticity of their so called *thesis* cannot be questioned as they remain within the zone of the imagined, never really claiming factual accuracy. Their ultimate

goal is sensationalism. Then again, books such as *Chariots of the Gods?* (1968) By Erich von Däniken look at theories such as aliens as the forefathers of human civilization and they are extremely popular. These are theories, often conspiracy theories, and they manage to sell in large numbers. In some ways they are a part of the scope of Popular Literature. Popular Literature, then, is purely judged by its commercial success. It is meant to entertain people across academic and critical spectrums. Usually, such works do not raise expectations of formal precision or thematic subtlety. However, as the plays of William Shakespeare proves, what is popular in one time can become 'serious' in another. The classification of the popular and the serious, then, is age specific. The critical demand of one age may be different from that of another–or simply the contemporary often fails to assess its literature properly. The 'respectable' works of the Elizabethan period, such as the works of Christopher Marlowe or Ben Jonson, are no longer popular and they remain firmly within the classification of literature proper. However, each and every age since the Renaissance in Europe has seen this distinction between *Literature* and *Popular Literature*. It is easier to judge in hindsight as the declining popularity or declining critical appeal of a text allows us to ascertain its category. But as far as the contemporary is concerned one has to trust its own critical establishment as well as the prevailing popular sentiment. Of course, there are instances of literary works which do not at all demand a high critical position–such as the modern pulp fiction. Such works have been there since the beginning of the printing press. If during the Renaissance the public imagination loved the romances (those which have not survived, even in any syllabus), then we have the cheap 'dime' novels, such as those by H. Rider Haggard or Chetan Bhagat, in more modern times.

Although a rigid definition of Popular Literature may prove to be a difficult proposition, one can always think of such literature as something that does not tax the reader's intellect too much, if at all. Any socio-economic-political subtext in such literature seems to be purely accidental. The crucial idea behind Popular Literature is that it will allow the reader to escape to a different reality where the reader does not have to have any philosophical or political realization. Of course, from this angle any book can be included in this genre. From the reader's point of view something like *War and Peace* (1869) can possibly seem to be 'light' reading and someone can find the secret of the universe in the *Shiva Trilogy* (2010-2013) by Amish. But these are exceptions. Generally, the serious reading mind will select a work which will allow it to cater to its needs–if it needs rest then it will choose something that is diverting, if it is looking for cerebration then it will choose something serious. Of course, there are readers who always choose the former, but there are very few who can remain cent percent faithful to the latter.

## 1.1.4 Popular Literature and Classics (and Bestsellers)

As stated earlier, it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between Popular Literature and the Classics in the contemporary period. Classics are defined as texts that have stood the test of time. One can look at a novel like *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)–it was well received by the reading public, but was not widely accepted by the critical establishment. But it has since become a part of the canon and is studied academically, though its popularity has dwindled. In the case of a novel like *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), both the popularity and critical acclaim has remained intact. So one cannot foresee whether a work of literature (a work of art in fact) will become a classic or not. Generally, there are very few popular works and Bestsellers that remain so over a very long period of time. Classics have their own demand. They sell well across ages. But the term Bestseller is applied to a book that has been recently published. A Bestseller, then, can be a part of the Popular Literature arena; or it can, with due critical approval, become a part of 'serious' literature.

Of course, one must remember that Popular Literature is a part of wider concepts of Mass Art or Kitsch or low brow art which look at the large body of artistic output of any time that fails to reach the elevated rank of serious literature. But many of such works later on obtain cult status, and many of them are re-interpreted in such a new way that they become a part of canon.

One case in point can be Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). It found widespread success, and it was considered to be a part of the popular Gothic genre. Critical opinion was divided about this then anonymously published novel. But as time progressed, appreciation increased. And now we consider it a classic, even though it has retained its place in popular imagination. The opposite instance is *Richmond, or the Stories in the life of a Bow Street Officer* (1827) by Thomas Skinner Sturr. One may even think of works such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). These were extremely popular at the time of their publication, but the former is now remembered only as one of the first examples of crime fiction and the latter as one of the famous 'sensational' novels of the Victorian Era.

There is a significant difference between Popular Fiction and 'Junk' or 'Rubbish' which has neither respectability nor style. They often find a largish readership, but they never survive even in the immediate memory of the reader. Mere commercial success does not allocate a text in the realm of Popular Fiction as a cultural category. Popular Fiction may not have any universal appeal or philosophical or psychological or political depth, but it is formally and stylistically

superior. In fact, sheer stylistic excellence can elevate a bestseller or something belonging to the Popular Literature category to classic status, as in the case of Raymond Chandler's novels like *The Big Sleep* (1939) or *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940).

It is difficult to draw a clear line between serious literature and Popular Literature. Some people think that the distinction is not actually substantial, but merely social. One of the strategies accepted by the critics is to categorise these works in different genres and create the idea of 'Genre' Literature. There can be Romance novels, or Detective Novels, or Science Fiction novels and so on. These genres include a variety of works not all of which evolve into serious literature in cultural perception. Most of the so called 'Tea Cozy Crime Novels' remain in the popular domain, whereas many works by Agatha Christie are now in different syllabi. The Sherlock Holmes stories have a difficult relationship with canon. They remain very popular, yet they lack the element(s) that attracts serious attention. The problem with Genre Fiction is that not all the works included may find a broad enough audience to call it Popular. So, ultimately we go back once again the commercial aspects to ascertain the location of such works that may be included in the realm of Popular Literature.

## 1.1.5 Origin of Western Popular Literature

There is no history of Popular Literature in the sense that we have a history of literature. In fact, one might say that the history of Popular Literature is actually the history of literature itself. The idea of the Popular came into being at a certain point in history, and the possibility of mass production and mass distribution created certain texts that were 'manufactured' quickly and perhaps without much consideration for literary merit. These books were meant to divert and divert alone, catering to the demands of sensationalism. Some of the classics, and canonical texts, were also popular. But the distributors collected them, whereas the so-called Popular Literature texts were written for the sole purpose of mass-entertainment. From the point of view of distribution a text such as *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) would have been considered successful if it sold well. One may say that a work such as *The Arabian Nights* remains popular, is considered a classic, yet with its location hovering somewhere in-between the canonical and the sensational. Some texts have been now included in the list of classics though there are fewer readers for them. But as it has been discussed earlier, the texts that specifically looked after the demands of the increasing reading public that became the first instances of Popular Literature.

The invention of printing had popularised reading to a very large extent. But it was only with the Industrial Revolution that printing actually became affordable–with the end-products also becoming much less costly and more available. This was certainly not limited to Europe. The beginning of Popular Literature could be seen developing simultaneously, if not earlier, in the United States of America as well. In fact, it was in the American continent that much of the still popular works belonging to the form was created. The nineteenth century changed the world in more ways than one realises. The automatic paper machines were first invented in England. Along with this there were other discoveries such as more efficient printing presses that made books easier and cheaper to produce. And the number of books printed each year increased exponentially. Better typefaces made reading easier–handwritten manuscripts boasted of brilliant calligraphy, but not always reading ease. Education also became more available and necessary in this industrialised world. So the increase in the sheer volume of the reading public was breathtaking. The demand was now for more books, and more books that would provide material for all tastes. A section of the people was happy with serious literature, but there was a large section which was now looking for non-serious works. The possibility of including illustrations added to the reading pleasure–and made magazines a reality. From the mid-Nineteenth Century, the experience of reading changed radically.

Along with cheaper books, the popularity of libraries also increased. Book lending became as good a business as bookselling. The Routledge 'yellowbacks' became extremely popular and there were significant rivalries amongst a number of houses that brought the price of books down to the lowest possible. However, the demands of business and the condition of the economy forced many publishers to look for books that promised to sell in large numbers–cheaper books (such as the Penguin Paperbacks) were hugely successful, but the publishers also looked for content that would bring in good business. The advent of the 'paperback', much less expensive than the 'hardcover', was a significant step in creation of Popular Literature. For a while, paperbacks were not considered worthy of serious literature. There were 'two-penny libraries' that started distributing books, among which genre-fiction–which is another nomenclature for Popular Literature–became the most popular. And this perhaps is the moment when the idea of Popular Literature as a separate possibility came into being.

## 1.1.6 Various Kinds of Popular Literature

Popular Literature is often called Genre Literature; therefore it is quite obvious that there are several generic divisions that may be found within its periphery.

The variety of public demands and the consequent variety that Popular Literature catered to are indeed quite impressive. It is difficult to compare the popularity of these kinds–in fact, it is impossible to fathom whether detective stories are more popular than ghost stories, or fantasy fiction more in demand than adventure stories. They may be escape reading, or even junk reading according to many, but their acceptance amongst the larger reading public makes many among these serious social phenomena. The number of genres that fall under this ambit is quite large. This section will focus on the most widely read. There are some examples which may fall into more than one category.

**Detective Fiction:** This is the genre in which a crime is committed and a detective figure tries to solve the crime. In most cases the crime is successfully solved and the culprit identified, if not apprehended by the law. Generally this form does not look at the post-detection part of criminal cases–in which the fact that the crime is committed by the identified culprit has to be proved in a court of law. It is usually accepted that 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841) by Edgar Allan Poe is the first detective novel; *The Moonstone* (1868) by Wilkie Collins is the first English detective novel. There are several kinds of detective fiction–the 'hard boiled' cynical detective (Philip Marlowe by Raymond Chandler), the genial yet sharp private eye (Prodosh Mitter by Satyajit Ray), the 'tea cozy' mysteries where a gentle non-professional detective solves cases (Miss Marple by Agatha Christie), the classic detective (Hercule Poirot by Agatha Christie or Byomkesh Bakshi by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay), the police procedural in which the process of detection by the established police force finds great prominence (Adam Dalgliesh by P.D. James), the whodunit in which the puzzle is gradually solved by the detective figure (novels such as Daphne du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn* (1936) or Dorothy L. Sayers's *Unnatural Death* (1927) and the thrillers in which mostly ordinary people, sometimes not so ordinary people, find themselves under dangerous circumstances and has to outsmart the villain figures who are bent on causing harm to them and to the larger world [*The Girl on the Train* (2015) by Paula Hawkins or *A Time to Kill* (1989) by John Grisham]. Quite often these kinds overlap: some works falling under multiple categories.

**Mystery Stories:** Mystery stories are those that look at the unknown and try to solve them. Often these stories become adventure stories. There are murder mystery stories which may fall under the class of detective stories. There might be elements of the supernatural involved or puzzle solving or breaking a series of codes. The protagonists may be experts or common people with extraordinary intelligence who by design or chance break through all the adverse elements and manage to solve the mystery. In some cases the mystery remains unsolved and the

mystery itself becomes the focus of the narrative, not the process or attempt of solving it. Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967) falls under this category. Among the regular Mystery Stories on may include Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), Christopher Priest's *The Prestige* (1995) and Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) among others.

**Spy Fiction:** Espionage is one of the most popular genres in the Popular Fiction category. It is a form that glorifies the person who takes great risks to gather information from a perceived enemy. This enemy may be a group or a nation. The 'operative' may have to infiltrate the group pretending to be a member or may have to disguise himself or herself as a national within enemy territory. This will always involve great risk to the person. The success of the 'mission' may have a simple result such as pieces of information that may solve a crisis or may have the grandest scope of saving the planet. There are largely two forms of Spy Fiction–**romantic and realistic**. The realistic fiction, such as those by John Le Carré, is much more political and unglamorous and is rarely included in the Popular Literature framework. The romantic spy fiction is still as much a staple favourite as it was in the days of pulp books. The James Bond series by Ian Fleming is probably the most well known. Spy Fiction has been there for a long time with writers such as James Fenimore Cooper (*The Bravo*, 1831), Rudyard Kipling (*Kim*, 1901) and Joseph Conrad (*The Secret Agent*, 1907) writing novels with such elements; but most of them have been elevated to proper literary status. John Buchan's *The Thirty Nine Steps* (1915), The Saint series by Leslie Charteris, Ken Follett's *The Eye of the Needle* (1978) or Jack Higgins's *The Eagle has Landed* (1975) are famous examples of this form.

**Horror Stories:** Horror stories most often focus not on the element of horror, but on terror. The idea of disgust that horror involves is limited to certain tales, whereas most stories have the issue of terror. The fear of death and that of the supernatural, dominate these tales. Quite often these stories become metaphorical. Many of these stories have an element of psychosis that finds expression through the aspect of horror. There are simple ghost stories and there is the genre of the Gothic, there are vampires and cult or exotic elements that often take centre stage. The earlier examples of this form are mostly accepted as classics now–novels such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) or Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) are examples of such works. Among the most prominent is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* which remains popular to this day. Sheridan Le Fanu and M.R. James are now considered to be masters of the ghost story. The other accepted classic of this form is *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by Henry James. Among the modern writers Stephen King has

written a large number of horror stories. Some of the work by Roald Dahl may fall under this category. Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1983) and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) are widely popular; the latter focussing on the typical trope of the 'haunted house'. The horror genre often focuses on a past unresolved crime and the victim still looking for revenge or redemption.

**Fantasy Stories:** Although fantasy includes much of the other genres, but Fantasy Stories indicate a particular kind of fiction that looks at fantastic elements– including feats of the hero/heroine and the villainy that they have to face. Quite often such fiction has a setting that is far from reality. Science Fiction is considered to be a separate form, but many critics consider Science Fiction to be another form of fantasy. However, most fantasy stories are more like fairy tales meant for a more grown-up audience. They more often than not go back to the erstwhile world of kings and queens and magic and sorcery. The otherness of setting and the beyond-normal framework characterise this particular form. Although one may include books such as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) but they are often read as commentary on various social issues and are consequently included in the sphere of high literature. *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights* (also known as *Arabian Nights*) is perhaps the most universally popular set of fantasy stories. *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) series by J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956) by C.S. Lewis, L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) or the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling are modern examples of fantasy fiction. One of the contemporary favourites would be *The Song of Ice and Fire* (1991-) by George R. R. Martin. One of the major writers of this form, firmly located in the popular/pulp category, is H. Rider Haggard. His novels such as *She: A History of Adventure* (1887) and *Ayesha* (1905) are definitive examples of Popular Fantasy Fiction.

**Adventure Stories:** Adventure stories have always been popular. Often the target of such stories is the younger readership, though there is a significant audience among older readers too. Generally Adventure stories contain a tale of excitement and action around a heroic figure, male or female, who would embark on an exciting voyage. The central figure's age is irrelevant. Depending on the target audience, the protagonist may be young or older. Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series is an example of having younger protagonists. The setting can be exotic places or familiar places which will turn out to be full of intrigue. Quite often the author goes back in time and creates a new pseudo-historical world as in Robert Cochran's *The Sword and the Dagger* (2019). There has to be a lot of danger. There might be one central antagonist or a number of them, there may also be animals or monsters involved. Sometimes natural calamities take place of the antagonist, as in Danika Stone's

*Switchback* (2019). The adventures usually take on massive proportions and are quite unreal in their process and outcome. Stories which now have become part of high-brow culture are classics such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). One of the most enduring adventure novels is H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). The novels by Clive Cussler featuring Dirk Pitt, starting with *Pacific Vortex* (1983), show how adventure stories can become a series or even a franchise. Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Chander Pahar* (*Mountain of the Moon*, 1937) is an all time favourite Bengali adventure novel. There is a sub-genre of Adventure Fiction which involves mostly animals. *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906) by Jack London are two examples.

**Science Fiction:** Science Fiction remains one of the most popular amongst the realm of Popular Literature. Science Fiction, also known as Sci-Fi or SF, may deal with adventure stories or philosophical stories or stories of any kind, but must have a component of imagined scientific elements which affect the setting in such a way as to make it different from our time. Quite often these stories speak of technological advancements. Fantasy and horror are important elements of this form. Mostly sci-fi looks at the future, but sometimes there are stories which go back to the past. The elements may be spaceships that go to other constellations light-years away, or may be medical advances that create a new way of life or any number of such things. Hard Science Fiction bases itself on science; Soft Science Fiction is more social. Sometimes the author imagines a perfect future where the current problems of the world are solved and humanity looks at new challenges. Jules Verne and many other such writers looked forward to a number of wonderful achievements which have now become reality. Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) imagined the first submarine. Flying machines have been imagined for a long time. A number of novels by Arthur C. Clarke look at an ideal future where humanity has the luxury to explore and ruminate on the philosophical issues regarding existence. *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is one such work. Philip K. Dick's stories often have a metaphysical orientation. His *Simulacra* (1964) or *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) are now considered classics. But quite often current problems of the world are symbolically or metaphorically presented in these stories. Ray Bradbury's work has now become canonical–his novels and short stories often look at psychology and sociology. His *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) is an iconic novel. Authors such as Bradbury generally look at what is known as Dystopia, as opposed to the Utopia imagined by Clarke or Isaac Asimov in some of their works. The best example of dystopia is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). One should also mention Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which, like *Brave New World*, is not within the popular parameter. They

are considered serious literature because of their focus on serious socio-political issues.

**Historical Fiction:** A large number of books belonging to the Popular Literature bracket deal with re-imagination of history. These books go back to familiar historical times and create an imaginary version of either a historical figure or one or more imaginary figures based around a historical character or events. Since they pretend to present or counter known histories, they are also called *counter-factual* fiction by some critics. Sometimes they commemorate a particular event in history, trying to pay tribute to it through a popular presentation. Often they are simply market-oriented, profiting from the anniversary or such of a historical event; or they are politically motivated, reinventing an event to serve the purposes of one political identity or the other. Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) takes a look at the life and politics of Thomas Cromwell. *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999) gives a fictional account of the painter Johaness Vermeer's relationship with the possibly imaginary woman who modelled for his painting of the same name. *The Book Thief* (2005) by Markus Zusak or *The Boy in Striped Pajamas* (2006) by John Boyne go back to the Nazi occupation of Europe. Then there are books like Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) which present the history in a biased way, denying certain injustices by showing a rather idealized picture of society. J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) portrays the Indian mutiny of 1957 from the colonial point of view. One of the most interesting examples of historical mythification can be found in Jules Verne's *The Steam House* (1880) where the author shows the use of a mechanical elephant and presents Nana Sahib as a typical monstrous villain. Then there are books such as *The Naked Mughals* (2017) by Vashi Sharma which claim to 'revive' history and show the true (and obviously ugly) face of the empire.

**Western Novels:** This category includes specifically American novels which focus essentially on post-civil war USA where the 'cowboys' come in constant conflict with a number of foes including the Native Americans (known as the Red Indians). The term 'Western' comes from the setting which is the 'Old West' frontier. There are regional aspects that find primacy; the north and the south sometimes clash. Although this form is not as popular now as it was half a century back, yet it remains a major section of the Popular Literature form. Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) is now a part of the canon. Michael Punke's *The Revenant* (2002), Larry MacMurtry's *Comanche Moon* (1997), Jack Schaefer's *Shane* (1949), Charles Portis's *True Grit* (1968) are among the most popular Western novels. These novels speak of the hardship of life in the American West where crops are sparse, the land is unfriendly. The form began with Frontier tales from authors such as

James Fenimore Cooper whose novels such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) is still considered an example of the popular classic.

**Romance Fiction:** Romance novels are categorised by their emphasis on love stories. They are full of fantasy and excess. There are elements of adventure and innocence which often seem completely naive or unreal, but those are apparently what the readership demands. For a long time this was considered to be 'literature for women', a tag which is now being challenged. The usual formula is that the 'pure', young and simple female protagonist, the typical 'heroine' figure, will be in danger or inconvenience and will be rescued by a dashing, almost rakish, handsome rich man. She will obviously fall head over heels in love with him and eventually he will also reciprocate. There might be some clichéd obstacles and these will be conquered through some further clichéd actions. The primary point of these novels is that they avoid novelty and offer comfort through familiarity. The situations differ slightly, as do the names and locations and times, there are slender bits of mystery and suspense, but the central formula remains the same. The more modern books often involve intense physical scenes and they often break through earlier taboos. Erich Segal's *Love Story* (1970) is among the more sophisticated ones. The Mills and Boon series once was highly popular. Danielle Steel was a prolific writer of this genre. Among her books one may mention *The Gift* (1994), *Prodigal Son* (2015) and *The Long Road Home* (1998). In recent times books such as John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), Nicholas Sparks' *The Notebook* (1996), David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) are being categorized within this genre.

**Humour Literature:** Literature in English has a long tradition of humour. In fact, humour constitutes a major part of all literatures of the world. Some of these works become part of the high-brow culture–as in the case of the works by Joseph Heller (*Catch-22*, 1961), John Kennedy Toole (*A Confederacy of Dunces*, 1980) and Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 1969). P. G. Wodehouse remains a phenomenon: he remains equally popular and seriously loved. But there remains a large body of works which either satirise or present genial humour and remain within the popular framework. There are books which are full of straightforward laughter and amusement, and then there are books which contain dark humour. Black humour or dark humour challenges social norms and evils through pungent lampooning or sophisticated yet scathing targeted comedy. There is also the subgenre of Romantic Comedies which look at tales of love with the lens of humour. Roald Dahl's stories contain often contain a macabre, even sadistic, humour. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979) by Douglas Adams takes the form of science fiction and gently comments on much of social mores. Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) re-imagines *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and shows with gentle comedy the acute

crisis that many women go through. One should also mention Tom Sharpe's novels, particularly the Wilt series including *Wilt* (1976), *The Wilt Alternative* (1979) and *Wilt on High* (1985). His novels satirising Apartheid in South Africa –*Riotous Assembly* (1971) and *Indecent Exposure* (1973)–were well received and extremely popular. One should also mention George Mikes, whose *How to* series is extremely popular. His books combine narration with cartoons. His *How to be an Alien* (1946) is very popular.

**Sports Literature:** There is a niche crowd for literature that speak about Sports activities. In Bengali Moti Nandy used to write stories and novels based on a variety of sports. However, one must remember that these works should have at least one Sport at the centre of the plot, not just in the periphery or as the background. There are many kinds of Sports and many kinds of Sports Literature. Only a few have been accepted within the canon or within the bracket of high literature. Among all the Sports, Hunting and Mountaineering have been favourites with the reading public. Jim Corbett's or Kenneth Anderson's stories and novels are still read by a very large number of people: *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* (1948) by Jim Corbett is considered to be a classic these days. Stories regarding the conquest of Everest or other such mighty peaks are also quite popular. Sometimes people consider them as a part of travel literature, but quite often they are written more from the Mountaineering point of view, with its nitty-gritty, rather than from any travel oriented outlook. John Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* (1997) is a journalistic document, but has been extremely popular. Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna* (1951) is a harrowing retelling of the assault on the Annapurna summit. There are many other books focusing on other Sport forms. One may mention Marcus Berkmann's *Rain Men* (1995) focusing on cricket. *Roy of Rovers* (1954), the tales of a footballer, was an extremely successful comic strip which was translated in many languages. Dick Francis writes thrillers on horse racing such as *Nerve* (1964) or *Odds Against* (1965). Enid Bagnold's *National Velvet* (1935) is an enduring fantasy regarding a girl's dream of winning the Grand National steeplechase.

**Young Adult:** Usually these are books that targets to an audience within the age group (but not limited to) the pre-teens or early to mid teens. Even though books in the series of Harry Potter may fall under this category if one follows only the age bracket, they remain within the fantasy genre. The books that find space here are tales that focus on the angst of the young minds, their negotiations with the world that changes when they change from childhood but are yet to reach full adulthood. Some focus on the stories of people who have just reached adulthood (not the inbetweeners but young-adults). One may mention Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) or Gayle Forman's *If I Stay* (2009) or Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007).

**Nonsense:** Poetry is generally considered highbrow. But Limericks and nonsense poetry, fall under the category of the Popular. Edward Lear's Limericks are truly world famous. As far as Nonsense Poetry is concerned one may mention Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' or Edward Lear's 'The Jumblies'. Any discussion on Nonsense poetry would be incomplete without mentioning Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol* (1923). The Nonsense is not limited to poetry. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is often considered a classic example of Nonsense Literature. Books such as Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories* (1922) may be cited as example. One must also mention plays such as *Lakkhaner Shaktishel* or stories such as 'Heshoram Hushiyarer Diary'or 'Ha Ja Ba Ra La' (all belonging to the first decades of twentieth century) by Sukumar Ray.

## 1.1.7 Themes and Issues of Popular Literature

Popular Literature or Genre Literature cannot be summarily dismissed as lacking in critical values. These books reflect the current socio-economic and political state of the parent culture and often act as propaganda for the establishment or the challenges to it. Even if they are innocent in their intentions, they definitely contain marks of the socio-cultural issues of the contemporary time. Although there are a number of such possible issues, let us look at a major few.

**Gender:** Gender stereotyping has been one of the biggest complaints against Popular Literature. If on one hand we have the ultra-masculine 'superhero' structure in pulp fiction or comic books (always the hero saving the heroine and the day), we have the establishment of the patriarchal ideal of feminine in the Romance novels. It is not until recently that there are attempts at creating equal spaces for all. Tarzan or Superman or Allan Quatermain are used to create in popular imagination the exemplary male figure, the idea of the 'feisty' heroine also emphasises the feminine characteristics that society needs to establish. The 'feisty-ness' makes the heroine exceptional, but does not allow her to become the principal protagonist. She is perhaps braver or more intelligent than the average 'housewife' figure, but still needs the protection and needs to be allowed to function by patriarchy. Lois Lane from the Superman stories, Jane Porter in Tarzan and many such heroines exemplify the feminine role in these stories. Not only are these stories generally insensitive to gender issues–apart from a few which try to be politically correct–they actively celebrate the patriarchal masculine and mostly make a mockery of other genders.

**Economics:** Popular Literature quite often manages to include a number of social issues. The monetary health of a society is something that may be shrouded in a number of ways, but in popular culture and literature they find often surprisingly accurate representation. Crime Fiction is of particular interest as often criminal acts–

not blue collar crime, but those on the ground–show the despair and frustration of an economically weak time. Even superhero stories show how 'hope' is presented in a time of hopelessness. The characters belonging to these stories represent common people and their common day to day issues. Quite often philosophy and macro-history fail to capture the angst created by financial crises, but Popular Literature never fails to do so. The adventure stories are often situated in times of exploration–exploration that is necessitated by need, and by greed. The cowboy stories speak of widespread migration, the hardships faced by the so called 'pioneers'. Disease, famine, war–all have economic repercussions. One may read Walter Van Tilberg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1940) or Jack Schaefer's *Shane* (1949). The post-Great War American 'Noir' crime fiction often showed how poverty and insecurity is grasping the nation. Greed often became the primary motivator. Very often the primacy of organized crime shows to which extent greed and corruption have pervaded society. W. R. Burnett's *Little Caesar* (1929) and *High Sierra* (1940) are good examples. Neo-Noir novels also carry similar trends. One can cite as example James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* (1987) or *L. A. Confidential* (1990). In novels such as Popular Literature by trying to create a fantasy world, often indirectly shows how much the society needs money.

**Politics (Colonialism):** No literature can exist outside politics. There will be a trace of politics even in the apparently apolitical works. Popular Literature, having the burden of catering to popular taste, has often been accused of some form of political incorrectness or other. They have either become overt propaganda for some ideology, even ideologies which are considered extreme by liberal sides. Written in Nazi Germany, Julius Streicher's *Der Giftpilz* (*The Poisonous Mushroom*, 1938) was a book for children which equated the Jewish people with poisonous mushrooms. Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905) remains an example of propaganda for White Supremacy. Similarly, the mushrooming of religion-specific books often creates a similar paradigm for religious politics. One only has to look at the Tarzan stories to understand how White superiority is established in the innocent mind. The fact that Tarzan is a white male baby, belonging to British aristocracy and falling in love with an American woman, represents in a nutshell the entire power-politics of the world. Even Hergé (actual name Geroges Remi) has been accused of being incredibly offensive for his portrayal of African characters in his Tintin comic books. The European supremacist behaviour is nowhere more apparent.

**Religion:** Although never overtly apparent in Popular Literature, quite often religious ideas are used in such a sub-textual manner that they leave a significant impression on the readers. Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat Pray Love* (2006) packages the idea of spiritualism, and creates an impression of Indian spiritual superiority. Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* (2012) shows how a religious text can change the life

of a boy. Amish Tripathy's hugely popular *Shiva Trilogy* (*The Immortals of Meluha*, 2010; *The Secret of the Nagas,*2011; and *The Oath of the Vayuputras,* 2013) create a fantasy world emphasising a religious presence and catering to a not so covert political issue. Novels like Dan Brown's *The Da-Vinci Code* (2003) may seem to challenge familiar precepts, but they end up creating an interest in issues and religious details and artefacts that otherwise would have remained unexplored. And with sophisticated retellings of core religious stories–such as Campfire's graphic novels *Ravana: Roar of the Demon King* (2011) and *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* (2011)–certain ideas are modernised and sometimes they are reinvented to suit modern purposes.

**Migration:** Perhaps the most popular migrant is Superman. United States of America and migration are two terms that have a significant relationship. Written by two Jewish men, the issue of acceptance in a new land is one of the most understated ideas that can be found in the modern superman myth. Laura Z. Hobson's *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), although no longer considered to be a part of popular literature, looked at the Jews living in America and still not being accepted. In many ways the early American pioneer stories were also stories of migration. Some of the early popular classics, such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), speak of travel and of symbolic colonial settlements. Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) speaks of Irish immigrants in America. Mircea Eliade's *Bengal Nights* (1933) shows a collision of cultures that takes place when a European temporarily migrates to India. There are comic accounts such as J. R. Ackerley's *Hindoo Holiday* (1932).

**Issues related to Science:** Much of Popular Literature focus on contemporary issues. Even when the theme is historical, the central concern will definitely be of immediate interest. And science and its discontents often show just how much the populace is interested in scientific advancements or discoveries. Science Fiction speaks about fantasy. Through its Utopic, as well as dystopic, vision it tries to assess the impact of scientific breakthroughs in the life of humanity and the life of society. Although it is difficult to ascertain how the discovery of the telescope was received in popular perception, one can see the impact of the atomic age on people. Comic books and mythologies such as the Godzilla construct has epitomised the fear of atomic disaster. Popular Literature does not merely resist the technological aspect of scientific progress, but also addresses the philosophical or moral questions. Although it is now a classic, when it was published *Frankenstein* was such a question. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) was followed by a number of satirical novels and works, some in favour. One such novel was Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863). Quite often literature has been used to support

scientific issues–particularly through Science Fiction. The early twentieth century Futurism movement contested romantic claims that supported the human against the technological. A number of continental artists had engaged in Futurism, but many were disillusioned as it soon degenerated and started leaning towards fascism.

## 1.1.8 Relevance of Popular Literature in Modern Life

Popular Literature, in its various forms, still remains very significant for readers of all ages. The complaint of contemporary times, that people do not read, is made invalid by the sale of popular books such as the *Twilight Saga* (2008-2008), Chetan Bhagat's books or the Harry Potter series. Popular Literature often looks at modern political issues, international events, sports issues and even fashion–thereby making the readers aware of a number of things while creating opinions in support of for certain ideologies. For instance, Mukul Deva's novels such as *Lashkar* (2008) speak of Indian spies and the role of the then Prime Minister of India, subtly glorifying the ruling government. Then there are subversive works which challenge the central ideology–J. G. Ballard's *High Rise* (1975) scrutinizes a number of contemporary social precepts. In poetry too we have several such experiments. Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* (1982) manages to add twists to familiar fairy tales and question the very value system that they seem to present. All ages have their own psychological challenges, as much for the youth as for the adults. Quite often, popular fiction, in whichever generic form, becomes a shelter or an instrument through which individual problems are analyzed. With the emergence of a powerful 'young adult' demographic, the corresponding literature looks at the modern life and modern issues that plague these younger minds. Quite often serious literature becomes too much of an intellectual challenge for pleasurable reading–and all minds require pleasure. Popular Literature remains popular because the new texts, with which the new mind (not age wise, but Age wise) can connect, give necessary relief. Reinventions such as Charlaine Harris's *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (the first book came out in 2001) which was adapted for the small screen and became the ultra successful *True Blood* series (2008-14) create a newer storyline basing itself on the classic *Dracula* (Bram Stoker, 1897) motif. The new stories are more identifiable to the newer audience and they often become symbols of the contemporary anxieties that modern generations face.

But Popular Literature also often becomes political tools. The explosion of myth-oriented literature, both in children's content and in adult's, has its roots in a specific ideological strategy. The emphasis on certain events in history, which are turned into popular stories, also serves to keep those memories fresh and to

remind the audience that those were the triumphs or tragedies of a definite system. There are a number of novels on the Gulf War and the Middle Eastern conflicts, glorifying the United States of America's involvement in the violence in that region. There are also ecological propaganda books that speak of how the planet needs saving. Sometimes they are in the form of science fiction, sometimes they speak more directly. One may mention books such as Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries: 2015* (2009) which speaks of a world in severe water crisis.

## 1.1.9 Summing Up

Although we are academically looking at the area of Popular Fiction, it still remains firmly in the zone of the popular. The interpretation we are offering are located in this academic space only, the average reader is uninfluenced by such criticism or thought; and that is the primary power of Popular Literature. The predominant definition of Popular Literature is that which is easily comprehensible to the reader and does not require effort in connecting. However, we have seen how effortlessly some texts belonging to the popular section become either classics or a part of the canon. If they become classics than it is by popular choice, if they become canonical then it is through the choice of the academia. But in both cases, the subversive texts are often pushed towards oblivion. But some survive. From all the genres that have been mentioned we have classics. These texts, significantly 'popular' in their time, have now a different kind of value. Be it *Frankenstein* (1818) or *The Big Sleep* (1939) or *Dracula* (1897) or *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) or such–they have confirmed locations in their culture now. Unlike much of their contemporaries, these texts have had a more lasting influence. But a much larger number of texts are forgotten, often not only because of their stylistic failure, but because they were too time-specific, their subjects are no longer relevant. Very often we see texts which are seriously good, but they are no longer read because their concerns are no longer relevant. If one turns to the early English novels (not only the cheap books or 'chapbooks' as they are also known as) then one will see how those texts, even with the best literary merit, are no longer considerable. So, quite often Popular Literature comes with an expiry date.

## 1.1.10 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. How many kinds of Popular Literature can you think about? Write briefly on any three of them.

2. What are the main concerns that a reader may find in any popular literature book?
3. Would you say the Popular Literature has any connection to life, or is it just fantasy?

- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What was the reason for the rise of Popular Literature?
  2. How would you define Popular Literature?
  3. What is the difference between Popular Literature and Classics?
  4. Is there a possibility of Popular Literature becoming serious literature?
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. How is Popular Literature different from 'junk'?
  2. Write a short note on 'Genre' Literature.
  3. How is the invention of the printing press important in relation to Popular Literature?

## 1.1.11 Suggested Reading

Berberich, Christine. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction*. London, Bloomsbury, 2015.

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Sutherland, John. *Bestsellers: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

# Unit-2 □ Crime and Detective Fiction

*Structure*



## 1.2.1 Objectives'

Crime fiction is one of the most popular literary genres, and has been for centuries, but where did the genre come from? This unit aims to delve into why and how crime fiction and its sub-genres become such a huge part of literature and popular culture?

## 1.2.2 Introduction

As a part of this module that focuses on introducing a number of genres vital for gathering a basic knowledge of the domain of Popular Literature, this unit will focus on two related genres, namely Crime Fiction and Detective Fiction and two of their significant exponents. The content has two sections. The first is designed to be a primer that should aid the students in gathering conception regarding these two genre's position within the domain of Popular Literature, information about their salient features, and similarities as well as differences. While designing the second section importance is given to offering an overview of the contribution to the development of these genres by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Dame Agatha Christie.

## 1.2.3 Locating the Genres within Popular Literature

Despite warning the readers about the deceptive nature of the very phrase 'Popular fiction', David Glover and Scott McCracken, do offer a number of useful

observations that can help in identifying Popular Literature. Late nineteenth century is considered to be the beginning of what Popular Literature at present is known to be. They define it as: "books that everyone reads usually imagined as a league table of bestsellers whose aggregate figures dramatically illustrate an impressive ability to reach across wide social and cultural divisions with remarkable commercial success".

This definition associates the ability to impress literally any reader with becoming a Popular Fiction and it is this particular aspect that can help significantly in differentiating Crime Fiction or Detective Fiction from other notable varieties of fiction. In his insightful elaboration about the very beginning of stories in general, Italo Calvino comments that the main purpose of the first storytellers was to "extract an explanation" of the world around by using all the type of characters and actions he/she was familiar with. Calvino then mentions "making prohibition" and "transgression" of the same, amongst others, as two familiar actions that these storytellers used for framing their stories. Though Calvino does not really point these two to be the source of the crux of the matter of the entire oeuvre of Crime Fiction and Detective Fiction, their connection with the basic element of these stories, especially the ones referred as Crime Fiction is almost evident. As the famous proverb says, laws have always been meant to be broken and this very feeling helped significantly in giving birth to the genre of Crime Fiction.

## 1.2.4 Crime and Detective Fiction

As described above, the very idea about Crime Fiction was intimately related to the speculations about breaking of laws. When humanity saw various rules constructed for maintaining order getting broken for different reasons, speculations, about the limits of these acts and potential methods of creating awareness against them began. Narratives born out of such speculations may collectively called Crime Fiction. Since these tales, at their simplest level, were intended to act as cautionary fables, the stories started ending with punishment of their respective lawbreakers, which gradually produced the two basic character types of the genre, namely the criminal or the transgressor and the enforcers of rules. In cases, where these fictional accounts of Crimes that can likely be committed by individuals under various circumstances featured the element of chasing prior to the punishment of the offender, an element of suspense started playing a key role and thus the Thrillers came into existence.

Crime Fiction therefore appears to be a broader and more complex variety of fictional narratives where an act of crime functions as the main subject of

the plot. Whereas, Detective stories, are narratives defined by their focus on the detection of the Criminal by a sleuth of remarkable intelligence and courage. Technically, Crime Fiction is linked to and adopted by many other genres. It is not mandatory for Crime Fiction to be a story about detection. For instance, Fyodor Dostoevsky's famous novel *Crime and Punishment* is not at all connected to any detective figure of the conventional kind but it is recognized as one of the finest examples of Crime Fiction ever. In case of Crime Fiction narratives, the Detective is conventionally used for creating a foil to the image of the Criminal. His/her method of unravelling the identity of the Criminal and the final act of gathering adequate proof for exposing the criminal publicly builds a narrative that provides assurance to the readers about the society's safety. Other than the stories known as 'Police Procedurals', where professional crime investigators are shown to be tracing the criminal, mostly following the conventional methods of enquiry, the tracking of proofs and the criminal is entrusted with this individual of formidable skills, that is the Detective. Therefore, the depiction, of the Detective figure and his/her unique methods of detection is vital for the discussion ofan important sub-genre of Crime Fiction.

## 1.2.5 Author Profiles

According to Martin Priestman, the seeds of Crime Thrillers were sown in Edgar Allan Poe, with the publication of the renowned story 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. Poe himself acknowledged William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) to be a vital source for the writing of this immensely successful story but it was Poe himself who forged the first rubric of the genre. He used a sensational murder that appeared to be absolutely beyond any logical explanation, followed by the introduction of C. Auguste Dupin, a gentleman of Paris who solves the gruesome murder while others are entirely at a loss. Poe basically introduced the figure of the Detective even before the term came into existence and in doing so he truly pioneered the genre of Crime Thrillers. However, the three stories Poe wrote, with Dupin as leads were not really sufficient in quantity to cement the genre's position amidst readers as well as critics. The genre lacked prolific writers for years. Despite the substantial contribution of Émile Gaboriau amongst the French, and Wilkie Collins amongst the British, the genre had to endure a stasis as it was yet to be helmed by authors exclusively dedicated to it. The situation underwent a radical change from late 19$^{th}$ century onwards, which as mentioned before, was also the time when Popular Literature in general started flourishing. In the following portion, two writers, important for their quality and quantity of writings are discussed briefly:-

**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle** (22 May 1859-7 July 1930) He was born in Scotland to a

family often troubled by financial crisis. His father Charles Doyle was a civil servant and had to work as an illustrator for additional income. When Sir Arthur completed his education by obtaining a medical degree from the University of Edinburgh, his family's condition had worsened as his father had become an alcoholic. Unlike many famous writers, Doyle was a good athlete as well. He earned a considerable amount of fame as a boxer in particular. Besides doing private practices he also travelled widely as a part of various ships. He was knighted in 1902 due to his voluntary service in the Boer War. Writing enabled him to support his family but he was not engaged in it simply for money. The world knows him primarily as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, the first major Detective of English Literature whose introduction changed the genre forever but Doyle's efficiency as a writer is shown by the variety of his writings. Other than short stories and novels featuring Holmes, he wrote multiple short stories of interesting variety. His contribution as a writer of Gothic stories alone could have earned him a place in any account of Popular Literature. In fact, these stories like 'Lot no. 249', 'The Terror of Blue John Gap', etc. prove his skills as a writer of engaging Thrillers.

Doyle wrote the entire canon of Holmes stories and novels from 1887 to 1927. Altogether he wrote four novels and sixty short stories with Holmes as the lead. As suggested by Julian Symons: "the very character of Holmes revolutionized the crime story". He first appeared in the novel *A Study in Scarlet*(1887) and had not become well-accepted until he appeared in the short stories. Technically it was the story 'A Scandal in Bohemia' that enabled Holmes and creator to gain acceptance widely. Holmes is shown to be a typical urban figure with eccentricities. Doyle had used his own experiences as well as the fascinating deductive skills of his teacher Dr. Joseph Bell to give his hero an incredible cognition power. Symons opines that Holmes is mostly portrayed as "a kind of intellectual Nietzschean superman". Dupin, the perfect gentleman, tried to solve cases simply by trying to think like the criminal but Holmes was a thinker, logician, eccentric person with addictions who solved challenges through his encyclopaedic knowledge and courage. H.R.F. Keating credits Doyle as the first writer to introduce the concept of the 'series character' and appreciates him for his use of lucid and succinct prose. Yet both Symons and Keating are found agreeing about the main drawback of Doyle as a writer. None of his novels appear to have well-made plots. Though nearly all of his short stories are well-knit, he struggled with the form of novel, particularly in maintaining the element of thrill. Recent criticisms have found a reflection of Doyle's support for his contemporary British imperialism in the Holmes canon. Christine Berberich in particular has offered a reading of the canon in the said manner by highlighting the recurrent usage of people from Britain's rival countries as villains by Doyle.

**Dame Agatha Mary ClarissaChristie** (15 September 1890-12 January 1976): She was born in Torquay in a financially stable upper-middle class family. She was said to be a very shy but happy child. Her biographer Laura Thompson offers a valuable insight into their family life commenting: "Agatha grew up in a matriarchy". Although she was not allowed to learn in an institution after completing her school levels, the liberating atmosphere ofher household helped her significantly. She hardly received any serious distraction from her parents or siblings ever due to any family dispute. Rather, her mother and sisters always supported and even triggered the writer in her through their positive criticisms. The only thing that created serious issues in her life was her troubled marriage. She married Colonel Archibald Christie in 1914 and due to his husband's affair suffered a mental condition. In 1926, immediately after the publication of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* which was her first major breakthrough, she disappeared for ten days and was eventually discovered in a hotel using the name of her husband's mistress. Her second marriage with Max Mallowan saw her mostly at peace. She won several accolades for her writings and was entitled as Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1971. Along with her writings he offered military services during the two World Wars and assisted her second husband in his archaeological excavations.

Christie churned out 82 Detective novels in total. Despite the recurrence of her publications, she is seldom found to be rehashing her plots or characters. For a genre branded as formulaic from the beginning, Christie acted as a true saviour. She brought a welcome change to the genre by regularly using devices like Red Herring, Double Bluff, etc. In some of her novels, like *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* or *Murder on the Orient Express* she used Red Herrings like a maverick. The use of the murderer as the narrator or placing of the murder in an ongoing train, implying any of the passengers can be the murderer; she moved the genre to a new level. In the world of her novels the readers are always to stay alert and equally suspicious of all characters. As the number of Thrillers started increasing, many readers developed a tendency to outrun the plots by consciously attempting to read against the grain of the narrative, using their experience of reading previous works. Christie used an interesting method to counter this. She deliberately made her narratives look like the clue for detection has already been given and in the end brought in a final twist that would show how wrong the reader was to jump at conclusions. The novel *The ABC Murders* is an ideal example of this double bluffing.

Not only did Christie help flourishing the art of narration in Thrillers, but she also challenged the generic template of the British masculine, eccentric detective

figure through her memorable characters. Her first detective Hercule Poirot is a Belgian of limited physical strengths. Unlike Holmes, he is often shown to be making mistakes or even appearing comical. Similarly, the other most oft used sleuth, Miss Jane Marple, she took subversion of the figure of the detective to a different level altogether by making her central character an elderly woman who looks anything but sharp. To quote Rosemary Herbert and Dana Bisbee: "Marple used the elderly stereotype to advantage". In stories featuring Tommy and Tuppence Beresford she breaks the myth of linking a detective's bachelor life with his/her efficiency. The duo are seen operating as a couple even after becoming grandparents. Mr. Harley Quin, whom she called her favourite character shows further variation by remaining an enigma himself. He solves cases with perfection and is yet barely seen or understood by any. A retired Government employee is used as an unusual detective in the Parker Pyne stories. By making him a plump man and a person more interested in bringing back happiness to his client's life rather than actually investigating a murder case, Christie showed how Thrillers can be written going outside the usual formula of featuring a sensational and preferably gory murder.

## 1.2.6 Summing Up

The two writers discussed above have indeed offered the genres a number of seminal texts and methods. While the former attempted to endorse the superiority of the British, male, scientifically inclined adventurist; the latterintroduced characters apparently erroneous or comparatively imperfect as efficient sleuths. After their arrival British Detective Fiction found a number of truly seminal generic templates that allowed a writer to come up with sufficient number of combinations. Christie in particular seems to have a wider significance for the genealogical studies due to her conscious efforts at always maintaining a novelty in her novels. She began as a Detective fiction writer of the Golden Age, marked by her portrayal of crime being more akin to puzzles than serious threats. Eventually she surpassed these typical features by recurrently introducing characters who are not really in a cozy situation at all. If Doyle helped in building the canon, Christie nourished it further by pruning the excess and adding new varieties.

## 1.2.7 ComprehensionExercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Define Crime Fiction and Thriller, focusing on their similarities and differences.

2. Why would you consider a Thriller a part of Popular Literature? Give suitable examples for your arguments.
3. Write a critical essay on the contribution of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as a writer of Thriller.
4. How did Agatha Christie improvise the dominant trend of writing Thrillers? Answer with suitable examples.

- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Make a comparative study of the characters used as detectives by Agatha Christie.
  2. Attempt a comparative study of the narrative styles of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Offer brief overviews of the following terms/ characters:
     Red Herring, Double Bluff, Unreliable Narrator, Twisted Ending
  2. Write briefly on the following characters:
     Dr. Watson, Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Jane Marple, Parker Pyne

## 1.2.7Suggested Reading

Allan, J. M. and C. Pittard (2019), *The Cambridge Companion to Sherlock Holmes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Delamater, J. H. and R. Prigozy (1997), *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction*, Westport: Greenwood Press

Moore, L. D. (2015), *Connecting Detectives: The Influence of the 19th Century Sleuth Fiction on the Early Hard Boileds*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company

Newburn, T. (2018), *Criminology: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Priestman, M. (2003), *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

# Unit-3 □ Western Science Fiction: An Early History

*Structure*



## 1.3.1 Objectives

This Unit introduces the learner to the genre of Science Fiction (henceforth SF) and traces the evolution of the genre with special reference to the early exponents from Europe and America, with whose works we have all grown up as children. So in this Unit you will specifically learn about the work of H.G. Wells, Jules Verne and Isaac Asimov.

## 1.3.2 Introduction

SF, in broad terms, refers to literature which has a predominantly imaginative and mostly futuristicenvironmental setting proliferated by highly advanced and often apparently unrealistic technological objects and phenomenonand yet governed by theoretically established rules of science and scientifically verifiable laws of nature. Though often popularly considered a specific genre of literature, SF cuts across the generic divide by incorporating within its corpus multiple literary genres such as history, romance, travel, fantasy and others. This trans-generic status of SF makes it difficult for critics to bracket it in fixed terms and thus there have been multiple attempts at defining it without arriving at a well-accepted consensus. While the Oxford English Dictionary defines SF as “imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, frequently set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel”, the Cambridge Dictionary considers it as “a type of writing about imagined developments in

science and their effect on life especially in the future". SF theorist DarkoSuvin's definition is often accepted to be the gold standard. Suvin in his groundbreaking work *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction* defines it as "a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment". Glossing on this definition another theorist Carl Freedman points out to what Suvin refers to as 'estrangement' and 'cognition' and elucidates uponthe dialectic between the two concepts. Freedman comments that through the process of estrangementSF conjures up an alternative strange world which in turn functions as a critical eye scrutinizing the real world. But though this world is unfamiliar in its apparent makeup, it recognizes and mirrors the real world in multiple ways and thus the criticism it offers of the real world holds ground as authentic. Freedman stresses the importance of the dialectic noting,"If the dialectic is flattened out to mere cognition, then the result is "realistic" or mundane fiction, which can cognitively account for its imaginings but performs no estrangement; if the dialectic is flattened out to mere estrangement (or, it might be argued, pseudo-estrangement), then the result is fantasy, which estranges, or appears to estrange, but in an irrationalist, theoretically illegitimate way." (Freedman 11) Thus, this constant tussle between these opposing pulls marks the hallmark of SF.

Among the various features that define a literature as SF, Adam Roberts lists a fundamental few (Roberts 12). He notes that a SF book would like have these following themes, trappings, subjects, props:

- Spaceships, interplanetary or interstellar travel
- Aliens and encounters with aliens
- Mechanical robots, genetic engineering, biological robots
- Computers, advanced technology, virtual reality
- Time travel
- Alternative history
- Futuristic utopias and dystopias

These features are not the only parameter however. SF, a still evolving genre, is always on the lookout for exploring newer thematic and technical avenues to try to present itself anew and thereby secure its contemporaneity.

## 1.3.3 Origin and Evolution of the Genre

Like with its definition, the exact date or period of origin of the genre of SF has been highly contested amongst theorists. Opinions range from it being a

relatively new genre emerging out as a byproduct of the culture fostered by the Industrial Revolution to it being a much older genre with regular specimens of it being identified throughout literature of all ages. In this regard, Adam Roberts notes that these two broad ways of approaching SF also throws some light on the very nature of the genre. He argues: "Stress the relative youth of the mode and you are arguing that SF is a specific artistic response to a very particular set of historical and cultural phenomena; more specifically, you are suggesting that SFcould only have arisen in a culture experiencing the Industrial Revolution, or one undergoing the metaphysical anxieties of what nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche called 'the Death of God'. Stress the antiquity of SF, on the other hand, and you are arguing instead that SF is a common factor across a wide range of different histories and cultures, that it speaks to something more durable, perhaps something fundamental in the human make-up, some human desire to imagine worlds other than the one we actually inhabit". (Roberts 38)Ancient epics like *Gilgamesh*, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* and other works of antiquity like Cicero's *SomniumScipionis* and Plutarch's *The Circle of the Moon* all exhibit stray characteristics of SF, though they can hardly be classified as true specimens of the genre.

Some critics often posit that prototypical works of modern day SF had actually emerged and saw a great upsurge during the seventeenth century fostered by the ambience of Renaissance Humanism. Brian Stableford comments that "the seventeenth century writers began producing speculative fictions about new discoveries and technologies that the application of scientific method might bring about, the earliest examples being accommodated–rather uncomfortably-within existing genres and narrative frameworks" ( Cambridge Companion 15). The utopian fantasy genre which mostly had an imaginary voyage or travel narrative incorporated within its corpus, elements and tropes which can be considered characteristic features of the genre of SF. Works like Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*(1627), Johann Valentin Andreae's*Christianopolis* (1619), TommasoCampanella's*La Citta del Sole*(1623), Bishop William Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638), John Wilkins's *Discovery of a World in the Moone* (1638), Savibien Cyrano de Bererac's*The Other World, or the States and Empires of the Moon* (1657), Bernard de Fontenelle's*Discussion of the Plurality of Worlds* (1686) all embody prominent elements of SF with lunar voyages being a popular motif. Renowned scientist of that era, Johann Kepler, also needs to be mentioned here for he along with publishing his groundbreaking scientific research works on planetary motion also produced (circa 1600) one work of what may be termed SF titled *Somnium, siveAstronomiaLunaris/ A Dream, Or Lunar Astronomy* (1634).

The Enlightenment movement of the 18th century with its particular focus on science, rationalism, materialism, realism prepared the bedrock for the genre to evolve farther. Moreover, the era encountered a great deal of exciting scientific discoveries like piston steam engine, balloons, parachutes, gas lights, mercury thermometer, lightning rods, bifocal lens, etc. The entire 18th century thus saw production of works at regular intervals relying more heavily upon scientific frameworks and most often dealing with interplanetary voyages and adventures. Journeys to uncharted territories on the Earth also featured in several narratives of the era, though it was getting out of vogue with new places being discovered in rapid rates. Seminal works like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) narrated extraordinary voyages to strange places of the Earth inhabited by races vastly alien. Samuel Madden's 1733 novel *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century* featured time travel, though without explaining the details of the phenomenon. Norwegian author LudvigHolberg's novel *Niels Klim's Underground Travels* (1741) novel presented alternative worlds and space travel in vivid details. Voltaire's novella *Micromegas* (1752) too is an important work of that era dealing with inter-galactic space travel and alien visitation upon Earth from faraway planets.Marie-Anne de Roumier Robert's *Lord Seton's Voyage Among the Seven Planets* (1765) and Louis-Sebastien Mercier's *The Year 2440* (1770) also stand out as important landmarks of the genre in the 18th century.

The 19th century was marked by the peak of what is popularly now known as the first Industrial Revolution. Machines became a dominating aspect of the European culture with further progress in technologies. Along with it, was the strong sway of empiricism as science with its rationality fought hard with religious dogmas. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) charting out his groundbreaking theories of evolution shook the foundations of theology and people started becoming disillusioned with their faith in religion and leaned more towards scientifically proven facts. During the first decades of the 19th Century, the literary and cultural movement of Romanticism also enjoyed popularity and fostered the free play of 'Imagination'. All these factors propelled the growth of imaginative scientific literature and to a considerable number of genre theorists, it was in this very century that SF as a distinct genre truly emerged. One of the earliest examples of 19th Century SFis Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The novel is often categorized in the genre of Gothic literature, which again was an offshoot of the movement of Romanticismand it conjures up an atmosphere both fantastic and horrific. What is striking however is how within such an apparently Gothic framework (though many critics have rejected it having such a one), Shelley seamlessly employs several narrative tropes and ideas which makes the novel stand out from other classic texts of the genre like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* or Anne Radcliffe's

*The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Instead of evoking horror from the supernatural which was a staple tactic of Gothic fiction, Shelley consciously shifts to science and its misadventure. Scientist Victor Frankenstein, almost a Faustian character, resorts not to occult magic but modern science as he performs an experiment bringing back a dead body to life with electricity. What follows is a tale of metaphysical dread as the fate of the creator and the 'monster' he creates out of a scientific experiment become intertwined inseparably. *Frankenstien,*criticized during its time of appearance as juvenile piece of literature, has since then gradually become a cultural landmark, deeply influencing both practitioners and enthusiasts of the SF genre. So profound has been its impact that critics like Paul Alkon has went as far as stating that ''science fiction starts with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*'' (Alkon 1), while DarkoSuvin has noted that Frankenstein has been fundamental in setting the SF leitmotif of progress becoming 'indissoluble from catastrophe' (Suvin 10). Experimental works like Jean-Bapiste Cousin de Granville's *The Last Man* (1805) dealing with the apocalypse and E.T.A.Hoffmann's short stories "The Automata" (1814) and "The Sandman" (1816) preceded Shelley's novel. Jane Webb's three volume 1827 novel *The Mummy* is another important piece of early SF portraying a future featuring a world with vastly different aesthetics and culture. Major American authors like Edgar Alan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthrone also tried their hands in this new genres with short stories like "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion" and "Rappaccini's Daughter" respectively. Other writers like Samuel Butler, R.L. Stevenson, Mark Twain, Camille Flammarion also produced works bearing affinity with this genre. The two most important figures of 19th C. SF however has been Jules Verne and H.G.Wells whose works spill over to the next century too. Both Verne and Wells were dedicated science fiction writers and their works, which would be discussed in subsequent sections, have been extremely influential in shaping up the future course of SF.

The 20th Century has been the most vital age for the development and proliferation of the genre. In fact, it was in the early decades of the 20th century, that the term 'Science Fiction' entered popular parlance, thanks to writer-publisher Hugo Gernsback. His 1926 English language pulp magazine, *Amazing Stories*, entirely devoted to science fiction, featured the word 'scientifiction' in describing its contents. By 1929, Grensback switched to using the label 'science fiction' (the term was arguably first used by William Wilson, way back in 1851), laying solid foundations for it to develop as a distinctive genre and specifically anthologizing writers such as H.G.Wells, Jules Verne, Edgar Alan Poe. Grensback commented that SF had great didactic potential in it as it can make "the world a better place to live in, through educating the public to the possibilities of science" (Grensback, quoted in Roberts, 54). Grensback's contribution to the genre cannot be overstated

and he has often been hailed as one of the founding fathers of SF. Other magazines following the popularity of *Amazing Stories* such as *Wonder Stories*, *Astounding Stories*, *Astonishing Stories* and *Startling Stories* also helped in cementing the popularity of science fiction among the masses. Chronologically speaking, the next most important figure in the history of Science Fiction has to be John W. Campbell, with whom begins the second phase of the science fiction magazine culture. Campbell took over the role of editor of the magazine *Astounding Stories*in 1937 and renamed it *Astounding Science-Fiction*. What Grensback started and Campbell developed and consolidated was creating a solid fandom of the genre by opening up interactive windows through their magazines amongst fans, writers and critics who could engage in serious discussions of the genre and thus helped usher in what is popularly known to be the 'Golden Age of Science Fiction'ranging from 1938 to 1946 (often the 1939 July issue of *Astounding Stories* is considered to be the starting point). In this 'golden age' there was this noticeable shift within the genre where the focus changed from outlandish technology to the characters using such technology making the narrative texture more intriguing and layered.Many founding principles and tropes like 'three laws of robotics' and 'space opera' were also introduced in this era. Campbell was also extremely influential in shaping up the careers of future science fiction giants Issac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert A. Heinlein, A.E. van Vogt, Jack Williamson, etc, many of whom made their literary debuts under the editorship of Campbell. Infact, both Asimov's hugely impactful short stories, "Runaround" and "Nightfall" were published in the pulps. Also noticeable was the emergence of science fiction films especially during the 1950s. Films like *Destination Moon*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,Forbidden Planet* captured public imagination with their extraordinary spectacles. The 1950s stands culturally significant for it saw publication of works which would gradually turn out to be classics of the genre. Asimov published his *Foundation*series as well as collection *I, Robot* while Heinlein produced *Between Planets*, *The Puppet Master*, *Double Star,Starship Troopers* all in this decade. As we enter into the next decades, more specifically the sixties, the era of New Wave SF begins. This phase saw production of works that put equal emphasis on both form and content and opted for experimentation of the narrative style prioritizing literary quality over hard and accurate scientific facts and becoming more politically conscious. Major exponents during this phase include writers such as Ursula Le Guin (*The Left Hand of Darkness*), J.G. Ballard (*The Wind from Nowhere*) and Philip K. Dick (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*?). As the 80s came there was an escalating growth in cyberculture and as a result a new form of science fiction came to the fore known as cyberpunk. Cyberpunk literature primarily portrayed futuristic societies dominated by high technological advancements, yet somehow

the social order was failing in those worlds. William Gibson *Neuromancer*(1986) was a definitive achievement in the cyberpunk genre helping Science Fiction reach out newer avenues. Other important writes of the phase include Bruce Sterling and Jon Shirley. Established writers like Asimov too changed their styles bridging gaps between their earlier and later works. Variants of cyberpunk literatures like "Steampunk" and "Dieselpunk" also emerged during this era.

Science Fiction currently have diversified significantly incorporating elements from several distinct genres. Concerns about the environment have helped the rise of "Climate Fiction" which deals with climate change often in a post-apocalyptic setting. Subgenres like "New Space Operas", "Generation Ship Fiction" and "New Weird" have emerged too with having strong political consciousness.

In this posthuman era where technology has permeated every aspect of modern daily life, the potential for Science Fiction to explore newer avenues remains unlimited. As a genre having the great power of social commentary on the human condition, it remains a great responsibility for Science Fiction to constantly rise up to the task trying its bit to make the world a better place to live in.

## 1.3.4 H.G. Wells and Jules Verne

The two most distinctive practitioners of the genre of Science Fiction who have had a lasting impact over their predecessors are the French writer Jules Verne and the English novelistH.G. Wells. Their representative key texts have been so supremely influential in firmly establishing and shaping the genre that they are often touted as the founding fathers of the Science Fiction literary genre.

### Jules Verne:

Jules Gabriel Verne (8 February 1828–24 March 1905), more popularly known as Jules Verne debuted into the literary scene around exactly the middle of the 19th century with a comedy play known as *The Broken Straws* (1850). Verne followed this work with adventure short stories like "First Ships of the Mexican Navy" and "A Voyage in a Balloon" and other comic operas. Verne's literary career took a turn as he befriended avid explorer and geographer Jacques Arago who recounted experiences of his far and wide travels to the writer and also the notable publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel who encouraged a meticulously hardworking Verne to develop the rudimentary idea of an adventure novel of him. The collaboration between writer-publisher duo of Verne and Hetzel brought forth the first adventure novel of Verne, *Five Weeks in a Balloon* in 1863. This novel comprises many of the tropes and motifs that would go on to recur in and define the signature style of Verne's

fiction. Set in Africa, the novel's factual data were methodically researched and the narrative was layered by the thrill of exploration and adventure, gaining high popularity with the readers upon its release. Thereafter, Verne would go on to release most of his novels in serialized from in Hetzel's magazine before publishing them in book form later. It was in fact Hetzel who conceptualized the plan of Verne's adventure novel sequence which later came to be known as *Extraordinary Voyages*. This novel sequence would go on to include landmark novels like *Journey to the Center of the Earth*(1864)*, From the Earth to the Moon*(1865), *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*(1869), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872). Individual in their own rights, these novels disclose common traits, the most primary of which is the motif of travel, often quests guided by drive for acquiring scientific knowledge. Verne explored this motif and intelligently catered to the public demand of stories of explorations of the mysterious places of this planet which by the time Verne was writing had already been mostly discovered.

Verne's novels, in closer scrutiny, have often been criticized by some as not being true Science Fiction at all. It has been argued that the facts Verne provided are often scientifically fallacious and the speculations he made hardly came closer to the truth in the future. The literary genius of Verne however is too solid to be refuted by such claims. What is most important, as Adam Roberts has so cogently put, is that Verne's works "consolidated a particular sort of technology fiction as being core to SF as a genre: a story not only premised on one or other technological artefact…but a story that *enframes*the world in a certain way" (Roberts, 130). This enframingof the world, according to Roberts is the secret behind Verne's long lasting popularity and appeal, a world which is"global, capable, mobile and yet grounded at all points in comforting bourgeois social and cultural certainties" (Roberts, 130).

## H. G. Wells

Herbert George Wells (21 September 1866–13 August 1946) was a prolific man of letters who wrote novels, short stories, social satires, historical accounts, biographies, etc. but it is mainly his works of Science Fiction upon which his enduring legacy rests. Interestingly, in just a ten year span from 1895 to 1905, Wells produced almost all his science fiction masterpieces as gradually he veered towards other forms of writing in the later part of his literary career. His first novel,*The Time Machine*, published in 1895, shows the extraordinary inventiveness of the author masterly conceptualizing the notion of time travel, so central a motif in Science Fiction. In fact, the term "time machine" owes its popularity to Wells. The protagonist of the story, an unnamed time traveler, voyages through time by the help of his invention and in the process experiences the human race at different

eras, mostly of the future, existing in forms and conditions far removed from the present time. This gives Wells a chance of scrutinizing his contemporary class-divided British society while pitting it against fantastical and futuristic worlds. Wells's subsequent novels *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) narrating how a vivisectionist tries to play god by inter-species breeding in a remote island and *The Invisible Man* (1897) showing how a megalomaniac scientist becomes invisible and try to upset the social order, also embody his brilliance as a socially aware science fiction writer providing beautiful mélange of scientific theory and serious philosophy. Wells's next major novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898) remains another landmark in Science Fiction history introducing popular themes of alien invasion, space travel, total war and others. The invasion of the extra-terrestrial and evolved Martians upon the world has often been analyzed in terms of imperialism and therefore a direct critique of British colonial project. Other notable works of Wells in this genre include*When the Sleeper Awakes* (1899), *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) *The Food of the Gods and How it came to Earth* (1904), *The War in the Air* (1908), *Men Like Gods* (1923).

What makes Wells a giant in the field of Science Fiction is not just the astonishing prescience of his works but also their distinct social awareness and the spirit of incisive query about the human condition, factors which are often considered to be hallmarks of great literature. An individual born and bred up in a lower middle class British household and having a strongly socialist outlook, Wells was aware of the evils permeating human society and his works mostly prove to be rich social commentaries. The genius of Wells lay in the fact that barring one or two works, most of his settings are very recognizable and thus when bizarre occurrences take place in such known landscapes, the effect of awe on the readers get intensified. Wells is also supremely important for bringing to the genre of science fiction many tropes and motifs which would gradually become fundamental to the genre. Rightly does Patrick Parrinder note about Wells that he is "the pivotal figurein the evolution of scientific romance into modern science fiction. His examplehas done as much to shape SF as any other single literary influence' (Parrinder,*Science Fiction*, p. 10).

## 1.3.5 Isaac Asimov

One of the greatest literary figures in 20th century Science Fiction has to be Issac Asimov, a biochemistry professor and a prolific writer having a literary oeuvre almost unmatched by any other writer belonging to the genre. An avid science fiction enthusiast, Asimov made his literary debut writing a short story "Marooned Off

Vesta" in the magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1938. He spent some time in the arena of pulp magazines writing mostly short stories ("Nightfall" and "Runaround" are notable mentions) and being associated with the magazine Astounding Stories which ran under the able editorship of another giant of Science Fiction, John W. Campbell, who in turn was greatly influential in shaping Asimov's career. Asimov's first novel *Pebbles in the Sky,* came out years later in 1950. The same year saw a collection of science fiction essays and short stories titled *I, Robot* by him in which he established the "Three laws of Robotics", a premise which has become fundamental for future writers working in the genre. In the next year was published what is considered as one of the cornerstones of his career, the novel *Foundation*. The novel would go on to later be a part of first a trilogy and then an entire series. This first *Foundation* novel was a collection of five interconnected short stories (most of which were already published earlier in the magazines) about the fall of a galactic empire and the titular institute's attempt to preserve the ruins of the civilization. Other *Foundation* novels were published subsequently titled *Foundation and Empire* (1952),*Second Foundation* (1953) *Foundation's Edge* (1982), *Foundation and Earth*, (1986), etc. (the first original three forming the trilogy which won the Hugo Award in 1966 for being the best science fiction trilogy of all time). Asimov's *Robot* series featuring positronic robots also expanded and gradually came to include more than 30 short stories and 5 novels including *The Caves of Steel* (1954), *The Naked Sun* (1957), *The Robots of Dawn* (1983), *Robots and Empire* (1985).

Asimov's works belong to the category of hard science fiction which prioritizes the accuracy of scientific facts in the narratives. He along with Arthur C, Clarke and Philip K. Dick are often considered to be the "holy trinity" of hard science fiction who were pivotal in establishing science fiction firmly as a serious literary genre, Asimov literary body which comprises a staggering 40 novels and more than 380 short stories apart from numerous non-fiction books is a testament to both the genius and prolificacy of this master story teller, a man who has had and will be having unfathomable influence upon the future practitioners of the genre of Science Fiction.

## 1.3.6 Summing Up

Science fiction has always focused on possibilities and also questioned the idea of the human. Luminaries such as those mentioned, and other giants like Arthur C. Clarke, had not only spoken about space travel and discoveries, but they have looked deep into philosophical dilemmas and questioned the very nature of morality. Science fiction is not limited to any one culture or language, but it has

been found in many spaces and in many forms. Although it is often bracketed within the popular, science fiction can occasionally go beyond and be a part of the canonical and the highbrow cultural zone.

## 1.3.7 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Briefly write about the origin and development of the genre with reference to the 19th century.
  2. Write a short essay about the fathers of Science Fiction?
  3. What impact did Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* have on the genre of Science Fiction?
- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What contribution did H.G.Wells make to the genre of Science Fiction?
  2. Write a short note on Issac Asimov's concept of "three laws of robotics".
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What is science fiction?
  2, What are the basic features of Science Fiction?
  3. Write a note on the Golden Age of Science Fiction.

## 1.3.8 Suggested Reading

Asimov, I. *I, Robot*. New York, Harper Voyager, 2005.

Latham, R. Ed. *Science Fiction Criticism*. London, Bloomsbury, 2017.

Roberts, A. *Science Fiction*. New York, Routledge, 2002.

Seed, D.*Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

Wells, H. G.*The Time Machine and Other Works*. Ware, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth, 2017.

Wells, H.G.*The War of the Worlds*. New York, Dover Publications, 1997.

# Unit-4 □ Pulp Fiction

*Structure*



## 1.4.1Objectives

This unit aims to introduce you to the genre of pulp fiction, and the idea of what the genre entails. It will attempt to focus on the history of pulp fiction, contextualizing its development through time, primarily in the United States and deal with the characteristic features of the same. It will also seek to introduce you to the primary examples in the genre, and seek an understanding of the development of the same in India. After the completion of this unit, you will be able to:

a) Understand the scope and definition of the term 'pulp fiction'.
b) Understand the development of pulp fiction, primarily in the United States contextualized in history, both literary and social.
c) Understand the location in its history of some of the prime exponents of the genre.
d) Observe and understand the character of pulp fiction in general.
e) Locate its historical development in India.
f) Understand the comparative reading, the different strands of the development of pulp fiction both in India and the West, primarily in the United States.

## 1.4.2 Introduction to Pulp Fiction

The term "pulp fiction literature" describes a category of early 20th-century mass-produced, low-cost novels and magazines. These magazines got their name

because they were printed on cheap, subpar paper made of wood pulp. The tales were frequently offered for sale at newsstands and pharmacies because they were intended to be economical and available to readers from the working class. When "pulp fiction" was first coined in the late 1800s, it was used to refer to a particular category of magazine. These periodicals, sometimes known as "penny dreadfuls," were stuffed with exciting tales meant to frighten and thrill readers. In addition to science fiction and horror, they frequently included graphic stories of crime, adventure, and romance. *The Encyclopaedia of Pulp Fiction Writers: The Essential Guide to More than 200 Pulp Pioneers and Mass-Market Masters by Lee Server* (2002) notes that the term Pulp literature is

> … used to describe a mere physical characteristic of the periodicals of the 1880s to 1950s whose pages were made from the cheapest grade of pulpwood paper, the word came to have an expanded meaning both categoric and aesthetic: pulp as a genus of imaginative reading matter distinguished by mass production, affordability, an intended audience of common as opposed to elite readers, a dependence on formula and genre; and pulp as a literature aimed at the pleasure centres of the reader, primarily concerned with sensation and escape, variously intended to excite, astonish, or arouse.

J.A. Cuddon in the *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1976) defines it as follows:

'Pulp' is a pejorative term for certain t kinds of fiction (and its authors). Pulp magazines began to appear during the First World War or earlier and got their name from the fact that they were printed on wood pulp, which gave the content a coarse, grainy appearance. They were about 7 x 10 inches in size, had gaudy covers and comprised about 120 pages. They published short stories and occasional extracts from novels. During the 1920s they became extremely popular (there were well over 200 in existence), and they remained popular in the 1930s. Eventually, television brought about their demise.

As the product of the American publishing industry in the early 20th century, which was looking for new ways to reach a wider audience,the pulps were cheap, disposable entertainment that was accessible to anyone with a few cents to spare. They offered tales of adventure, romance, and crime that were designed to transport the reader to a different world.

Pulp fiction publications frequently employed formulaic, well-known plots in their works. They have basic prose, lots of action, and were created to be quick and simple to read. Since many of the stories were serialised, readers would need to purchase numerous issues to read the whole thing. After World War II, pulp fiction's appeal waned as readers shifted their attention to other media, such television, and

comic books. However, many contemporary genres, such as crime fiction, science fiction, and horror, continue to draw inspiration from pulp fiction.

Pulp literature also featured comic books, which were frequently produced on the same subpar paper as pulp periodicals, in addition to novels and magazines. Comic books, which told tales of superheroes, cowboys, and other eccentric characters, had a big influence on popular culture in the middle of the 20th century. In general, early 20th-century popular culture was greatly influenced by pulp fiction literature. Although the stories were straightforward and conventional, readers were engrossed by their exciting adventures and action-packed narratives. Numerous books, films, and television programmes still today continue to be inspired by the rich history of pulp fiction, carrying on the genre's legacy.

## 1.4.3 Historiography of Pulp Fiction

The birth of the pulps can be traced back to the 1890s, when cheap magazines and newspapers began to emerge. These publications were aimed at the working class, and they featured stories that were designed to be quick and easy to read. Many of these publications were sensationalist, featuring lurid stories of crime, sex, and scandal.In the early 1900s, publishers began to experiment with new formats that would make it easier to produce cheap, mass-produced fiction. One of the most successful formats was the pulp magazine, which was printed on cheap, low-quality paper made from wood pulp.Pulp magazines were typically eight to ten inches tall, and they featured colourful, eye-catching covers that were designed to attract readers. The stories inside were usually serialized, meaning that readers would have to buy multiple issues to follow the entire story.Pulp as it is described above came about because of the new ideas and hard work of the 19th century. Before that, there weren't many ways to write popular fiction that was truly popular, as it was not many people could read. Printing took a long time and cost a lot of money, and only a small number of people could read them. All of that started to change in the 1800s. Reading and writing became easier for the "common people" when schools got better, and everyone was required to learn how to read and write. The mass production of books, newspapers, and magazines was made possible by the invention of the rotating steam press and other useful new tools for binding, setting type, and making paper. The growth of mail services and railroads made it possible for them to be sent quickly and cheaply. Under these conditions, publishing could now attract a new type of industry entrepreneur who wants to take advantage of a market that was previously unknown or untapped: the millions of people who just learned to read. Publishers sold the first mass-produced fiction in new, efficient

forms that looked like newspapers or paper booklets and cost one penny, which was cheap enough for almost everyone.Most of these magazines focused on escape and sensationalism because they were made to make money and were thought to appeal to the low tastes of the masses. The story weeklies and what were called "penny dreadfuls" in England were followed in the 1860s by the dime novels, which were almost all about dramatization, horror, crime, and lechery. The "dreadfuls" wrote stories like *Varney the Vampire*(1845), which was a bloody story about a cruel immortal, and *Sweeney Todd (the Demon Barber)*(1846-47), which was a story about serial murder and cannibalism. On both sides of the Atlantic, stories about nice crooks like Dick Turpin and Spring-Heeled Jack made them into folk heroes. Even though the new fiction magazines could print sweet and religious stories, the goal of the popular press was to make money, and advertisers thought that a steady stream of thrills was the best way to make that happen. In order to keep selling a lot of copies every week, the popular press gave readers a mix of the old and the new. The old included repeating plots and dramatic situations that had worked well before, and the new included genres that were changing, like science fiction and detective stories, and stories that were taken from real life, like melodramatic stories about slum girls or Wild West adventures. Popular fiction mags made it necessary for a new kind of writer, called a "hack," to come along. Industry came before art, and schedules, reliability, and a steady result were the most important things. This meant finding not artists who only made things when the spirit moved them, but driven makers who could make things on demand. Unknown hires were paid as little as possible and worked in secret; they were given house pseudonyms to keep them from becoming famous and getting a pay rise as a result. On the other hand, even the famous names of world-class popular fiction writers like Alexandre Dumas and Charles Dickens had worth not because of their individual skills but because of their successful brands. Some people in the printing business didn't think twice about putting the author's name on something that was written by an anonymous hack. Even though the publishers didn't like them, readers created new literary stars like Joseph Holt Ingraham, who wrote the popular melodrama *Fanny H*. or *The Hunchback and the Roue*(1843) (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow called it the worst novel ever written by anyone); Ned Buntline, who wrote about and greatly exaggerated the life of a frontier hunter named William Frederick Cody, also known as "Buffalo Bill"; and Horatio Alger Jr

In 1882, Frank Munsey started a cheap fantasy magazine for kids called *The Golden Argosy*, and this was the first time the pulp magazine was seen. The magazine changed into Argosy, a thick, nearly 200-page magazine for adults that was all fiction. It was originally a weekly publication that featured a mix of fiction and non-fiction articles. It had about 135,000 words of fiction and a little poem,

all written in ugly blocks of black type on the cheapest paper available. The huge package with a tonne of material was a big hit. However, in 1904, it switched to an all-fiction format, which proved to be hugely successful. The magazine's circulation grew rapidly, and soon, other publishers began to imitate its format. Munsey then came out with another magazine called *All-Story*. Soon, *Street & Smith*, which was known for its collection of cheap novels, copied the style with its Popular Magazine. There were also entries from other companies and trashy magazines. When Edgar Rice Burroughs and Max Brand started writing for pulp magazines, they became very famous very quickly. This made the pulp industry make more money than anyone could have imagined.At the same time that pulp magazines were being made and getting better, the book printing business was also changing. Popular mainstream fiction during the Victorian era was mostly made up of slow-moving, three-volume novels about domestic life. However, this changed when younger writers like Robert Louis Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, Arthur Conan Doyle, and H. G. Wells started writing innovative, single-volume, fast-moving books *like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*(1886), *She*(1886), *The Hound of the Baskervilles*(1902), and *The Invisible Man*(1897). Their work, along with that of Jack London, Bram Stoker, Baroness Orczy, Owen Wister, Zane Grey, and others from the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras, was a sign of the explosion of pulp and popular writing that was to come.

In the 1910s and 1920s, pulp magazines became increasingly popular, as publishers realized that there was a huge market for cheap, disposable fiction. The general fiction pulps were soon joined by crime, western, romance, adventure, and fantasy-focused magazines. Eventually, during the 1930s "try anything" boom years, readers could find pulps about spies, World War I flying aces, FBI agents, famous trials, sex, Foreign Legionnaires, weird threats, zeppelins, and the unique adventures of super heroes like Doc Savage, the Shadow, G-8, Operator #5, the Spider, and Terence X. O'Leary. Because of their high quality and new ideas, some pulp magazines became famous and even mythical. Hugo's low-end "lending libraries" (areas of drug stores and other companies where you can rent books for a few pennies a day) had genre novels and, in some cases, what was considered erotica at the time.You can see how the pulps affected popular culture in general by looking at the careers of former pulp writers who went on to work in movies (as writers and, in the cases of Richard Sale, Frank Gruber, and others, as producers and directors), the quickly growing comic book industry, radio, and TV.

The 1920s and 1930s saw a rise in the popularity of the pulp fiction subgenre because to the appearance of pulp publications like *Black Mask*, *Amazing Stories*, and *Weird Tales*. Some of the most well-known authors of the day, such as Dashiell

Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and H.P. Lovecraft, had stories published in these journals, which were frequently sold for just a few cents. The "Doc Savage" series, which Lester Dent wrote under the pseudonym Kenneth Robeson, is among the most well-known examples of pulp fiction literature. In the series, a brave explorer by the name of Doc Savage travelled the globe battling crime and unravelling mysteries. The 1930s and 1940s saw enormous popularity for the stories, and the figure has subsequently gained notoriety as a cultural icon. The Edgar Rice Burroughs "Tarzan" series is another well-known example of pulp literature. Numerous books, films, and television series were based on the experiences of a guy raised by apes in the African bush.

One of the most successful pulp magazines, as noted before was *Black Mask*, which was published by Pro-Distributors Publishing Company. It was launched in 1920, and it quickly became known for its hardboiled detective stories. Many of the stories featured tough, cynical detectives who were unafraid to bend the law in pursuit of justice. The magazine's most famous writer was Dashiell Hammett, who wrote some of his most famous stories for *Black Mask*, including *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). Another popular pulp magazine was *Amazing Stories*, which was launched in 1926 by Hugo Gernsback. It was the first magazine to focus exclusively on science fiction, and it helped to popularize the genre. Some of the most famous science fiction writers of the era got their start in *Amazing Stories*, including Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury.

The paperback books that came out in the late 1930s, were cheap and easy to carry around. This was the start of another change in pulp fiction. These paperbacks were sold in the same places as the pulp magazines, and most of the same people bought them because they had violent and sexually explicit stories on the covers and inside. Pulp magazines would lose their place on the newsstands to paperbacks, which would put them out of business. At first, almost all books with soft covers were copies of books with hard covers.The pulp era began to decline in the 1930s and 1940s, as the advent of radio and movies began to draw readers away from print fiction. However, the pulps continued to be popular with a core audience of devoted fans. Some of the most successful magazines of the era included *The Shadow*, which featured stories of a mysterious vigilante, and *Weird Tales*, which featured horror and fantasy stories. The decline of the pulp era was hastened by the outbreak of World War II, which caused paper shortages and forced many publishers to shut down. However, the legacy of the pulps can still be seen in modern genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and detective fiction. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the pulps, as collectors and fans seek out vintage copies of the magazines.

In 1950, Fawcett, a New York publisher, started to make original paperback fiction by ordering new works instead of copies. Fawcett used well-known names from the pulps and commercial fiction circles, like Cornell Woolrich and Sax Rohmer, as well as a lot of new young talent, like Vin Packer and David Goodis. This helped the old fans of pulp magazines and a new generation of readers who wanted something stronger than the old magazines. Fawcett's Gold Medal line of original hardback books was a huge hit. Many other companies started putting out softcover versions of the same kinds of shocking originals. Pulp fiction changed into a new style that was gritty, real, and often sexual, with an iconoclastic desire to explore the controversial and taboo. In the paperbacks, shocking topics like drug addiction, youth delinquency, racism, and homosexuality led to the creation of new genres. The work of paperback pros like Jim Thompson and Charles Willeford gave reading to escape a weird, cynical edge. There were a lot of small softcover companies in Great Britain that put out tough, fake American private eye stories and erotic fiction. The different "noir" versions in France, the "yellow-backs" or "giallos" in Italy, and similar books in other countries around the world showed that there was a growing trend and that the pulp fiction style was popular around the world. Pulp fiction would keep changing itself and it would adapt to changes in society and the market. In the 1960s, when literary censorship started to fall apart, erotic fiction paperbacks became the mainstay of many small softcover companies. At first, these books were vague and used euphemisms, but as that decade went on, they became more direct. At the same time, the growing cultural power of African Americans affected the work of Holloway House, a Los Angeles-based publisher that came to focus on brutally realistic novels about inner-city crime and vice, as told by authors like Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines. In the 1970s and 1980s, literary critics said that the novel was dead and that there was a "new illiteracy." However, pulp paperbacks kept finding ways to reach non-traditional readers that "respectable" hardback presses didn't care about. Working-class American men were loyal readers of Don Pendleton's violent anti-Mafia series, *The Executioner*. In Britain, shocking events like the largely violent and racist skinhead movement were almost exclusively written about in cheap, sensationalist paperbacks. More recent paperback lines of hard-boiled fiction have been aimed at hip-hop fans in the U.S. and Afro-Caribbean immigrant communities in the U.K. Publishers like Cleis Press have printed both new and old "lesbian pulp fiction" for a specific audience. Even though most pulp fiction has a bad reputation for being unrealistic and lurid, its societal importance has been underrated. Hard-boiled crime fiction, far more than the popular drawing-room mysteries, showed the brutal realities of modern crime and what life was like in gangland during Prohibition and on the mean streets during the Great Depression. Science fiction used to be about monsters with bug-

like eyes, but as it grew up, it moved past that time and started to think about the future of people and technology in a way that was both thought-provoking and often right. The sex pulps wrote about a subject that was both exciting and scary in a way that mainstream magazines and publishers didn't dare to do for decades. Most of the well-known hardcover authors of the time didn't deal with the post-war psychological states of separation and angst as well as Jim Thompson and David Goodis did in their noir fiction. Pulp fiction has often closely mirrored the hopes and dreams, ideals and prejudices, taboos and sexual fantasies of the society it was written for. It wasn't sold in fancy bookstores, but in places like drug stores, cigar shops, and bus stations. The pulp writer's wild ideas about everything from television to world war, from space travel to terrorist attacks on the United States, have turned out to be glimpses of the future. This book tries to show how pulp fiction has changed over more than a century by giving descriptions of more than 200 writers, both good and bad, and sometimes even worse, from some of the first pulp writers in the 19th century to people who still write pulp today.

## 1.4.4 Indian Pulp Fiction: A Brief History

Pulp Literature in India first appeared in the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century. It is distinguished by its broad appeal, low production standards, and emphasis on sensationalist tales, which often incorporate themes of crime, romance, adventure, and suspense. These tales were first distributed in pulp magazines, which were sold cheaply to a sizable, primarily working-class readership and printed on cheap paper with obscene cover art and provocative titles.

The British Raj placed limitations on the import of foreign literature, especially pulp publications from the United States, in the early 1940s. This is when Indian pulp fiction first appeared. As a result, there was a gap in the market that was swiftly filled by Indian publishers who started making their own pulp publications. The general public loved these periodicals because they offered a cheap and convenient form of entertainment. The Hindi-language *Chandamama* and the English-language *Indian Detective and Mystery Magazine* were the most widely read of these publications. With a focus on crime and mystery, the stories in these journals were greatly influenced by American pulp fiction of the era and frequently adapted from works that had been first released there.

The prolific writer Ved Prakash Sharma, who produced over 170 books in Hindi, many of which were printed in pulp magazines, was one of the genre's most important contributors. The fast-paced action, oversized characters, and almost cinematic quality of Sharma's books earned them a cult following among readers.

*The Man with the Coat*, his most well-known book, sold over 1.5 million copies and was made into a well-liked Hindi movie.Surender Mohan Pathak, who is frequently referred to as the "King of Indian Pulp Fiction," was another significant author in the genre. The majority of Pathak's novels were crime and mystery fiction with hard-boiled detectives, femme fatales, and sophisticated plots with unanticipated turns. The protagonist of his most well-known series was the private eye Vimal, who developed a cult following among readers.

The ability of Indian pulp literature to capture the social and political climate of the moment was one of its distinctive features. In the middle of the 20th century, corruption, poverty, and violence were pervasive in Indian society, and these topics were addressed in a number of the stories. Additionally, the genre gave women and writers from underrepresented groups who might not have otherwise had the chance to submit their work to publications in the mainstream a platform.Despite being widely read, Indian pulp literature has received criticism for having simplistic and formulaic stories as well as a propensity for using clichés and stereotypes. The lack of intellectual merit of the genre, which has caused it to be marginalised in the greater literary canon, has also been brought out by critics. Others contend, however, that the genre contributed significantly to the growth of popular literature in India and gave a wide segment of the population a much-needed source of pleasure.

In recentyears, both domestically and abroad, there has been a resurgence of interest in Indian pulp literature. This has caused the genre's importance to be re-examined and its contribution to Indian popular culture to be acknowledged. A number of publishers have also started to reprint vintage pulp novels and magazines so that a new generation of readers can access them. Indian Pulp Literature constitutes a distinctive and significant period in Indian literature history. Despite its flaws, it gave writers a place to share their work and offered a type of entertainment that a large audience could access and purchase. Popular Hindi films and television shows that continue to use the themes and tropes of the genre are living examples of its heritage.

## 1.4.5 Pulp Fiction–Select Examples

### Samuel Dashiell Hammett (1894–1961)

Dashiell Hammett created five novels and a string of short tales throughout the course of a single, unusual 10-year creative phase (followed, also extraordinarily, by 30 years of writer's block). These works are still considered to be among the

pinnacles of American genre literature. In addition to being the founding father of hard-boiled crime fiction, Hammett is also possibly its most important literary stylist. He is the author of *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), *Red Harvest*(1929), and *The Thin Man*(1934). Detective fiction was a rather bloodless genre before Hammett, more of a literary game for the parlour. Hammett altered everything. Hammett introduced the real world into the mystery genre with his hard, precise language and believable-appearing crime solvers—instead of brainy, quirky aristocrats, as was typical. Samuel Dashiell Hammett, who was mostly self-educated, was born on May 27, 1894, in St. Mary's County, Maryland. At the age of 20, he responded to a job posting in a Baltimore newspaper and joined Pinkerton's National Detective Service. For the following many years, he travelled the nation on a variety of tasks as an armed Pinkerton, from violent strikebreaking jobs to cases involving missing persons and "wandering husbands." His investigative career was put on hold by World War I, and it was while he was serving in the military that Hammett received a TB diagnosis. He sought to realise a long-held dream of becoming a writer in San Francisco after receiving extensive, but fruitless, therapy in military hospitals. After some failed attempts at Southeast Asian melodrama and literary vignettes, Hammett rapidly realised the importance of his vivid Pinkerton experience as a prospective topic. Hammett discovered a sympathetic audience for his work in *Black Mask*, a pulp publication that at the time included mystery, detective, and cowboy fiction. It was here that he also developed the unique method and style that would forever alter the landscape of American mystery writing. His recurring lead character and narrator, an anonymous member of the Continental Detective Agency (or "The Continental Op," as the magazine would have him referred to), was a city professional who was tough, street-smart, and familiar with both sides of the law. In contrast to the other mystery authors that contributed to the *Black Mask*, Hammett, a former Pinkerton, was knowledgeable about the actual methods of crime and detection. His stories were vivid, filled with car chases, shootouts, and gorgeous ladies to keep the thrill-seeking reader entertained, but the overall impression was realistic, not fantastical. The freezingly cold, understated, and devoid of overt emotion phrases and dialogue of Hammett's unique prose had the ring of truth. This was how actual criminals communicated and how a true investigator carried out his duties. *Black Mask* began serially publishing Hammett's first novel-length piece in 1927, a novella titled *The Cleansing of Poisonville* that depicts the story of a Montana mining town entirely controlled by criminals and the Op's attempt to eliminate them by setting one rival gang against another. It is both a gangster epic and a detective mystery. In its original serial form, the book features 26 murders and some of the most concise and lucid prose in the canon of American literature. The book version of the work, titled *Red Harvest*, was

released by Alfred A. Knopf in 1929. Three additional Hammett books would be published by *Black Mask* over the course of the following three years: *The Dain Curse*, *The Glass Key* (another ground-breaking book that explored mob meddling in big city politics), and *The Maltese Falcon*. *The Thin Man*, Hammett's fifth and final book, was released in 1934. It was the ultimate hard-boiled detective caper and featured the private eye Sam Spade and a dazzling opposition—lush femme fatale Brigid O'Shaughnessy and the homosexual troika of rotund Casper Gutman, gunsel Wilmer, and perfumed Levantine Joel Cairo—in their ultimately fruitless pursuit of "the black bird." This was the well-known story that introduced Nick and Nora Charles, who were modelled after real-life lovers Lillian Hellman (1905–1984) and Hammett, who had a lively, competitive relationship. Nick, a former investigator who is now content to live off the money of his devoted wife Nora, is persuaded to re-join the fray during a drunken holiday vacation to New York by an old friend who has a missing relative. *The Thin Man* is frequently criticised by hard-boiled fans for having a lighter, more frivolous tone than Hammett's other works, but it is actually every bit as good and unique as any of the other books, with tough, smart prose, precisely etched characters, vivid settings (high-life and low-life Manhattan at the end of Prohibition), along with brilliant and, in this case, occasionally hilarious dialogue. Following MGM's purchase of Hammett's book, five sequels were made with William Powell and Myrna Loy as the iconic Nick and Nora. *The Thin Man* is a very influential movie that is as enjoyable as the book. It helped start the "screwball comedy" genre, which featured quarrelling, witty love duos and made the idea of a hot married couple plausible. The 1941 movie adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon*, which was actually the third in ten years and was written and directed by John Huston with Humphrey Bogart playing Sam Spade, may have had even more of an impact on Hollywood history. A mystery as hard-boiled as any gangster movie, this fierce private eye thriller's critical and commercial success would usher in the period of dark, risky crime pictures that would come to be known as film noir. By this time, Hammett himself had stepped aside, unable or unwilling to write another book after 1933. He mostly wasted away his life on cinema money, royalties, and subsequently on Lillian Hellman's generosity. He managed to serve a stint in the army during World War II while stationed in the chilly Aleutian Islands despite being 47 years old and suffering from tuberculosis. He was forced into a five-month federal prison term for contempt of court in the early 1950s because he had been a Marxist and political activist at one point. He passed away in 1961, broke and with none of his books available in his own country. He is an artist and innovator who endures as one of popular fiction's immortals.

## ● Raymond Chandler (1888-1959)

In 1933, Raymond Chandler, a 45-year-old unsuccessful poet, had just been let go from his position as manager of a minor oil firm in California. At the height of the Great Depression, Chandler was left without a plan. He was neither the successful businessman he had always hoped to be nor the artist he had once imagined himself to be. He started paying more attention to the detective pulps he frequently read in his leisure time in an effort to channel his dormant aptitude for writing into something more useful than romantic poetry. Weekly and monthly publications with obscene covers, typically depicting a colour rendering of a half-clad girl or an act of violence, and contents filled with more of the same, the pulps were known and despised in high-minded circles as cheap, sensationalistic, and poorly written reading material intended for the working classes. Despite being a member of the literary elite himself, Chandler discovered that the pulps could not be completely discounted. He learned about the distinguishing features in one of his favourite pulp magazines, the Joseph T. Shaw-edited detective and crime pulp *Black Mask*. Chandler had been delighted and startled to discover glimmerings of quality and true flair in the magazine's harsh private eye escapades month after month. He was also undoubtedly aware that Dashiell Hammett, a magazine graduate, had gone on to become a well-known and well-respected hardback author. However, when Chandler started writing his own detective novel that he hoped would appear in the pages of *Black Mask*, he had no regard for fame or success. He was trying to figure out how to pay his bills. But unless you could generate reams of sellable pages, trying to make a lot of money in the pulps was a fool's errand. The usual churn-'em-out pulp pro had little in common with Chandler from the start. It took him five months to complete his first story; during his career, Chandler never sold more than five stories in a calendar year. However, that piece—a private detective novelette titled "Blackmailers Don't Shoot"—did get picked up by *Black Mask*. A new profession emerged. More stories were written by Chandler as he laboured over each word and created a prose style that was commensurately gritty and easy to read, yet fine-grained, balanced, attentive to poetic ideals and linguistic nuances, and, as he continued to publish, increasingly cloaked in a gloom of rueful romanticism and bitter wit. By 1939, Chandler was prepared to extend the story of his private eye protagonist, and he sold Dashiell Hammett's own New York publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, the rights to his book *The Big Sleep*. A dying wealthy man with two disobedient children hires Philip Marlowe, a private investigator with a base in Hollywood, to do the job. Murder, nymphomaniacs, and a pornographic ring are all involved in the case. It was abrasive, quick, seductive, funny, and poetic. In order to perfect his fusion of the lyrical and the hard-boiled, Chandler was well on

his way. It appeared that the budding poet would have to wait until middle age, experience, and the wearying toll of life's setbacks before finding his literary voice. *Farewell, My Lovely*(1940), an even more complicated and spectacular effort, came after *The Big Sleep*. Only *The Long Goodbye*(1953) was on par with or superior to the first two Marlowe novels, but Chandler would go on to produce another five Marlowe novels, each an exceptional work. Chandler's book sales were small in the 1940s despite the praise he received from critics, and he felt compelled to accept lucrative screenwriting gigs from Hollywood studios when they became available. He co-wrote the screenplay for Billy Wilder's adaptation of James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity*. The movie was a much better adaptation of Cain's novella and one of the top three or four film noirs ever created. *The Blue Dahlia*, starring Alan Ladd and Veronica Lake, was written by Chandler when he was still working for Paramount Pictures. It was a classic film noir, soaked in post-war cynicism and characteristic crackling Chandler banter, though not quite in the same league as Double Indemnity. As an intelligent and self-conscious author of pop fiction, Chandler was possibly the first successful pulp graduate to write sophisticatedly about the genre as well as the significance and worth of the Hammett-Black Mask school's hard-boiled literature. From the 1940s on, in print and on screen, untold numbers of readers would be influenced by Chandler's distinctive, simile-filled prose, his ruefully cynical perspective on human nature, his poetic and vivid response to landscape, and his concept of the private eye as a knight errant in a depressing, corrupt world. Despite all the imitations, Chandler's timeless and shimmering work continues to be in a class by itself. His creations became stereotypes and encouraged other people's clichés.

## ● James M. Cain (1892-1977)

Cain, who was born in Annapolis, Maryland, initially imagined pursuing a quite different artistic endeavour. Since his educator father had dabbled in opera before him, young Jimmy longed to be an opera singer. Opera would continue to be Cain's great interest, and as a novelist, he would incorporate the subject into several of his works, with some peculiar results. However, Cain lacked the natural vocal equipment for the job and gave it up. In the spring of 1917, following a brief stint as a teacher, he accepted a job as a reporter at the *Baltimore American*. He had started to consider a writing profession while still in college. He would work as a journalist for the following 14 years, with only his service as a soldier in World War I (he saw action in the battle of the Meuse-Argonne in France) as an interruption. He afterwards transferred to the Baltimore Sun, where he established himself as a reporter and author. The literary star of the town, H. L. Mencken, became his buddy and acted as a mentor in some ways. Cain later had editorial

roles in New York and rose to prominence in the journalistic community. He was a student of the great newsman Walter Lippmann and served for a brief while as managing editor of *The New Yorker*, a newly launched magazine. Cain was a huge hit before his first book was published, unlike the ne'er-do-wells Hammett and Chandler, who fell into writing through the back door of the pulp magazines. His attempts to compose plays and novels in New York had all failed, and he was dissatisfied with his journalism employment. He believed that he needed a new beginning and, with the aid of an agent, was able to land a scripting deal with Paramount Pictures in Hollywood. The movie industry did not seem to be Cain's true calling, but the new surroundings and a group of new screenwriter friends, including Vincent Lawrence and Samson Raphaelson, inspired Cain to create a novel. He saw a vision of a man being killed by a gentleman and a woman who ran a petrol station. He remembered the Ruth Snyder-Judd Grey case, which was the subject of a tabloid sensation in which a corset salesman and a married woman killed the latter's husband before eventually turning on one another. "That fits the idea I've had for just such a story," Cain said to a fellow writer. "A couple of jerks discover that a murder, though dreadful enough morally, can be a love story too. But then they wake up to find that once they've pulled the trick off, no two people can share this terrible secret and live on the same earth." Like Ruth and Judd, they turn against one another. Cain began to write. Lippmann, Lawrence, and other people helped Cain along the way, and eventually he had something positive. He was using the term "bar-b-que." Alfred A. Knopf, the publisher, didn't like it. Before Vincent Lawrence came through again, Cain fumbled around for another book, considering *The Black Puma* and *The Devil's Chequebook*. He described a time when he had to wait all day for a crucial letter to arrive in the mail. When the postman came to the door, Lawrence could tell because "the son of a bitch always rang twice," he added. Wasn't the postman knocking or ringing twice before leaving an old English custom or something?" Cain wondered. The memorably delayed retribution meted out to his murderous characters recalled something from the book. *The Postman Always Rings Twice*(1934) was Cain's moniker. And he had a tale. The owners of a roadside petrol station and cafe, an ugly Greek man, and his attractive wife, are interrupted by a bum. The wife and the bum end up having a sexual relationship. They chose to assassinate the husband. They fail on their first attempt but succeed on their second. The murdering couple's relationship deteriorates, then rekindles, but ironic justice eventually catches up with them both. Cain rose to fame after the book became a success. They hurled me from the hay truck at midday," the novel's oft-quoted opening line, hooked readers with a harsh, filthy, and compulsively readable readability. The book was "like a ride on a rollercoaster," and the copywriters did not exaggerate this time. The first-

person narration, the voice of a not-too-smart vagabond, an everyman's loser, and a basic yet supercharged rendering of events tore through the polite, aloof layers of literature with "the speed, violence, and energy of dynamite." Despite being filled with an indescribable lingering romance and poetry, the book read with the clarity and immediacy of a tabloid front-page story. Cain had added a vital new component, passion, to some of the realistic effects and hard-boiled style created in the pulps—as well as in the tabloids, in the work of Ernest Hemingway and Ring Lardner. The hellcat Cora and the vagrant Frank Chambers were like Tristan and Iseult in a gutter, and *The Postman* was foremost a love story. Cain had stripped it of extraneous material and reduced it to its angular, gleaming bones in order to convey a good, tricky, twisting tale. Postman was only 35,000 words long, barely a novelette (Knopf stretched it to 188 pages in hardback by using big type and wide margins). Cain even did away with the unnecessary pronouns "he said" and "she said," allowing the reader to infer who was speaking on their own. This would serve as the standard for page-turners for years. The work was adopted into literary and popular culture and served as the benchmark for subsequent generations of books about desire, love, and murder.

Cain took his time starting a new project after waiting so long for a good idea to develop into a finished book. Before giving in to the lucrative offers from publications to produce a serial, he authored articles and short tales and did some work for the cinema. It was only supposed to be a quickie, and Cain pledged that it would never be published as a book. Cain spoke with some insurance investigators while researching *Postman*, and using another real-life crime as inspiration, he crafted a fiction about a lady working with an insurance salesman to murder her husband to collect on his policy. Cain realised that this story, *Double Indemnity*(1936), was essentially another version of *Postman*, not as well-written, but also a compulsively readable work, filled with exceptional dialogue, Southern California exotica, and a richly detailed inside tour of the insurance business. He wrote to his agent that it would be more of a love story than a murder story, but as jealousy is the main theme that wrecks them, it would move all right to an exciting end. It first appeared as a serial in *Liberty* magazine before being released as a hardback collection in *Three of a Kind*(1943), a collection of short stories that also included *Career in C Minor* and *The Embezzler*. *Serenade*(1937), Cain's second significant work, had a bisexual hero and passionate love scenes in a Mexican chapel. Cain characterised it as "about an opera singer and a Mexican whore," and it delivered content that was at least as frightening as the sex and violence sequences in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. His theories about how an opera singer's "sex coefficient"—i.e., his sexual orientation—affected his voice, his friendship with a closeted Charles Laughton, and a chance encounter with a prostitute in a brothel in

Guatemala City—are just a few of the strange ideas and experiences Cain used to create the story. These aspects were mixed with a murderous scheme and another ironic storyline twist in which you were ultimately caught up in your crime. The book was widely praised when it was published in 1937, but there was also some disagreement. Along with the Catholic Church, many commentators and librarians were outraged and disgusted by its vile contents, which included murders, prostitutes, perversions, sex in church, and the use of sacramental wine in an iguana stew. Many reviewers now view the book as the most problematic of Cain's significant works. Although the author would assert that his ideas on homosexuality were supported by clinical data obtained from medical authorities, they would eventually come to seem outdated, at worst giving what was meant to be the book's bold, cutting-edge content a sensation of absurd cluelessness. As an intelligent opera star, Cain's hard-boiled first-person narrative style, which worked perfectly for *Postman's* drifter, strained credibility. Additionally, *Serenade's* meandering through various landscapes and periods of time made the terse, fast-paced prose feel out of place. The book did well in sales upon release, though not nearly as much as *Postman*. Many readers who were uncomfortable with anything related to homosexuality, especially the unsettling idea that a story's "hero," making love to a voluptuous Mexican prostitute on one page, could turn out to be a "fairy" on another, were turned off by word of mouth about the homosexual element in the second half, according to Cain and others. *Serenade*, despite its discomfort, is considered a wonderful work by many of Cain's contemporary fans. It can be challenging to defend anything that others find unpleasant or frightening. The third major work by Cain combined the ancient and the new. Similar to *Double Indemnity*, it took place in Southern California against a carefully studied backdrop of a certain workplace and suburban lifestyle. However, it diverged from his earlier works' simple murder mysteries and terse, hard-boiled first-person narration. In *Mildred Pierce*(1941), Cain portrayed the struggles of a modern woman, a "commonplace suburban housewife with a nice figure and a way with men," as she finds success as a pie-baking business owner while also dealing with a weak husband, a string of unreliable suitors, and an unappreciative daughter. The book was strong and insightful despite resembling conventional best-sellers and glossy magazine fiction serials of the day rather than the brutal, frantic material that had built Cain's reputation. Cain would go on to create many excellent books, notably the underappreciated historical classic *Past All Dishonour* (1946), and he would continue to stir up controversy with his work on *The Butterfly*(1947), an "Appalachian Postman" with the shocking addition of incest. However, following the release of *Mildred Pierce*, Cain's standing as a significant writer on the American scene started to decline, and he never fully recovered. Ironically, he would start to establish himself as a major name in films around this time. *The Postman*

*Always Rings Twice*, *Mildred Pierce* (reworked as a film noir), and eventually *Serenade*—minus the censorable content—would all be brought to the big screen as a result of Billy Wilder's stunning film adaptation of *Double Indemnity*, which started a trend for gritty murder/love stories. For many years, Cain held the title of most well-known hard-boiled novelist thanks to a combination of his early works and the box office success of his feature films. Cain's work appeared more equipped to fit a conventional notion of literature, while the other two members of the hard-boiled trio, Hammett and Chandler, were sometimes dismissed as simply mystery writers, regardless of how inventive. Cultural heavyweights like Edmund Wilson, who rejected most of the strong crime authors of the day as trivialists and mere entertainers, thought Cain to be a genuine artist. He was once dubbed the "American Zola" for his brutally realistic descriptions of the "human beast." Cain himself took offence at people referring to him and Hammett as the founders of a "hard-boiled school" of literature. He insisted that he had never read either author. Cain's reputation would eventually—and arguably—be surpassed by the other two, whose comparatively brief careers delivered a condensed and coherent body of work. Contrarily, Cain continued to write despite his work falling out of favour with the general public and generating fiction that gradually lost its original impact. Even while those early outstanding books continued to draw readers, the following efforts reduced his reputation. Parts of subsequent books, like 1975's *Rainbow's End*, with its fast-paced plot, bloodshed, and incest undertones, demonstrated that Cain maintained his unique literary talent well into his seventies.

## ● Ved Prakash Sharma (1955-2017)

A well-known pulp fiction author from India named Ved Prakash Sharma became well-known for his books on crime and thrillers. Sharma, who was born in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India, on June 10, 1955, started writing in the 1960s and later rose to prominence as one of the pulp fiction genre's best-known authors. Sharma's books were renowned for their frantic action, thrilling stories, and likeable characters. His straightforward writing approach focused on giving his readers an exciting reading experience. He is regarded as one of India's pulp fiction genre's forerunners and the author of more than 170 novels, many of which have been made into films. In the late 19th century, the pulp fiction genre was born in the United States and swiftly expanded to other nations, including India. A subgenre of popular literature known as "pulp fiction" was distinguished by its sensationalist themes, garish covers, and subpar paper. The stories were geared towards a broad readership and often concentrated on crime, mystery, horror, and science fiction. In terms of topics and material, Sharma's books were comparable to Western pulp fiction. Although he focused on giving his readers a sense of place and time, his

writing style was distinctively Indian. Sharma employed the culture and civilization of India as the setting for his novels, which were set in various sections of the country. Vimal, a detective who appeared in numerous of Sharma's novels, was one of his best-known characters. Detective Vimal was a charming and daring individual who was constantly one step ahead of the crooks he was pursuing. He rapidly became a reader favourite because of his quick wit and ability to think on his feet. The way that women were portrayed in Sharma's books was equally noteworthy. Sharma's female characters were fierce and self-sufficient in a genre that was frequently criticised for objectifying women. They frequently acted as the protagonists of the tales and actively participated in resolving the crimes and riddles that formed the core of the novels. Many people have read Sharma's books and found them enjoyable. His writings were well-liked by both urban and rural readers and various Indian languages had them translated. Sharma's writing was approachable and simple to comprehend, which appealed to a variety of audiences. Sharma's popularity was largely due to his capacity to appeal to his readers' hopes and aspirations. His stories frequently featured protagonists who overcame significant challenges to find happiness and prosperity. Through the characters in Sharma's books, his readers were able to virtually experience the thrill of adventure and the excitement of victory. Another noteworthy aspect of Sharma's books was their social critique. He emphasised the inequities and inequalities that existed in Indian society through his stories. He used his writing to challenge the status quo by including characters who were frequently up against corruption and tyranny in his works. However, Sharma's writing wasn't without its detractors. His writings were criticised by some as being vulgar, sensationalist, and appealing to the people. Others criticised his writing as lacking literary merit and depth, saying it was predictable. Sharma's legacy as a pulp fiction author is obvious, notwithstanding these concerns. He was one of the most prolific and well-liked authors in the field, and people still read and savour his books today. His impact on the Indian literary scene cannot be overestimated, as seen by the work of other Indian pulp fiction writers. Finally, it may be argued that Ved Prakash Sharma, a well-known pulp fiction author from India, had a significant influence on the development of the genre.

## ● ShobhaDé (1948-)

Despite some Indian English fiction's pulp-like tendencies from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, it wasn't until the 1980s and the arrival of the glamorous model-wife-mother-socialite-columnist ShobhaDé that the term "pulp fiction" started to be taken seriously when referring to Indian English books. Why, when it might have been applied to many earlier works, did the label

"pulp fiction" come to be associated with ShobhaDé's books? This question has a number of potential solutions. One is that there are numerous ways in which Rushdie's ascent and Dé's rise are related. This is not a reference to the fact that the popularity of *Midnight's Children* expanded the reach of Indian English publishing beyond what R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai, and Raja Rao had been able to do in the past, but to the fact that Rushdie's and Dé's languages are anchored in the expansion of a specific type of Indian urban middle class, either numerically or in terms of confidence. One may argue that Dé's invented language for her Stardust cinema columns was a pulp variation of G.V.'s invented languages. Rushdie and Desani adapted their respective perceptions of Indian reality. Once more, the Rushdie-Dé generation of post-Independence was likely a two-way street because Dé was made possible by the same sociolinguistic circumstances that gave rise to Rushdie, and both authors released their debut novels in the 1980s.Dé's literary career must be viewed in the context of both the pre-Rushdie phenomenon of film and gossip magazines like *Stardust* and the growing popularity of post-Rushdie Indian English fiction. One of the magazines with the most readership among all Indian periodicals is Stardust, which was founded in 1971 by Magna Periodicals, run by Nari Hira. Although *Stardust* is also available in other Indian languages, the English-language version has seen the greatest success. When Hira was searching for an editor for his new magazine in 1971, he appears to have chosen ShobhaRajadhyaksha (later Dé), a trainee copywriter who was 23 years old, based on a fictional conversation with Shashi Kapoor, a prominent celebrity at the time. The mix of rumours and information, the private and the public, celebrity sex and middle-class voyeurism, English phrases, and Hindi words that helped develop *Stardust* continues to serve as the conceptual and linguistic foundation for Dé's fiction. In addition to *Socialite Evenings* (1989), *Starry Nights* (1991), *Sisters* (1992), *Strange Obsessions* (1994), *Snapshots* (1995), *Second Thoughts* (1996), and *Sultry Days* (2003), she has written several other books. In addition, she has written at least three books of prose, including the autobiography *Selective Memories* (1998). Dé's novels purport to follow the lives of India's upper and higher middle classes, primarily in or near Bombay; however, they are rife with pulp elements of contemporary and popular romances, including not only tall and handsome men, beautiful women, and so on, but also an entire consumerist code. The driveways of her novels are rolled up by Honda Accords. Both "Afghan Snow" and "Pond's Dreamflower Talc" are used by her characters. Additionally, she has stated in an interview that she usually includes Goa in her "plotlines" (Goa is essentially a brand name for "tourist paradise" in middle-class India). Although her novels' narratives are straightforward in comparison to, say, Salman Rushdie's, they can occasionally be seemingly complicated in a soap operatic fashion. The majority of Dé's novels are mostly accounts of material

prosperity and renown in a world of intrigue and opportunity. In general, they depict an Indianized middle-class version of the American Dream, seen from a feminised perspective. For instance, Dé's debut book, *Socialite Evenings*, is the memoir-style account of Karuna, a well-known Bombay socialite, and how she went from being a middle-class girl to becoming a star surrounded by the stereotypical trappings of celebrity (wealth, property, relationships, neurotic friends, fashionable criminals, etc.). In *Starry Nights*, Aasha Rani is portrayed as a "vulnerable, small-town girl" who is "pushed into the crass world of Bombay cinema, teeming with vicious, preening stars and near-stars and insecure, high-society celebrities" by her cunning mother. The stories in her previous works are driven by the same or related issues. Regardless of how clichedDé's stories may seem, it would be a mistake to disregard them. Although her characters are stereotypes, their interactions reveal more significant developments and problems in some circles of modern middle-class India. These difficulties and changes are being driven by economic and cultural factors. According to a number of studies, on the economic front, between 1997 and 2002, the consumption expenditure of the urban 20% of the population increased by a historically unprecedented 30%, while that of the rural population, which makes up the majority of Indians, fell by more than 95%. On the cultural front, middle-class Indians in India's major cities are increasingly speaking English (sometimes intermingled with other Indian languages) out of convenience rather than out of any particular cultural preference. Their English is not the same as that of literary novels, despite the fact that authors like Rushdie have taken inspiration from them, nor is it the supposedly bumbling English of semi-urban character types (who may be imagined along the exaggerated lines of Peter Sellers' comic caricature in Blake Edwards' 1968 film The Party). A certain class of middle-class Indians has been produced because of these cultural and economic developments, and at least to that Indian, their realities seem unique. The readers of Dé's books, her characters, and, one could argue, even Dé herself, are members of this segment of the urban Indian middle class.

## 1.4.6 Indian and American Pulp Fiction: A Comparative Study

The two separate popular fiction subgenres of Indian and American pulp literature first appeared in their respective nations in the middle of the 20th century. Both genres have definite variations that reflect the cultural and historical circumstances in which they emerged, even though they have some parallels in terms of subjects and style.

## ● *Historical Background*

The advent of mass printing technology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to the creation of inexpensive, widely disseminated publications, which is where American pulp literature got its start. Pulp magazines were characterised by sensationalist stories that frequently combined aspects of crime, horror, romance, and adventure with poor production values, obscene cover art, and cheap editing.On the other hand, Indian Pulp Literature evolved in the middle of the 20th century as a result of the British Raj's prohibitions on the importation of foreign literature. As a result, there was a gap in the market that was swiftly filled by Indian publishers who started making their own pulp publications. The general public loved these periodicals because they offered a cheap and convenient form of entertainment.

## ● *Themes and Design*

The focus on sensationalist narrative, entertainment value, and popular appeal defines both American and Indian pulp literature. The subjects and writing styles used by the two genres vary, nevertheless.Many of the stories in American pulp literature feature hard-boiled detectives and femme fatales, and it is well known for its emphasis on crime and mystery. The most well-known authors of the genre, like Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain, were noted for their fast-paced action, complex plots, and use of colloquial and slang vocabulary.Indian pulp literature, on the other hand, is renowned for its emphasis on a larger range of subjects, such as crime, romance, adventure, and suspense. The most well-known authors in the genre, like Ved Prakash Sharma and Surender Mohan Pathak, were renowned for their fast-paced action, oversized characters, and a nearly cinematic aspect that won them a great deal of readership.

## ● *Narrative Organisation*

An emphasis on action, suspense, and cliff-hangers characterises the narrative form shared by American and Indian pulp literature. But there are some clear distinctions between the two genres' approaches to storytelling.The third-person narration used in American pulp literature gives the reader a more detached view of the action. A fragmented narrative structure is another technique used by the genre, and many of the stories in it have many plotlines that come together at the conclusion.In contrast, Indian pulp literature is renowned for its first-person narration, which gives the action a more individualised perspective. The genre also uses a more chronologically ordered narrative framework, with many of the stories having a single plot that runs throughout them.

- ***Cultural and Social Context***

The subjects and styles of American and Indian pulp literature were significantly influenced by the social and cultural situations in which they were created.The emergence of American pulp literature coincided with the social and economic upheaval of the Great Depression and the Prohibition era, which increased the genre's emphasis on crime, violence, and corruption. The most well-known authors of the subgenre, such Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, were well-known for their criticisms of the law enforcement and judicial systems as corrupt elements of American society.Indian Pulp Literature, on the other hand, was created while the nation fought to end colonial authority during a period of social and political upheaval in India. Many of the works in this genre dealt with topics like corruption, poverty, and violence, reflecting the social and political reality of the day.

## 1.4.7 Summing Up

By this point, we ought to have a clear understanding of the Pulp literature subgenre, its historical context, the function of the publishing industry in both India and the West, a comparative reading of both Indian and American Pulp fiction, and a ranking of some of the genre's key figures.

The genre has been crucial to the growth of popular literature in India and other countries. With their distinctive writing styles and subjects, authors including James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Ved Prakash, and ShobhaDé have made significant contributions to this genre. In India, where it has aided in introducing literature to a larger audience, pulp fiction has played a significant role. Pulp fiction has succeeded in capturing the attention of a sizable readership by concentrating on subjects that are important to everyday life, such as crime, love, and passion, especially those who are not typically inclined to read high-brow literature.

Indian pulp writers like Ved Prakash, who has been one of the most prominent writers in this genre in India, can see the impact of authors like Cain, Chandler, and Hammett in their work. His writing displays an in-depth knowledge of pulp literature's themes and tropes, and he has succeeded in writing stories that are both enjoyable and thought-provoking. At the same time, it's critical to acknowledge the achievements of female authors who have given the genre a distinctive perspective, like ShobhaDé. Her writing reflects the shifting social and cultural context of India, and she has used pulp fiction as a vehicle to examine topics like gender and

sexuality that are frequently taboo in Indian culture. Despite its widespread appeal, pulp fiction has frequently been criticised by literary critics as a cheap kind of entertainment. This argument, however, fails to take into account the fact that pulp fiction has millions of readers worldwide and has been a significant contributor to the growth of popular culture.

## 1.4.8 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Types:**
  1. What are the characteristics of pulp literature, and how have they evolved over time? What impact has pulp literature had on popular culture, and how has it influenced other genres of literature and media?
  2. How have writers in the pulp genre explored themes such as crime, love, and passion? What unique perspectives have women writers brought to the genre, and how have they challenged traditional gender roles and social norms?
  3. What are the ethical and social implications of pulp literature, particularly with regard to representations of violence, sexuality, and other taboo subjects? How have these representations evolved over time, and what impact have they had on readers and society?
  4. How has pulp literature been received by literary critics and scholars, and what debates have emerged over its literary value and cultural significance? What challenges have emerged for writers in the genre, particularly in terms of finding audiences and gaining critical recognition?
- **Medium Answer Types:**
  1. Give the characteristic features that define the "hard-boiled" detective.
  2. What themes and issues does ShobhaDé explore in her pulp fiction, and how do they reflect the changing social and cultural landscape of India?
  3. How has Ved Prakash contributed to the development of pulp fiction in India, and what are the key characteristics of his writing style?
- **Short Answer Types:**
  1. What is pulp literature, and how does it differ from other genres of literature?
  2. Who are some of the notable writers in the pulp genre, and what are some of their most famous works?

3. What are some of the common themes and motifs found in pulp literature, and how have they evolved over time?
4. How has Indian pulp literature been received by literary critics and scholars?
5. Which class of Indians generally form the characters of Shobha De's fiction?
6. Name one famous novel by Ved Prakash Sharma

## 1.4.9 Suggested Reading

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# Unit-5 □ Bengali Crime Fiction

*Structure*



## 1.5.1 Objectives

This Unit aims to provide an overview of the genealogical development of Crime Fiction in Bengal, introduce the learners to the significant Bengali writers and their contribution in the development of the genre and provide an insight into the cultural politics involved in the creation of these writings.

## 1.5.2 Introduction

Along with an introduction to the pioneers of British Crime Fiction, as found in the Unit number 2, this module intends to encourage the students to extend their knowledge of the genre to the study of Indian Crime Fiction. Since it is beyond the scope of a single module to offer a comprehensive study of the entire corpus of Crime Fiction written in various Indian languages, this module will focus on highlighting the key aspects of Crime Fiction written in Bengali alone.

## 1.5.3 Bengali Crime Fiction–A Brief Historiography

Despite running the risk of offering a homogenized and a somewhat simplified narrative about the development of a genre, offering a genealogical overview with foregrounding of the impact of the unique contribution of key exponents still seems to be relevant for imparting introductory lessons. This section will therefore draw attention of the readers to the gradual development of Crime Fiction in Bengali

by classifying the genre's development till date into three stages. In each stage the genre got shaped in a notable manner by the contribution of significant writers. Their contributions led to the emergence of particular trends which gradually became the defining features of each of these three stages. While discussing this genre's development, this section will therefore trace the impact of these significant contributions on the genre in detail.

First Phase (Mid-Nineteenth Century): Sukumar Sen begins his discussion on the history of Bengali Crime Fiction by referring to the beginning of a tradition of stories featuring policemen during 1850s. The first of these came to be known as *Bankaullar Doptor*. It was a collection of 12 narratives featuring detailed records of cases solved by the eponymous Bengali Police Officer named Barkatullah or Bankaullah. After the success of this anonymous collection, a number of writers released their respective books fashioned in a similar manner. Sen mentions four writers who wrote these stories about the exploits of polices during the Colonial rule. Girish Chandra Basu and Priyonath Mukhopadhyay are the two Bengali writers of this kind whereas Major A.T. M. Ramsay and R. Reid are the two British writers who published their books during this era. The monthly series by Priyanath Mukhopadhyay entitled '*Darogar Daptar'* became the most popular amongst these. All these four writers shared a similarity. They were either officers or detectives employed by the British. Despite this similarity significant differences can be noted in these works. The two British books, namely *Detective Footprints, Bengal 1874-1881* and *Every Man His Own Detective*, by Ramsay and Reid, respectively,were basically written with the intention to guide the newly recruited British police officers. Whereas, Girish Basu's *Sekaler Darogar Kahini* featured detailed accounts of the criminals that make it appear to be a book on the mindset of these criminals mostly.

The other major trend of Bengali Crime Fiction of nineteenth century produced tales of sensational crimes which at times bordered on the vulgar. Bhuban Chandra Mukhopadhyay introduced this trend by publishing his book *Haridaser Guptakatha* in multiple volumes in between 1871-73. He is memorable for his translation of several Western novels in Bengali as well. Among his translations the Bengali version of *The Wandering Jew* and *The Sorrows of Satan* are worth mentioning. His choice of text for translation indicates how seriously he devoted his writing skills on offering sensational tales for Bengali readers. Though his crime stories brought in a significant amount of variety to the genre of Bengali Crime Fiction, they also had a malign influence. Crime Fiction became synonymous to vulgar literature or *Battalar Sahitya* chiefly due to the usage of scandalous tales in *Haridaser Guptakatha*. Eventually the popularity of Bhuban Chandra's books

encouraged a bunch of writers to imitate his model and churn out a large number of tales featuring scandalous crimes. Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Nabakumar Dutta, Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay are chief amongst these imitators.

Second Phase (Beginning of the twentieth century to the 1930s): If the previous century mainly witnessed the gradual degradation of the genre, it also saw the initiation of its redemption. Sarachchandra Sarkar(Deb) began the purgation of the genre almost singlehandedly. His father was a renowned professor of English literature who seems to have had a significant influence on his son. Sarachchandra started publishing a book series called *Goyenda Kahini*. What is remarkable about this series is its delicate balance between sensationalism and sophistication. These books gained an extraordinary popularity amongst the mass and class alike. As suggested by Sukumar Sen, Saracchandra should be credited as the first writer who drew the attention of the educated elites to Bengali Crime Fiction. Moreover, as the title of his book series suggests, he pioneered the Detective Fiction in Bengali as well.

It is not at all a matter of coincidence that the first proper Bengali Detective appeared in the literary scenario in the hands of a writer who may be considered as an immediate successor of Sarachchandra. *Goyenda Kahini*'s success has indeed contributed greatly to the rise of Panchkari Dey and his famous Detective characters: Debendrabijay and Arindam. Panchkari Dey introduced the first super sleuth of Bengali Crime Fiction through his character Debendrabijay. A curious mix of the scandalous elements of *Battalar Sahitya* and British sophistication maybe found in Dey's novels like *Nilbasana Sundori*. The Detective Debendrabijay is shown to be an epitome of rationality and manners, whereas the criminals, especially the female criminals like Jumeliya is shown to be lustful and corrupt. Further sophistication of the genre was made possible by the involvement of educated writers during this time. Ambika Charan Guha and Dinendra Kumar Roy marked this trend in particular. Both of them were teachers by profession. In their writings a preaching and didactic tone can be noticed. They pushed the genre towards becoming cautionary narratives.

Third Phase (From 1940s to 2000): During the third and most fertile stage of Bengali Crime Fiction's development, the genre started showing a definite movement towards attaining originality. Writers of this era introduced multiple Detectives who soon became iconic amongst the readers. Hemendra Kumar Ray and Nihar Ranjan Gupta developed the first generation of these stories. Both of them imitated Western classics to a great extent and yet their characters consistently showed their Indianness. Roy created the famous Detective Jayanta, the erroneous police inspector Sundarbabu while Gupta created the character of Kiriti Roy. Unlike

Sherlock Holmes, these Bengali detectives are shown fighting against villains with supernatural power as well. Jayanta and his friends in particular are often shown having face offs with powers beyond the logic of science.

The second generation of the writers of the third phase comprise of multitalented writers like Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay and Satyajit Ray. Both of them produced a substantial body of crime fiction. Though both of the iconic characters of these two writers, namely Byomkesh Bakshi and Prodosh Chandra Mitra or Feluda, resemble Sherlock Holmes to a significant extent, both of them embody Bengaliness in a vivid manner.Sharadindu wrote 33 stories featuring Byomkesh and Ray created altogether 35 Feluda stories, all of which gained immense popularity. After the death of these two stalwarts the Bengali Crime Fiction genre has experienced a serious lack of powerful writers. Although Syed Mustafa Siraj's Colonel Niladri Sarkar, Samaresh Majumdar's Arjun, and Sasthipada Chattopadhyay's Pandab Goyenda series gained a considerable amount of success, the genre is yet to witness the arrival of characters that can equal Feluda or Byomkesh.

## 1.5.4 Cultural Politics and Significance

Like other notable variants of Popular Literature like Science Fiction or Horror, Crime Fiction too has its share of cultural significance. In fact its engagement with the depiction of criminals and their punishment makes it more directly involved with the political ideologies of its milieu than the other genres mentioned above. In case of Bengali Crime Fiction the depiction of the enemies in particular shows its relationship of the cultural politics of the nation. At its initial stage, during the nineteenth century, these stories chiefly function as a medium of popularizing and normalizing the colonial rule. Bakaulla and the other police protagonists of the first phase are therefore symbolic representation of the excellence of British administration. The *Battala Literature* served as an outlet of the contemporary society's prudishness amongst other things. The association of Crime Fiction with these scandalous tales shows how the nineteenth century middleclass people looked down upon transgressors of all kinds.

The twentieth century tales on the other hand are marked by their recurrent usage of the *Bhadralok* figure as protagonists. Gautam Chakrabarti offers an interesting discussion of this aspect of Bengali Crime Fiction in his essay. Chakrabarti defines the word *Bhadralok* as : "the Bengali middle classes, which cultivated a specific aura of eclectic culturaland intellectual tastes, despite their social conservatism". He finds a co-presence of Anglophilia and Indianness in these figures that function in the preserving of the status quo in a manner similar

to the colonial rulers. Though Chakrabarti identifies Byomkesh and Feluda as the examples of *Bhadralok* Sleuths, Jayanta, Kiriti, and even Arjun seem to owe their origin to this particular section of the society. Indrajit Hazra argues that Feluda was born out of Ray's grudge against the rise of a lumpen class in Bengal. Crime Fiction or to be more specific Detective Fiction of Bengal certainly presents the privileged caste, educated class, and financially stable section of the society as Detectives who function as moral guardian of the world around.

Along with the above mentioned Anglophilia, Bengali Crime Fiction is also remarkable for its parodying of Western tropes of Detective by using gullible Detectives. Rabindranath Tagore in his story 'Detective' attempted an interesting parody of thin kind by introducing a character who goes on suspecting people at random following the Western Detectives' examples and at the end finds all his suspicions to be utterly baseless. Sibram Chakraborty and Narayan Sanyal followed this tradition by offering hilarious tales of Detectives named Kolke Kashi and Sherlock Hebo, respectively.

In recent times Bengali Crime Fiction lacks charismatic figures and though it may be viewed as a reaction to the dominance of super sleuths like Feluda or Byomkesh for a long time, it may also be a reflection of the gradual rise of cynicism about the legal system in general. One of the most significant developments of the genre in recent times is its attempts of subverting the gendered and largely sexist trajectory through using female Detectives like Mitin Masi.

## 1.5.5 Summing Up

From the sections given above a reader can derive basic knowledge regarding the gradual development of Bengali Crime Fiction and become familiar with the key exponents of the same. For furthering their study of the genre, students are encouraged to develop a first-hand experience of studying the representative texts of the three phases discussed above.

## 1.5.6 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer type Questions:**

  1. Discuss the development of Bengali Crime Fiction during the nineteenth century with reference to its exponents.
  2. Offer a comparative study between the tropes of Western and Bengali Detective, with suitable examples.

- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  3. Who are *Bhadraloks*? How does Bengali Crime Fiction present this class during the twentieth century?
  4. What are the important features of the Bengali Crime Fiction of the twentieth century? Discuss with examples.
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Write short-notes on the following characters/texts/ authors:
     Feluda, Byomkesh Bakshi, Mitin Masi
  2. Write short-notes on the following texts:
     Detective (by Tagore), Shajarur Kanta, Bakaullar Doptor
  3. Write short-notes on the following authors:
     Panchkari Dey, Bhuban Chandra Mukhopadhyay, Sarachchandra Sarkar,

## 1.5.7 Suggested Reading

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Dey, Anindita. "Weaving Fiction from Facts in the Adventures of Feluda." South Asian Review, 2022, DOI: 10.1080/02759527.2022.2033072.

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# Module-2

# Unit-6 □ Humourists of the Twentieth Century

*Structure*



## 2.6.1 Objectives

This Unit focuses on the significance of comedy as a genre and its place in popular culture. It delineates the popularity of comedy in the twentieth century literary milieu by specifically looking into the works of P.G. Wodehouse, Ogden Nash and Terry Pratchett.

## 2.6.2 Introduction

Humour or comedy has all along been treated with a step-motherly attitude in literature. The high-brow adjudicators have all along been sniggering at the very entity or element of humour or comedy as if it is the pastime of the lowly and thereby implying that humour or comedy is an inferior thing, loved only by the pedestrian reader. Needless to say, it has been one of the silliest misjudgements on the part of the determiners of literary tastes and trends. One of the major drawbacks of English literature has been its incapability of according the due importance and value to comedy. No worthwhile award like the Booker has been conferred upon a really funny book till date, even though the undeniable truth is that almost all of us love to laugh, to indulge in a genuine bout of guffaws. Even the greatest names in English literature, including Shakespeare and Dickens, specialised in creating

unforgettably humorous characters and evinced all along an eagerness to laugh at the excesses and follies of the self-important amongst us at any given opportunity.

## 2.6.3 Who is a Humourist

A humourist is an intellectual who makes use of humour in the expression of thoughts either in writing or public speaking. A humourist pursues humour on the intellectual level and employs it in garbing their innermost ideas, which are often caustic or vitriolic,so as to make the same less blunt or bitter and therebymake it seem tolerable or enjoyable. This is where the humourist differs from other pursuants of humour, particularly the comedian who indulges in it to present an entertaining public spectacle either in the form of stand-up comedy or in films.

## 2.6.4 Humour in Twentieth Century Literature

The twentieth century has been so to say a watershed era as far as English literature is concerned. A crucial chapter in the chronicles of civilisation, the last century has seen some of the most tumultuous developments in the history of humankind, including the two greatest wars, the rise and fall of nations, giant leaps in technology, deplorable instances of jingoism, ghastly acts of terrorism as well as path-breaking experiments in myriad spheres like literature, films, or art.

The twentieth century has thus been a curious era comprising stark contradictions which is all the more startlingly obvious in the triumphant sway humour has had over an epoch predominated by some of the most ruthlessly sombre and harrowing incidents in human history. This utterly confounding victory lap of humour can perhaps be reconciled with the overwhelming bleakness of the age that probably made the mind hunger for comic relief in between episodes of dark and dismal developments. Humour possibly won its glorious success by providing reprises to souls tormented and depressed by the sickening regimen of saddening realities.

Humour offered the common reader with the aroma and flavour of an untasted-before brew, heady yet stimulating as the English breakfast tea.

## 2.6.5 P. G. Wodehouse (1881-1975)

One of the most widely read English humourists of the twentieth century, Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was anauthor of myriad talents—a comic novelist,

a writer of short stories, lyricist, and playwright. Wodehouse was also one of the most prolific writers of all time, who edited a newspaper column, collaborated on Broadway musicals with the likes of Jerome Kern and Cole Porter, adapted straight plays, wrote hundreds of short stories and authoredover 90 books which earned him an Oxford doctorate, a knighthood, and an unchallengeable reputation as the greatest comic novelist of the twentieth century.

Born on October 15 1881 in Guildford, Surrey, England, the third son to Henry Ernest Wodehouse, a British magistrate based in Hong Kong, and Eleanor Wodehouse. After graduating from Dulwich College, London, Wodehouse began his career in a bank before joining the*Globe* in 1902 as humour columnist for their 'By the Way' column while starting to write freelance for many other publications. He lived and worked for long spells in America and France after 1909. Wodehouse's marriage in 1914 to Ethel May Wayman, an English widow, marked the beginning of a happy and lifelong bond. During one of his stints in France at the time of World War II, he was captured by the Germans (in 1940).Wodehouse had to spend most of the War interned in Berlin. In 1941, he made five radio broadcasts from there to the United States, giving a humorous and apolitical accountof his experiences as a captive accompanied by a subtle mockery of his captors. The broadcasts, made through an enemy network, caused severe revulsion in England, leading Wodehouse to resolve that he would never return to the country. He remained true to the resolve and lived the rest of his life in the US, formally taking US citizenship in 1955. Subsequently,England forgave his broadcasts, he was knighted by the British government in 1975, and his effigy was exhibited in Madame Tussaud's, to his absolute elation. Wodehouse died on February 14 1975 in Southampton, New York, at the age of 93.

In spite of his momentous contribution towards making humour classy and popular in English literature, and being rightly defined by Evelyn Waugh as one of the best writers of the first part of the twentieth century, John Mortimer has said that he gave he gave more pleasure to a wider public than a Joyce or a Forster.

Wodehouse's art lay in a telling a simple and amusing story in a befittingly uncomplicated and entertaining style, through a light-veined mockery of the inter-war upper-class England, their oddities, eccentricities, and peculiar fashion. But this apparently frivolous mockery comprised an acute observer, a brilliant craftmanship, and a benign wisdom.

Beginning novel writing with school stories, Wodehouse shifted later on to comic fiction, populating and thereby enriching the genre with his regular and unforgettable characters—the perpetually impeccable and tirelessly garrulous Psmith, witty and imperturbable; the absent-minded Lord Elmsworth; the eternally

resourceful Ukridge; Mr Mulliner with his inexhaustible trove of stories; and the Blandings Castle folk. But his stories of the unforgettable partnership between Bertie Wooster, the jolly gentleman of leisure and Jeeves, his incredibly resourceful and inherently superior valet, the 'gentleman's gentleman', are largely regarded as his masterpieces. Jeeves, a man of myriad talents, not only provides his master with the day's first enlivening cup of tea, advises him on the perfect choice of socks, or warns him about the overtly ostentatious tie but acts as an extremely handy dictionary of quotations in motion for his allusion-inclined boss, and solves all his problems.

Wodehouse's work sustains its charm and popularity with its dry humour issuing out of anenthusiastic enjoyment of life's laughable aspects. With his light-hearted enjoyment of life enhanced by amusing application of words and phrases, Wodehouse is the ideal read for a mind seeking relief from drudgery and pain. To sift through his pages and to meet his wonderful characters is to bask in the sunlit warmth of his hearty humour.

However escapist, Wodehouse's fiction does not shy away from the portrayal of real life or the political and social trends of the time. The aunts and young feminists, gangsters and nouveau rich, the oddballs and enthusiasts, the brainless bachelors of the Drones Club, and the rowdysupporters of the Fascist Black Shorts movement actually intend to unsettle the peaceful equilibrium of the societybehind their apparently funny and benign exterior. Though Wodehouse's literary realm has often been described as innocent, prelapsarian, paradisal, Elysian, idyllic, he was fond of glancing, from various new viewpoints, at the existence of dystopian realities at the base of every Utopian world.

## 2.6.6 Ogden Nash (1902-1971)

Frederic Ogden Nash, an American poet famous for his light verse, remains one of the most widely appreciated and imitated exponents of the genre whose work consists of over 500 such pieces of poetry. By the dint of his unconventional rhyme schemes Nash earned the honour of being proclaimed the country's best-known producer of humorous poetry.

Nash was born in Rye, New York, to Edmund Strudwick and Mattie Chenault Nash, on August 19 1902. Nash attended Harvard in1920, dropping out a year later to earn a living and thereafter tried several jobs including teaching, selling bonds on Wall Street, and writing streetcar advertisements before joining the advertising department of Doubleday in 1925. In this phase of writing brilliantly innovative and catchy advertisements, Nash increasingly focused upon honing his talent of writing

the whimsical poetry that would subsequently make him famous, scribbling bits and pieces of poems on yellow scraps of papers. Some of these later on constituted *Hard Lines* (1931), his first book of humorous poems, which was an instant and immense success. The lucrative prospects of selling poetry made Nash give up the advertising job and take up poetry-writing as a full-time occupation in 1932. Nash's next few books of poems, *Free Wheeling* (1933), *Happy Days* (1933), and *The Primrose Path* (1935) also were successful and earned him greater public attention. With the immensely popular Broadway musical, *One Touch of Venus*, to which he contributed as lyric writer, Nash experienced a new lease of success in 1943. Nash died on May 20 1971 at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, aged 68 years.

If called by a panther,
Don't anther.
Or,
Candy
Is dandy,
But liquor,
Is quicker.

These are a couple of specimens of lines by Ogden Nash that have earned eternity in the minds of his readers and have been assimilated in the ethos of America, lines by the poet whose droll verse with its unconventional rhymes made him the country's best-known producer of humorous poetry.

Nash's is a curiously capricious poetry of whimsical words and style, issuing primarily out of ridiculing the common human follies and the several banalities as well as the pointlessness of contemporary urban life, his focal area which Nash defines as the minor eccentricities of humanity.Nash modelled his poems along with his style largely on the humour-filled parody of the disastrous attempts at poetry by Julia Moore, the farm woman-versifier of the 1970s. He embarked on his mission of transforming Moore's flaws into something rich and rare and infectiously hilarious while avoiding the rustic, didactic or moral, and sentimental elements of her poems.

Nash's humour is the combined effect of the features that make his poetry such an entertaining read—the crippled syllabications and pronunciations, the reshuffled stresses, the quasi rhymes, and the usage of the elongated and rambling line. Even the hypochondriac poems, that demonstrate his rather obsessive preoccupation with ailments and sickness, are laced with zany humour and are free from morbidity, often ending in self-criticism: 'I can get a very smug Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,

Thursday / or Friday in bed out of a tenth of a degree. / It is to this trait I am debtor / for the happy fact that on weekends I generally feel better'.

Nash owns a unique position in the whole corpus of humorous literature, be it of America or any other country. His contribution consists primarily of making an art out of humour and ridicule. Although apparently simplistic and uncomplicated, Nash remains an author almost impossible to imitate or excel.

## 2.6.7 Terry Pratchett (1948–2015)

Sir Terry David John Pratchett, better known as Terry Pratchett, is one of the foremost names in the realm of twentieth century, primarily for his humour-hued fantasies and science fiction, particularly the 41 novels of the 'Discworld' series.

Pratchett was born in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, England, on April 28 1948, the only child to David and Eileen Pratchett. Pratchett left school when he was 17, to pursue an apprenticeship as a journalist. During this apprenticeship, he took the National Council for the Training of Journalists proficiency course and scored the highest marks in his group. Pratchett's breakthrough as an author happened in 1971with the publication of his first novel, *The Carpet People*. The first Discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic*was published in 1983.

With the BBC broadcasting *The Colour of Magic* as a TV series in 1985, Pratchett became a household name across the UK. Inspired by the growing popularity, Pratchett gave up his job as the Press Officer of the CEGB in 1987 and devoted himself to writing full-time. It was a discreetmove that resulted in massive sales catapulting himto the position of the UK's highest-selling author of the 1990s. Pratchett was proclaimed as the top-selling and highest earning British author by *The Times* in 1996.Pratchett was knighted for his contribution to literature in 2009. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2007. He subsequently made a huge public donation to Alzheimer's Research, UKand also became its patron. Pratchett died on March 12 2015 at the age of 66.

Pratchett's usage of humour is best evidenced in his Discworld novels which embody a genial mockery of the fantasy genre thereby exposing the hypocrisies of contemporary society in a complicated and ever-expanding universe and challenge the reader's intelligence through their tantalisingly multi-layered plots.Discworld, though originally conceived by Pratchett as a fantasy world held up by four elephants balanced on the back of a giant turtle—a light-hearted lampoon of the genre of the typical fantasy—hassubsequently almost done away with the parody and moulded itself into a sophisticated strike at contemporary society, exposing the

ridiculousness of everything ranging from Hollywood to the postal service, from the banks to football.

Pratchett's humour consists of his unique writing style and its several idiosyncrasies. Names of characters, places, and titles in his books contain puns, allusions, and cultural references. Names like Cohen the Barbarian and Leonard of Quirm parody Cohen the Barbarian plus Genghis Khan and Leonardo da Vinci, respectively, alongside the parody of real-world phenomena like film-making, newspaper publishing, rock and roll music, religion, ancient Greece, Egyptian history, the Gulf War, etc. Moreover, further parody is included as a feature within the stories, comprising subjects such as Ingmar Bergman's films, numerous fiction, science fiction, and various administrative systems.Pratchett's use of footnotes represents a comic departure from the narrative and are occasionally accompanied by footnotes of their own.

## 2.6.8 Summing Up

Humour is a way of dealing with reality. Through the layer of the popular, humour often looks at the contemporary and records the apparent absurdities, embedding vital critiques within its simplistic, and often caustic, content. Humour is directly related to history and even when it is at its genial best, it does not fail to represent the anxieties and issues of a time and space that is passing. 20th Century humour often functions as a prism through which the world is explored and its various dynamics and upheavals are gently (sometimes not so gently) captured without being preachy or creating pedestals.

## 2.6.9 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Discuss the significance of the rise of comedy as a literary genre in the twentieth century.
  2. What are the contributions of P.G. Wodehouse, Ogden Nash and Terry Pratchett in the world of humour?
- **Medium Length Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What is humour?
  2. How is humour relevant in contemporary living?

3. How did Wodehouse use humour in his narratives as a critique of the society?
4. What is the relationship between humour and history?

- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Write a short note on P.G. Wodehouse.
  2. What was 'discworld'?
  3. What do you understand by the term 'humourist'?

## 2.6.10 Suggested Reading

Caroll, Noel. *Humour: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014

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# Unit-7 □ Comics and Graphic Novels

*Structure*



## 2.7.1 Objectives

This Unit aims to relate the etymological origin of the term 'popular' with its ontological existence by looking at the ways comics and graphic novels have made a niche for themselves within the canon of popular literary culture. The students are welcome to debate whether comic and graphic novels should be treated as serious literature as we try to locate the rise of the genre in the West and in India.

## 2.7.2 Introduction

Discussing the etymology and journey of the term 'popular' and elaborating on various attitudes and ideas that the term received, reflected and signified,Raymond Williams writes:

> **Popular** was originally a legal and political term, from *popularis*, L—belonging to the people. An **actionpopular**, from C15, was a legal suit which it was open to anyone to begin. **Popular estate** and **popular government**, from C16, referred to a political system constituted or carried on by the whole people, but there was also the sense (cf. COMMON) of 'low' or 'base'. (198)

As Williams further informs, through the 18th and 19th centuries, the term shall gradually go on to signify something 'widely favoured', 'well liked' and even 'good'. However, '**Popular culture** was not identified by *the people* but by others, and it still carries two older senses: inferior kinds of work (cf. **Popular literature**, **popular press** as distinguished from *quality press*); and work deliberately setting out to win favour....' (199). And later, in the 20th century, the term was shortened to 'pop', the monosyllabic expression got a 'lively informality' but also became a victim of prejudice that often deemed popular art, literature and culture as 'trivial' (Williams, 199).

It is important to recall this brief history of the term 'popular' and the prejudices associated with especially in the context of our attempt at understanding comics and graphic novels, that are most spontaneously placed as texts put within the canon of popular literature and despite their wide popularity are often treated as aesthetically inferior, trivial and often objects of juvenile entertainment. Since we have in our syllabus a text like DurgabaiVyam and SubhashVyam's*Bhimayana* (2011), it is important for us to periodically inform ourselves regarding the term, genre and medium of comics and graphic narratives and determine whether or not comics and graphic narratives deserve to be identified as 'trivial' and 'inferior'. At the same time, we must look at how comics and graphic novels developed in the West and in India so that we can adequately identify the evolution of this brand of literature. Awareness about this evolution shall also enable us to locate the commonalities and differences between alphabetically written literary texts and texts written in graphic language while at the same time helping us to characterize *Bhimayana*, its art and ideology better.

## 2.7.3 Defining Comics and Graphic Novels

Comics is a form as well as a medium that uses images to communicate ideas, with or without alphabetic text and can be both of a single panel or frame or one that has multiple panels arranged sequentially. However, there are various opinions about true nature of comics and the way the same differs from the term 'graphic novel'. There is no denying the fact that most comics amalgamate image and alphabetic text in order to communicate ideas and the most typical form of comics is a multi-panelled sequential narrative. However, there are notable exceptions. For example, *The Far Side* by Gary Larson, *Non Sequitur* by Wiley Miller, Keane's *The Family Circus*and even the famous *Dennis the Menace* are all single-panelled comics having no sequence formed out of a succession of panels or frames. On the other hand there are wordless comics and graphic novels like Daishu Ma's

*Leaf*, Guojing's*The Only Child*, Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* and Sophie Burrows' *Crushing*. While all thinkers place 'image' as the central and inseparable medium of communication in comics as without them comics cannot function, differences generate with regard to the questions of the place of alphabetic texts or words and the element of sequentiality and to what extent they can be understood as inseparable with regard to comics.

Of all the regularly available definitions, McCloud's definition of comics is the most quoted one. As McCloud mentions, comics, 'plural in form but used with a singular verb' is:

> Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer. (9)

Comics presents a multimodality, and as Versaci writes, 'comic narration blends and modifies features shared by other art forms—especially literature, painting, photography, and film' (13). According to Eisner, comics is essentially a sequential art in which a description of action in a panel of comics can be 'diagrammed like a sentence' (2), and in comics, that deals with 'two fundamental communicating devices: words and images' (7) the 'accompanying text adds some non-illustrated thoughts' (2). Keeping in mind the fact that we have *Bhimayana* in our syllabus and also the fact that it—though fairly in a different manner—uses a way of graphic storytelling that is closer to longformcomicbook sequential narrative wherein we find regular interconnectivity of alphabetic text and images, we shall mostly focus on the most common variant of comicbook narration and graphic storytelling where alphabetic text and images are used to visualize a narrative with the use of a multi-panelled sequential framework.

## 2.7.4 Tools of Graphic Narration

In this regard one must understand that comics naturally use a visual language and the greatest power of comics lies in its ability to visualize. In this regard we must understand that the image in comics can be used for photorealistic representation or even in an imaginatively expressionist manner just like we have sometimes an imaginative transportation from the literal and real in our act of witnessing a painting. In a multi-panelled sequential comic we can often find a grid of democratic panels and the reader can be naturally drawn to pursue a 'Z' (top left corner of the page to bottom right corner of the page following the succession of images and panels) path of reading process. The panels are separated by a space that can be often adjusted, increased and reduced according to needs and situations. This space separating one panel from the other is called gutter. However, in order to

accentuate a particular moment of the story, there can be a larger frame somewhere between evenly shaped panels which would naturally attract the attention of the reader. Sometimes such a larger frame can be spreading through two side-by-side pages, a phenomenon that is called a two-page spread. Sometimes a whole page can contain one large frame. This type of page is called a splash page or full-page splash. When a frame is half the size of the page the same is called a half-page splash. On some occasions, a specific panel or frame that is not quite as large as a half page splash can be seen utilizing the entire width of the paper. This type of frame is called a full-width panel. In certain cases, a portion of an object can pop out of a panel. This kind of visualization is called bleed. Similarly, comics also presents an optic experience where things are visualized from various angles and according to various ways of seeing. Thus, there can a long view or longshot wherein we can find a panel in which the reader is situated away from a specific action as if to suggest that he is watching things from a distance. On the other hand, there can be a close-up and an extreme-close-up for greater detailing and drama. Similarly there can be extreme-longshots, worm-view, hawk-eye view or even low-angle shots that are used for visualizing an object or experience.

When we look into the ways alphabetic texts work in comics, we must first recognize that the alphabetic text in comics does not merely appear as linguistic signifiers as we would expect them to be in texts that are alphabetically written. Comics is a form of graphic narration and therefore even the alphabetically written text must be seen as visualizations. Alphabetic text in comics stands as both a linguistic signifier and a visual metaphor, forming the imagery of the comics in question. It is part of the imagery. Thus, it needs to be pursued graphically too. Alphabetic text in comics can appear in various ways. It can appear as a ‘caption’, a descriptive text that is often spoken by a third person omniscient narrator. It can appear in speech and thought balloons of characters visualized in order to refer to their spoken or unspoken yet contemplated words. It can even appear as onomatopoeia. In some cases, the alphabetic text can be completely part of a scenery. However, as the alphabetic text forms part of the imagery it can be shaped, sized and placed variously as per the demands of various contexts available in a graphic narrative. The alphabetic text can be typed, hand-written and so on. A slight alteration of size and font or visual register of the alphabetic text can signify a change of mood, emphasis and so on.

We must know the differences between a comics and a graphic novel. Graphic novel uses the same visualization medium that is available in comics. The term ‘graphic novel’ is fairly a new entrant. It is often applied to, and often used by creators and publishers to refer to, graphically written works that are longer than

the usual comic book and self-contained compared to many comics that appeared periodically. Moreover, as we would later see in our discussion, since the term 'comics' often loosely signifies something non-serious and juvenile, and since in most cases comics were monthly or weekly published in stapled pages in the form of periodicals or often as part of newspapers and periodicals in the form of strips, the act of naming self-contained and longform works as 'graphic novels' and attempting to distance them from comics, even though both utilize the same communicative tools and machinery, can be understood as an attempt at achieving gravity and social, intellectual and aesthetic acceptability. According to Sabin, this usage/ invention of the term 'graphic novel' was a 'hype—the invention of publishers' public relations departments. It meant that publishers could sell adult comics to a wider public by giving them another name' (165). It is important here to highlight that sequentiality is central to graphic novels since they are longform works utilizing the communicative medium of comics. However, graphic novels can also be wordless.

## 2.7.5 A Brief History of Western Comics

What we today identify as comics with its verbal-visual-sequential narrative form in the most normative way, is often associated with various visual mediums of narrative art in the west and thereby various such arts are considered precursors of comics. As mentions Sabin:

> Although the comic itself is an invention of the nineteenth century, its antecedents date back to the Middle Ages. It was only with the origins of printing in Europe that images were produced for a mass audience. It is true that before this there had been illustrations, paintings and other artworks designed for public view, there had even been narratives in sequential pictures, such as Trajan's Column in Rome (dedicated AD 113) and the Bayeux Tapestry in Normandy (c 1100). But in order to see these, people had to travel to them. After the advent of the printing press, images could travel to the people. (11)

After the advent of the printing press and with the development of technologies and societal environment beneficial towards mass-circulation, broadsheets came into play. In the 17$^{th}$ and 18$^{th}$ century Europe, several creators developed narratives through sequentially placed illustrations. William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* (1726) is a prime example in this regard. However, it was only in the era of Industrial Revolution that magazines and newspapers, wherein later we shall see comic strips, started to develop. In 1826, *The Glasgow Looking Glass*, the first comics magazine started its journey. The Francophone Swiss artist, RodolpheTöpffer too published

sequential narratives told in illustrations with attached alphabetic texts. In 1867, C. H. Ross and his wife came up with the first regular comicbook character which would appear in *Ally Sloper'sHalf Holiday.* In America, Outcault's*Yellow Kid* and *Hogan's Alley* began gaining popularity in the newspapers.

In the Twentieth century, the medium became even more popular for the kids with the rise of European and American comics like *The Adventures of Tintin*, Superman, Spiderman Captain America comics and others. In the 1960s and 70s 'Comix' developed as a genre that used the narrative methodology of comics though it was mainly for an adult audience and different from mainstream comics. The term 'comix' was thus used to identify underground comics. On the other hand, graphic novels were to be understood as longer works, no longer stapled 32-pagers, that would present a self-contained non-periodical visual narrative through the use of sequential illustrations.

## 2.7.6 A Brief History of Indian Comics

India had and continues to have its own visual art forms, some of which can be placed as precursors of modern-day comics. Art forms like like *Talapatra,PataChitra*, *Chitrakathi*, *Phad*, *Kaavad*, *Kalamkari*, *Nakshi-Kantha* have made use of sequentially placed illustrations, with or without the use of alphabetic text, in India. Ajanta Cave drawings too use images in sequence to narrate scenes. Similarly, *Razamnama* too used images and alphabetic texts to tell the story of *Mahabharata*. Some of these visual-storytelling methods definitely had their influences on Indian comics. However, when we look at comics strictly from a modern point of view we must clearly identify Indian comics as a phenomenon originating and developing under a definite western influence.

In the 1950s, comic strips began to appear in newspapers. *The Phantom*, *Mandrake* and *Rip Kirby* were famous comics during this period. It was in the 1960s, when the *Times of India* began with *Indrajal Comics*. *Indrajal Comics* began as a monthly magazine with its first ten issues devoting sixteen pages (of each issue) to Phantom and the other twelve pages to general knowledge for the kids. Gaining popularity gradually, *Indrajala Comics* soon switched to fortnightly and weekly appearances between 1967 and 1981. These super-hero comics gained wide popularity as they were gradually getting published in several regional languages like Bengali, Marathi, Gujrati, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Hindi. In this regard one must also remember the name of Narayan Debnath, the creator of Batul the Great, who would appear as the first Indian comicbook superhero whose stories were published in Bengali. Similarly, Debnathalso came up with

*Hnada and Bhoda*. While many of the superhero comics that developed in the 1960s and 1970s were either Western superheroes told in Indian languages or Indian superheroes rivaling the established western comicbook superheroes, with the emergence of*Amar Chitra Katha*, by AnatPai, comics in India took a new turn. *Amar Chitra Katha* which began in 1967, was principally devoted to comicbook narration of figures drawn from Indian mythology and history. Thus, issues on Krishna, Shiva, Shivaji, Akbar, Asoka and other such mythological and historical figures were subjects of *Amar Chitra Katha*'s visual narration. Pai even tried his best to introduce comicbook histories in school curriculum and was successfully pushing comics into the education system. Colaterally, such brands as Diamond Comics, Raj Comics, Tulsi Comics and others too developed characters like Chacha Chaudhary, Nagraj, Commando Dhruva, Bahadur, Jamboo that became extremely popular among kids.

On the other hand the graphic novel made its entry in India with Orijit Sen's 1994 work *The River of Stories*. Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor* (2004), *The Barn Owl's Wonderous Capers* (2007), *The Harappa Files* (2011), *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* (2016) and *Doab Dil* (2019) are extremely popular works. AmrutaPatil's*Kari* (2008), *AdiParva: Churning of the Ocean* (2012), *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* (2016), *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest* (2019) are significant works that are commonly included in the canon of Indian graphic novels along with Vishwajyoti Ghosh's *Delhi Calm* (2010). Other such important graphic novels are Malik Sajad's*Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*, *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* by Durgabai and SubhashVyam, Srividya Natarajan's *A Gardener in the Wasteland*. There have also developed very popular comics anthologies that cater to a wide audience in India. Some of them are *First Hand* and *Pao* anthology and *Longform*.

## 2.7.7 Prejudices against Comics and Graphic Novels

Comics and graphic novels have been historically viewed inferior to alphabetically written literary texts. As writes Sabin,

> Comics have smuggled their way into art books before. Invariably they have been there, however, as an aside, a digression, to demonstrate the inspiration for the 'proper' art that constitutes the bulk of the book. (7)

Comics have been severally attacked. Critiquing comics, Fredric Wertham in 'Comics in Education' wrote:

> Of course we can now reach multitudes of children and semi-illiterate adults with images rather than with cultivated language. But should we?

> Any degradation of language is a potential threat to civilization. (Quoted in Hatfield, 32)

While we certainly do not live in that sort of environment anymore, we must also understand that comics and graphic novel receive marginal attention compared to alphabetically written texts in the academia. And in the words of Hatfield, they are often viewed 'sub-literary' and 'juvenile' (32). Thus, it would not be erroneous to assume that in spite of their wide popularity and the variety of themes and issues that the comics and graphic novels tread with there is consistently a lack of attention, if not a predominance of negative prejudice, towards them in the academia.

## 2.7.8 Can Comics and Graphic Novels Communicate Serious Issues?

Comics communicate in a multimodal language and often demands a critical literacy for maintenance of a fruitful signification mechanism. The narrative methodology of comics and graphic novels needs to be understood as a special kind of writing. The greatest power of comics lies in its ability to visualize a story. It can visualize a story in photorealistic terms; however, can also illustrate things utilizing various drawing techniques and amalgamating various visual-arts techniques at the same time. This provides a natural polyphony and layeredness to the visual narration. This layeredness and polyphony is extended with the imaginative and creative use of the alphabetic text and the arrangement of shapes and sizes, fonts, placement and styles of the same. While the alphabetic text in comics can ally with the images to demonstrate the non-illustrated thoughts, in certain cases, the alphabetic text can even deviate from, distort and critique the illustrated part of the visualization. Thus, it can promote a heightened sense of plurality and polyphony. In certain cases, according to few commentators, the graphic language employed in the comics and graphic novels, transcends the limitations of the alphabetic language. According to Versaci, for example,

> ... comic book memorists have an additional "signifier" at their disposal—the artistic style of their images—and this important element allows them to present the first person narration in ways unique to the comics medium. As a representational device, images present the world through a third-person perspective; by contrast, the text of comic book memoir is typically written in the first person. Thus, the words achieve interiority through the "I", yet the pictures suggest exteriority because we "see" the first-person narrator and are therefore positioned "outside" of him or her. (44)

Additionally, the visualization narrative in comics and graphic novels can even expose and express the often unspeakable experiences in creative ways. Often, its non-serious cartoonized narration can subvert dominant discursiveness of officially mediated narratives, histories and doctrines. Thus, the fact that comics is an extremely innovative and constantly evolving and maturing language in itself is proven by the fact that Scott McCloud's doctoral thesis that we commonly know as *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* is actually written in the form of a longform comics. The fact that serious issues are dealt with in comics and they often are aimed at reforming and informing the minds of the children and adults rather than promoting juvenile delinquency is supported by the works like Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. *Maus* presents the eye-witness accounts of a victim of the Holocaust. In *Maus*, all Jews appear as mice, the Germans as Cats and the Polish as pigs. Visualizing the horrors of the Holocaust, the genocidal instinct of the Nazis and the unspeakable dehumanization and agony of the Jews is narrated by the sequential narrative of cats enjoying themselves in killing mice. The book won the Pulizer Prize and remains a landmark proof of the comics' ability to deal with serious, often unspeakable, chapters of history, both public and personal. Similarly, in India, even many comics meant for children had a serious purpose. AnantPai began *Amar Chitra Katha* to educate Indian children through visual storytelling and entertainment. He even managed to push *Amar Chitra Katha* into schools. Orijit Sen's *The River of Stories* is based on the Narmada BachaoAndolan, while Ghosh's*Delhi Calm* and his edited volume *This Side, That Side*, depict respectively the commoners' experiences of the Emergency in India and the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. As we shall be studying later in detail, *Bhimayana* is a critique of untouchability and casteism in India and utilizes the graphic narration of the Ambedkar story. Using cartoonized characters and visual narration methodology, Sumit Kumar's *Amar Bari, Tomar Bari Naxalbari* is an excessively layered and informative retelling of the violent and problematic history of the Naxalbari and Maoist movements. Malik Sajad, in his attempt at presenting the alienation and dehumanization of the Kashmiris visualizes all Kashmiris, Muslims and Hindus, as hanguls (the Kashmiri stag, which is considered the national animal of Kashmir and is a species that is endangered) while all other Indians and foreigners are placed as regular human beings. Mark Waid informs:

> In 2013, an instructor named Christy Blanch unveiled the first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) devoted to comics, using them as a lens through which to examine gender issues. Blanch set an enrollment record for an online humanities class with nearly 10,000 students across six continents, and no one laughed. They just started queuing up for her next class. (ix)

## 2.7.9. Summing Up

Comics can communicate anything and everything and can be interpreted variously by various age-groups, genders, classes, races and castes. While it is a fact that comics can communicate serious issues, stories and histories, we must also keep in mind the fact that it is not necessary for comics to be dealing with serious subjects all the time. Comics must be enjoyed as themselves just like other forms of literature. What comics and graphic novels demand is a critical literacy of a special category that can enable the reader to interpret the possible meanings of visualization. It is not inferior to alphabetically written literature and is an ever-evolving arena since ways of saying and seeing can never be limited. It is erroneous to assume that comics, as a form and as a medium is subliterary in nature. Moreover, even if a section of comics is devoted to children's entertainment, the same must be pursued critically and attentively as a distinct body of children's literature in order to diagnose the politics of visual articulation in such comicbooks. Thus, comics and graphic novels, in India and outside India, are consistently gaining greater respect and popularity as a communicative tool to tell excellent stories, histories and memories. They are consistently pursued as subjects of serious academic research and many universities and research institutes have developed curriculums containing comics and graphic novels over the years. These developments certainly pave a way forward and make comics-enthusiasts, lovers and creators hopeful about further mass-acceptance and greater accommodation in the academia.

## 2.7.10 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What is a Comic Book? Is there any difference between Comic Books and Graphic Novels?
  2. Write a brief history of Western Comic Book culture. Does this history bear any link to the history of Indian comic books?
  3. Do you think comics as a genre can be treated as serious literature? Give reasons for your answer.
- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1 Write briefly on the form of a comic book.
  2. Would you say Comic Books are accepted by all? Give reasons for your answer.

3. How relevant are comic books in today's society?

- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Write briefly on a) McCloud's definition of Comics b) Eisner's definition of comics
  2. Write briefly on the prejudices against graphic novels.

## 2.7.11 Suggested Reading

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# Unit-8 □ South Asian Popular Literature: History and Politics

*Structure*



## 2.8.1 Objectives

This unit traces the rise of popular fiction in South Asia. The unit provides a brief overview of the contemporary literatures coming out from the countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afganisthan and their place in the postcolonial milieu. Learners are encouraged to debate the notions of "serious" and "popular" literature.

## 2.8.2 Introduction

"Literature is a Mansion with Many Rooms" says Indian poet, Meena Alexander, in her interview with Jhilam Chattaraj, at the Hyderabad Literary Festival on 8th January, 2016 (https://www.asiancha.com/content/view/2298/547/). As regards her take on the rise and criticism of popular literature in India, Alexander says:

> I don't believe in criticising anyone's work because it is popular or kitschy. Everybody should write. It is up to the reader to choose and decide. I don't think popular fiction is bad at all. It is great, it is there. It may not be my taste, but someone else may enjoy it. So it's fine. I don't think one should prescribe what people should write and what is good and what is bad. I don't think that way.

Popular literature is written primarily to entertain the masses. Ken Gelder considers popular fiction to be the "opposite of Literature" in *Popular Fiction* (2004) and preferred to use "Literature" instead of "literature" to distinguish the latter "general field of writing" from the former "quality literary works". For this reason, Gelder further distinguishes between the words "author" and "writer". He argues that popular fiction has less to do with "originality and creativity", so for popular fiction, the term "writer" is preferred to "author". Another trait which differentiates the two, according to him, is their aims; while the goal of "Literature" is the self-expression of the author, the primary focus of popular fiction is its readers. The most important genre in popular literature is undoubtedly the romance, closely followed by fantasy or science fiction, detective story or murder mystery. In recent times, genres as graphic novels and comic books are also included in popular literature.

## 2.8.3 Short History of Popular Fiction in South Asia

South Asian literature popular literature refers to the works of authors originating from or residing in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Although many of them have moved away from their countries to settle abroad, they remain emotionally engaged with their cultural roots and take interest in the changes taking place in their homelands. In his *South-Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations* (2016), Alex Tickell, identifies the period from the early 1990s to the present as one of radical historical and cultural change in South Asia which in turn considerably "reshaped fictional imaginaries" in this region (3). He identifies India's dominating presence in South-Asia owing to sustained economic growth and urban-societal developments, Pakistan's long history of military rule and the global ramifications of the 'war on terror', Sri Lanka's long running, collectively traumatizing ethnic conflict and Bangladesh's rapid urban growth and the legacy of the 1971 liberation war, as the foremost factors that generated literary reflection in this part of the world.

English has become the nearest thing there has ever been to a global language in the 21st century. This has promoted the unprecedented production and consumption

of popular literature in English, in South-Asian countries which were former colonies of England. In *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) Salman Rushdie remarks:

> What seems to me to be happening is that those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it–assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.

Older patterns of readership which prompted South-Asian writers to cater to a 'double audience' at home and abroad, have been supplemented by the emergence, in India particularly, of a new generation of readers of English fiction published specifically for the Asian markets (Tickell). The importance of this literature may be evinced from its inclusion in the English Literature curricula in universities across the world in the last few decades. Commercially, the importance of South-Asian literature is marked by high profile literary festivals held in the region and lucrative contracts offered to the authors by publishing houses.

## a. India

Indian English fiction dates back to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864). However, it was Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981)–an internationally acclaimed bestseller–that started a new trend in the Indian English novel which paved the way for the emergence of a new generation of novelists who shaped the course of contemporary fiction. In recent times, since 1990s, India has seen the emergence of "popular" fiction in English which explore the experiences of English speaking young Indians living and working in urban metropolises. These novels provide adequate space for the young India to express themselves in ways that are significantly different from the earlier popular Indian writings in English.

Chetan Bhagat is the most prolific writers of popular fiction with several bestsellers to his credit: *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *Half Girlfriend* (2014) and *One Indian Girl* (2017). *The New York Times* article: "An Investment Banker Finds Fame Off the Books" cited Chetan Bhagat as "the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history." Durjoy Datta, is the bestselling author of twelve novels which predominantly explore romantic relationships. He believes himself to be the voice of his generation, which has found no real representation in Indian English fiction. Some of his works are: *Of Course I Love You!* (2008), *She Broke Up, I Didn't* (2010), *Till the Last Breath* (2012), *When Only Love Remains* (2014), *Our Impossible Love* (2016).

Amish Tripathi deserves special mention for reviving mythology as popular fiction. His *Shiva Trilogy* has been the fastest selling book series in Indian publishing history and his debut novel, *Immortals of Meluha* (2010) was a phenomenal commercial success making him an internationally acclaimed Indian author. It was followed by *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011), *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013), *Scion of Ikshvaku* (2015) and *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017). Tripathi's work is mythological fiction based on a fantasy re-imagining of the Indian god Shiva reinventing him for modern India. Therefore, though critics suggest his books lack any literary merit, they admire him for his ability to "create completely new stories from old ones".

Among women writers Preeti Shenoy, a blogger and writer from Pune, is "the only woman in the highest-selling league," who ranks among the top five highest selling authors in India ("India Today"). Most of her works focus on young adult relationships and the many facets of love: *Life Is What You Make It* (2011), *Tea for Two and a Piece of Cake* (2012), *The Secret Wish List* (2012), *The One You Cannot Have* (2013), *It Happens for a Reason* (2014), *Why We Love The Way We Do* (2015) and *It's All in the Planets* (2016).

Rashmi Bansal, an Indian non-fiction writer, entrepreneur and a youth expert is the bestselling author of eight books on entrepreneurship. Her first book, *Stay Hungry Stay Foolish* (2008), traced the progress of 25 MBA entrepreneurs and sold a record number of copies. She introduced a very new concept–that entrepreneurship is not just a business; it is really about creating one's own destiny which touched a chord in young India. This was followed by *Connect the Dots* (2010), *I Have a Dream* (2011), *Poor Little Rich Slum* (2012), *Follow Every Rainbow* (2013), *Take me Home* (2014), *Arise Awake* (2015) and *God's Own Kitchen* (2017). Most of these have made it to bestsellers list.

Popular literature in India lacks literary elements. However, it offers a critique the socio-cultural issues of India in the era of globalisation. The characters presented are representatives of the youthful, aspirational middle class and therefore the novels may be read as a reflexive engagement with the cultural politics of more literary traditions of Indian-English fiction (Tickell 8).

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## b. Pakistan

Mushtaq Bilal's *Writing Pakistan: Conversations on Identity, Nationhood and Fiction* (2016), a collection of conversations with ten contemporary writers of Pakistani fiction in English, draws our attention to the "increasing popularity and visibility" of Pakistani writers of English fiction in the global literary market.

Pakistani popular fiction rose to prominence after 11 September 2001 al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the retaliatory US invasion of Afghanistan. As Pakistan became involved in this neighbouring conflict, both as an ally and a target of a military campaign, international readers became interested in learning about the dynamics of its society and culture, which breed religious extremism. The global attitude to Islam and Islamic societies in the post-9/11 era often degenerated into anti-Muslim racism. This was both "reified and challenged" by writers of Pakistani origin.

Mohammed Hanif is a British Pakistani writer and journalist well known for his debut novel, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008). It is a political satire based on the 1988 plane crash that killed General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, former president of Pakistan. Hanif condemns General Zia and the coterie of officers. The narrative is held by Junior Officer Ali Shigri, who is convinced that his father was killed on the orders of the General. The narrative touches upon issues that dominated the Pakistan of 1980s: a blind woman stoned to death for being the victim of a gang rape and the unobtrusive rise of Islamic extremism in the form of the Taliban. Hanif's novel marks "a new departure in Pakistani writing ... It is probably the first English novel about Pakistan with ambitions to cross over from literary to popular fiction" (Sara Wajid, *New Statesman*). Among other popular fiction of this genre are Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). Pakistan, with its long history of army coups and military dictatorship, needs novels of this kind. Nadeem Aslam, British-Pakistani writer, won critical acclaim in the West for *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), his third novel after his prize-winning *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and the *Season of Rainbirds* (1993). *The Wasted Vigil* takes readers into the ruined world of Afghanistan, exploring the

impact of the political and religious forces on the lives of apparently unconnected ordinary people thrown together when Marcus, an English doctor whose progressive Afghani wife was murdered by the Taliban, opens his home to the others: Lara, from St. Petersburg, looking for her brother, a soldier who disappeared decades before during the Soviet invasion; Casa, a young Afghani *jihadi* eager to sacrifice his life for Islam; and James, an American Special Forces agent trying to protect America from Islamic terrorists.

Contemporary Pakistani women writers offer contrasting portraits of womanhood. Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord* (1991) shocked the conservative Pakistani society for its exposure of her politically famous but abusive husband, Mustafa Khar. A devastating indictment of women's role in Muslim society, it was an international bestseller translated into 39 languages. Durrani claims to be the first Muslim woman in history to have publicly expressed her experience of domestic violence and proclaims: "I have my voice now and I'm not letting it die ... I got it with too much difficulty." *Blasphemy* (1998) explores hypocrisy of religious figures and *Happy Things in Sorrow Times* (2013), based on an Afghan girl Rabia, critiques dynamics of Afghan politics in the pre/post 9/11. On the other end of the spectrum is Sabyn Javeri's bestselling political thriller, *Nobody Killed Her* (2017). Javeri uses strong women characters to challenge submissive female stereotypes in conservative Pakistani society. The novel explores the friendship of two women: Rani Shah, the scion of a political dynasty; and Nazo Khan, an asylum-seeker. Though assumed to be a fictionalised version of the life and assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Javeri considers her work as a story of ambitious women, scaling new heights in a country steeped in fanaticism and patriarchy. *Hijabistan* (2019) is her collection of short stories set in the UK and Pakistan where Javeri uses the *hijab* as a metaphor for truths that her characters conceal from society.

Pakistani popular fiction portrays a negative view of the country: "Pakistan is lawless, conservative, reactionary, orthodox Muslim, anti-woman, and run by military dictatorships and crazy politicians". Therefore, general readers of this fiction consider it to be politicised and written for the global Anglophone community. The sudden popularity of this fiction after 9/11 reinforces this view. However, most contemporary Pakistani novelists assert that they consider fiction to be an art form and write for readers who have the ability to appreciate their works and not merely draw political insights about Pakistani society and Pakistan's relationship with the West. While some are quick to reject the 'reductive frameworks,' others are happy to 'build bridges between Pakistani culture and the rest of the world' and 'disarm' some of the wrong perceptions about Pakistani society (Dr. Munazza Yaqoob).

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- *What we talk about when we talk about Pakistani Literature.* (https://themissingslate.com/2013/07/18/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-pakistani-literature-an-interview-with-snehal-shingavi/)
- *Writing Pakistan: Conversations on Identity, Nationhood and Fiction* Reviewed by Dr. Munazza Yaqoob. (file:///C:/Users/Aditi/Downloads/345-Article%20Text-615-2-10-20171230.pdf)
- 'I Have My Voice Now': Pakistani Abuse Survivor Devotes Life to Helping Women (https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/785n8g/i-have-my-voice-now-pakistani-abuse-survivor-devotes-life-to-helping-women)
- This author's fictional tale of a female Pakistani politician is a story set too close to reality (https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/culture/story/sabyn-javeri-book-review-nobody-killed-her-benazir-bhutto-indira-gandhi-lifest-971700-2017-04-16)

## c. Bangladesh

Bangladeshi English fiction rose into prominence with the creation of Bangladesh as a sovereign country through the war for liberation in 1971. However, as Bangladesh was created on the basis of linguistic nationalism, it was difficult for aspiring writers to write in English ignoring national sentiments throughout the 1980s and early the 1990s. Lack of English-book publishers and readers also compounded their problem. (Khademul Islam, "Life and times of literary magazines"; Fakrul Alam "In the streets of Dhaka"). In this context Dr.Rashid Askari writes:

> In South-Asian English writing, Indian or Pakistani writings in English have by now proved their own existence. But Bangladesh is lagging much behind. Nevertheless, Bangladesh is not giving a walk-over.

English fiction from Bangladesh appeared from the mid-1990s through the writers of Bangladeshi diaspora. Australian-Bangladeshi writer Adib Khan has published five novels in English: *Seasonal Adjustments* (1994), *Solitude of Illusions* (1996), *The Storyteller* (2000), *Homecoming* (2005) and *Spiral Road* (2007), among which *Seasonal Adjustments* won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book. He explores search for self and identity, migration, displacement and diasporic anxiety. Bangladeshi-born British writer, Monica Ali, wrote her debut novel, *Brick Lane* (2003) about the immigrant scene of East London and won international acclaim. The dilemmas faced by Asian women abroad are frequently explored by Bangladeshi diasporic women writers: Rekha Waheed's *The A-Z Guide*

*to Arranged Marriage* (2005) and *Saris and the City* (2005); Kia Abdullah's *Love, Life and Assimilation* (2006); Swedish-Bangladeshi Dilruba Z. Ara's *A List of Offences* (2007), Sanchita Islam's *Gungi Blues* (2008), Tanwi Nandini Islam's *Bright Lines* (2015).

A significant number of writers of Bangladesh explore the process of identity construction against the backdrop of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Tahmima Anam's debut novel, A *Golden Age* (2007) is a fictional rendering of the 1971 genocide. Her two other novels are: *The Good Muslim* (2011) and *The Bones of Grace* (2016). Kazi Anis Ahmed's debut novel, *The World in My Hands* (2013), is a story of two friends torn apart after the army takeover. Mahmudur Rahman's *Killing the Water* (2010), Manzu Islam's *Song of Our Swampland* (2010), Neamat Imam's *The Black Coat* (2013), Ghalib Islam's *Fire in the Unnameable Country* (2014) and Shazia Omar's *Dark Diamond* (2016) explore facets of Bangladeshi history and culture, overlapping the past and the present.

The success of Bangladeshi writers in the global arena inspired Bangladesh-based writers. The emergence of publishing houses and literary magazines in Dhaka: 'Bengal Lights Books' (2011) has helped the expansion of popular fiction in Bangladesh in recent times.

## Sources:


- *Bangladeshis writing in English* (https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-150619)
- *Opening Bangladesh to the World: A Conversation with Four Contemporary Writers* (www.jstor.org/stable/10.7588/worllitetoda.87.3.0045)
- Alam, Fakrul, ed. *Dictionary of Literary Biography: South Asian Writers in English*, 2006.


## d. Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan writing is marginalized in the academic study of 'South Asia' and the location and politics of publishing has had considerable impact on Sri Lankan writing in English: "Like in Bangladesh and Pakistan, Sri Lanka reaction and resistance existed against the language of the coloniser after independence, and creative writing in English was considered an elitist activity until the 1980s" (Fakrul Alam). However, there was also growing reaction against this trend. Lakdhas Wikkrama Sinha, a Sri Lankan poet known for his fusion of the two languages–English and Sinhala–wrote in first book of poems, *Lustre: Poems* (1965):

> I have come to realise that I am using the language of the most despicable and loathsome people on earth; I have no wish to extend its life and range, enrich its tonality.
>
> To write in English is a form of cultural treason. I have had for the future to think of a way of circumventing this treason; I propose to do this by my writing entirely by making my writing entirely immoralist and destructive. (51)

Sri Lankan writing in English primarily emerged with the publications of still best-known diasporic writers: Michael Ondaatje, Shyam Selvadurai and Romesh Gunesekera. Michael Ondaatje won the Booker Prize for *The English Patient* (1992) and the Sri Lankan novel was recognised globally. His novels–*Running in the Family* (1982), *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), *Anil's Ghost* (2000)–explores the dynamics of family and loss of cultural identity in the backdrop of war and violence. Sri Lankan civil war that erupted in 1983 after years of ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamils minority left its mark in most Sri Lankan novels in English, like Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) and Romesh Gunesekera's *Reef* (1994), which won international acclaim.

Among the most celebrated contemporary authors is Ashok Ferrey whose first two books–*Colpetty People* (2005) and *The Good Little Ceylonese Girl* (2006)–were both shortlisted for Sri Lanka's prestigious Gratiaen Award. Ferrey's novels explore Sri Lankans as they navigate worlds between Ceylon and the West while managing to stick to their Sri Lankan roots: *The Professional* (2013) and *The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons* (2015). Ru Freeman, a Sri Lankan born American novelist, uses the memories of political strife in her childhood in Sri Lanka in *On Sal Mal Lane* (2013). Nayomi Munaweera offers powerful portraits of Sri Lankan during the civil war, to evoke Sri Lanka for her western readers in her debut novel, *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2012), through Yasodhara and Saraswathi–one Sinhala, the other Tamil–and their struggle for survival. Sonali Deraniyagala's *Wave* (2013) is a memoir of a strong woman forced to re-construct her life after the devastating 2004 Asian Tsunami which wipes out her family.

Though the ethnic conflict and the tsunami have defined Sri Lanka's image for the past few decades, there are novels where characters struggle to assert themselves in the conservative Sri Lankan society. Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998) offers a glimpse into the life of the elite in Colombo whose lives are destroyed by conflicted passions and class hatred. Ru Freeman's *A Disobedient Girl* (2009) portrays two strong women, torn apart by class, yet struggling to retain control of their lives. It is an indictment of caste, class and race in Sri Lankan society. Shehan Karunatilaka uses cricket as a device to write about Sri Lankan

society, culture and politics in *Chinaman: the Legend of Pradeep Mathew* (2011) through a journalist's quest to track down a missing cricketer of the 1980s. Nayomi Munaweera's *What Lies Between Us* (2016), is the story of Ganga, a young girl, who has to immigrate to the US with her mother after they are ostracised by their unforgiving community. Pramudith Rupasinghe, author of six best-selling novels, breaks away from traditional Sri Lanka based books, to write *Behind the Eclipse* (2016) about a tribal boy surviving the Ebola crisis in Africa.

Though a new generation of Sri Lankan writers in English has emerged in recent times, the politics of Sri Lankan publication discriminates the resident writers of Sri Lanka and benefits the expatriate Sri Lankan writers. Therefore, Fakrul Alam comments: "Sri Lankan writers in English resident in their own country have never received sufficient international exposure, nor have their works been published or written about abroad."

## Sources:

- 10 best books by Sri Lankan authors (http://www.pulse.lk/kindleleaf/10-best-books-sri-lankan-authors/)
- *Sri Lankan Women Writing in English* (https://roar.media/english/life/culture-identities/sri-lankan-women-writing-in-english/)

## e. Afghanistan

In a war-torn country like Afghanistan, there is little demand for books. Few authors have published books owing to the lack of readership and publishing opportunities. This gap is filled almost exclusively by expatriate Afghan writers in the recent years like Khaled Hosseini and Nadia Hashimi.

Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul and immigrated to the United States. He is known for his vivid depictions of Afghanistan in three bestsellers–*The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013). Prior to the release of his third novel, Hosseini said: "I am forever drawn to family as a recurring central theme of my writing". *The Kite Runner* tells the story of Amir, a young boy, struggling to cope with memories of haunting childhood abuse. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, also set in Afghanistan, has a feminine perspective as it follows the shifts in the political and social spheres through the relationship between two women, Mariam and Laila, the first and second wives of an abusive husband. Familial love is also the theme of the third novel–the separation of the two siblings, Abdullah and Pari, is "the heart of the book".

Nadia Hashimi, American novelist born to Afghan parents who immigrated to the US in the 1970s, is the author of three international bestsellers: *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell* (2014), *When the Moon Is Low* (2015) and *A House Without Windows* (2016). Her debut novel, *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, is a moving tale of powerlessness and the courage to control one's own destiny. Set in Kabul in 2007, it tells the story of Rahima who adopts the ancient custom of *bacha posh*, which allows her to dress and be treated as a boy until she is of marriageable age. Dressed as a boy, she can attend school and chaperone her older sisters. Interestingly, a century earlier, her great-great grandmother, Shekiba, left orphaned by an epidemic, dressed as a man–the guard of the king's harem–and built a new life for herself. The story of two women separated by a century and connected by legacy raises questions about the fate Afghan women struggling against oppressive societal rules down generations. Hashimi's second novel, *When the Moon Is Low* explores issues of refugees and immigration through an Afghani family fleeing persecution after the Taliban occupation. Her third novel, *A House Without Windows* is a commentary on Afghanistan's culture and legal system. Zeba's quiet life as a loving wife and mother is shattered when her husband is found brutally murdered in the courtyard of their home. She is thrown into prison for his murder and her future is in the hands of an outdated legal system. Hashimi shows the stark reality of Afghanistan where women suffer in a traditional culture.

The emergence of internationally-acclaimed novels has provided a window into Afghani culture and society for Western readers. However, much of what is said and written about Afghanistan today is from the perspective of an outsider and is liable to repeat past generalizations. But even this wave of literature is important for its positive impact on the literary scene in Afghanistan.

### Sources:

- Triumph of Afghan writers in exile boosts literary scene at home (https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/firouzeh-ramazanzadeh/lifestyle-culture/triumph-of-afghan-writers-in-exile-boosts-literary-scene-at-home)
- Khaled Hosseini: https://khaledhosseini.com/
- Nadia Hashimi: https://nadiahashimibooks.com/

## 2.8.4 Politics of South Asian Popular Fiction

"Popular fiction" is also denoted by terms as "junk fiction" a term introduced by Thomas J. Roberts in *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction* (1990), and even "pulp

fiction", "commercial fiction", "mass market fiction", with associated negative connotations. Undoubtedly South Asian popular literature is influenced by the currents of the global literary marketplace with regard to the politics of the tastes of the reading public, the authors' aspirations for success and publishing industries. The politics of literature is not the same as the politics of writers, nor does it concern the way writers explore socio-political and cultural issues. To quote Jacques Rancière (*Politics of Literature*, 2008): "The expression 'politics of literature' implies that literature does politics simply by being literature ... It assumes that there is an essential connection between politics as a specific form of collective practice and literature as well-defined practice of the art of writing" (3). As Rancière suggests, it simply implies that literature highlights issues "out of space and time, place and identity, speech and noise, the visible and the invisible" that is the arena of the political (4).

## a. Readers

Readers have a crucial role in the development of popular fiction as the success of popular fiction in the commercial market depends on the interest of the readers. It is often claimed that diaspora writers writing in English have a western audience in mind. This view has an element of truth considering that most South Asian countries have a lack of readers and publishers of English fiction. Commercial success for these writers depends largely on having an international audience. For expatriate readers such literature also helps to relate with the homeland they left behind. The situation is significantly different in India where popular literature has risen dramatically in recent times as more Indians are reading for pleasure and have more disposable income.

Thomas J. Roberts reassesses popular literature in his *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction* (1990) and explores the motives and experiences of readers of these genres. He seeks to explain the paradox that consumers of 'junk' fiction disparage them though they enjoy reading them. Noel Carroll in *The Paradox of Junk Fiction* (1994) builds upon this paradox and suggests that ordinary readers typically read popular literature for the stories which immerse them the everyday reality in apparently effortless ways that serious literature usually does not. It will not be an exaggeration to suggest that authors like Chetan Bhagat and Durjoy Datta helped Indian youth re-discover the art of reading books. Majority of readers of popular literature can be described as 'beginners' in the sense that South Asia is home to a vast number of illiterate adults. Though state policies promote education, there is very little interest in reading literature. Most readers are simply not ready for serious literature which is obvious from the popularity of popular fiction. In this context Kavya Sharma says,

> A layman who probably earlier wouldn't bother to read a book, or visit a bookstore, began their reading habit with Chetan Bhagat. With the use of Hinglish, sharp/blunt tone of the language of the book, simple English and a storyline, though already seen in many movies/daily soaps, Bhagat managed to capture the audience that wasn't targeted before. What was unbelievable and worked in his favour was his books capturing the youth and middle-aged generation alike ... This style of writing paved way for many like him. (*The Art Of Story-Telling And Story-Selling*)

The readers become 'addicted' to such books which effectively reduce popular literature to commodities for consumption. Successful authors are automatically encouraged to produce literature that propagates the trend in a way that guarantees abundance of the market economy. This brings up the second point of discussion: the politics of authorship.

## b. Authors

The new generation of South Asian writers–both diasporic and home-based–explore memories and realities of the home country and its problems and possibilities. In *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995) Elleke Boehmer observes:

> Since the early 1970s, as it is widely known, post-independence nations have been increasingly plagued by neo-colonial ills: economic disorders and social malaise, government corruption, state repression ... (230)

The cultural environment of the writers undoubtedly influences their writing. As contemporary writers engage with historical conflicts, shifts in the balance of power, changing socio-cultural concerns, from their own perspectives, South Asian literature automatically acquires political dimensions. Writers undoubtedly write for the pleasure of writing but often the expectations of readers and the popularity of certain genres make them rethink their approach. All writers ultimately want their work to be read and appreciated and what definitely increases the chances of success is following the trend. So, most of them try to write what is popular and what appeals to their target readers. Kapish Mehra, managing director of Rupa & Co., one of India's largest publishers of English-language titles, says Chetan Bhagat is "wildly popular among young people who rarely read novels because he captures their voice and their viewpoint. Crucially, he uses English as it's spoken in India, spliced with Hindi, brand names, and tech lingo" (*The Rise of India's pulp fiction*). Over time, this becomes a vicious cycle where both the writer and reader suffer as mediocrity breeds mediocrity and popular literature suffers as a whole. In the long run, 'popularity' of popular literature depends on the intrinsic merit of the books and not on following fleeting trends.

## c. Publishing

Graham Huggan, in his *Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) has explored of the processes of production, dissemination and consumption of the rapid development of the postcolonial literary texts particularly "the influence of publishing houses and academic institutions on the selection, distribution and evaluation of these works" (vii). For South Asian, especially Indian bestselling authors in the last five years, marketing has indeed played an important role by creating a pre-launch product buzz around the book. The authors themselves assume celebrity status by having their official websites, effective media presence/TV interviews to reach out to a larger audience at home and abroad.

Sarah Brouillette *South Asian Literature and Global Publishing* (2007) identifies the success of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) as the key moment that started the emergence of a global market for South Asian literature. This was followed by writers who consistently achieved strong sales figures while collecting literary prizes. The success of Indian English literature encouraged and paved the way for popular fiction in English which is however, not considered 'literature' by critics and scholars. India's biggest-selling author in English is "often dismissed as persona non grata" by literary critics, but that does not daunt Chetan Bhagat. In an interview with Ankush Arora (*Book Talk: Ten years on, India's Bhagat prepared to face critics*, 2014) when asked: "Did you ever feel a sense of inferiority?" Bhagat replies:

> When my first few books came out, a lot of the literary community tried to dismiss me as somebody who is not serious or not a real writer. And you still find vestiges of that on Twitter ... Popular fiction was not accepted when I started writing. It was not considered literature.
>
> Bhagat is not concerned about literary prizes either. His motivation is simple:
>
> I am writing to reach Indians. Now if it fits into the Booker Prize, it's fine. If it doesn't fit, then what can I do about it? ... It's not a competition with other writers for me. I have to wean the young kids away from YouTube, from WhatsApp, from Candy Crush and make them read my book.

Bhagat's views resonate with many other South Asian writers of popular literature who desire to emulate his phenomenal success. India's dominant booksellers as well as small shop owners agree that the quick-read genre is rising exponentially. Since young India appreciates popular literature, Kapil Mehra suggests, as publishers, their job is to put out content that people can relate to. The result is an explosion in popular fiction with catchy titles that leaves many critics aghast. Aadisht Khanna, in *When everyone's an author* (2010) published

in 'The Mint', a business daily, remarked: "If everyone can be an author, anyone can be an author. With a few honourable exceptions, the 100-rupee novels aren't just mediocre, but awful." With the growing market for such fiction, writers are not willing to go against prevailing trends. Authors, publishers and readers all are equally responsible for the growing market for mindless popular fiction creating a certain stagnation of literature. However, there is hope that someday things will change for the better.

### Sources:


- *Politics of Literature* by Jacques Rancière
- *3 Reasons why Indian popular literature is stagnant* (https://www.thebookpub.com/indian-popular-literature/)
- *You Write, we sell* (https://www.telegraphindia.com/7-days/you-write-we-sell/cid/1534979)
- *The Art Of Story-Telling And Story-Selling: What Makes A Bestseller In India* (https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2018/05/indian-authors-and-the-book-selling-market/)


## 2.8.5 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. How is popular literature different from serious literature?
  2. Give reasons for the rise of popular literature in South Asia.
  3. Write an essay on the prevailing literary trends in any two South Asian countries.
  4. How is popular literature subject to the politics of publishing houses?
- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Would you consider Chetan Bhagat to be a voice of young India? Why or why not? Discuss.
  2. Do you believe that the rise of popular fiction and a global press has allowed marginalised women to find their voice? Discuss.
  3. How will you differentiate between South Asian popular literature and serious literature?
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Briefly trace the rise of Bangladeshi popular fiction.

2. Why are popular literature authors called "writers"?
3. What are some of the ways in which South Asian writers of popular fiction contribute to the Post-Colonial existence of English literature?

## 2.8.6 Suggested Reading

Bilal, Mushtaq. *Writing Pakistan: Conversations on Identity, Nationhood and Fiction*. India, Harper Collins, 2016.

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Brouillette, Sarah. *South Asian Literature and Global Publishing*. Wasafiri, 22.3, 2007, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02690050701565356.

Carroll, Noel. *The Paradox of Junk Fiction*. Volume 18, Number 2, October 1994, pp. 225-241.

Gelder, Ken. *Popular Fiction*. London, Routeledge, 2004.

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Huggan, Graham. *Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. 2001.

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Roberts, Thomas J. *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction*. Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1990.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. London, Penguin. 1991.

Tickell, Alex (ed.). *South-Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations*. London, Springer, 2016.

# Unit-9 □ Bengali Science-Fiction

*Structure*



## 2.9.1 Objectives

This unit introduces the learner to the genre of Science-Fiction in Bengali, through a detailed study of the contextual history that facilitated the development of the literary form in Bengali and its characteristic features and introduces you to important authors in this genre. Any understanding of the development of this genre in the Bengali language would be incomplete without an understanding of the development of the form in western literature, primarily English literature. After reading this unit, the learner should be able to understand the scope of the definition of science-fiction and trace its development in Bengali historically, both social and literary. Learners are given a brief overview of the contributions of some of the important authors in this genre and observe the characteristic features that define the BengaliScience-Fiction text.

## 2.9.2 Introduction to Science Fiction

To begin, it would be essential for us to understand what the definition of Science-Fiction is in general and understand its scope. There have been many attempts at defining Science-Fiction by leading exponents in the field, and it would be good to look at some of them.

Hugo Gernsback, the editor and publisher of the first Science-Fiction magazine *Amazing Stories*, defined it in 1926 as,

> …a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision... Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading—they are always instructive. They supply knowledge... in a very palatable form... New adventures pictured for us in the scientifiction of today are not at all impossible of realization tomorrow... Many great science stories destined to be of historical interest are still to be written... Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but progress as well. (*Encyclopaedia of Science-fiction*)

Renowned author Kingsley Amis defined Science-Fiction as,

> Science-Fiction is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extra-terrestrial in origin. (Amis14)

And Isaac Asimov, perhaps the greatest exponent of the form in its truest sense defined Science-Fiction as,

> Science-Fiction can be defined as that branch of literature which deals with the reaction of human beings to changes in science and technology. (Asimov, "How Easy to See the Future!", Natural History, 1975)

Attempting to understand its scope from these definitions, it can be said that, aScience-Fiction narrative is usually a prose narrative, i.e. it can be a short story, *novella*, or of a novel length. Content-wise it has been difficult to pinpoint any clear definition of this genre and hence it has not been easily classifiable. Science-Fiction stories can encompass content of innumerable varieties. For example, journeys into other worlds,exploration of space, intergalactic travel, interplanetary warfare, and some Science-Fiction stories are both utopian, and some are dystopic. Many are concerned with interplanetary travel and especially the arrival of different alien life forms on earth, which has been a popular trope in Science-Fiction literature all around the world. They also deal with technological and scientific change. These narratives carry the element of the fantastical, yet are rooted in reality. The primary

characteristic that we can deduce from this is that almost always a Science-Fiction narrative is speculative in nature. They often stretch the imagination.

**Read: Entry on Science-Fiction in J.A. Cuddon's*The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* (1999)**

## 2.9.3 Brief Historiography of Science Fiction

The term Science-Fiction was first used in 1851 by Wilhelm Wilson, in his work, *A Little Earnest Book upon a Great Old* Subject. The beginning of Science-Fiction can be traced to the 2nd century B.C. Wilson, in reference to Thomas Campbell's assessment regarding truth in poetry, remarks that "Now this applies to Science-Fiction, in which the revealed truths of Science may be given, interwoven with a pleasant story which itself may be poetical and true…" (Cuddon 791). However, it can be said that elements of Science-Fiction in literature have been existent since the 2nd century B.C. *A True Story*, by the satirist Lucian contains many themes and ideas that are common with modern Science-Fiction, including travel to other realms, alien and artificial life forms and wars between worlds.

The seventeenth century development of modern science during the age of European Enlightenment marked a period of important developments in Science-Fiction literature. Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (1634), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) are two of the important works of the period. In the next century, Johnathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) forms an important landmark. In the 19th century, with the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the genre of science-fiction marked another important sign-post in the history of the science-fiction novel. Authors like Jules Verne and H.G. Wells were noted for their realism and attention to scientific accuracy. Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) predicted the nuclear submarine. H.G. Wells, according to many, is the most important author of science-fiction of all time. His important science-fiction works include *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898); which encompass themes like time-travel, alien invasion of earth, advancements in biological science amongst others. The twentieth century saw the genre of science-fiction expand to other mediums more susceptible to its expression, most notably, films, television and other audio visual media. However, one of the giants of the genre during this time is Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke who have explored newer grounds in the genre. Asimov with works like *The Caves of Steel* (1954) which fuses science-fiction with detective fiction, *The End of Eternity* (1957) and *I, Robot* (1950) and Arthur C. Clarke with *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) remains some of the most adapted novels during the time.

## 2.9.4 Indian Science-Fiction in Bengali

To attempt any description of the term 'science-fiction' in Bengali is a difficult one, as any understanding or analysis of the same must begin with the analysis of 'kalpabigyan', a term coined in 1962 by noted Adrish Bardhan, the foremost exponent of the craft in Bengali, in the first science-fiction magazine in the language titled *Ashcharja* (Wonder) which he edited and where it was initially associated with 'bigyanbhittikgalpa' or science based stories.

The very word 'kalpabigyan' itself is not limited contextually to the scope of the word 'science-fiction' in the western sense of the term and has a wider meaning. Traditionally, it encompasses three different modes of texts, which found their origin during colonial Bengal, at the height of the Bengal Renaissance, its interest in western science and western modernity in general. The three different kinds of stories as enumerated are as follows:

a) 'Bigyannirbhargalpa' or science-dependant stories

b) 'Bigyanbhittikgalpa' or science-based stories and

c) A combination of mystery ('rahashya') and science ('bigyan') which is part science fantasy and part science mystery, in the mould of an adventure story.

In a literary sense, the term 'kalpabigyan' encompassing these three forms comprises fiction, non-fictional accounts providing background to important inventions and stories of lives of scientific figures and essays on scientific topics, many of which were not speculative in nature.

The history of the genre in Bengali would not be properly understood if the colonial context to its beginning is not discussed. The period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, normally referred to as the Bengal renaissance witnessed a fundamental embracing of western mode of education, knowledge and science. The period particularly witnessed amongst others a marked development in scientific pursuits and activities among Indian and Bengali educated middle class. Madhusudan Gupta (1800-1856), hailed from Baidyabati, Hooghly and is credited with having performed India's first human dissection at the Calcutta Medical College in 1836, broke new grounds in counteracting traditional Hindu taboos of touching of the dead. Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937) was a polymath, physicist, biologist and one of the earliest exponents of science-fiction in Bengali. The period was marked by a social upheaval resulting from continuous tension between ancient wisdom and modern European knowledge; and in various 'kalpabigyan' texts found reference of both through this tension. Also prevalent as a trope is a reference to

colonial tensions, and the need for a subversive response to colonial domination. The idea is manifested in two important works on 'Future history' BY Bengali authors, "A Journal of Forty Eight Hours of the Year 1945"by Kylas Chunder Dutt, published in *The Calcutta Literary Gazette* on 6th June 1835 and "The Republic of Orissa: A Page from the Annals of the Twentieth Century" by Shoshee Chunder Dutt, published in *The Saturday Evening Hurkaru* on 25th May, 1845, as well as *SwapnalabdhaBharatbarsherItihash* ("India's History as Revealed in a Dream") by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay; published in 1862. RokeyaSakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905) is also a significant example of science fiction written around the time. Interestingly, it should be said that all three were written in English. While the first two attempt to configure and reconcile the contradictory demands of science with indigenous myth, folk and fable, the third is the first feminist science fiction. Though some critics credit Hemlal Dutta as one of the earliest exponents of science-fiction writers in Bengali for his *Rahashya* (The Mystery) published in the magazine *Bigyan Darpan,* it is Jagananda Ray (1869-1933) with *ShukraBhraman* (1892) (Travels to Venus) who can lay claim to be the earliest writer of science-fiction in Bengali. The story described a journey to another planet where alien creatures are described through an evolutionary theory resembling the one propounded by Darwin. Interestingly, Ray's work was published six years before H.G. Wells wrote *The War of the Worlds* (1898) where he speaks about aliens from Mars. Ray was a major writer who popularized the genre of science tales during the period. He wrote a number of essays introducing complex scientific subjects in simple language. *ShukraBhraman* too was introduced as a non-fiction narrative, in the form of a dream to explore many scientific ideas, specifically of Darwinism.

In 1896, Jagadish Chandra Bose wrote *Niruddesher Kahini*, a tale of weather control. Later he included the story with changes in the collection of essays titled Abyakto (1921) as Palatak Tufan (Runaway Cyclone). Begum RokeyaSakhawat Hossain (1880-1932), another key figure during the Renaissance was a pioneering feminist, who spoke out for the rights of Muslim women in particular, wrote *Sultana's Dream* (1905), one of the first works of feminist science-fiction. It depicts a feminist utopia in which women run everything and men are secluded, in a mirror-image of the traditional practice of purdah. The women are supported in their lives by typical science-fiction tropes like electrical technology, which facilitates flying vehicles. The novel also depicts how to harness the power of the sun and control the weather. She also wrote another utopian novel *Padmarag* (1924) in Bengali.

From the 1920's onwards, science-fiction and scientific fantasy in literature became a staple part of magazines for young adults as they attempted to inculcate empirical values and scientific temper amongst its readers through essays produced in an engaging and lucid style. Of special significance are primarily four magazines,

*Sandesh*, started by Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri who was its founding editor, and later was carried forward by his son, Sukumar Ray and grandson, Satyajit Ray, *Mouchak*, edited by Sudhir Sarkar, *Rangmashal*(1937-1946), edited by Hemendrakumar Ray and later Debiprasad Chattopadhyay, and *Ramdhanu* (1927-1988), edited in succession by Bishveshvar, Manoranjan and Kshitindranarayan Bhattacharya. It is in these magazines that the blossoming of science-fiction in Bengali actually took place. Important works were written by Sukumar Ray (1887-1923) who wrote a number of rhymes and short narratives in the manner of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, but with distinct scientific elements, and a number of essays between 1913 and 1923 in the magazine *Sandesh*, with the practical purpose of scientific education. Some of these essays are in the guise of stories which demonstrate scientific fact, for example, "ShanirDeshe" (In the Land of Saturn) and "HeshoramHushiyaar' er Diary", which is a parody of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912).

The genre of science-fiction flourished more in the time between Hemendrakumar Ray (1888-1963) and Premendra Mitra (1904-1988). In two magazines *Ramdhanu*and*Rangmashal*, Premendra Mitra published many of his important science-fiction works, including *Sekaler Katha* (1927 *PipdePuran* 1931), *PatalePaanch Bachar* ["Five Years in the Ocean Depths"] (1931), *Ramdhanu* (1931) and *PrithibiChariye* ("Beyond the Earth", which was later named *ShukreJaraGiyechhilo*) (1937). Hemendrakumar Ray, one of the pioneers in children's fiction in Bengali also wrote a series of novels which fall under the genre of *kalpabigyan*, including, "MeghduterMartyeAgaman" ["The Martian Invasion"] (1925-1926 Mouchak) and its sequel "MaynamatirMayakanan" ["The Magical Forest of Maynamati"] (1926-1927 Mouchak), and DragonerDuswapno ["The Dragon's Nightmare"] (1939 Mouchak). Other notable authors of this genre, some of whom we will discuss later in this unit are,Manoranjan Bhattacharya and Kshitindranarayan Bhattacharya, who wrote their stories in the magazine *Ramdhanu*, which often intermingles the stories from the ancient hindu myths from the Puranas and the Epics with the speculative elements of science-fiction, thereby seeking to reconcile elements of tradition and modernity, while "criticizing the excesses and pretenstions of both" (Bengali sf. encyclopaedia) Leela Majumdar (1908-2007) Satyajit Ray (1921-1992), RajsekharBasu (1880-1960), who wrote under the pseudonym Parashuram, wrote many short stories which may be considered as 'kalpabigyan'. The story "Ulatpuran" (Upside-Down) (1927), explores the alternate history of colonialism. The story "Gamma-Manush Jatir Katha" ("The Sotry of the Gamma-Men") (1945) speaks about world politics from the point of view of a Martian. "Mangalik", (The Martian) was written in 1955, and the alchemy fantasy "ParashPathar" ('Philosopher's Stone') (1948).

The 1960's were an era of change and reform. The country and the Bengali literary world both were going through a change of enormous proportions. While the Indian subcontinent was struggling to find its economic and political identity, Bengali literature in general was reeling from the void left by Rabindranath Tagore and his contemporaries. This and the following two decades with the advent of new visual media saw the golden age of kalpabigyan in the Bengali literary scene, primarily with Satyajit Ray and Adrish Bardhan. With Bardhan, it was through his magazine *Aschrojo*or Amazing. Incidentally it too was the golden age of science-fiction in the Anglophone world, with authors like Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlin. In Bengal, thoughPremendra Mitra continued to write other novels in the genre including *AkasherAtonko, ManusherProtidwondiMoyDanoberDweep* amongst others the main impetus of the period was gathered around the emergence of several science-fiction magazines who catered to the tastes of their readers. The magazine *Ascharja* (1963-1968) arising from the editorial teams of Adrish Bardhan, Ranen Ghosh, Amitananda Das et al was a pioneer in the field. *Fantastic*, another magazine which continued for a year from 1975-1976, *Bismay* started in 1982 and *Kishor Gyan-Bigyan*, started in 1981 were some of the important ones. Another magazine which perhaps held its own in publishing stories in this genre was the revived *Sandesh*, started by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury,and later revived by his grandson Satyajit Ray, which featured Ray himself, who wrote prominent science-fiction stories, and introduced the world to his famous character, Professor Shonku, and Leela Majumdar among others. The contribution of these magazines to the history of the Bengali science-fiction is of paramount importance as along with carrying translations of prominent English science-fiction works, they featured almost all of the current science-fiction authors in Bengal, including Premendra Mitra, Leela Majumdar, as well as the authors of the following generation, Satyajit Ray, Adrish Bardhan, Syed Mustafa Siraj, Anish Deb, Ranen Ghosh, Amitananda Das, Enakshi Chattopadhyay, Dilip Raychaudhuri, and Samarjit Kar, among others. Syed Mustafa Siraj published his first important science-fiction work, "SahararSantrash" *The Terror of Sahara* in the magazine *Pakshiraj*. Some notable later authors are Sunil Gangopadhyay, who published stories featuring the character 'Nil-manush' who is a superhero affected by alien technology and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay whose first story 'Bhela' (1975-76) may be considered an important science-fiction work in Bengali amongst contemporary authors. Two of the most important stories from Mukhopadhyay are are 'Bhutudeghori' ["The Ghostly Watch"] (1984) and 'Patalghar' (2000); which was adapted into a film .by Abhijit Choudhury in 2003.

**Read: Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay's entry titled "Bengal"in *The Encyclopedia of Science-Fiction*. Eds. John Clute, David Langford, Peter**

**Nicholls and Graham Sleight. Gollancz, 1 Mar. 2019. Web. 7 June 2019. <http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/bengal>.**

## 2.9.5 Science-Fiction from Bangladesh

Though critically speaking on the history of the genre of Bengali science-fiction, it would be immaterial to specifically delineate a separate point on science-fiction writers from Bangladesh, as many of the pre-independence figures as well as authors who made everlasting contributions to Bengali-science-fiction in general were from the geographical reality that post-partition of India and Indian independence have come to be known as East Pakistan and later Bangladesh. However, it is a reality which is undeniable. So whereas we have discussed and named many important authors who have worked in West Bengal with its literary centre at the capital city of Calcutta, the linguistic oneness would render it to it be imperative to also look into the important figures that formed the pantheon of Bengali Science-Fiction on the other side of the border in Bangladesh.

Science–Fiction in East Bengal was thought to have started with Qazi Abdul Halim and his novel *MohasunnerKanna* (Tears of the Cosmos). After independence, Humayun Ahmed wrote *Tomader Jonno Bhalobasha*(Love for You All) and it was published in 1973. This novel is treated as the first complete Bangladeshi science-fiction novel. He also wrote *Tara Teenjon* (They were Three), *Irina*, *Anonto Nakshatra Bithi*(Endless Galaxy)*, FihaSomikoron* (FihaEquation), *DwitiyoManob* (The Second Man), among other works. *DwitiyoManob*, published in 2002 is inspired by the science-fiction novel *The Hampdenshire Wonder* (1911) by J.D. Beresford and deals with the supernatural powers of 'homo superior' who are the next generation of 'homo sapiens'.

The golden age of science-fiction writing in Bangladesh, came with the contributions of Muhammed Zafar Iqbal. Iqbal was born in 1952 at Sylhet in the then East Pakistan. He wrote the short story 'Copotronic Sukh Dukho' while he was a student at Dhaka University. The story was later included in the anthology of the same name. After his first work, which gained huge popularity in Bangladesh, Zafar Iqbal transformed his comic strip *MohakasheMohatrash* (Terror in the Cosmos) into a novel. In 1997, *Moulik*, the first and so far the longest running science-fiction magazine was started in Bangaldesh with famous illustrator Ahsan Habib as the editor. Habib himself is an author of science-fiction with PaoelBroonksirBichar.

## 2.9.6 Some Important Exponents of Bengali Science-Fiction

### a) Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937)

The name of Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose requires no introduction. He was a Bengali polymath, physicist, biologist, biophysicist, botanist and archaeologist, and one of the earliest exponents of science-fiction in the Bengali language. Born on 30th November 1858 in Mymensingh, in erstwhile Bengal Presidency and presentdayBangladesh, he died in 1937 in Giridih, present day Jharkhand. The place of his death ironically is the the same locale inhabited by perhaps Bengali science-fiction's greatest scientist Professor Shonku.

Jagadish Chandra Bose as a science-fiction writer would best be remembered for a story written in Bengali and published towards the end of the nineteenth century. Though it was in its truest sense, bi-lingual, 'PalatakToofan' or *Runaway Cyclone* is one of the first science-fictions written in Bengali. Written in 1896, it was published first as "Niruddesher Kahini" ("The Missing One"); most remarkably as the winning entry in a competition sponsored by the hair oil company *Kuntalin*, whose only criterion was that the stories in the competition should feature Kuntalin hair oil. "Niruddesher Kahini" became one of the earliest Bengali science-fiction stories. The bi-lingual story was presented as excerpts from science magazines, including *The Scientific American.* The story begins with a mysterious situation, that of a cyclone which was threatening to devastate Calcutta has suddenly gone missing without a trail. The answer to the mystery resides in the balding protagonist of the story, with his Kuntalin Hair Oil. On a trip to Ceylon, current Sri Lanka, the ship is threatened by large waves, caused by the cyclone in question. While he was staring at imminent death, he remembers his loved ones, especially his daughter, who would always slip a bottle of hair oil in his bag. Remembering hence a scientific piece about how gravity acts differently on different objects, and why oil floats on water and hence calms the surface of the waves. In a desperate attempt to try anything to avert the situation, the protagonist empties his bottle of hair oil into the sea, and like magic, the waves calm with the cyclone dissipating and thereby the protagonist is saved along with Calcutta. Bose expands on the story later and writes it completely in Bengali as 'PalatakToofan'.

"The central conflict in kalpavigyan that gives rise to its various themes is the conflict between knowledge and science" says Bodhisattwa Chattopadhyay. He further adds that Science-Fiction "is not about science, but sf texts must depend on

certain scientific attitudes if they are to be recognized as part of the genre. For this reason, sf must continually wrap imaginary and fanciful ideas in a linguistic shell that bears some measure of resemblance to a society's understanding of science and scientific activity" (Chattopadhyay 437). Bose's short story is emblematic in this regard, as it is perhaps the first known story which explores the literary usage of the 'butterfly effect' or sensitive dependence on initial conditions. In other words, it is a sensitive dependence on initial conditions in which a small change in one state can result in large differences in the later state—like calming of a wave out at sea that takes the wind out of a cyclone later to make it disappear altogether.

Historically speaking Bose's story marks a distinct beginning in Bengali science-fiction writing. The advent of western education and science through the colonizers resulted in these narratives of science gaining popularity as a literary genre in Bengal, thereby accommodated Western Science into an Indian world-view, says Debjani Sengupta, which was "very much a part of the Indian intellectual discourse of the late 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in Bengal". Another aspect of the Bengali Science-Fiction genre which we find in this story is with respect to the characterization and the presentation of the simpleton archetype in science-fiction. A nondescript figure with lack of physical prowess and who is often derided or ridiculed, who would be the focus of the adventure.

**Read:**

- **Chattopadhyay, Bodhisattva. 'Kalpavigyan and the Question of Imperial Science". *Science-fiction Studies*, 43.3. 2016. 435-58.**
- **Sengupta, Debjani. "Sadhanbabu's Friends: Science Fiction in Bengal from 1882-1974". *Science-fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film*. Ed. Erika Hoagland and Reema Sarwal. North Carolina:McFarland& Co. 2010. pp. 115-126.**

## b) RokeyaSakhawat Hossain (1880-1932)

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born into Muslim aristocracy in colonial Bengal. Her father Abu Ali Saber was against women's education and Rokeya was not allowed any formal education. Even though her father had a European wife among his four wives, he was averse to his daughters learning the English language. He was also opposed to Bengali language, as the Muslim elites of the time considered local languagesas un-Islamic. It is thus surprising that Rokeya mastered both languages in a way that she could and eventually take these up as a creative medium. She wrote her masterpiece "Sultana's Dream" in English and later translated it into Bengali. She wrote several other prose pieces and letters in English and incessantly continued writing in Bengali. She acknowledges the

dedication of her brother, whose unfailing interest in tutoring her that can be traced in Shamsun Nahar's *RokeyaJibani* [The Life of Rokeya, 1937]:

> I have never stepped inside a girls' school or any school or college; whatever education I have acquired is owing to my elder brother's infinite love and mercy. All my other relatives, instead of giving any encouragement, would taunt and ridicule my efforts for education. Yet I never gave up. Brother too never felt disappointed by the scornful remarks from others and stop[ped] teaching me. (21)

Rokeya's several statements show that she was treated with indifference by her parents in childhood. In the entry on Rokeya in the *Literary Encyclopedia*, M A Quayum reflects on this and writes that such parental negligence could have been "an expression of their contempt for a girl child, as it was a social norm at the time to see girl children as a burden, sometimes even as a curse upon the family". In all her writings, Rokeya has shown an Indian girl's struggle to stand in life, and the pioneer science fiction story *Sultana's Dream* is her triumph.

In this she has countered the fact that Indian girls owned neither the 'home' nor the 'world'. In this story she has created a utopia called the Ladyland and has placed the women in power. The men are subservient to women in the *Mardana*, a term Rokeya used as a binary of *Zenana*, the cloistered space for women. She shows science education as the way out not only for the sovereignty of the Ladyland but for the making of a secular world with gender equity. We must remember that there has been a substantial gap after Rokeya in women's participation in science fiction writing.

**Further reading:**


- **Mahmud, Shamsun Nahar. *RokeyaJibani* [The Life of Rokeya]. 1937. Dhaka: Shahitya Prakash, 2009.**
- **Quayum, Mohammad. "RokeyaSakhawat Hossain". *The Literary Encyclopedia*. First published 05 September 2012**


## c) Premendra Mitra (1904-1988)

Premendra Mitra was one of Bengal's most influential practitioners of the craft of science-fiction. He was a poet, novelist, short story writer and an exponent of science-fiction stories. He firmly believed that science-fiction. Two of his famous stories are *PipreyPuran* ("The Story of the Ants") and *Mangalbairi* ("The Martian Enemies"). The first story begins away from the present reality, "This happened many years ago. Everything was strange then... The Earth was beautiful to look at! The ground was covered with soft green grass. Countless varieties of plants sported

many hued flowers, and at night the sky was covered with thousands of stars–it was a wonderful sight". The story presents the current present as a thing of the past and explores a future world which is now real, and is infested and overrun with Ants. They are gigantic, organized, and intelligent and have defeated the humans in battle. The story evolves at a time when human beings were too preoccupied to fight each other and the ants plotted silently to prepare and take over the world. They began their attack from their lair in the Andes Mountains in South America in the year 7757. The South American Nations fell one after another without much resistance. Monstrous ants surrounded human habitations and annihilated everyone, but a certain Don Perito who escaped to Mexico and informed the others about the marauding arrival of the ants from the South. Within matter of years, Guyana, Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina all fell. The ants used powerful bombs attached to their bodies and advanced technological weapons which rendered all humans that came in its line blind. Under attack, the human civilization ironically forgot their own enmity and came together to fight for a common cause and against a common enemy.

The story is divided into sub-sections with different first-person narrators. The first narrator is the one who begins the story. The next is the diary of Asesh Roy, an explorer who in the year 6757 had first seen the ants. The third narrator is Senor Sabatini, a famous author from Rio-de-Janiero in Brazil who accounts for the third deadly attack by the ants. The fourth account is by Sukhomoy Sarkar, a prisoner for five years at the hands of the ants, and it is he who gives the most detailed account of the social and economic organization of the ant society.

The narrative structure of the story offer interesting departures in the otherwise linear and continuous narrative. The implausible appear possible due to the trope of the first person 'eye-witness' account that the narrators give. The theme explored is perhaps best exemplified in Sukhomoy Sarkar's narrative, that is a comparative reading of the society of ants and humans and in which the humans are perhaps found wanting. The ants live in a democratic set up where there are no differences of wealth and status, and ants are only differed by the work they do. Everyone has a purpose in the ant society and the social structure makes everyone render some sort of service and is useful. They are advanced in form of knowledge and sense of justice.

*Mangalbairi* explores similar themes as in *PipreyPuran*, where we see Earth being attacked by Martians who undertake ecological warfare by planting seeds which grows into a deadly plant that spreads like wildfire and consumes all nature in its path. The world gets united to fight this common threat forgetting its own differences and enmity. Mitra again uses the idea that perhaps it would take

something cataclysmic like such, to induce human kind to find a common ground forgetting their differences and enmity.

Another theme important to Mitra's science-fiction stories is the way science is perceived and used. Much like many other science-fiction practitioners of his generation Premendra Mitra also questions the idea of the use of science out of economic and political motivations. One of the important stories which explore this theme in Mitra is *Mosha* ("The Mosquito"), published in 1945, one which features for the first time one of the most iconic characters in the pantheon of Bengali literature, Ghanashyam Das, or Ghana Da. He is characterised by his motley band of followers who listen to his outrageous and tall stories, know they are fantastical and yet marvel in the apparent believability of them. Ghana da is also, amongst other things, an embodiment of Mitra's skill as a narrator. The story, *Mosha*, revolves around a mad scientist who breeds a new type of mosquito, which is deadly and invincible. It takes a timely arrival to the scene by Ghana da, to save mankind from this deadly breed. When all fails, it takes ironically, one slap of his hands to kill this breed of mosquitoes. Ghanada never fails to amaze with his tall stories, but he is, as Debjani Sengupta correctly opines, "a personification of Premendra Mitra's humanistic ideology and moral universe". (Sengupta 79). We see in collections like *GhanadarGolpo* ("Stories of Ghanada") and *AbarGhanada* ("Ghanda Again"), the typical Bengali travelling to outerspace in search of black holes and origins of the universe. In *Mangal GraheyGhanada* ("Ghanada in Mars"), the protagonist is forced to travel to Mars where he witnesses an advanced civilization who have waged war against each other, and after years of conflict, the only inhabitants of the planet are a group of females.

Premendra Mitra's science-fiction stories explore the prevalent tropes of the conflict between science and humanity. As a conscious artist, inhabiting a world post Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and with the threat of the Hydrogen bomb looming in a tense cold-war atmosphere, the author through his science-fiction narratives explore the fallibility of scientific endeavour without the essential ethos of human and moral upliftment. His tales serve as a warning for the younger generations (who were his primary intended readers) about pursuing scientific pursuits but with an essential humanist core.

## d) Leela Majumdar (1908-2007)

Leela Majumdar was a niece of Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury, and is perhaps the first woman to write science-fiction in Bengali. Though she is primarily known as a writer of children's fiction, her science-fiction stories have been read

by adults as well. Her fame as a science-fiction author resides amongst others on her novel, *Batash Bari* ("The House of Winds"), published in 1974 and on her short story, "GoromPani" (1972), which remains one of the more important tales on human and alien contact. Her collection *KolpoBigyanerGolpo*, explores the prevalent tropes of the lives of the underdog, where the nondescript character gets a life changing experience from the strange and fantastical occurences. In the story "GoromPani", the protagonist, Shambhu, the owner of two petrol pumps suddenly during one rainy and windy night, gets few strange visitors wearing mackintoshes and requiring petrol. Shambhu obliges and in the process of doing so, he witnesses their space ship. One of the alien strangers presses two new hundred-rupee notes in Shambhu's hand. As he returned his ruminations expressed an important theme in Majumdar's body of literature; a critique of the rigid watertight notions of universe and us, of the everyday real and the fantastical and outlines that perhaps both can exist within one another and bear a coterminous existence.

## e) Satyajit Ray (1921-1992)

Noted filmmaker, and renowned author Satyajit Ray, son of Sukumar and Suprabha Ray and grandson of Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury, carried on the tradition of his father and aunt Leela Majumdar in writing science-fiction and created one of the most iconic characters in Bengaliscience-fiction in Professor Shonku, in 1961. Ray himself by his own admission was "A science-fiction addict" (Travails with The Alien viii) and was actively involved with the first science-fiction magazine *Aschorjo* as its chief patron. He also became the president of the Science-fiction Cine Club—probably the first and only in India and abroad, as remarked by his son Sandip Ray (ibid). The first feature featuring this eccentric professor who resided in the quaint little town of Giridih was written for the magazine *Sandesh* and was called "Byomjatrir Diary" ("The Diary of the Space Traveller"). The stories were written in the form of first person accounts, in the form of journal entries as the famous inventor/scientist travelled the world and undertook various adventures. In all there were thirty-eight stories written, with the last one coming out in 1992, the year the author died. The stories are much more than scientific fiction. "They are also travelogues, fantasy tales, tales of adventure and romance" (Sengupta 122). They are also tales of fantasy, adventure and romance.

As a character, Shonku matches his courage with honesty and integrity, his curiosity with self-control. He has been credited with an impressive array of inventions: Annihilinine Capsules, Miracural, Omniscope, Snuffgun, Mangorange, Camerapid, Linguagraph etc, and the "list is long and remarkable" (ibid.). Some of them are drugs to be consumed, some machines and some are gadgets, and all

of them have human purposes and uses, and none can supersede the mind that conceived them. In fact, the very dichotomy between the world of man and the machines that man invents is one of the prime themes that run through Ray's stories of Professor Shonku. Some of Shonku's inventions imbibe human traits and are "transformed from mere inventions to companions that humans have always craved" (ibid.). This is seen in the diary itself. "Byomjatrir Diary" begins with the protagonist attempting to build a rocket. The first attempt to fly it, ends unsuccessfully as the rocket lands in his neighbour Abinashbabu's radish patch. Abinashbabu has no liking for scientists and for Shonku in particular and Abinashbabu jokes that Shonku must try out his rocket during Diwali for the fun and entertainment of the local children. Shonku decides to teach him a lesson for not taking his invention seriously, and drops his latest invention in his tea. It is a pill modelled after the "Jimbhranastra" as described in the Mahabharata. The pills induce yawning and nightmares. Shonku had tried a quarter of the pill himself and found that half of his beard had turned grey in the morning from the effect of the nightmares he had had. This manifests an already established theme which has been explored by many science-fiction authors in Bengali, which is the amalgamation of ancient Indian myth and western science.

One of the hallmarks of the Shonku stories is that all of his adventures, though science-fiction, explore a real and believable world. The choice of setting, in a quaint little town also acts as believable contrasts to the scientific pursuits that he undertakes. His locale makes the stories much more rooted in reality. In his preparations for the journey into space, Shonku decided to take with him, his pet cat, Newton, his trusted servant, Prahlad and his robot, Bidhusekhar. It would be worthwhile to take a closer look at the first mention of Bidhusekhar.

> For the last few days I can hear Bidhusekhar making a "ga, ga" noise. This is strange in itself because he is not supposed to utter a sound. He is a machine, he must do whatever he is told, the only sound he is supposed to make is the clang of metals when he moves […] I know he has no ability to think nor does he possess any intelligence. But now I can see a difference in him. (quoted in Sengupta)

Shonku goes on to write how everytime he is about to mix Tantrum Boropacsinate with mushroom, snakeskin and egg shell of a tortoise to invent a new compound as a material for his rocket, he hears a big 'tantrum' behind him and sees Bidhusekhar clattering his head as if in disagreement. EverytimeShonku tries to use the Boropacsinate, the same clatter ensues but when he tries to use another chemical Velosilica, the robot nods in agreement. Bidhusekhar is perhaps Ray's own way of looking at the modern technological marvel of Artificial Intelligence that

is being used in advanced computing in the modern age. The human characteristic of Bidhusekhar is evident again when Shonku makes Prahlad try out his spacesuit. Shonku notes in his diary,

> Today I Called Prahlad to the laboratory to try out his suit and his helment. It was a sight. Prahlad was in splits. To say the truth, even I felt like laughing. Just at this moment I heart a metallic guffaw and turned to see Bidhusekhar sitting in his chair swaying and making a new sound. There can only be one meaning to that clatter. Bidhusekhar was also laughing at Prahlad. (quoted in Sengupta 123)

Ray's intended readership, as was with most science-fiction writers was children. Something which many critics have thought put science-fiction writing under certain limitations, because it fell under the branch of children's literature. Ray's science-fiction narratives question this assessment. The Shonku stories critique the Western notion of science and technological advancements. It has been correctly said that

> In Bengal, science-fiction is both a narrative of technology and progress, a sign of modernity during the period of colonization and also a creator of space in which a critique of that modernity can be accommodated. (Sengupta 123).

Professor Shonku's stories espouse some of the most important truths in human societal life, the importance of machines serving humans and not the other way round. They explore the idea that scientific pursuits are only important so long as they serve a higher moral purpose that is the improvement of human civilization, morally and societally and that scientific advancement at the cost of human virtue is disadvantageous in the long run, has been explored multiple times in these stories. The stories explore the relation between talent and human society and opine that as Debjani Sengupta correctly says, "Talent is creative, but that talent must be nurtured by society or it imposes a terrible burden on the bearer" (Sengupta 124). A case in point is the story, "Professor Shonku o Khoka" ("Professor Shonku and The Boy"), where the critical balance between scientific talent and societal nurture is critically analysed. The boy, a four-year old child of a post-office clerk, has become a prodigy after he fell down and hurt his head. Shonku is amazed at the talent that the boy exhibits in expressing with ease his knowledge in advanced mathematics, geography, anatomy, physics and literature. He has become one who could talk about Einstein's theory of relativity and recite Hamlet's monologues. He even shows knowledge of Shonku's own polar repellion theory. His abilities make him an unwanted sensation overnight, much to the disapproval and displease of Shonku. People flock to see the child and things turn out of control when the child decides to put an end to it. He creeps into Shonku's laboratory and drinks a potion

of the Annihilin. He is not killed but is induced into a deep sleep. When he wakes up, he has lost his prodigious talents and has become a normal four-year-old boy again. Through this story, Ray highlights how in a society being prodigious and a talent is not enough, and it is the society's responsibility to nurture that talent and help him/ her to flourish.

Apart from the Shonku stories, another of Ray's science-fiction stories which deserve a mention is "BonkubaburBondhu" ("Bonkubabu's Friend"). It marks a possible landmark in the history of science-fiction, not only in Bengali, but around the world as well. The story published in *Sandesh* the literary magazine in February 1962, a year after Professor Shonku began his journey. The plot of this story revolves around Bankubabu, a simple and ordinary school teacher who is made fun of by the local people meets a friendly alien, named 'Ang' from the fictional planet Craneus, who had accidentally landed on earth. The erstwhile timid and nondescript Bonkubabu, being aware of being the only person in this world who have had an encounter with an alien is filled with a renewed sense of confidence and joy and later is not shy of giving his detractors a piece of his mind.

Ray's story, though apparently simple is remarkable in many aspects. We must remember, that with the advent of audio-visual and the cinematic medium, the post WWII west had generally explored the theme of alien landing on the American soil as a symbol of hostility, carrying forward the legacy of earlier science-fiction works like H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Ray's story was one of the first, if not the first, to explore the ideas of the benevolent alien, the lost alien befriending a simpleton. Ray adapted this story in the form of a script titled *The Alien*, a film which never got made and which can be said to be the inspiration of Steven Speilberg and his movie *E.T. The Extra-terrestrial* (1982).

**Refer Debjani Sengupta's essay from: http://sarai.net/sarai-reader-03-shaping-technologies/**

## f) Adrish Bardhan (1932-2019)

The last name amongst the select authors is perhaps the most important one. No single author has worked more tirelessly to promote nor had a bigger contribution to the genre of science-fiction in Bengali, than Adrish Bardhan, so much so that the term used to define science-fiction in Bengali, "kalpabigyan" was coined and framed by him. It was writer-editor Adrish Bardhan, who gave the genre its basic identity. Adrish Bardhan was born on December 1, 1932 in North Kolkata. His father Anil Bardhan and grandfather Chandicharan Bardhan founded the Hindu Boy's school. Influenced by Sibram Chakraborty's novel *Bari ThhekePaliye*, he ran away to Bombay in search of a job. After being introduced to different parts of

the country due to his profession, he returned in the 1960's to Kolkata.

He started the science-fiction magazine *Aschorjo* in 1963, in what would be a landmark event in the pantheon of Bengali Science-Fiction. In this magazine Bardhan performed the role of the editor under the pseudonym Akash Sen. Prominent figures like Premendra Mitra and Satyajit Ray were his guides and at first he wrote many of the stories and articles himself under different names. His brotheDr. Asim Bardhan acted as the publisher. Joining the magazine as authors were writers like Kshitindranarayan Bhattacharya, Manabendra Bandyopadhyay, and later emerging writers like Ranen Ghosh, Bishu Das, Manoranjan De, Sridhar Senapati, Enakkshi Chattopadhyay and Samarjeet Kar. *Aschorjo,* not only featured stories, but also articles, novellas which were serialized and reviews of films and books related to science-fiction. It was truly the representative of the most important period in Bengali science-fiction.

Apart from original works, the magazine contained translations of predominant western science-fiction authors, like Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Jules Verne, H.G. Wells et al. Bardhan was the first to translate to Bengali, the work of HP Lovecraft. To fund the progress of Bengali science-fiction, Bardhan established businesses like Alpha-Beta polishers and Dipti Printers in his house. His important literary collections were short story anthologies titled—*MahakashjatriBangali* (*Bengalis in Space*) and *Sobuj Manush* (*Green Men*)—with contributions by, among others, Satyajit Ray, Premendra Mitra and Dilip Roychowdhury, which were broadcast on All India Radio and read by the authors themselves. During the time, Bardhan created another of the famous scientist heroes to appear in the realm of Bengali science-fiction along with Shonku. Professor Natboltu Chakra, a scientist par excellence having mastery over all the disciplines of science and who was always accompanied by his assistant Dinanath Nath made his appearance in stories like "Atlantis er Shondhane" ("In Search of Atlantis"), "Kalo Chakti" ("Black Disc") amongst others.

Adrish Bardhan died on 21st May, 2019, in his residence at the age of 86. Besides how own fiction and magazines which are over 50 in number, he contributed to a new legacy, the Bengaliscience-fiction magazine *Kalpabiswa*. His own works are bestsellers till date.

## 2.9.6 Bengali and Western Science-Fiction: Comparative Readings

A brief comparative reading between the science-fiction of the West and

Bengali would yield many points of similarity as well as difference. Like its western counterpart, most Bengali science-fiction narratives use the icon of the eccentric scientist, the male scientist as the hero or narrator is a trope which finds space both in the western, English canon as well as the Bengali canon. The difference however lies in the fact that in Bengali, these scientists never lie in social isolation; they are never oblivious of the sociological reality around them. Though conspicuously they are characterised by the absence of any marital life, the scientists in Bengali literature, have pets, friends, neighbours or colleagues with whom they mingle and interact. The Bengali science-fiction differs from its Western counterpart in another aspect, that the scientist's world here is not a world which is only that mysterious world of machines and robots. It is a place where a robot is called by a name and accorded status of a friend. Scientific pursuit is more humane and replete with possibilities. Amongst other features that distinguish Bengali science-fiction in general from its western counterpart are discussed in varying capacities before, but to sum up, we can see the figure of the timid nondescript individual undergoing an immersive experience. In general it would be perhaps apt to opine that in Bengaliscience-fiction, which in general sense is speculative, we see a more humane aspect of the fantastic, especially amongst many of the later authors.

## 2.9.7 Summing Up

We should by now have a distinct idea of the concept of science-fiction, its speculative nature, the history and contextualization of science-fiction in Bengali, an assessment of some of the main exponents of the craft and a comparative idea of certain features of the genre in both the western English canon and the Bengali canon.

Science-fiction in Bengali which tentatively began at the hands of Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose and later on was formalised by perhaps its most famous exponent Adrish Bardhan and reached its maturity with Satyajit Ray. And it is in Ray's words we can say that

> As long as a man himself has not senses weightlessness, or felt the searing upthrust of the rocket or fathomed a fraction of the infinite complextities of a giant computer, for him the elements of wonder will persist clinging to the very ideas.

It is this sense of wonder that science-fiction thrives on, and will continue to do so as long as there are men willing to dip into a tale that will make him feel small in the face of the expanding universe… (Ray 6-7).

## 2.9.8 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Discuss the important features of science-fiction in Bengali and compare it with its western counterpart.
  2. Assess the contribution of Satyajit Ray in the world of Bengali science-fiction.
  3. Bengali science-fiction reaches its formal brilliance with the efforts of Adrish Bardhan. Discuss.
  4. Trace the history of the development of science-fiction in Bengali.
- **Medium Answer Types:**
  1. Give a character sketch of Professor Shonku.
  2. What is the importance of a character like "Ghanada" in the pantheon of Bengali speculative fiction?
  3. According to you what are the primary themes explored in Premendra Mitra's science-fiction?
- **Short Answer Types:**
  1. What is the story through which Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose began his foray in science-fiction?
  2. In which story did Premendra Mitra's character "Ghanada" first appear?
  3. What is the profession of Bonkubabu in Satyajit Ray's "BonkubaburBondhu"?
  4. What is the name of the famous scientist hero of Adrish Bardhan?
  5. What is the name of Sukumar Ray's parody of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*?
  6. In which of Premendra Mitra's science-fiction stories do we find the character Don Perito?

## 2.9.9 Suggested Reading

Amis, Kingsley (1960). *New Maps of Hell*. New York: Ballantine, p. 14.

Chattopadhyay, Bodhisattva. "Bengal." *SFE: The Science-fictionEncyclopedia*, 1 Mar. 2019, <www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/bengal>.

Cuddon, J.A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin, 1999.

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Ray, Satyajit. *Travails with the Alien: The Film that was never made and Other adventures with science-fiction*. Ed. Sandip Ray. Noida: Harper Collins, 2018.

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Stableford, Brian; Clute, John; Nicholls, Peter (1993). "Definitions of SF". In Clute, John; Nicholls, Peter (eds.). *Encyclopedia of Science-Fiction*. London: Orbit/Little, Brown and Company. pp. 311–314.

# Module-3

# Unit-10 □ Arthur Conan Doyle: The Sign of the Four

*Structure*



## 3.10.1 Objectives

This unit provides a detailed study of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*. The learners are given a brief overview of the Victorian mentality towards the colonies and the colonised. We shall try to look at the text against the backdrop of Victorian idealism and the way the detective and his art of detection is inherently tied up to the social customs and prejudices of his age, including science.

## 3.10.2 Introduction

"How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth?" (*The Sign of Four*, Chap. VI, p.80).

Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* (1890), the second published case of Sherlock Holmes, contains the first utterance of what is perhaps his best-known, and most repeated, aphorism. Indeed, much of *The Sign of Four* seems quite improbable, even impossible, but once started it is impossible to resist the fast-paced excitement of this dark tale. This unit will introduce you to the novel

written by Arthur Conan Doyle, the British writer best known for his detective fiction featuring the character Sherlock Holmes.

## 3.10.3 Arthur Conan Doyle: A Short Biography

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle was born on 22 May 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland, to Charles Altamont Doyle and his wife, Mary (née Foley). The Doyles were a prosperous Irish-Catholic family brought to ruin by Charles Doyle's excesses which ultimately ended in his confinement to a lunatic asylum–a tragedy highlighted by Conan Doyle in his story *The Surgeon of Gaster Fell* (1880). However, supported by other wealthy members of the Doyle family, Arthur was sent to Hodder Place, Stonyhurst, a Jesuit preparatory school in England and then to Stonyhurst College. He found Stonyhurst harsh owing to its strict medieval principles and practices. During these years, Conan Doyle's only moments of happiness were his correspondences with his mother, a habit that lasted till her death in 1920. It was also during this time that he discovered his talent for storytelling which he had inherited from his mother. After graduating at the age of seventeen, Conan Doyle decided to pursue a medical career at the University of Edinburgh. His decision was influenced by Dr. Bryan Charles Waller, a lodger his mother had taken-in to make ends meet. While studying, Conan Doyle began writing short stories and his first published piece, "The Mystery of Sasassa Valley" appeared in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* in 1879. In 1881 he obtained his Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery degree. On this occasion, he drew a humorous sketch of himself receiving his diploma, with the caption: "Licensed to Kill". During the next few years, the young man divided his time between trying to be a good doctor and struggling to become a recognized author. In March 1886, Conan Doyle started writing his first novel *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) which was published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* and introduced the immortal characters of Sherlock Holmes and his friend Dr. John H. Watson. *The Sign of the Four* appeared (1890) in *Lippincott's Magazine*. Over all, Sherlock Holmes appeared in four novels and fifty six short stories by Conan Doyle. In 1885 Conan Doyle married Louisa Hawkins and after her death in 1906, he married Jean Elizabeth Leckie in 1907. He fathered five children: two with his first wife–Mary and Arthur–and three with his second wife–Denis, Adrian and Jean. Unfortunately, all of Conan Doyle's five children died without issue, leaving him with no grandchildren or direct descendants. Arthur Conan Doyle died of a heart attack on 7 July 1930 at the age of seventy one.

**Sources:**

1. The Official site of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Estate (https://www.arthurconandoyle.com/index.html)
2. *The Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia* (https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/)
3. Arthur Conan Doyle's Drawings and Paintings: Self-Portrait–"Licensed to Kill"
(https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/images/9/9f/1881-arthur-conan-doyle-self-portrait-licensed-to-kill.jpg)

## 3.10.4 Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes was introduced to the world by Arthur Conan Doyle in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and in between 1887 and 1927 Conan Doyle published sixty two cases featuring the amateur detective with powerful observation and deduction abilities. The sixty two cases include four novels:

1. *A Study in Scarlet* (published November 1887 in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*)
2. *The Sign of the Four* (published February 1890 in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*)
3. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (serialised 1901–1902 in *The Strand*)
4. *The Valley of Fear* (serialised 1914–1915 in *The Strand*)

The short stories, originally published in magazines, were later collected in five anthologies:

1. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (published 1891–1892 in *The Strand*)
2. *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (published 1892–1893 in *The Strand*)
3. *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (published 1903–1904 in *The Strand*)
4. *His Last Bow* (published 1908–1917)
5. *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (published 1921–1927)

In addition to these Conan Doyle also wrote plays featuring Holmes which are collected in *Sherlock Holmes: The Published Apocrypha* (1980), *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1981) and *The Uncollected Sherlock Holmes* (1983). Although Holmes remained Conan Doyle's most popular literary creation, he wrote prolifically in other genres, including historical adventure and science fiction.

It is generally believed that the character of Sherlock Holmes was inspired by Dr. Joseph Bell, one of the teachers of Arthur Conan Doyle at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh University. Like Holmes, Dr. Bell was noted for drawing large conclusions from the smallest observations. Conan Doyle describes Dr Bell as a "thin wiry, dark" man, "with a high-nosed acute face, penetrating grey eyes, and angular shoulders" who "would sit in his receiving room with a face like a Red Indian, and diagnose the people as they came in, before they even opened their mouths. He would tell them details of their past life; and hardly would he ever make a mistake" (The Official site of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Estate). Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a letter to Dr Bell on 4 may 1892:

> It is most certainly to you that I owe Sherlock Holmes, and though in the stories I have the advantage of being able to place him in all sorts of dramatic positions I do not think that his analytical work is in the least an exaggeration of some effects which I have seen you produce in the outpatient ward. Round the centre of deduction and inference and observation which I have heard you inculcate, I have tried to build up a man who pushed the thing as far as it would go–further occasionally–and I am so glad that the result has satisfied you, who are the critic with the most right to be severe. (*The Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia*)

The doctor left such a deep impression upon the young student that Conan Doyle dedicated *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* to him, who gave credit to the author for Sherlock Holmes's genius: "You are yourself Sherlock Holmes and well you know it."

Though Sherlock Holmes stories are generally considered milestones in the field of crime fiction, Conan Doyle's attitude towards his most famous creation was rather ambivalent. Thinking himself as a historical novelist, Conan Doyle originally thought of killing off Holmes in the twelfth story, "The Final Problem" (1893). In November 1891 he had written to his mother: "I think of slaying Holmes ... and winding him up for good and all. He takes my mind from better things." His mother responded, "You won't! You can't! You mustn't" (*An Introduction to the Detective Story*, 78). From 1894 to 1901 Conan Doyle worked on his plays and historical novels. However, under family and publishers' demands, he "resurrected" the detective and wrote *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and short stories between 1901 and 1927.

**Source:** *An Introduction to the Detective Story* by LeRoy Panek

## 3.10.5 *The Sign of the Four*: Background and Title

*The Sign of the Four* was written in 1889 after Joseph M Stoddart, the managing editor of *Lippincott's Monthly*, commissioned the story. At this point, Doyle had only written one story featuring the detective–*A Study in Scarlet*–and he was not a popular character yet.

### a) Background

*The Sign of the Four* is in essence a work of the Victorian period, both in its setting and the general outlook that it–consciously or unconsciously–embodies. Queen Victoria's reign in the 19th century was a period of such rapid expansion that the phrase "the empire on which the sun never sets" was popularly applied to the British Empire. The novel is particularly linked to India, which was considered the "jewel in the crown" of the British Empire due to India's resources and strategic location. The British were fascinated by those aspects of Indian culture that they could consume, such as food and textiles, yet they knew very little about the country. Ordinarily Victorians in England encountered India and Indians through exhibitions. As Shompa Lahiri suggests:

> Some 5.5 million people visited the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886. All aspects of Indian art, architecture, commerce and industry were exhibited, including a living exhibit of Indian 'village' artisans, who were in fact prisoners of Agra gaol. As this example proves, it was not just Indians who were put on display during the exhibition: Britons' ignorance about Indian life was also subjected to the harsh light of satirical scrutiny. ("The Victorian Passion for India", 2017)

Victorians regarded Indians as racially inferior to them applying Charles Darwin's theory of evolution proposed in his *On the Origin of Species* (1859). While commenting on the way in which different "races" or "sub-species" of man have developed, Darwin suggests that: "Some of these, such as the Negro and European, are so distinct that, if specimens had been brought to a naturalist without any further information, they would undoubtedly have been considered by him as good and true species." Though Darwin was personally against the institution of slavery, he still believed his own "race" to be widely superior to blacks and non-whites. By depicting the non-Europeans as inferior, and consequently in need of the European white man's civilizing presence, Victorian intellectuals like Darwin created cultural conditions for the West to embark on its colonial project. Edward

Said summed this up in his groundbreaking work, *Orientalism* (1978): "To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule" (p. 39).

These ideologies of Victorian England find reflection in Conan Doyle's work. Tonga, a native of the Andaman Islands, is 'saved' by Jonathan Smalls, and brought to England, for the latter's selfish purposes. He is portrayed as a cannibal–inherently inferior and inhuman–to his European saviour. Further, the plot of *The Sign of Four* is built upon the quest of a European looking for buried treasure in India, which may be an unconscious allusion to the exploitative nature of the British Raj itself.

**Source:**

- "The Victorian Passion for India" (https://stravaganzastravaganza.blogspot.com/2017/09/the-victorian-passion-for-india.html)
- "Darwin and Race" (https://wallbuilders.com/darwin-and-race/)
- Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*
- Edward Said, *Orientalism*

## b) Title

There has long been a debate on the title of the novel: *The Sign of Four* or *The Sign of the Four*. It was originally published in *Lippincott's Monthly* as *The Sign of the Four* but it was republished as *The Sign of Four*. The second title is preferred by most editors. The narrative mentions the five-word version of the title. The text most uses both the versions.

- It's been the sign of four with us always (p. 103).
- "Save, perhaps, the Sign of Four" (p. 181).
- " ... You remember that we saw the name upon the chart in Captain Morstan's possession. He had signed it on behalf of himself and his associates–the sign of the four, as he somewhat dramatically called it" (p. 86).
- " ... We made careful note of the place, and next day I drew four plans, one for each of us, and put the sign of the four of us at the bottom, for we had sworn that we should each always act for all, so that none might take any advantage" (p. 108).
- " ... I scrawled down the sign of the four of us, as it had been on the chart, and I pinned it on his bosom. It was too much that he should be taken to the grave without some token from the men whom he had robbed and befooled" (p. 112).

## 3.10.6 The Story: Summary of the Chapters

### Chapter I–The Science of Deduction

*The Sign of the Four* begins at the Baker Street home of Sherlock Holmes where the detective is seen injecting himself with cocaine. Dr. Watson expresses great concern over Sherlock Holmes' use of drugs–morphine and cocaine–which would damage his "great powers" but Holmes insists his mind rebels at stagnation when he does not have cases to solve. They talk about his profession notably the distinction between "observation" and "deduction." Holmes demonstrates the difference. Mrs Hudson, the landlady, announces the arrival of a young woman visitor called Miss Mary Morstan.

### Chapter II–The Statement of the Case

Miss Morstan is described by Watson as a woman of "limited means" who is however, "dressed in the most perfect taste" (67). She has come to consult Holmes on the recommendation from her employer, Mrs. Cecil Forrester. Miss Morstan tells Holmes and Watson of the mysterious disappearance of her father, Captain Morstan, senior captain of his regiment–the 34th Bombay Infantry–of the British Army stationed in India. He had arrived in London in 1878 on twelve months' leave only to disappear under mysterious circumstances ten years ago. Among his belongings were "a considerable number of curiosities from the Andaman Islands" where he had been in charge of the convict-guard (68). His only friend in London, the retired Major Sholto of his own regiment, had no knowledge of his whereabouts. A few years later, Miss Morstan started receiving pearls in the mail. In the last mail she received an anonymous note instructing her to go to the Lyceum Theatre in London that evening with two friends. Holmes and Watson agree to accompany her. Watson is deeply impressed by the beauty and grace of Miss Marston.

### Chapter III–In Quest of a Solution

Holmes begins his investigations and tells Watson that the pearls must have something to do with Major Sholto, who, he discovers, by consulting the back files of *The* Times, died the same week that Miss Morstan started receiving the pearls. On their way to the Lyceum theatre, Miss Morstan shows them a "curious paper" she found in her father's desk which appeared to be a map, with a small red cross drawn on it and a curious hieroglyphic like four crosses in a line with their arms touching drawn on the left hand corner with the accompanying words: "the sign of the four – Jonathan Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, Dost

Akbar" (70). At the Lyceum Theatre they find a carriage waiting for them which takes them through the London suburbs to a "third-rate suburban dwelling-house" and are received by a "Hindu" servant (72).

## Chapter IV–The Story of the Bald-Headed Man

It is the house of Thaddeus Sholto, the son of Major Sholto, an eccentric man of thirty years. The house conjures a sense of the opulent "exotic" East with its rich tapestries and paintings, tiger-skins and hookah pipe. Thaddeus tells them Captain Morstan died a long time back from a heart attack while arguing with Major Sholto about the Agra treasure–an immense collection of jewels and pearls worth not less than half a million sterling (76). Major Sholto had spent his last days in fear of men with wooden legs and on his death bed had tried to reveal the location of the treasure. But the sudden appearance of a bearded face in the window gave him a shock and killed him. Next morning, Thaddeus and his twin brother, Bartholomew, discovered a note on Major Sholto's body which read: "the sign of the four." Major Sholto had instructed his sons to share the treasure with Miss Morstan and give her pearls so that she might never feel destitute. Watson is dejected that Miss Marston's potential inheritance would place her beyond his social league. Thaddeus finally reveals that Bartholomew had located the treasure at the family home, Pondicherry Lodge in Upper Norwood, and he requests his visitors to accompany him there to divide it.

## Chapter V–The Tragedy of Pondicherry Lodge

At nearly eleven o'clock that night, the group reach the Pondicherry Lodge and find the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernstone, in an agitated state. She says that Bartholomew has not left his room all day. Holmes and Watson look through the keyhole and see Bartholomew's face grinning back at them, abnormally still. They break in and confirm that Bartholomew is dead; his body is still and cold; he has been dead for hours. Holmes finds a note by the body, which reads "the sign of the four" (79). He also notices a "long dark thorn" stuck in Bartholomew's ear, suggesting he was murdered by a poisonous blow dart. The Agra treasure is apparently stolen by the assailants.

## Chapter VI–Sherlock Holmes gives a demonstration

Holmes investigates the scene and concludes that two persons–one with a wooden-leg and a short accomplice–had committed the crime. The thorn is a foreign object–not an English thorn–which suggests the involvement of a foreigner in the crime. However, Athelney Jones, the Scotland Yard detective, arrives on the scene, dismisses Homes' deductions as fanciful theories and arrests Thaddeus on the charge

of murdering his brother. Holmes assures Thaddeus of his release and names the suspect–Jonathan Small, one of the sign of four. Holmes also picks up a lead–the wooden-legged man had stepped in creosote during escape. He sends Watson to drop off Miss Marston and fetch Toby, "a queer-mongrel, with a most amazing power of scent" (83), from Sherman to track the lead.

## Chapter VII–The Episode of the Barrel

Dr Watson drops Miss Morstan at home, feeling deep affection towards her, but restrains himself because "a half-pay surgeon" should not take advantage of his intimacy with a prospective heiress (83). Holmes climbs to the roof to find more poison darts and a barrel next to the house. He builds up the case on the basis of inference:

> Major Sholto remains at peace for some years, happy in the possession of his treasure. Then he receives a letter from India which gives him a great fright. ... He guards himself against a wooden-legged man, a white man. (86)

Since, there is only one white man among "the sign of the four"–Jonathan Small, he is the murderer. Holmes also infers that Small's accomplice is a person of "savage instincts" (87) who killed Bartholomew inadvertently. When Watson fetches Toby from Pinchin Lane, the dog leads Holmes and Watson on a wild chase across London ending up at a creosote store much to their amusement.

## Chapter VIII–The Baker Street Irregulars

Holmes and Watson try to help Toby regain the trail and this time Toby leads them to a wooden wharf by the Thames. Holmes tricks a local woman, wife of Mordecai Smith; a man who gives boats on hire, into revealing that a "wooden-legged man" came in the night to hire a boat from Mordecai Smith called the *Aurora*. Holmes hires a group of street urchins–"a dozen dirty and ragged little street arabs" who are the "Baker Street irregulars" (90) to look for the steam launch. Holmes discloses to Watson that Jonathan Small's accomplice was a diminutive savage from the Andaman Islands.

## Chapter IX–A Break in the Chain

Holmes becomes agitated at the lack of progress in the case and when the street urchins fail in their investigation, he disguises himself as a sailor and tracks the *Aurora* down to a shipyard, ready set to sail that evening with Jonathan Small and his accomplice on board. Athelney Jones comes looking for Holmes in the evening, equally frustrated with the mystery, when Holmes is out. Watson describes him as:

> Very different was he, however, from the brusque and masterful professor of commonsense who had taken over the case so confidently at Upper Norwood. His expression was downcast, and his bearing meek and even apologetic. (94)

Holmes surprises Watson and Jones in the disguise of "an aged man, seafaring garb" (95) much to his amusement and later asks detective Jones to act under his orders in exchange of all the official credit for solving the crime. Jones readily agrees to Holmes' stipulations though the "whole thing was irregular" (96).

## Chapter X–The End of the Islander

Holmes, Watson and Jones enjoy dinner together; drink a toast to the success of their expedition before leaving for the river. Holmes asks Watson to bring his service revolver. The three men board the police boat at Westminster Wharf and head out to Jacobson's yard where the *Aurora* is docked. As the *Aurora* takes off, one of the Baker Street irregulars signals Holmes and the police boat begins its exhilarating chase. The searchlight of the police boat reveals the fugitives–Jonathan Small and his accomplice, Tonga, with Mordecai Smith at the helm. As the police close in Jones orders *Aurora* to stop. Tonga tries to shoot at them with his blowpipe; Holmes and Watson shoot him dead. He drops into the river. Jonathan Small tries to escape but is soon captured by the police. A solid iron chest of Indian workmanship is recovered from the *Aurora*; presumably the Agra treasure.

## Chapter XI–The Great Agra Treasure

Jonathan Small reflects on his unfortunate life and feels his best defence is just the simple truth. Watson delivers the Agra treasure to Miss Morstan, only to discover that it is empty. Watson and Miss Morstan are both relieved because they felt the "golden barrier" between them was finally gone. He professes his love and as she accepts, Watson exclaims, "Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one (102).

## Chapter XII–The Strange Story of Jonathan Small

Jonathan Small is taken to Baker Street and asked to tell his story at Holmes' request. Originally, a poor Englishman from Worcestershire, he joined the British Indian Army–the 3rd Buffs–to get out of a mess with a girl. However, while swimming in the Ganges a crocodile bit off his right leg leaving him incapable of soldiering. Invalided by the army and unfit for any active occupation he was employed by Abel White, an indigo planter, as an overseer to look after his coolies. When Abel White and his wife were killed by the natives during the Indian Mutiny, Small was forced to take shelter in Agra fort where the British troops

were stationed. Small was selected to guard an isolated door in the fort with two Sikh troopers–Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan–who convinced him to join with them in seizing treasure from a merchant, Achmet, who came seeking refuge in the fort. Along with Abdullah's cousin, Dost Akbar, these men made up the "sign of the four" and pledged loyalty to each other. They killed the merchant, acquired the treasure which they hid in the Agra fortress to be retrieved when peace was restored after the Mutiny. However, the crime was discovered and the four men were arrested and sent to a prison camp on the Andaman Islands. There, Small made the acquaintance of Major Sholto and Captain Morstan, and devised a plan for his escape in exchange of a share of the treasure. Sholto retrieved the treasure, betrayed the others and took it back to England. Meanwhile, Small befriended Tonga, a native of the island, who became his loyal companion and helped him to escape. The two came back to England, where they survived by displaying Tonga in fairs and freak shows. Small tracked down Sholto causing his death and later Tonga killed Bartholomew inadvertently. The two carried away the Agra treasure from the Pondicherry Lodge and planned to board the vessel, *Esmeralda*, outward bound for the Brazils. At the very end, Small reveals that he emptied the treasure into the Thames, just before his capture, out of spite.

Holmes is satisfied as the case is closed to his satisfaction. Athelney Jones thanks him for his help and leads Jonathan Small away to prison. Watson informs Holmes that Miss Morstan has accepted his proposal of marriage. Though, Holmes finds her a charming, young lady, he believes "love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things" (113) and is content with his own comfort–the bottle of cocaine.

## 3.10.7 Themes and Issues

Arthur Conan Doyle establishes the conventions of the detective novel in *The Sign of Four* in which Sherlock Holmes investigates and solves his second case. The case has its origins in faraway India–a colony of the British–but the story is set and finally solved in Victorian England. The novel implicitly raises the following themes and issues:

### a) Crime, Punishment and Justice

The theme of crime and punishment are closely related to the issue of justice in this novel. Several murders are committed in course of the novel and there are bizarre deaths: the four men of the "sign of four" kill the merchant Achmet to steal the Agra treasure and set off a chain of events, Major John Sholto causes the death

of Captain Arthur Morstan, Sholto himself dies of shock seeing Jonathan Small, Bartholomew is killed by Tonga, who is killed by Holmes and Watson. Justice is served to all perpetrators of evil but the central issue seems to be justice for Mary Morstan who hires the detective to solve the mystery. Thaddeus Sholto feels that Miss Morstan has been treated unjustly by his father, Major John Sholto, who stole the Agra treasure and kept her father's death a secret. He writes to her, "You are a wronged woman, and shall have justice" (68). Jonathan Small is unhappy to lose the treasure but he feels avenged:

> From that day I lived only for vengeance. I thought of it by day and I nursed it by night. It became an overpowering, absorbing passion with me. I cared nothing for the law–nothing for the gallows. To escape, to track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat–that was my one thought. Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than the slaying of Sholto. ... I believe the best defence I can make is just ... to let all the world know how badly I have myself been served by Major Sholto (111, 112).

For a moment, the reader may even feel empathy for the escaped convict when he exclaims:

> "Justice!" snarled the ex-convict. "A pretty justice! Whose loot is this, if it is not ours? Where is the justice that I should give it up to those who have never earned it? Look how I have earned it! ... " (103)

## b) Greed, Betrayal, Fear and Death

The themes of greed, betrayal, fear and death form the building blocks of the narrative plot of *The Sign of the Four*. The original crime–murder of the merchant Achmet, who came seeking refuge in the Agra fort for himself and his treasure–by the four men in charge of the security of the fort, was prompted by greed. Abdullah Khan proposes to Jonathan Small: "The world shall know of the merchant Achmet, no more, but the great treasure of the rajah shall be divided among us. What say you to it, sahib?" (106). Though, Small feels a twinge of conscience, he assents to the deed:

> In Worcestershire the life of a man seems a great and sacred thing; but it is very different when there is fire and blood all round you, and you have been used to meeting death at every turn. Whether Achmet the merchant lived or died was a thing as light as air to me, but at the talk about the treasure my heart turned to it, and I thought of what I might do in the old country with it, and how my folks would stare when they saw their ne'er-do-well coming back with his pockets full of gold moidores. I had, therefore, already made up my mind. (106)

However, the crime is discovered and the four are sentenced to penal servitude for life. Greed for wealth has a corrupting influence on Major Sholto and Captain Morstan. The Major betrays the four convicts serving under him in the Andaman Islands and lives in fear and guilt till his death. Thaddeus reveals how "some mystery, some positive danger, overhung" him:

> He was very fearful of going out alone, and he always employed two prize-fighters to act as porters at Pondicherry Lodge. ... My brother and I used to think this a mere whim of my father's; but events have since led us to change our opinion. (73)

On his death bed he confessed his guilt to his sons and tries to make amends for his past behaviour:

> My fault lies in the fact that we concealed not only the body, but also the treasure, and that I have clung to Morstan's share as well as my own. I wish you, therefore, to make restitution. (74)

At the end of the story, even Jonathan Small repents:

> It was an evil day for me when first I clapped eyes upon the merchant Achmet and had to do with the Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse yet upon the man who owned it. To him it brought murder, to Major Sholto it brought fear and guilt, to me it has meant slavery for life. (100)

Conan Doyle presents the counterpoint to the pursuit of riches through Miss Mary Marston. She is relieved that the treasure, which would have transformed her from a "needy governess to the richest heiress in London" (76) is finally gone. It would have been a "golden barrier" (102) between her and Dr John Watson who rightfully exclaims: "Whoever had lost a treasure; I knew that night that I had gained one" (102). Through, the Agra treasure, Conan Doyle raises the issue whether it is worthwhile to pursue wealth at all costs and also, whether such opulence brings happiness at all. The experiences of the characters seem to suggest otherwise.

## c) Setting of *The Sign of the Four*

*The Sign of the Four* has a complex plot involving the British Empire in India, the East India Company, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and a secret contract among four convicts in the Agra Fort, a stronghold of the British in India. It is set in Victorian London and offers glimpses of the city as well as the attitudes of Victorian society towards the Empire and its subjects.

Doyle mentions several locations in and around London in course of the story. The novel opens in Baker Street where Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson live, Mary Morstan drives to the Langham Hotel to meet her father, Major Sholto lives in

Upper Norwood and Thaddeus Sholto anonymously writes to Miss Morstan to come to the Lyceum Theatre. Chapter Three, "In Quest of a Solution," Watson gives a absorbing picture of the London streets as Holmes, Watson and Miss Morstan pass through:

> It was a September evening, and not yet seven o'clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. ... There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghost-like in the endless procession of faces which flitted across ... the dull, heavy evening, with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make me nervous and depressed. (71)

The streets of London are described as foggy reflecting the mysterious case as it were. The characters travel "at a furious pace through the foggy streets" of London to reach the Pondicherry Lodge in suburbs where "the monster tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the country" (71). There are two more journeys through London: Holmes and Watson take their "six-mile trudge" (86) with Toby and later chase the suspects along the River Thames by boat.

*The Sign of the Four* highlights aspects of Victorian society and culture. The novel begins and ends with Sherlock Holmes' cocaine use much to the disapproval of Dr Watson. Victorian England, wan era with a distinct drug culture because drugs such as opium, cocaine and morphine, were not only legal and but were often prescribed as medication despite their hazards. Hence, Dr Watson is appalled by Holmes' addiction:

> Three times a day for many months I had witnessed this performance, but the custom had not reconciled my mind to it. On the contrary, from day to day I had become more irritable at the sight, and my conscience swelled rightly within me at the thought that I had lacked the courage to protest. (64)

The novel reflects the Victorian preoccupation with social class boundaries which is represented by Dr Watson's concerns about the implications of Miss Morstan's inheritance of the Agra treasure. He is glad that the treasure is lost and admits: "It was selfish, no doubt, disloyal, wrong, but I could realize nothing save that the golden barrier was gone from between us" (102).

The novel mentions fairs and freak shows–popular forms of entertainment during the Victorian era–when people from all classes gathered to watch exhibition of live human curiosities. Jonathan Small displays Tonga, the native of the Andaman Islands, in London fairs to survive:

> We earned a living at this time by my exhibiting poor Tonga at fairs and other such places as the black cannibal. He would eat raw meat and dance his war-dance; so we always had a hatful of pennies after a day's work. (112)

Tonga is portrayed in a racist vein throughout the novel–"a little black man ... with a great misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair," "a savage, distorted creature ... [with] features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty" (99). This is the Victorian fear of the 'Other' particularly, the subjects of the Empire. Tonga displays an attitude of gratitude and loyalty becoming the "staunch and true" companion of Jonathan Small for saving his life. The contrast between the civilized European and the savage non-European native of the Empire is pronounced.

## d) The Empire and Imperialism

The Empire is a palpable presence throughout *The Sign of the Four* in several ways. It is set in the late 19th century, when the British Empire was immensely powerful. However, a growing threat to the Empire is evident in the mention of the "great mutiny" (104). Jonathan Small rues how it changed his fortunes and the course of the story:

> Suddenly, without a note of warning, the great mutiny broke upon us. One month India lay as still and peaceful, to all appearance, as Surrey or Kent; the next there were two hundred thousand black devils let loose, and the country was a perfect hell. ... Night after night the whole sky was alight with the burning bungalows and day after day we had small companies of Europeans passing through our estate with their wives and children, on their way to Agra, where were the nearest troops. (104)

Small's employer, Abel White, an indigo-planter, and his wife, obstinately refused to flee from the estate and fell victims to the rebels. Conan Doyle's novel offers glimpses into this turbulent period of Indian history when the power dynamics of the European and non-European was suddenly altered and the white man became the target of native wrath.

The Agra treasure symbolises the wealth of India which originally attracted the European traders. India was the "jewel in the crown" of the Empire, and the theft and transportation to England reflects the way Britain exploited India's resources during colonisation. Major Sholto's house–the Pondicherry Lodge–where the treasure was hidden is named after an Indian town, while Thaddeus Sholto's house is literally a miniature India with its oriental lifestyle. Sholto probably inherits this from his father and describes his house as an oasis of art in the howling desert of South London:

> The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there, to expose some richly-mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of amber and black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger-skins thrown

> athwart it increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood upon a mat in the corner. A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odour. (72)

The novel associates India with wealth and luxury but also offers glimpses into the harsh realities of the sub-continent through Jonathan Small's experiences:

> Twenty long years in that fever-ridden swamp, all day at work under the mangrove tree, all night chained up in the filthy convict huts, bitten by mosquitoes, racked with ague, bullied by every cursed black-faced policeman who loved to take it out of a white man. (103)

The colonial desire of being a civilizing presence in the colonies is reflected in Holmes' description of Tonga and the aborigines of the Andaman Islands he reads out from a gazetteer:

> ' ... They are a fierce, morose, and intractable people, though capable of forming most devoted friendships when their confidence has once being gained.' ... 'They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features. Their feet and hands, however, are remarkably small. So intractable and fierce are they, that all the efforts of the British officials have failed to win them over in any degree. (91)

The British attitude of "divide-and-rule" is subtly hinted at during the conspiracy to loot the Agra treasure. The Sikhs–with Muslim names–choose Jonathan Small as one of them:

> I tell it to you because I know that an oath is binding upon a Feringhee, and that we may trust you. Had you been a lying Hindoo, though you had sworn by all the gods in their false temples, your blood would have been upon the knife and your body upon the water. But the Sikh knows the Englishman, and the Englishman knows the Sikh. (107)

Jonathan is loyal to "the sign of four" till the last just is Tonga remains loyal to him. But the Englishman, Major Sholto, betrays fellow Englishmen–Captain Morstan and Jonathan Small, suggesting generic character traits are mythical, and individuals act as per their own personal predilections.

## 3.10.8 Characters

**(a) Sherlock Holmes**, the "unofficial consulting detective" (64), famous for his powerful observation and logical deduction, solves the case for his own mental stimulation. He takes cocaine and morphine to stimulate

his mind when he is forced to remain idle. In the story he shows little emotion and is inclined to rationalisation.

**(b)** **Dr John Watson**, Holmes' friend and flatmate at Baker Street, London. He was a doctor in the army and forced to retire due to injury. He is not only Holmes' assistant but genuinely cares for his wellbeing. He meets Miss Mary Marston in the story who later becomes his wife. Over all, Watson is empathetic and thus a counterfoil to Holmes.

**(c)** **Miss Mary Morstan**, a young lady, who brings the case of "the sign of four" to Sherlock Holmes. At that time she was working for the family of Mrs Cecil Forrester in the capacity of governess. She grew up in a boarding establishment in Edinburgh for her mother had died shortly after her birth and her father, Arthur Morstan, was an officer of the British army stationed in India. A share of the infamous Agra treasure would have altered her fortunes: "from a needy governess to the richest heiress in London" (76) but Miss Marston is content with her humble existence as the wife of Dr. Watson.

**(d)** **Major John Sholto**, an officer of the British Indian Army, stationed in India who was the only friend of Mary Morstan's father in London. They had served in the same regiment–the 34th Bombay Infantry. He is entrusted with the task of retrieving the Agra treasure but he betrays trust of his accomplices–Arthur Morstan and Jonathan Small, steals the treasure and escapes to London. He sets up the Pondicherry Lodge in Upper Norwood with lives the rest of his life in fear and guilt. He has two sons–Thaddeus and Bartholomew–who are twins.

**(e)** **Thaddeus Sholto**, one of Major Sholto's twin sons. He sends pearls to Miss Morstan and insists on sharing the Agra treasure with her as his father had instructed on his deathbed. He is disappointed with his father's action and his brother's objections to it. He is arrested by Mr. Athelney Jones of Scotland Yard, as a suspect of his brother's murder because they had been quarrelling the night before the murder.

**(f)** **Bartholomew Sholto**, Thaddeus's twin brother and Major Sholto's other son. He discovers the Agra treasure in the Pondicherry Lodge but is reluctant to share it with Mary Morstan. He is killed inadvertently by Tonga, the native of Andaman Islands, when he breaks in to steal the treasure with Jonathan Small.

**(g)** **Jonathan Small** is the man with the wooden leg, one of the four men who acquired the Agra treasure, who seeks revenge on Major Sholto for betraying their trust. He manages to escape from India with Tonga's

help and retrieves the treasure from the Pondicherry lodge. He plans his escape by renting a steam launch which would connect him with a ship sailing to South America. However, he is caught by Holmes and Watson. He dumps into the Thames before his arrest by the Scotland Yard.

**(h) Tonga** is a native of the Andaman Islands and a loyal companion of Jonathan Small who saved his life. Tonga helps Jonathan to escape the island by boat and accompanies him on his adventures over the years. Tonga is portrayed in a racist way–"the black cannibal" who would eat raw meat and dance his war-dance to entertain Europeans in fairs and freak shows. Jonathan admits to exploiting Tonga's exotic appearance in order to survive in London.

## 3.10.9 Summing Up

Marking the popularity of this particular text amongst contemporary readership, the novella has been adapted into the cinematic screen multiple times with the most significant adaptations being 1988's *The Sign of Four* with Jeremy Brett as Sherlock Holmes, 1987's British television series which opened with The Sign of Four starring Jeremy Brett as Sherlock Holmes. There has also been an animated version of the same and a Japanese adaptation in recent years called *The Adventure of the Cheerful Four* (2014) and a Colin McCarthy direction in the Sherlock television series which used the story with minor changes and air it as *The Sign of Three (2014)* starring Benedict Cumberbatch. The learners are welcome to watch the various adaptations and compare and contrast them with the original novella and trace the ways it had been adapted in the popular culture across generations.

## 3.10.10 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. How is the theme of crime and punishment shown in the novel?
  2. How does The Sign of Four show the corrupting influence of ill-gotten wealth?
  3. How is the city of London presented in *The Sign of Four*?
  4. How does *The Sign of Four* highlight the Victorian attitude towards the Empire and its subjects?
  5. What is the significance of Holmes' intake of cocaine in the novel?

- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. How does Doyle present India/the "Orient" with reference to to idea of the "other" and Britain's colonial attitudes at the time?
  2. How are Thaddeus Sholto and his home described in The Sign of Four? What is the purpose or possible effect of this description?
  3. How does The Sign of Four demonstrate as well as contrast with Victorian domestic values?
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Give a character review of Mary Morstan in The Sign of Four.
  2. Who were the *Sign of four*? Where did they get the Agra treasure from?
  3. What plan did all of the men agree to on Blair Island regarding the Agra treasure?

## 3.10.11 Suggested Reading

Allan, Janice M. and Christopher Pittard, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Sherlock Holmes*. UK: Cambridge UP, 2019.

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O'Dell, Benjamin D. "Performing the Imperial Abject: The Ethics of Cocaine in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 45 (5), 2012, pp. 979-99.

Wilson, Kenneth. "Fiction and Empire: The Case of Arthur Conan Doyle." *Victorian Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1993), pp. 22-42.

# Unit-11 □ J. K. Rowling: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

*Structure*



## 3.11.1 Objectives

This unit comprises of four sections that are prepared to encourage the learners to revisit a text which has been considered vastly as children's literature and a genre that is considered 'fantasy' and non-serious. The Unit is divided into four major sections where you will get to know about:

- J.K. Rowling as an author
- The literary type to which the text belongs
- A detailed analysis of the text
- The major characters and the roles they play

We hope that this Unit will encourage you to read not only the present text but infact the entire Harry Potter series which is perhaps one of the most happening aspects in the literary scenario of our times.

## 3.11.2 Introduction

As a part of this module that proposes to offer a general understanding Popular Literature, through discussions on a selection of key texts of the domain, this Unit will function in an introductory manner chiefly. The topic of the module is a text that unlike many of the literary classics is known at least in parts to many of the

students as chiefly an entertaining story and therefore the module is shaped both as a document that informs and a primer that points out such aspects of this famous tale that should induce students to offer these entertaining texts the kind of critical attention that they are used to give to the literary classics only.

## 3.11.3 J.K. Rowling: A Bio-Brief

Unlike most other fantasy fiction writers of a comparable kind of fame, Joanne Rowling(born in 1965)hardly seems to be a radical writer with a distinct ideology that sets her apart. Though she is often compared to stalwart post-second World War fantasy writers like J.R.R. Tolkien,C.S. Lewis, or Roald Dahl, she never had the reputation of a celebrated academician like the first two, nor could she turn out to be as prolific as the latter one. Even a comparison with her immediate predecessor Angela Carter hardly seems proper as Rowling's famous hepatology featuring Harry Potter is very different from Carters' fiction that are marked by the strong presence of feminist ideology or conscious usage of magic realism. Rather she shares similarities to some extent with L. Frank Baum. Just like Baum, Rowling was a person repeatedly given serious setbacks by luck and just like Baum; she too managed to come up with one basic story, while going through serious distress, which changed her life forever.Unlike Baum however, Rowling fared reasonably well as a maker of plots. Baum hardly managed to maintain a connection between the sequels of *The Wizard of Oz* but Rowling handled the storyline of all seven of her Harry Potter books without turning them into merely episodic tales that featured same characters. Her capability as a plot-maker is also testified by her moderate success as a writer of Crime fiction using the name Robert Galbraith. Till date she has authored seven Harry Potter books, seven books that are called supplement to the series, four Crime Fiction novels, one book for adults, and two screenplays.

## 3.11.4 Classifying the Text

The term 'Popular Literature' signifies a large body of widely varied literature in a consolidated manner. Looking at the differences between many of these texts, it seems necessary to justify this consolidation first. To put it simply, these texts that are at times polar opposites have one thing in common that is their popularity and a study of the factors that contribute to this popularity has always been an important aspect of the study of these popular texts. These texts are recurrently seen to be gaining popularity by borrowing and deviating from the pre-existing examples of similar kinds. Children's literature occupies a special position amongst

popular literatures and Rowling's success chiefly lies in the fact that she managed to create a story that won the popularity amongst readers of different age groups in an equal manner. This popularity, is of course a result of the aforementioned process of borrowing and deviation. For a proper understanding of the application of this process in this text, at first it is important to identify the main genres that are utilized for forming this series. Rowling seems to have combined elements of interlinked sub-genres of Children's literature like fairy tales, fantasy, and school stories for creating her Potter-verse. This section is designed to act as a glossary that gives information about the genres Rowling drew upon. The literary types or genres that have influenced the text arebriefly given below for your understanding:

**(a) Fairy Tale:** As suggested by Jack Zipes:"There is no such thing as the fairy tale; however, there are hundreds of thousands of fairy tales". Yet even from the multitude of fairy tales a few general features may be identified as the quintessential features of fairy tales, due to their recurrent appearances. Firstly, it has to feature magic or at least elements that are beyond the limits of the ordinary, secondly, it should end with a happy ending and has to be driven by the motto of wish-fulfilment, thirdly, it should have a moral lesson blended with its plotline. According to Zipes, this genre has its origin in the folklore and it represents the variety of folktales known as 'oral wonder tales'.

**(b) Fantasy fiction:** Though linked to the fairy tales, this genre has managed to establish it as a stand-alone one in the twentieth century. Maria Nikolajeva's insightful observation informs that fairy tales are immediate successors of myths but "Fantasy literature is a modern phenomenon". Harrold Bloom explains the rise of this genre as a reaction to "the displacement of the genre of romance" by "the naturalistic novel" during the nineteenth century. In his opinion, when the "archetypal patterns" of romance found it difficult to express themselves in the naturalistic novels, they started forming an alternative medium which is what at present has become the fantasy fiction. As the domain of the ordinary world turned out to be unsuitable for these archetypal elements, the writers came up with the device of shifting the story to a land of the extraordinary in these tales and this too became a defining feature of the genre.

**(c) School story:** Having its origin in the novel *The Governess* by Sarah Fielding, the sub-genre initially began as a variant of the code of conduct books that had become popular in the eighteenth century. It focused on the lives of the pupils of residential institutions chiefly. Eventually

these novels started treating issues of law breaking, bullying, rising of sexuality in the pupils of their respective institutions.

## 3.11.5 Critical Summary

This chapter-wise discussion of the novel comprises brief summarizations of the important events of each chapter and analyses that will indicate the thrust areas as well as the necessary approach to be taken for the same. The section intends to provide basic guidance to the study of the text and therefore should not be considered as exhaustive.

### Chapters:

### a) The Boy Who Lived

The chapter prepares the readers for a journey that will alternate between the world of reality and fantasy. Unlike many other classic fantasy novels like *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Rowling's novel does not begin with having the protagonist transported to the fantastic world immediately. Rather, the action begins at the unremarkable world in an almost ordinary manner. The Dursleys are introduced first. They live in Number four Private Drive. In a tongue-in-cheek manner Rowling describes the physical appearance and nature of the Durslyes and makes clear that they are repulsed by anything magical. As the novel puts it, the Dursleys were" proud to say that they were normal". It is significant that the first few glimpses at the magical world's inhabitants are given through Vernon Dursley's point of view. He notices some people oddly dressed sounding excited and appearing euphoric, taking names like the Potters, Harry, etc. which makes him feel worried. The narrative at this point mimics the reaction thata significant number of Rowling's first readers might have given when they had first started reading her maiden venture. After building up the suspense to a significant extent, the chapter reveals nearly half of the origin of the protagonist of the novel. Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall, Rubeus Hagrid are introduced. Magic is introduced through Dumbledore putting out the street lamps using his Put-Outer, McGonagall's transformation from a cat to a woman, and Hagrid's flying motor cycle. McGonagall as well as the readers are soon informed about the event that was fantastic even by the standards of the fraternity of wizards. Voldemort, the mighty evil-wizard had attacked the Potter family. After killing James Potter he went for the child and when his mother Lily tried saving him, he killed her as well. Surprisingly he could not kill the baby Harry and instead got himself apparently

killed when he tried killing him. The whole world of wizards had a reason to celebrate that night because of Harry but Dumbledore decides to keep him away from everything. Little Harry, described as 'the boy who lived' around the world is therefore kept at the doorway of the Dursleys with a letter.

Beginning portions of the novel echo the tales of changelings and even the Superman comics. Like Clerk Kent, Harry belongs to a different world and is an orphan. He is similar to changelings because of his magical blood. The most interesting aspect of Harry's origin-story however, is its biblical echo. Like Jesus Christ, Harry too arrived in the world as a messiah. He freed the world from Voldemort's threat by nearly killing him at their very first meeting at the cost of becoming an orphan. Before his full resurrection in the 4th book of the series, Voldemort constantly gets defeated by Harry whenever he tries even touching Harry. As explained by Dumbledore at the end of the novel, Lily Potter's sacrifice had 'marked' Harry's very skin with something sacred which made it impossible for Voldemort, the epitome of corruption, to even touch it. Despite its engagement with the very word 'witchcraft' which is mostly used in a negative sense in Christianity, the novels seem to rely heavily on virtues that are held in great esteem amongst the Christians. Emily Griesinger's article, 'Harry Potter and the "Deeper Magic":Narrating Hope in Children's Literature',offers interesting insights in this regard. The origin story of Harry, as narrated in the first chapter, equates Harry with hope. According to Bruno Bettelheim one of the most important aspects of a fairytale is its ability to give children hope. Rowling herself, as indicated in the section on her biography was searching for hope and so were many other people of different age-group during the last years of the twentieth century. Harry Potter literalized the hope for everyone and that might be one of the reasons behind its popularity. Connie Neal's discussion on the opening scene draws attention to the similarity between the first night of baby Christ with that of Harry. Both slept in a neglected condition at night far from all the celebrations happening for their arrival.

## b) The Vanishing Glass

Second chapter of the novel takes the story ten years forward and shows Harry being mistreated by the Dursleys. He is provided only the barest of essentials by Dursleys. They clearly consider Harry as a burden and treat him accordingly. He is basically treated as an unpaid servant. While Harry is treated as an irritating liability, Dudley is obnoxiously pampered. The birthday celebration of Dudley in this chapter shows how the Dursleys overindulged in pampering their only son. Magical elements make a very significant appearance in the chapter. Harry's

difference from a non-wizard is shown in the episode at the zoo. Harry starts talking to a Brazilian Boa Constrictor at the zoo and when Dudley punches him aside the glass before the snake disappears. Dudley's friend Piers tells the Dursleys about Harry's interactions with the snake and that leads to Harry's starvation. Ending of the chapter shows Harry recollecting memories of getting mistreated by the Dursleys throughout his childhood.

Condition of Harry at this point is similar to that of Cinderella before the arrival of the fairy. Just like her she is mistreated and forced to do household works and like Cinderella he is shown to be special. Apart from the allusion to the Cinderella tale, the chapter shows the novel's depiction of faulty parenting. Dursleys not only treat Harry in an unjust way but they fail as parents of Dudley too. They have turned him into a selfish and greedy boy who is very likely to be a burden for the society in future. Rowling was herself a single mother at the time of writing the first books of Harry Potter series which seems to have influenced his Harry Potter novels in a significant manner. She has shown the financially weak Weasleys being able to become parent figures to both Harry and Hermione. Sirius Black is also shown to be an efficient Godfather to Harry despite his own troubled life. While these people succeed in parenting their wards properly despite various drawbacks, the Malfoys amongst the wizards and the Dursleys amongst the non-magic people fail as parents in spite of their financial superiority.

## c) The Letters From No One, and d) The Keeper Of The Keys

The third and fourth chapters may be grouped and discussed together for their similarity of function in the development of the plot. In these Harry is moving closer to the magical world of Hogwarts and getting resisted by the Dursleys from doing so. At the beginning of the third chapter Harry is in his misery because of the debacle at the zoo but he is also found to be a little hopeful because he and Dudley had finished their primary schools and he was already informed that he and Dudley were not going to share the same school for their secondary education. The situation takes a surprising turn one morning with the arrival of a mysterious letter, meticulously addresses to Harry. Unfortunately his uncle and aunt snatch and read it and their shocked reactions make it clear that it has something important about Harry. The rest of the third along with the beginning of the fourth chapter, centre around the repeated and increasing arrival of these letters and Uncle Vernon's angry and ridiculous attempts to stop them. He boards up every gaps of their house to make them stop but the letters keep arriving in a larger number. Finally he decides to make everyone move to a shack on a rock, out in the sea after the arrival of more than forty letters through their fireplace on Sunday. They move to the rock

on the night of Harry's eleventh birthday and despite the ongoing storm, Harry is finally given his due letter right after he turns eleven. Rubeus Hagrid, the Keeper of the Keys of Hogwarts School arrives in person to the shack and delivers the letter, paying little attention to Uncle Vernon's reactions. Harry comes to know about his true identity from Hagrid and the letter. He is informed that both his dead parents and he are wizards. He is also informed how famous the Potters are in the world of the wizards. In short, he is shifted from rags to riches in a metaphorical way in this chapter.

These chapters depict Rowling's borrowings from Charles Dickens and serve as moments of peripeteia and anagnorisis in a positive sense. Anny Sadrin, in her book *Parentage and Inheritance in the Novels of Charles Dickens* shows how frequently in his novels Dickens shows sudden revelations about the true parentage changing the social and economic status of his protagonists. Harry's case, in these chapters, appears to echo these moments of the Dickensian novels. John Granger offers a detailed discussion on Rowling's borrowings from Dickens in his *Harry Potter's Bookshelf: The Great Books Behind the Hogwarts Adventures*. Vernon Dursley's angry reactions show his jealousy and insecurity about Harry's new found status. Both Vernon and Petunia claim that the detest magic but in reality they suffered from insecurities about their non-magic nature. For them Harry's going to Hogwarts meant transcending them in everything. Their behaviour in this sectionresembleDickensian characters like Edward Leefordof *Oliver Twist*, who tried to erase proofs about Oliver's parentage.

## e) Diagon Alley And The Journey From Platform Nine, and f) Three-Quarters

The fifth and sixth chapters also seem fit to be studied together. In these Rowling takes the readers not only to the world of magic but also to junctions between the magical and the real. Though Harry was a wizard by birth, as revealed in the earlier chapter, he initially had no idea about the magical world. The plot begins and remains in the world as readers know it for four chapters. People of the magical kind do occasionally turn up in the world of the non-magic people but instead of explaining these sudden appearances simply as 'magical', significant details are provided regarding the methods used for journeying between these two domains. Eventually it is shown, especially in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, that it is possible to simply transport from one world to another instantly but Rowling does not reveal that until the sixth instalment of the series. In fact, inevery preceding bookshe shows a unique way of entering the magical world. Not only does this pattern add variety and spectacle but it also contributes significantly

towards establishing the verisimilitude of the world of magic created by Rowling. Towards the beginning of the fifth chapter Harry asks Hagrid how he arrived at the secluded shack far from the land. Hagrid replies that he flew and adds something important-the magical community is not allowed to use magic in the non-magical world. Soon it is revealed that there is a bank, a newspaper, a Ministry, even a railway service created to distinctly serve the magical community. Descriptions of the Gringotts bank, Diagon Alley, and the platform number nine and three quarters indicate how titbits of our familiar world were used as the foundation of the world of magic by Rowling. By showing the rules and regulations of the magical world she clarified that her Wonderland was not simply a land where anything goes. Rather, it is shown to be a place with limitations and problems of various kinds. One needed money to buy ingredients for performing magic of all sorts and even a wizard or witch has to reach the railway platform in time. In short, before shifting the narrative to the world of the magic, the writer ensures that the parallel existence of this other world is rationalized and instead of being reminded of the differences between themselves and the fantastic wizards or witches, the readers of the book are frequently encouraged to notice the similarities between the two.

## g) The Sorting Hat, The Potions Master, The Midnight Duel, Hallowe'en, & h) Quidditch

In this novel, from chapter Seven onwards, Rowling starts drawing upon the genre known as the School Story. Schools, especially of the residential kind function as the Setting of these narratives. Barring the last book of the series, Rowling uses Hogwarts School as a major locus for the plots and naturally that endows these stories with many basic features of this genre. In the essay 'Harry Potter's Schooldays: J.K. Rowling and the British Boarding School Novel', Karen Manners Smith outlines the generic elements of the School Story. According to her, inter-dorm or inter-house rivalry, competitive team sports, teacher-student relations, moral dilemmas over breaking of rules, are the defining features of these stories. These chapters are introductory and formative as they set the stage for nearly everything that takes place in Hogwarts throughout the subsequent books. Generic moments and stereotypical characters pervade these chapters mostly. The sorting of Harry and his batch mates give an idea about the basic differences between the four Houses of the school. Draco Malfoy, who is introduced in the chapter 'Diagon Alley' as a bully, sharing similarities with Dursley, is sent to Slytherin, while Harry and his new acquaintances, Ron and Hermione are sent to Gryffindor. The teachers of the school are also introduced in these chapters with significant details. Though all of them have a distinct nature, they represent only the stereotypical set of the

genre. Severus Snape, the teacher of Potions, a subject similar to Chemistry, is shown as the unfair teacher who harasses the lead characters. Professor Binns, the teacher of History of Magic is described as a boring lecturer like most other teachers of History. Professor Flitwick and Quirrell function as comic relief and McGonagall and Dumbledore resemble the character type of the strict yet loving ones. McGonagall for instance plays crucial role in bringing out Harry's hidden talent for Quidditch. Her letter with the costly Quidditch accessory Nimbus Two Thousand explains how sensibly she maintains the code of conduct and yet manages to give importance to the bending of the same on special occasions. Growth in friendship and rivalry are also shown in a significant manner in these chapters. Draco Malfoy repeatedly tries to provoke Harry and Ron in the chapter 'The Midnight Duel' and Hermione's logical protest at the two boys' haughty responses to Malfoy's challenges creates a misunderstanding between the three, only to be resolved in a manner typical to the genre in the chapter 'Hallowe'en'. The chapter on Quidditch too looks generic enough for its depiction of the victory of the underdog. Rowling however, utilizes these generic moments for developing the plot further by making Malfoy's challenges the reason behind the three friends' discovery of the monstrous three-headed Dog, the secret door guarded by it, which eventually leads to the discovery of the Philosopher Nicolas Flammel and his great discovery-the Philosopher's Stone. Even the description of the Quidditch game serves to develop the plot as it gives an interesting misdirection regarding Snape's motives, which is clarified only at the end. In short, these basically formulaic chapters are made to serve significantly by the writer for making the plot move towards its climactic moments.

## i) The Mirror Of The Erised & j) The Man With Two Faces

The novel and the whole Harry Potter series is evidently influenced by Fairy Tales and just like an ideal tale of such kind, this novel too teaches moral lessons, particularly in the eleventh and the last chapter. Unlike most other orphans or foundlings of a fairy tale, Harry is haunted by the death of his parents multiple times, even after getting his life changed by his attachment with the world of magic. The whole series in general and this novel in particular looks significantly different from wish-fulfilment stories because of its emphasis on the mortality of both the good and the bad characters. It is very significant that the main antagonist of the series, Voldemort transforms into a monster mainly due to his obsession with immortality, while most of the virtuous people embrace death fearlessly for the sake of protecting others. Rowling tries to caution against the Faustian hankering after power and immortality in a very interesting manner in all of his Harry Potter stories and by turning the Philosopher's Stone into a MacGuffin, this novel speaks volumes

in this regard. Voldemort not only wants to return but also achieve immortality by using the stone and the futility of a quest of this kind is very impactfully shown in these chapters. Despite its presence in the title itself and its major influence on the motivation of the main characters of the text, the Stone is finally shown to be something very insignificant and undesirable. Apart from this usage as a MacGuffin, the triviality of it is highlighted by using the magical mirror also. The apparently enigmatic name of the mirror and the words written above the mirror are actually words written backwards. The Mirror of the 'Erised' is therefore the Mirror of the 'Desired' basically, which cautions saying: "I show not your face but your heart's desire". A mirror symbolically represents introspection but this mirror does not do that. Instead it tries to befool the onlooker by enticing him or her with their greatest desire or fantasy. The mirror creates a dangerous addiction in this way, thereby destroying the onlooker by keeping him or her absorbed in the world of dreams. By placing this mirror as the final obstacle for the seekers of the stone Dumbledore wanted to make the seeker realize the danger of every obsessive desire. While Harry develops the realization in the chapter 'The Mirror of the Erised', Voldemort, the other student of Dumbledore fails to do so. In the concluding chapter, selfless love is shown as more powerful than the dark powers by showing the impact of Harry's touch on Professor Quirrel's Voldemort-possessed body. Along with the critique of the quest for immortality, this foregrounding of the value ofasacrifice makes the novel akin to the classic fairy tales and Christian allegories.

## k) Norbert The Norwegian Ridgeback, and l) The Forbidden Forest

Depiction of the perennial conflict between good and evil maybe the major focus of Harry Potter series but in many of his adventures Harry and his friends also engage in rescuing endangered animals of the magical world. Just like our world, the world of the magical-people has its share of anthropocentric people. Draco Malfoy for instance serves to be a prime example in this series, particularly in the first and third novels. Magical creatures are shown in a very interesting manner in the series. Some of them can actually speak and all of them have unique powers that set them at par with human beings. Rowling never depicts these beings to be fearful or monstrous. Instead she provides the examples of Hagrid, Hermione, or Charlie Weasley who are ready to go to any length for protecting endangered or oppressed beings of the magical world. In this novel for example, Hagrid and Charlie's love for dragons, which have the reputation of a monster in popular imagination question the normalization of this fear and hatred about gigantic beings.

Naturally, Voldemort is shown to be a polar opposite of these animal lovers. He is shown to be preying upon a Unicorn, which is said to be the most innocent and defenceless of the magical creatures. His attempt to lengthen his life by consuming such an innocent being vilifies such anthropocentric attitude to nature and animals. The grudge against the humans in Centaurs like Bane too seems significant in this regard as it shows the reaction against the age long exploitation of non-humans The wizards and the witches too have varying attitudes regarding the non-humans. Some of them exploit animals and some treat these non-humans as equals. Throughout the series Rowling has shown her preference for the latter section and in this novel she expresses her views in this regard through these chapters.

## 3.11.6 Characters and their Roles

Rowling mostly relies on the use of stereotypes when it comes to characterization. This novel abounds with such examples mostly. She is quite Dickensian in a way. Ron Weasley plays the role of the slightly dumb sidekick of the hero, Draco Malfoy and Dudley Dursley act as bullies, Hagrid serves mostly to be the kind foolish man like Mr. Micawber and Voldemort is shown to be a typical villain. The novel however has a few interesting characters that are more than stereotypes for their comparatively dynamic nature and in this section they are briefly outlined below:

Harry Potter: He is the eponymous hero of the story. Among the stereotypical characters of the whole series, Harry is closest to becoming a ‘round character’. Through the seven novels Rowling allows him to grow, mature, and learn just like the protagonist of a Bildungsroman. In this book he is shown to be a character akin to the Dickensian orphans who initially suffer due to a lack of family and recognition but eventually achieve everything. Though Harry definitely plays a messianic role in the series and this novel, Rowling never elevates him to the level of a superman. Rather he is shown to be a mediocre student who has duties and fame thrust upon him right from the beginning of his life. As a person he is shown to be quite stubborn at times but he is also courageous, sensitive, and driven by common senses, as shown in the chapter ‘Through the Trapdoor’. Yet he mostly remains to be a common man throughout the novel. Even his everymanish name that makes him akin to the proverbial Toms, Dicks, and Harries, indicate his ordinariness. As shown in the fields of Quidditch, the only thing Harry excels in, he is a curious seeker who is entrusted by fate to find the answer to the problem of the immortality of his arch-rival Voldemort.He resembles the hero of monomyths that myth critics like Joseph Campbell talk about.

Albus Dumbledore: The character second in importance for the Harry Potter-verse is the Headmaster of Hogwarts, Professor Albus Dumbledore. Rowling pays a great importance to the unfurling of this particular character throughout the series. As mentioned in the third section, he definitely resembles the stereotype of the wise teacher but what makes him interesting is the co-existence of wisdom and erroneousness in him. In this novel he shows remarkable intellect by using the Mirror of the Erised for guarding the Philosopher's Stone, and by handing the Invisibility Cloak over to Harry but he is also shown to be making serious mistakes as well. In the last chapter he himself admit that leaving Hogwarts with the Stone in it was a serious error on his part and yet the readers cannot help forgiving him for his wonderful analysis of the effect of the mirror on Harry or the power of Lily Potter's sacrifice. He is undoubtedly one of the most interesting mentor figures of Children's literature.

Hermione Granger: Apart from Harry, or his legendary mentor Albus Dumbledore, the most dynamic character of the series is Harry's best friend Hermione Granger. Rowling allows her to move freely between a wide number of character types. She resembles the nerds for her constant attachment with books but is also shown to be a saviour many a times. In this novel, her knowledge and attentive nature helps Harry immensely. For instance, in the chapter 'The Midnight Duel', it is Hermione who first notices that the monstrous dog Fluffy was guarding a door. Though she is not described to be beautiful in this novel, from the fourth instalment of the series she emerges as a beauty with brains. Her very presence in the world of magic challenges Voldemort's essentialistic discourse regarding the primacy of the 'purebloods'. In short, the character of Hermione Granger maybe considered as a proper subversion of the stereotype of a 'witch' and a 'nerd'.

## 3.11.7 Summing Up

After going through the novel with the aspects mentioned above in mind, a vital insight regarding the Harry Potter series and by extension, the genre it affiliates to, that is, Fantasy fiction of the twentieth century, maybe gained. It was Herbert Read who first pointed out the necessity for creating "Fairy-Tales for Grown-Ups" adding a note of regret abouthis contemporary Western World for its inability to produce the same. A number of post-Second World War British writers seem to have responded in an impactful manner to this lack of an updated form of Fairy Tales. J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Roald Dahl, and J.K. Rowling are the most renowned ones amongst these post-Second World War writers of the Fantasy. Their writings chiefly seem to have a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, they are born out of a

craving for the unblemished and supposedly golden days of the Victorian age and on the other hand, these presented apparently defamiliarized avatars of the crises that troubled the contemporary British minds. The Harry Potter novels do this with great success by mixing the generic elements of the genres popularly known to be realistic ones (Bildungsroman, School Story) with quintessential elements of Fairy tales.

As a result, the series developed a form that successfully catered to different age group of readers, which accounts for its immense popularity and massive commercial success. Like all other best-selling franchise, this series too faced its share of objections for being repetitive. Such objections indeed seem true to a great extent, as from the second book onwards, Rowling indeed seems to mostly have stuck to the basic structure of the first book which had given her success. Despite these shortcomings, the series' ability function as an engaging cautionary narrative about the corrupting influence of the craving for power and exploitation of the non-humans must also be taken into consideration and this first volume of the series serves as a proper introduction to these features in a remarkable way.

## 3.11.8 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer TypesQuestions:**
  1. Discuss *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as a mixing of realistic and fantastic elements.
  2. Write a short essay on the theme of Christian love and sacrifice in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.*
  3. Write a note on the treatment of non-human characters in*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.*
  4. Critically discuss the structure of the plot of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.*
  5. Despite the usage of elements of fantasy, Rowling's novel are considered to be convincing in nature, discuss how this verisimilitude is maintained by her with reference to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.*
- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Write a short note on the inclusion of the Quidditch game in Harry Potter series.
  2. Why does Voldemort fail to kill Harry as a child and in the last chapter of the novel? What does it symbolize?

3. Write brief notes on the roles of Ronald Weasley, Neville Longbottom, Severus Snape in the novel.
4. Do you feel Rowling uses misdirection or Red Herrings in the novel? Answer with example.
5. What is a MacGuffin? Write a note on its usage in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.*

- **Short Answer Type Questions:**

1. How does the death of his parents influence Harry's character and the decisions that he makes over the course of the book?
2. Why is Harry's insistence on being placed in Gryffindor House instead of Slytherin House so significant in terms of his development as a character?
3. Is there a clear sense of good and evil in the book?

## 3.11.9 Suggested Reading

Anatol, Giselle Liza Ed. *Reading Harry Potter Critical Essays*, Praeger, 2003.

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Whited, Lana A. Ed. *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, University of Missouri Press, 2004.

# Unit-12 □ DurgabaiVyam and SubhashVyam- *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability*

***Structure***



## 3.12.1 Objectives

This Unit aims to introduce the text of *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchabilty* to the learners. We will explain how the form of a graphic narrative brings up complex issues of caste oppression, often borrowing from Ambedkar's own autobiographical notes. Moreover, the Unit will introduce to the learner the use of tradition and folk myth and painting style in this modern rendering of social criticism.

## 3.12.2 Introduction

*Bhimayana: Incidents in the Life of BhimraoRamjiAmbedkar*, subtitled as 'Experiences of Untouchability' was published in the year 2011 by Navayana and is designed as a graphic biography of BhimraoRamjiAmbedkar. Like other graphic narratives the text uses multiple modes to tell the story, and utilizes visual vocabulary, alphabetic text, sequentiality and so on. The artwork of the text is done by DurgabaiVyam and SubhashVyam, while the narrative is designed by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand. The artwork of *Bhimayana*is especially unconventional and styled according to traits of Pardhan Gond art, practiced by PardhanGonds in central India. Apart from the fact that the text is characteristically different from being a regular 'comicbook' or 'graphic novel', it is also severally removed from a regular 'biography' of a heroic figure like Ambedkar. These traits of the text

disable a steady generic identification. Bhimayana definitely visualizes the real-life experiences of Ambedkar, and these experiences appear in Ambedkar's own autobiographical notes (1935) that were composed with the purpose of critiquing the evilness of casteism and untouchability in contemporary India. However, the narrative emplotment of the Ambedkar story in *Bhimayana* refuses to place Ambedkar as a heroic and messianic figure of the distant past. As we shall further find by investigating the text, there is consistent conflation of past and present in the text. Moreover, Ambedkar's narrative, even though it forms the narrative spine of the book, is used with more than one purpose. The book is layered and while it hails and celebrates Ambedkar'sexceptional struggle and zealous revolt against casteism and untouchability, it consistently places Ambedkar as a sufferer a common victim of casteism since he suffered because of himself being typified as a member of the caste that he represented as part of the violent cycle of dehumanization and marginalization that victimized and continues to victimize millions in India. Thus, it is a book that contains Ambedkar's real-life 'experiences of untouchability' but is not limited to it, and tries to talk about the historical injustice that continues even in contemporary India by keeping its central focus on the life of Ambedkar.

## 3.12.3 Summary of the Text

*Bhimayana* presents scenes from Ambedkar's life. However, it is designed as a frame narrative. The book begins 'one day in the recent past' where we find on the opening splash page a scene where two youngsters are conversing about the job quotas for backward and scheduled castes in contemporary India. There is an unnamed boy who is sitting on the bench with his friend. If we focus on the spatial arrangement of the text, we can find that the boy is placed right at the centre of the splash page while the girl, his friend, is placed at the corner. The boy appears disgusted, since he feels that the system of job quotas for backward and scheduled castes is unfair. To this, the young girl replies by characterizing caste as unfair. In order to elaborate on the unfairness of casteism and underline the fact that though often kept safely under the carpet, casteism and its discriminatory mechanism are sadly still vibrant in India the unnamed girl refers to several incidents of human rights violation in contemporary India that took place as a result of this venomous and oppressive system. She talks about the Khairlanji incident in which members of the Bhotmange family were brutally massacred and their dead bodies were dumped in a canal by upper-caste people of the village. She asserts how untouchability, caste-based discriminations are persistent problems that the Indian society is still plagued with. And it is in this context, with an intention of sensitizing his friend

about this normalized injustice, she refers to several other newspaper reports about dalits being oppressed. This provides the context for bringing the story of Ambedkar to the forefront.

The unnamed girl narrates the experiences from Ambdekra's own life and the book now uses three sections, 'Water', 'Shelter' and 'Travel' in order to depict the unspeakable sufferings of Ambedkar and how he fought against such injustice.

## 3.12.4 Issues

### a) Water:

Since *Bhimayana*'s central focus lies on Ambedkar's real-life experiences and how he rebelled against the injustice normalized by casteism in his own lifetime, it is useful to have a brief overview of Ambedkar'sreal-life experiences which the book deals with. One of the greatest jurists and social reformer, Ambedkar, who would later spearhead the committee drafting the constitution of India and serve as Law and Justice Minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet, was born on 14th April, 1891. When he was only a child, Ambedkar, a Mahar by caste, was marginalized as other members of his caste by ones belonging to the upper castes. The Dalit children had to sit outside the class. As he mentions in his 'No Peon, No Water', he was considered an untouchable in his school and was usually refused water. In the section titled 'Water', the narrative begins when Ambedkar is a boy of ten years. Ambedkar is seen in his early school days, where being a Mahar boy is understood as untouchable. He is naturally cornered and is even denied water by the Brahmin teacher and peon. Ironically, while his father had built a water tank for the people affected by famine in Goregaon, little Ambedkar is left to witness how even the domesticated animals have access to village water-bodies while he and the other members of the caste he typifies are denied water. Ambedkar lies ostracized when he finds out how even beasts shall be trimmed with brushes and shears while his hair, the hair of a Mahar cannot be touched as per the prevailing custom.

The section then visualizes experiences of young Ambedkar as he travels to Masur to stay with his father. His father's secretary, Kiran, has forgotten to inform Ambedkar's father about the arrival of Ambedkar and his siblings. Having found out that nobody has turned up to receive them at the station, they seek the aid of the station master who refuses to do much after knowing that they were Mahars. They are forced to board a cart. The cart driver initially refuses to take them to

Goregaon since he too does not want to engage with Mahars. However, he exploits them and force them to pay double. The children cannot eat even though they have their packed food prepared by their aunt and neighbours since they don't get water to drink. The cart driver stops at a place where water is available. He rushes to his own village to have his food and directs them to the water-body which is later found as a cattle-pool. The thirsty children are later denied water even when they pretend to be Muslims.

The narrative then treads back to the frame story where the boy having listened to the experiences of Ambedkar recounted by the girl asserts that such incidents of denying water to the likes of Ambedkar are of distant past and do not happen in the twenty-first century India. However, the girl, reacting sharply to such beliefs refers to incidents happening even in 2008 when Dalits are killed for digging their own wells or Dalit women are torched in water wars. The proofs of such inhumanity shock the boy and the girl goes on to explain how Ambedkar, in his bid to revolt against this oppressive casteism launchedMahad Satyagraha in 1927 and later burnt copies of *Manusmriti* ceremonially as a mark of revolt against the way how caste-based discrimination is ideologically justified by the text.

## b) Shelter:

Ambedkar was awarded a Baroda State Scholarship in 1913 and he attended Columbia University and London School of Economics where he excelled and had almost forgotten about his status as an untouchable. This section of *Bhimayana* begins with Ambedkar who is now a fascinatingly educated young man in 1917 when he returns to India.Ambedkar boards a train to Baroda to join his service as a probationer in the Accountant General's office in the Baroda State. Inside his coach he encounters a co-passenger, a Brahmin, who is impressed with the lofty educational qualification of Ambedkar since he never got to know that his co-passenger was a Mahar. As Ambedkar reaches Baroda, he does not get any accommodation in any Hindu hotel since he is identified as an untouchable. He manages to stay in a Parsi inn by hiding his religious identity since the place was only meant for Parsis. However, when the Parsis find out his real identity he is threatened and driven out. Even the prime minister of the Baroda State remains unable to provide Ambedkar with an accommodation. Ambedkar desperately continues to look for a permanent shelter and fails each time. Even his liberal Christian friend Peter cannot keep him inside his house as his wife has prejudices against the untouchables. Ambedkar is even forced to spend his time in the KamathiBaug public garden. He has to quit his job and return to Bombay in just eleven days.

The narrative now trades back to the frame story wherein we find that the girl elaborates on the recounted incidents in Ambedkar's life to highlight the fact that such injustices faced by Ambedkar are not rare even in today's India. Even in 2008 three dalit students were beaten and evicted by the landlord because of their caste status.

## c) Travel:

The third and final section of the part of the book that deals with references to Ambedkar's life begins with a scene wherein Ambedkar and his colleagues from Mahar and other untouchable castes are seen travelling by bus in Aurangabad in the year 1934. Ambedkar and his colleagues are heard discussing how 'ideas about pollution [by way of engaging with untouchables] never change, even though people change their religion. Parsis, Chritians—they all cling to the caste system' (76). Ambedkar mentions how Muslims too are no exception. Ambedkar, while discussing how untouchability remains a steady menace, alludes to one of his experiences in Nasik that he encountered during his Bombay trip in 1929. Ambedkar informs how he could not find any tonga driver (cart driver) who agreed to drive an untouchable like Ambedkar to the station. The untouchables of Chalisgaon sent their nephew, an untrained driver, to drop Ambedkar at the station. However, they met with an accident and witnessed the harshness of the world around. Wounded untouchables were denied any medical attention. As the narrative comes back to the 1934 Aurangabad trip, Ambedkar and his colleagues are seen denied the use of the drinking water tank at Daulatabad fort by Muslims.

The narrative shifts to its frame wherein the young girl recounting Ambedkar's struggle states how Ambedkar remains the most influential figure in sensitizing Indians about the seriousness of equality and social justice. However, the Boy, refusing to give Ambedkar much credit, finds his friend's argument as mere exaggeration since in his view Gandhi was more serious about equality than Ambedkar. However, his friend tries to convince him by saying how Ambedkar 'launched organizations to raise political awareness and to build schools and libraries for the most marginalized castes. Gandhi had different priorities—he was more concerned with India's freedom from British rule than with the transformation of Hindu society' (88). Though she does not fully manage to convince her friend, her friend's harsh sentiments seem to have softened by the end of the narrative, as he too bids farewell to his friend by greeting him with 'Jay Bhim'.

## 3.12.5 Critical Analysis of the Text

### a) Relevance of the Title and the Subtitle of the Text:

The title 'Bhimayana' naturally alludes to India's celebrated epic, Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The term 'ayana' means journey and therefore 'Bhimayana' refers to Bhim's Journey. We can naturally identify that since the book deals with 'Incidents in the Life of BhimraoRamjiAmbedkar' 'Bhim' in the title refers to Ambedkar and thus the book appears to be given an apt title. However, *Bhimayana* does not present Ambedkar's experiences as exceptional and distant past narratives. Rather, the book narrates Ambedkar's experiences in connection with the collective experience of untouchability. Thus, 'Bhim' in the title also acts as a metaphor signifying the large section of the Indian population—in past and in present—who suffer the pangs of marginalization because they are identified not as individuals but as a type. The sub-titular phrase—'Experiences of Untouchability'—too therefore refers to collective experience the marginalized lower caste population while directly indicating towards Ambedkar's own experiences.

### b) Theme of Untouchability:

Untouchability, as a practice and prevailing custom as well as a metaphor standing as a mode victimization based on caste-based identity of a person or a tribe, is at the heart of *Bhimayana*. The book critiques the practice of untouchability and attacks the prejudices and ideologues that justify casteist oppression. Keeping the Ambedkar history/story at the centre of the narrative, the book manages to capture the horrors of casteism and hegemony is operationalized. However, Ambedkar's narrative, though it is an individual and personal journey, is not kept in *Bhimayana* as an exceptional one only to be looked at as a distant past. Ambedkar's narrative is told in the present context not in the form of a graphic biography, but in relation to contemporary existing casteist prejudices. We must recognize the fact that the girl, one of the inhabitants of urban India in the 21$^{st}$ century alludes to Ambedkar's experiences of untouchability that he encountered in the late 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ century India, both in villages and cities, only to sensitize her friend about the need to eliminate casteist prejudices that the 21$^{st}$ century Indian boy too is plagued with. The boy himself stands as a representative who unconsciously and venomously emulates the casteist discourses that were prevalent in past centuries and are still present with enough vigour. Moreover, since the ostracizing of lower-castes through untouchability and other forms of alienation and marginalization leaves the victims

traumatized with experiences that are often unspeakable, *Bhimayana*, in order to visualize the cornered status of the marginalized castes, uses effective and innovative modes of visualization. Thus, in the scene of Ambedkar being denied water at the school, we find how little Bhim is placed at the corner of the pages or panels. His physical frame being cornered is connotative of the forcible cornering he undergoes. This presentation effectively captures Bhim's unspeakable trauma. Similarly, the book continuously places the untouchables as dehumanized and feeble victims of casteism. The unnaturality of untouchability is visually represented by Bhim's body-frame being attached to a fish taken out of the water. It is suggested that just like the fish that cannot live without water, Bhim too lives a life of eternal thirst. Thus, to suggest how unnatural the practice of untouchability is, the scene conflates ecocide (the act of denying the fish its water) with that of casteist marginalization of Bhim (21). Moreover, the historicity of Ambedkar's narrative is consistently conflated with other contemporary realities like the genocide of Bhotmange family, Dalit students beaten up by landlords or Dalits being victimized by the upper-caste for digging a well by managing a conflation of multiple temporalities and spatialities in order to showcase the fact that India, even in today's world of modernity, has not been fully cured of the malady of untouchability and casteism.

## c) Problems of Generic Identification:

The central problem with regard to any critical appraisal of *Bhimayana* occurs when we try to identify the generic identity of the text. Though the text focuses clearly on the incidents in the life of Ambedkar, *Bhimayana* cannot be considered as a regular graphic biography because of several reasons. Firstly, incidents from Ambedkar's life appear only as one part of the frame narrative in the book among many other such layers in a narrative structure that employs multiple narrative voices—the third person omniscient narrative voice available in the captions, the voice of the characters of the boy and girl that converse among themselves about their contemporary social realities and Ambedkar, the voice of Ambedkar himself as he alludes to many of his personal experiences and so on—and multiple temporalities and spatialities. Secondly, even though ingredients of graphic biography are evidently and enormously present in the book, the book does not give a full-length life history of Ambedkar beginning with his birth story and continuing till his death like the *Amar Chitra Katha* graphic biography of Ambedkar. Thirdly, there is continual conflation of features of graphic biography and graphic history. However, the historical emplotment does not follow the regular structures of officially and academically written and mediated histories. Ambedkar's life-history is not presented as any exceptional heroic struggle. As writes Nayar,

In the non-realist mode of Bhimayana we see a type, the oppressed, rather than clear-cut individuals. We have identical faces of Dalits listening to Ambedkar and identical faces representing 'orthodox Brahmins'... (135)

There is sufficient de-eliticisation of history. The history narrated in Bhimayana can be understood as a kind of history-from-below wherein the dominant strain of regularly mediated and state-sanctioned histories is mimicked, subverted and attacked by the voices that are kept either at the margins of historiography or pushed outside historiography. Since Ambedkar is presented as a sufferer who suffers because he typifies the lower castes, his personal history is amalgamated with the collected history of the victims that suffered and continue to suffer. Bhimayana also amalgamates fiction with non-fiction, indigenous local belief systems, oral histories and recorded official histories. Thus, the narrative contains features of various features of different genres at the same time.

Even when we consider *Bhimayana* as a graphic narrative we cannot call this a regular comicbook or graphic novel, keeping in mind the kind of visual narration mechanism gets displayed in regular graphic novels and comics. The visual register of the book is distinctly different from the ones we mostly find in comics and graphic novels. There is evidently interplay of visual imagery and alphabetic text in *Bhimayana*; at the same time, we find evidences of sequentiality. While these characteristics conform to the visual structure of the regular comics, *Bhimayana* seems exceptionally alien when we see the visual designing of the graphic narrative. We do not come across the conventional panelling structure and often the conventional 'Z' path of reading normalized in Anglophone comics is transcended. Those which we try to see as panels in *Bhimayana* are actually *dignas*, a form of wall painting that are available in Pardhan Gond Tribe's painting culture. The graphic stylistics of the book defamiliarize the conventional optic experience available in comics by continuous interplay of animal imagery and historically valid narration done in a way which is far from being photorealistic. Moreover, the use of bird-beak and scorpion-sting speech balloons too enables the book to surpass conventional comicbook visualization.

## d) Visual Grammar and Graphic Style:

Apart from the frame narrative and incidents from the life of Ambedkar, *Bhimayana* has an entire chapter titled as 'The Art of *Bhimayana*' which gives us insights into the history of the book's composition and is essential especially with regard to our understanding and appreciation of the visual grammar and graphic style available in the book. *Bhimayana* is radical not merely in its theme but is

radically different from regular comicbook style of visualization. Listed below are certain special features of the style of graphic story-telling available in the book.

## e) Illustrations: Discarding Photorealism, Personalization and Conventional Panels

While *Bhimayana* deals with Ambedkar, a real-life historical figure, and his historically valid experiences, the graphic narrative does not present Ambedkar in photorealistic illustration. S. Anand informs while discussing how the visual composition of *Bhimayana* took place:

> During one of the sessions I had with DurgabaiVyam and SubhashVyam... they browsed the books of the masters of the graphic book genre, North American, Franco-Belgian and Japanese—Will Eisner, Art Spiegelman, Joe Sacco, Shaun Tan and Osamu Tezuka.... The Vyamscounterposed their own philosophy of art to the visual imagery in these graphic texts...: 'We'd like to state one thing very clearly at the outset. We shall not force our characters into boxes. It stifles them. We prefer to mount our work in open spaces. Our art is khulla (open) where there's space for all to breathe' (100).

Thus, typical close-ups or extreme close-ups, light and shadow, perspective and other such visualization mechanisms and methods of visual accentuation, common in western comics and those available in mainstream Indian comics and graphic novels were abandoned. The indigenous local aesthetics of Pardhan Gond art with sets of its traditional methodologies and tropes were accommodated as the basic aesthetic model for the book. The Vyams were not merely unfamiliar with conventional visual vocabulary and stylistics of comics but also unaware of Ambedkar. They came to know about him from Anand and gradually internalized his story by identifying their lives and humiliations that they too have undergone. As was promised to them, all the illustrations were initially full-page works. However, there was a threat of the book becoming an unaffordable 400-pager. At that point SubhashVyam suggested the use of *Dignas*, 'the traditional auspicious design patterns applied to walls and floors in Gond homes' (102) in order to divide pages. Thus, *Bhimayana* effectively presents a uniquely indigenous form of visual imagery that does not at all conform to the visual registers of conventional comics and graphic novels.

Moreover, even when *Bhimayana*presents details from the autobiographical notes of Ambedkar, it refrains from definite personalization in the visual imagery used in describing Ambedkar. We almost regularly find identical facial features when we compare Ambedkar and other untouchables and his colleagues. This signifies how Ambedkar's experience is part of the collective shared history of the people belonging to the lower castes oppressed by the casteist society. The sole way

of personalization available in case of Ambedkar is often the signature pair of spectacles and his blue suit which distinguishes him from the others.

## f) Use of Non-Human Imagery:

The visual texture of *Bhimayana* is replete with abundant use of non-human visual imagery wherein often we come across a discursive stereotypification of non-human animals. As mentions S. Anand,

> The ecology of Pardhan Gond art is such that even when dealing with urban subjects we see freefalling animals, birds and trees in landscapes without a horizon. The train becomes a snake, the intimidating fort a lion. The happiness of the people of Chalisgaon who receive BabasahebAmbedkar is not conveyed through smiling faces but a dancing peacock. (102)

The oppressed castes are often represented by non-human victims of the carnivores. For example, when the real-life narrative involving the members of the Bhotmange family bludgeoned to death is visualized, we find that in the full-width panel a carnivore is seen attacking the dalits with axes, while the dalits' faces are attached to faces of innocent sheep (12). Thus, the aggressiveness and violent nature of casteism is signified by the use of the carnivores standing as stereotypical visual metaphors of violence, while the sheep represents the helpless plight of the dalits. Similarly, when Ambedkar is denied water at his school we find Ambedkar's cornered body-frame attached to that of a fish in order to underline the viciousness of casteism and untouchability and to highlight by equating the displaced fish and thirsty Ambedkar how untouchability as a practice goes against the ethics of biospherical egalitarianism and remains essentially opposed to laws of nature. Thus, when Ambedkar is seen drinking from Chavadar tank, we see how his words before the assembled crowd appear in loudspeakers shaped in the manner of pipes showering water and when we locate how Ambedkar is accompanied by a fish while drinking from the Chavadar tank we locate how Ambedkar's idea of social justice conflates with the basic principles of natural justice (48-49).The feebleness of the voice of the lower-castes, the fact that they are often kept unheard and are systematically repressed, is represented by the use of speech balloons in the shape of bird-beaks. Even sympathizers of the lower castes, like the young girl, are allotted bird-beak speech balloons just like Ambedkar because they echo Ambedkar'sdiscurses and try in their limited capacity to uphold his vision about India. On the other hand, the oppressors, the subscribers of casteism, the prejudiced mob represented by the upper castes, orthodox Brahmins, Parsis who deny Ambedkar shelter, the peon who denies Ambedkar water, the cart driver who exploits Ambedkar as well as the young boy who is brain-washed by the

existing prejudices and dominant discourses that govern contemporary human society are allotted speech balloons shaped in the manner of scorpion-stings in order to metaphorically represent the venom that they consciously, strategically or unknowingly carry within themselves.

## g) Alphabetic Text:

One must first recognize the fact that *Bhimayana* is a graphic narrative wherein the visualization remains the central stylistic feature that distinguishes it from any other alphabetically written text. Graphic texts—as in comics, manga, graphic novels, non-fiction graphics—can be with and without alphabetic text. However, the alphabetic text, if it is available in graphic narratives, appears in various forms. In regular comics, they can appear as caption, i.e. a descriptive text; there can be alphabetic text allotted to characters via speech and thought balloons. Such alphabetic text can appear as typed, hand-written, uppercase, lowercase, bold lettering of many sizes and fonts. The alphabetic text can remain uniform throughout the text and can vary and juxtapose variations. However, in all such cases, all alphabetic text in a graphic text that juxtaposes image and alphabetic text the alphabetic text does act as linguistic and visual signifiers at the same time. The alphabetic text contributes immensely to the visual language of a graphic text. Thus, the way the alphabetic text is styled and shaped is of great importance when we study a graphic narrative.

In *Bhimayana*, the captions are spoken by the third person narrator. The alphabetic text in such caption-boxes is in uppercase lettering. For example, when the narrative begins and we encounter the 21st Century Indian urban setting, we find on the splash page a caption box containing narrative prose: 'ONE DAY IN THE RECENT PAST, A BUS STOP IN AN INDIAN CITY' (11) in uppercase lettering so that the readers can distinguish between various voices operating in the graphic narrative. *Bhimayana* does not utilize the conventional speech or thought balloon. The speech balloons are shaped alternatively as bird-beaks and scorpion-stings. The bird-beaks are allotted to characters that empathize with the untouchables and respect their struggles or those who are victims of casteism and untouchability. On the other hand, in order to effectively visualize the poisonous prejudice in the characters that legitimize marginalization and victimization of the lower castes their allotted speech balloons are shaped in the manner of scorpion stings. Often, as the character's perspective changes and he/she is cured of his/her hatred for the lower castes the scorpion-sting-shaped speech balloons are replaced by bird-beak speech balloons. Thus, while throughout the graphic narrative we find the young

boy who was disgusted with the job quotas for the lower castes being allotted scorpion-sting speech balloons, at the end, when he has learnt about the plight of the untouchables and has developed considerable amount of regard for Ambedkar, he is given a bird-beak balloon wherein we find him greeting his friend with 'Jai Bhim' (92). In this regard, we must also recognize the fact that there are other variations of the visualization of alphabetic text in the graphic narrative. In order to distinguish between the informal dialogues and officially written records, alphabetic text in regular dialogues appears in sentence-case while the formally published official narratives are recorded in uppercase lettering. Thus, on the same page we find Ambedkar's official published discourses appearing in uppercase lettering in boxes that are shaped as books while the dialogues between the young boy and girl are recorded inside bird-beak speech balloons in regular sentence case (92). On the other hand, certain words appear in bold and larger or smaller fonts in order to accentuate certain texts or to visualize the loudness or lack of audibility of a spoken statement. Thus, following the regular patterns of graphic narrative, and in some ways transcending them, *Bhimayana* presents an optic experience involving the alphabetic text that guarantees a linguistic signification mechanism wherein the alphabetic text also adequately works as visual metaphors.

## 3.12.6 Summing Up

*Bhimayana*, as a graphic novel can be considered as a counter project by incorporating the narrative means of graphic arts to recast Ambedkar in the political context of caste violence and Dalit oppression. By reading history and the present in parallel, Bhimayanawill help the learner become cognizant of the casteist biases inherent in our cultural mechanism. The graphic novel offers a fresh historical perspective by borrowing greatly from Ambedkar's own life history, thus, familiarizing the learner with the intricacies of caste biases in the past and present Indian context simultaneously.

## 3.12.7 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Do you think*Bhimayana* departs from the popular trends of Graphic Novels? Discuss
  2. How does *Bhimayana* deal with the caste issue?
  3. Discuss how alphabetic text has been used in *Bhimayana*.

- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Why is the book called *Bhimayana*?
  2. Write a note on the primary issues in *Bhimayana*.
- **Short Answer type Questions:**
  1. What is the significance of the way in which *Bhimayana* begins?
  2. Give an instance of animal symbolism in *Bhimayana* and discuss its significance.
  3. Comment on the significance of how speeches have been depicted in three types of bubbles in *Bhimayana.*
  4. Which art form has been used in the graphic novel and what is the significance of it?

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# Unit-13 □ Chetan Bhagat–2 *States: The Story of My Marriage*

***Structure***



## 3.13.1 Objectives

This unit aims to understand the relevance of Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* in modern India and explore its popularity amongst young readership. The learners will be guided into the story line, context and thematic concerns built into the narrative.

## 3.13.2 Introduction

The novel is, as the subtitle suggests, based on the story of Chetan Bhagat's marriage to his wife, whom he met in IIM Ahmedabad and charts the trajectory from courtship to marriage. The primary focus of the novel is on the cultural conflict between the two families, and the measures taken by the couple to resolve them in order to arrive at an amicable union between a Punjabi and a Tamil family.

## 3.13.3 Chetan Bhagat: A Bio-Brief

Chetan Bhagat was born on 21st April**,** 1971in New Delhi (West) to a middle-class family. His father was an army officer while his mother was a government

employee in the Agricultural sector. He has been a student of prestigious institutes of the country such as Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi and Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He has worked as an investment banker in Goldman Sachs (Hong Kong) and Deutsche Bank, India before giving it up to pursue a full-time career in writing. After getting a job in Hong Kong He migrated from India with family. It was here, that he encountered the problem of the inferior economic status of India by global standards. The questions of India's poverty, social-ills, corruption and backwardness inspite of available resources flummoxed him. In *'What Young India wants'* he says: "the world was much richer, smarter, fairer and, from what I could tell happier. All our spirituality, diverse cultural identities, policies has brought us nowhere" (Bhagat 63) These issues become central to his novels. His novels explore the anxieties and obstacles of middle-class youth in a corrupt and polarised post-independent India.

Apart from being an acclaimed writer of popular fiction in India, he is a regular columnist in *The Times of India, Hindustan Times* and *Dainik Bhaskar*, a motivational speaker, a successful screenwriter and a TV personality. Bhagat's novels have sold over seven million copies. In 2008, *The New York Times* cited Bhagat as "the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history". Bhagat was included in *Time* magazine's list of World's 100 Most Influential People in 2010. He is the author of bestselling novels like *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *What Young India Wants* (2012) (speeches and columns), *Half Girlfriend*(2014), *Making India Awesome* (2015), *One Indian Girl* (2016) and *The Girl in Room 105* (2018). He has also been involved in screenwriting of blockmuster Bollywood movies adapted from his own novels such as *Kai Po Che(2013)*, *2 States(2014)* and *Half-Girlfriend(2017).* Chetan Bhagat also hosts 7 RCRon ABP news, which began airing 11 January 2014. The show features a series of biographies of India's prime ministerial candidates.

## 3.13.4 Chetan Bhagat and Indian Fiction

The corpus of Chetan Bhagat's fiction is placed under the category of popular literature or pulp fiction. These labels carry with them pejorative connotations of not being something serious enough to fall under the category of 'high' literature. Matthew Schneider Mayerson in his "Popular Fiction Studies: The Advantages of a New Field"defines Popular fiction as:

> Popular fiction is defined by what it is not: "literature." Most critics openly orimplicitly adhere to the following claims: Whereas "literature" is indifferentto

> (if not contemptuous of) the marketplace, original, and complex, popularfiction is simple, sensuous, exaggerated, exciting, and formulaic (for example,Gelder; Radway; Makinen; Warpole). "Real" writers spend decades agonizingover each sentence, while genre hacks produce a new paperback each year,to be "consumed" in airports and quickly discarded. (21-22)

In recent times the Indian market has been flooded with such books that are easily affordable and primarily read for light entertainment. Chetan Bhagat's first novel *Five Point Someone*, about three students of IIT was responsible for bringing in the revolutionary wave in the publishing industry of India. Earlier, Indian fiction in English catered to a small but elite coterie of educated people who could afford these books on overtly serious subjects. Chetan Bhagat brought about a refreshing change in this scenario, by churning out novels that catered to the problems of the youth in contemporary India, written in light and pedestrian English, with ample doses of popular entertainment thrown in. Bhagat has no qualms in accepting that his fiction does not have the academic or literary value of serious literature, because he concedes to the fact that, for him, the primary purpose of pursuing a career in writing was to provide entertainment. He writes in *What Young India Wants*:

> All of this became possible because of the one little, ignored aspect of my personality. When I was a child-me as the entertainer. It surfaced again and changed my life. I mentioned earlier how I used to entertain my uncles and relatives when I was a child. That same entertainer reemerged in Hong Kong. My other banker friends took on hobbies like golf and bridge. Almost by chance, I decided to do what I enjoyed: tell stories. Perhaps I wanted to get over my depression and frustration. May be I wanted to reconnect with India. Whatever the reason, I decided to write a book.(xv-xvi)

Bhagat dramatically changed the landscape of India's domestic publishing scenario by expanding the readership of English novels beyond the miniscule, metropolitan, highbrow elite and reached out to the unassuming, urban middle class India and, more importantly, to the youth of the nation.

## 3.13.5 Structure of the Novel

The novel has been divided into six acts. Each act is given a separate title, based on the location of its setting-Act 1: Ahmedabad, Act 2: Delhi, Act 3: Chennai, Act 4: Delhi Reloaded, Act 5: Goa and the Final Act:Delhi & Chennai & Delhi & Chennai. The division of the story into various acts facilitates an easy reading for the readers. The novel has been written keeping in mind a variety of themes. However, the prime focus is given on the multi-cultural Indian society and socio-

cultural clashes between the North Indian and the South Indian society. The writer, by narrating a simple love story of a Punjabi boy Krish and Tamil girl Ananya, has revealed various facets of contemporary Indian society, the thought and behavior patterns of two different cultures in one country.

### About the novel:

In this context it would be pertinent to give you a brief idea about what supposedly led to the making of the novel. The story of the novel is based on the real love story of the writer himself. Bhagat, a Delhi based Punjabi boy and his wife Anusha Suryanarayanan, a Tamil girl, happened to meet in IIM Ahmedabad for their post graduate study in Management. Given their diverse cultural and regional backgrounds, the couple had a hard time convincing their parents for this marriage. The novel, *2 States; The Story of My Marriage* is Chetan Bhagat's fourth bestseller. It was published in the year 2009, by Rupa & Co, New Delhi. The fiction has been adapted for the Bollywood movie *2 States* starred by Arjun Kapoor and Alia Bhatt in the year 2014.

(You can access the full text from this site: http://ycis.ac.in/CEGC%20Library/English/Two%20State.pdf)

## 3.13.6 Themes and Issues

### *a) Contemporary social reality:*

The main reason behind the humongous popularity of ChetanBhagat's novels is that they revolve around issues and characters that are highly relatable in the Indian contemporary milieu. The novels mirror the Indian middle class society and its complexities very vividly. *2 States* is no exception. It captures the contemporary social reality of postcolonial India very faithfully under the following headings:

### *b) Middle class sensibility:*

Both Ananya and Krish belong to the middle class in the novel. The high worth ascribed to career options such as Engineering and MBA has been represented in the novel. Krish's mother is immensely proud of her son as are Ananya's parents. However, as showcased by the novel the parental pride is actually hinged on the social dividend that these careers reap in the marriage market of the society. For example, Kavita is ecstatic thinking about the extravagant dowry her son's plush job would fetch for her.

### *c) Inter-generational conflicts:*

The inter-generational conflict is one of the major issues which drives the plot of the novel. Krish has a perennial dispute with his father who is an excessively dominating ex-armyman. Kavita, who is largely supportive of Krish also becomes hostile to him because of his relationship with Ananya. Similarly Ananya's parents are averse to her relation with Krish. The primary crux of the problem is that, Indian parents believe that they have a dominant claim in the primary decisions of their children's lives, irrespective of their age. The young generation on the other hand, is far more progressive than their previous generation, and refuse to let go of their sense of autonomy. For example, Ananya is a Brahmin Tamil, but she discreetly carries on her private rebellion against culinary orthodoxy, by eating non-vegetarian food in secret.

### *f) Multiculturalism and cross-cultural marriage:*

Even though India is a country of diverse cultures and ethnicities, cross-cultural marriage, even among educated communities is frowned upon, as manifested by the overwhelming hurdles that Krish and Ananya face before marriage. Each community is insular in its self-aggrandisement and refuses to see any merit in other communities. The Punjabis and South-Indians are polar opposites in their mannerisms and social behavior. While the Punjabis are gregarious and expressive, the Tamilians are restrained and both perceive each other with suspicion and hostility.

### *g) Love:*

Love and the barriers to its consummation form the major thematic impetus of Bhagat's novels. In this aspect, Bhagat's novels resemble Shakespearean comedies. In *2 States,* the protagonists have to traverse an arduous journey of making their families accept each other, before they can marry, because in India, merely love between a couple does not suffice, the consent f the families is all-important. The novel also manifests how the middle class Indian society perceives love as an inconvenience and distraction. For instance, Krish's father is infuriated when he comes to know that Krish is having an affair with a girl during his graduation from IIT. He calls it as an unpardonable waste of time and distraction.

### *h) Social menace-Dowry and marital abuse:*

Bhagat depicts several social menaces in is novel such as the prevalence and celebration of the dowry system and the gender disparity entrenched in the fabric

of the society. Kavita doesn't find it objectionable to excitedly discuss her son's monetary value in the marriage market and expects Ananya's parents to shower her with gifts. In the marriage of Minty, Krish's cousin too, the ugly face of the dowry system is laid bare. Even though Kavita can be extremely infuriating, one cannot help but sympathise with her because of the marital abuse she is subjected to. Marital abuse remains a sad reality across classes in Indian societies, and the sad part is that it is often brushed under the carpet because of societal inhibitions.

## 3.13.7 Characterisation

The characterization of Bhagat does not offer any profound insight into the recesses of human personality. They are ordinary people caught in the web of common troubles and their treatment is both credible and relatable.

***Krish***-Krish is a young, educated man, who is torn between his love for his mother and girlfriend, between his yearning for a job that provides financial stability and his love for writing. He is inherently a shy person, who has a lot of negativity bottled up in him.

***Ananya-***Ananya is an ambitious, educated, independent girl of the present generation. Not only does she stand up for herself but also for others in the face of injustice. She is a strong woman with self-esteem who does not accept the offensive behavious of Krish's mother. She also functions as a supporting framework for Krish in his latent desire to pursue a writing career.

***Kavita-***Krish's mother is a well-meaning woman who has had to suffer a lot of hardships and humiliation in her life. She has a dysfunctional relation with her husband, which is why she channelizes all her love and expectations on her son. She is deeply disturbed when all her expectations regarding he son's marriage is thwarted by her son, as she had expected it to be the only way of being respected by her family members, something she had been denied due to her husband.

***Krish's father-***Mr. Malhotra is the primary antagonist of the novel. He is an ex-army man who is extremely domineering with his wife and son.Even though he is guilty of inflicting a lot of psychological damage on his son and wife, in the end he redeems himself by mending the broken relation of Ananya and Krish and winning the faith of Ananya's parents.

***Mr. and Mrs. Swaminathan-***Ananya's parents are typical Tamilian parents who represent stereotypical members of their community. They are level-headed people, educated, restrained and cultured.

## 3.13.8 Chapter-Wise Summary of the Novel

There are three majorparts in the novel-the Prologue, the main story and the Epilogue. The novel is written in a first person singular.Krish, the narrator of the story, is the protagonist of the story. The Prologue begins with the following brief of Dr. Neeta Iyar by Dr. Ramachandran, apsychotherapist about Krish: "Patient has sleep deprivation, has cut off human contact for a week, refusesto eat, has Google-searched on the best ways to commit suicide."

Dr Neeta Iyer wants to know the reason for his depression and his constantthoughts of committing suicide. She asks him to narrate his story from the beginning.

The Prologue ends here and the next section begins with Krish's narrative of his life in IIM, how he met Ananya. At the beginning of the first act, Ananya Swaminathan, the chief female protagonist, isshown quarrelling with the hostel mess staff for not serving good quality food. Krish andmany other IIM students are in the queue to get the same food. Krish, who is used to hostel food is intrigued by this spirited girl and offers her sweet to placate her. Gradually Krish and Ananya become friends. Their friendship gets deeper when Krish offers to help Ananya with her mathematical foundation of marginal utility curve, after a professor insults her in class.

Gradually, they becomeclose friends and as the time passes they fall deeply in love. At the end of the course, both of them bag good placement. They want to getmarried but not without their parents' consent. This is the bone of contention. They belong totwo different cultural backgrounds-Krish is a Punjabi boy and Ananya is a Tamil girl. The Punjabi and Tamil culture is polar opposite to each other.Krish and Ananya,on the occasion of their Convocation Day, plan to introduce their parents and to let themknow their intention of marrying each , but the parents instantly take mutual dislike to each other. After the graduation, Krish goes to Delhi before he joins City Bank as a banker and Ananya goes to Chennai before she joins HLL.

In the second act, Krish tries to convince his mother for accepting Ananya as her daughterin-law on various occasions. Krish's mother is very possessive of him as she has had a thankless and abusive married life. In this section, the dark and grim aspects of Krish's father is revealed-his high-handedness, his arrogance, his patriarchal domination of his wife and son and his disgraceful behavior towards the family of his wife.Krish fails to convince his mother, who is steadfast in her desire to get her son married to a Punjabi girl, who would bring in a huge dowry,

as commensurate with the worth of her well-placed son. She thinks that is the only way she can salvage some respect from society and her extended family. Krish finally decides to leave for his job at CitiBank in Chennai to convince Ananya's parents.

The third act is located in Chennai, where Krish joins CitiBank. Initially, he has a very tough time dealing with Ananya's parents as they have very bad experiencewith Krish's mother in Ahmedabad. Meanwhile, Ananya's parents choose a boy named Harish for Ananyawho is highly educated and is also from their community. Ananya somehow manages to dissuade Harish by disclosing that she is not a virgin. In the due course of time,Krish wins the trust and consent of Ananya's parents. Krish gives tuition to Ananya's brotherManju for the preparation of IIT entrance test. Krish helps Ananya's father to prepare thepower point presentation for his office for the annual meeting. He prepares an excellent presentation which saves the office reputation of Ananya's father. Krish launches Ananya'smother Radha to sing at the City Bank musical concert with the outstanding singingcelebrities like Hariharan and S P Balasubramanium. He also organises a family dinner in abig hotel and proposes all of them to be convinced for their marriage. Finally, Ananya'sparents are convinced for their marriage. With half the battle won, Krish and Ananya gear up for the next hurdle-convincing Krish's mother in Delhi.

The fourth act is again located in Delhi. Krish comes to Delhi with Ananya. He takes transfer to a City Bank branch in Delhi. Ananya requests her office to assign a week's professional trip to Delhi. When they reach Delhi airport, Krish's mother comes to receive them. On seeing Ananya, Kavita makes no effort to conceal her dislike. Ananya tries to win the trust of Kavita but she fails in all her initial attempts. Krish's father is also not happy with the stay of Ananya at home. Ananya also comes to know about the family problems in Krish's house. Krish and his mother takeAnanya to Krish's maternal sister Minti's marriage ceremony. It is here that Ananya manages to win over Krish's extended family when she intervenes and prevents Minti's in-laws from extorting dowry from Minti's father. Kavita finally accepts Ananya as her daughter-in-law. The story, however does not have a happy ending here. Chetan Bhagat very rightly points out:

> Love marriages around the world are simple: Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy. They get married. In India, there are a few more steps: Girl's family has to love boy. Boy's family has to love girl. Girl's family has to love boy's family. Boy's family has to love girl's family. Girl and boy still love each other. They get married.
>
> Krish loves Ananya. Ananya loves Krish. Krish's family loves Ananya. Ananya's family loves Krish. Now Ananya's family has to love Krish's family

and Krish's family has to love Ananya's family. Both Ananya and Krish now plan to gather both the family in a very different place. (Bhagat 183)

The fifth act of the present fiction is located in Goa-a world famous tourist spot in India with beautiful sea beaches and natural beauty. Krish and Ananya select Goa for gathering their families. As soon as both the families meet, the socio-cultural differences become very evident and sticks out like a sore thumb. The meeting turns into a great fiasco as Krish's mother cannot keep the cultural and gender biases away while talking with Ananya's parents. Being from the boy's side, Kavita expects to be given more privileges from Ananya's parents. The arguments and counterarguments spoil the situation to an extent that Ananya's father starts feeling chest pain.

Both Ananya and Krish manage to convince their parents for reciprocal apologies but Ananya over-hears a regressive conversationbetween the son and the mother which makes Ananya break off the relationship. Krish tries to convince Ananya, but to no avail. Both of them become busy in their respective life. Krish tries to contact Ananyamany times but to no success. Krish's psychological condition progressively deteriorates. He becomes a workaholic and is diagnosed with clinical depression.

In spite of all the hurdles in the love story of Krish and Ananya, the final act brings a happy ending to the story. Krish's father comes to know about Ananya and makes a divine intervention. He meets Ananya's parents in Chennai and convinces them. It is perhaps his only way of trying to redeem his abominable behavior throughout his life. Ananya finally conveys the happy news to Krish and they are reunited. The next morning, Krish meets his father and thanks him for his help.

Finally, marriage of Krish and Ananya is organized in Chennai following the Tamil way of wedding. Krish's father refuses to come to Chennai with the crowd of relatives of Krish's mother, but he manages to come on his own means at the end. With the happy and joyful marriage ceremony, the novel comes to a happy ending.

The Epilogue concludes with the birth of twin sons of Krish and Ananya. Upon being asked by the nurse, to which states his sons would belong, Krish decisively answers "India", symbolically putting an end to communal differences.

In 2014, the novel was adapted into a Hindi language movie by the same name, and was directed by Abhishek Varman. The movie had Arjun Kappor and Alia Bhatt playing the roles of Krish and Ananya respectively, with Amrita Singh, Ronit Roy, Revathi and Shiv Kumar Subhramaniam as supporting cast. The movie remained faithful to the main plot of the novel and was both a box-office and critical success. The critics have universally lauded the movie for bringing out the

cross-cultural conficts between a Punjabi and a Tamil family,while keeping romantic essence intact.

## 3.13.9 Summing Up

In this Unit we have acquired a fair idea about the plot, its main characters, points of conflict in the novel and the resolution. The success of Chetan Bhagat lies in its story—one that is common and highly relatable to common people of India. The use of simple, colloquial language has also helped in garnering a wide readership for the novel. As students of literature you will surely be able to engage in a critical reading of familiar socio-cultural realities as you read this novel within the rubric of Popular Literature.

## 3.13.10 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer type Questions:**
  1. Chetan Bhagat draws a very faithful picture of contemporary Indian society. Discuss.
  2. Discuss the gender issues diffused in the novel *2 States* with suitable textual references.
  3. Consider *2 States* as an archetypal Indian popular fiction of contemporary times.
  4. Discuss the portrayal of inter-generational difference in *2 States.*
  5. Substantiate with suitable textual references the significance of the title of the novel*2 States.*
- **Medium Answer type Questions:**
  1. Sketch the character of Ananya and Krish, Mr. and Mrs. Malhotra, Mr. and Mrs. Swaminathan.
  2. Comment on the significance of the Epilogue.
  3. Consider the narrative style of Chetan Bhagat in *2 States.*
- **Short answer type questions:**
  1. Consider the significance of the dowry episode in Minti's wedding for the plot of the novel.
  2. Comment briefly on the characterization of minor characters in the novel.

## 3.13.11 Suggested Reading

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# Module-4

# Unit-14 □ Popular Literature and Colonialism

*Structure*



## 4.14.1 Objectives

This Unit focuses on some popular twentieth century Western authors, and aims to determine the waysin which colonial ideology has been ingrained in the popular literature of that age.

## 4.14.2 Introduction

Popular literature denotes writings designed for the masses and thrives on the popularity it enjoys among that large mass of readers. Unlike high or elitist literature that aims at enlightening or educating its reader and has an enduring appeal, popular literature essentially intends to entertain, aiming neither at achieving any degree of aesthetic brilliance nor at leaving an enduring impress. The spread of literacy and the giant strides achieved in the field of printing technology have been two major factors behind the massive spread of popular literature and its ever-expanding clientele.

The term ‘popular’ attaches a derogatory connotation to this particular genre of literature a through a judgemental statement of value implying the banal and conformist character of this cultural entity. The allegation of banality and conformity is often strengthened with quantitative data linking the ‘popular’ to commercial success, thereby suggesting popular literature to be a product of a commercialised mass culture.

The line of distinction between popular and high literature is, however, flimsy and not easy to demarcate. Works of several authors, once regarded as specimens of popular literature, are now included in the corpus of classy or high literature. The one unanimous yardstick of designating a literary work popular is the ephemerality of its appeal. Science fiction, fantasy, chic lit (mushy, romantic literature designed for young readers), graphic literature, comics, and most importantly, detective fiction or thrillers are regarded as prime representatives of popular literature today.

## 4.14.2 Popular Literature and Colonialism

Popular culture has all along been one of the most favoured media for the coloniser to influence the native psyche and thus toensure the growth and spread of colonial strangleholdon the native population. Popular literature has been one of the most effective elements of popular culture facilitated the perpetuation of the mighty sway of colonialism and its ethos over the minds of the colonised by way of the popular text the content of which was designed from the point of view of the coloniser, glorifying the institution of colonialism and justifying the domination of the colonial masters over the native populace.

Colonial expansion was one of the prime factors that led to writings during the days of the empire. Edward Said points out in his phenomenal work, *Orientalism* (1979), how scholars of the Western world virtually occupied Asia through the means of the renown earned from publishing work on the East. Though this occupation was sometimes well-intentioned, and its character varied from one place to another, it was usually appropriative, while it pictured and classified the native within the Western or colonial paradigm. Popular literature, in the hands of the coloniser, was moulded into the mighty metanarrative that would establish the coloniser as the designated masters, born to rule over the world. Designed in accordance with the requirements of the coloniser, popular literature is extensively exploited as a means of justifying his domination over the native, as if indicating that it was their lot to be ruled overand to be oppressed.

## 4.14.3 F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)

A foremost figure of twentieth-century literature, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald remains one of the prime American writers who helped American fiction of the ‘Jazz Age’—‘a generation grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken’ (Fitzgerald, *Paradise* 304)—acquire the flamboyance and charisma it is noted for.Fitzgerald’s literary output consists of major novels like *The*

*Great Gatsby* as well asfour volumes of short stories alongside 164 short stories that appeared in several magazines. Fitzgerald earned fame and notoriety both for his literary work and his personal life with wife Zelda. He is also remembered as one of the prime authors to constitute the 'Lost Generation' which also included Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, E. E. Cummings, Archibald MacLeish, and Hart Crane among others.

## Colonialist element in Fitzgerald's fiction

Fitzgerald's most successful and best-known work,*The Great Gatsby*,isabrilliant portrayal of the disillusion of post-war America and the moral degeneration of a money-obsessed society characterised by a hedonistic lifestyle. But when the surface of the novel is scratched, a curiously colonial subtext appears, making the book Fitzgerald's most significantly colonial novelas well.

From the postcolonial viewpoint, the novel is primarily about 'othering' –the psychological process of viewing oneself and one's class identity different and superior to all 'other' people, the crux of the colonial entity. In the American context, as reflected in *Gatsby*, the African-Americans were considered a different and inferior, often inhuman, people, in spite of existing within and being a part of the American population. One tell-tale example of this attitude finds expression in Nick's description of three black people–one woman and two men–passing by in a limousine driven by a white chauffeur as 'two bucks and a girl'. Immediately after, Nick adds, 'I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled towards us in haughty rivalry'.(Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*67)The black men are denied the basic human dignity as they are likened to 'bucks', mere animals or non-human savages, who demonstrate the audacity of rivalling the whites in sophistication and therefore, deserve nothing better than a dismissive 'laugh' by the white. The description of their 'rolling eyeballs' conforms perfectly to the racist stereotypes of African Americans as ineffectually infantile and idiotic, prone to comical melodrama.

The most tell-tale aspect of the colonialist content in *Gatsby*is the complete effacing of the African-American presence although this ethnic group comprised a sizeable part of the population of New York in the 1920s, which was the site of the Harlem Renaissance–the landmark upheaval by the black people in America. The complete absence of the black people in the novel represents one of the commonest colonialist agenda: of negating the very existence of the colonised and thus ensuring absolute domination over them. This 'othering' and denial of existence assumes a curiously ironic dimension when we come across Fitzgerald's own depiction of his book as a work belonging to the Jazz Age, which, in turn, refers to a musical genre invented and popularised by the black people. On the contrary, jazz is shown

in the novel to be a predominantly white man's thing and thus an element of high culture, uncontaminated by any black touch or involvement.

The colonial viewpoint unearths another major ironical aspect in *Gatsby*as members of the so-called affluent elite turn out to be victims of the colonial mindset. Jay Gatsby himself is the colonised 'other' who tries desperately to be included in the ostentatiously rich and class-conscious social realm to which Daisy, the love of his life, belongs. Gatsby is blissfully unaware that merely owning a forty-acre mansion and being one of the richest does not make him eligible for inclusion in Daisy's circle because he belongs to 'the less fashionable'(Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*p10) West Egg, and more importantly, lacks the lineage, the upbringing, and the blue-blooded background that Daisy boasts of. In his desperate bid for inclusion among the cultural elite Gatsby negates even his humble origin and fabricates an upper-class familial identity as well as a proud past of Oxford educationand game-hunting, and thusbares the typically colonised and the dastardly native mindsetthat blindly mimics the so-called sophistications of the upper crust.

### Major works

**Novels:** *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender is the Night* (1934), *The Last Tycoon* (1941; incomplete)

**Short stories:** 'The Ice Palace' (1920), 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button' (1921), 'The Rich Boy' (1926), 'Absolution' (1926)' 'The Bridal Party' (1930), 'Babylon Revisited' (1931), etc.

## 4.14.5 Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

Kipling was a combination of a journalist, short story writer, poet, and novelist. Defined by Henry James as 'the most complete man of genius' (Rutherford 2), Kipling was the first writer in English language to be awarded the Noble Prize in Literature and was also nominated for the British Poet Laureateship as well as for knighthood, though he declined both.

### Kipling: as a colonialist

Andrew Sanders calls Rudyard Kipling, "the noisiest popular apologist for the climactic expansion of the British Empire"(478).Kipling's literary career as well as his private lifewas deeply impacted by the British Empire which, in his work, was endowed withan intricately mythical or legendary role. It was a positive force in the

sense that it ordered and unified his creativity, and a negative one to the extent that it limited his perspective. In his magnified personal view, the Empirewas an entity that would maintain stability, order, and peace, relieve famine, abolish slavery, and construct the physical and the psychological foundation for 'civilization', alongside protecting the motherland. Amid a chaotic world, the British Empire, in Kipling's view, was an island of security.

'The White Man's Burden', according toKipling, was a burdensome onus, a moral responsibility, upon the civilised and hence superior as well as the strongest shoulders (of the British) predicated on firmly ingrainedfaith in British superiority, in all aspects including the political, racial, moral, and religious, which was to be to be sustained, defended, and protected by a specially trained and devoted elite.

Although Britain was busy then in its colonial expansions in Africa, Kipling's interest lay with the British imperial conquests in India as he emerged as the most insightful observer of the bizarre discrepancies that dogged the British regime in the relatively peaceful and prosperous period between the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny (1857-58) and the ever-spreading freedom movements of the early 20th century. From the journalist's point of view, Kipling observed the predicament of the common British soldier employed in India, far away from home, and the necessity on the part of the said soldiers to strictly adhere to the British code of gallantry to survive the rule of the jungle. Unlike Disraeli's romantic imperialism, Kipling's was a 'schoolboy imperialism' (Daiches 1091), based on a love of classes, orders and rituals and a schoolmaster-like perception of duty and responsibility.

Kipling's imperialism was seriously shaken during the First World War with the death of his son in action in 1915. His subsequent poetry, in general, bears a rather disillusioned view of the impermanence of the Empire alongside a nostalgic evocation of a past that never was. The man who had once compared England and the Empire as a Garden with everlasting glory, emphatically proclaiming, '*And the Glory of the Garden it shall never pass away*' (Kipling, Treasury 307), is found to have reached the realisation that 'Empires fall, / And Gods for Gods make room …' (Kipling, *Debits* 126)

A man of literary excellence, Kipling mostly remains a profile in wasted talent caused by his obsession with Britain's superiority colour and limits the range of his view. His blind advocacy of British imperialism was the factor that earned him a lot of disrepute and hatred. Orwell calls him 'a jingo imperialist … morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting' (Orwell 204).Writing of Kipling in 1942, Orwell points out that 'During five literary generations every enlightened person has despised him' (Orwell 203).

### Kipling: Salient Works

**Short stories:** The most prominent of Kipling's short story collections are *The City of Dreadful Night* (1885), *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888), *In Black and White* (1888), *Under the Deodars* (1888), *The Jungle Book* (1894), *The Second Jungle Book* (1895), and *Just So Stories* (1902).

**Novels:** Kipling'sforemost novels are *The Light that Failed* (1891), *Captains Courageous* (1896) and *Kim* (1901).

**Poems:** Some of the best-known collections of Kipling's poetry are: *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1890), *The Seven Seas* (1896), *The Five Nations* (1903), and *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (1940).

**Travel narratives:** The travel literature of Kipling includes volumes such as*From Sea to Sea–Letters of Travel: 1887-1889* (1899), *Letters of Travel: 1892-1913* (1920), and *Brazilian Sketches: 1927* (1940).

## 4.14.6 H. Rider Haggard (1856-1925)

Near the conclusion of the Victorian Age, emerged a name of stellar significance in the firmament of English literature. Remembered today primarily for his stories of adventure, Sir Henry Rider Haggardpioneered that branch of English fiction which extends from the'lost race' tradition. Haggard was a man of versatileaptitudes, ranging from the chivalrous heroism of a valiant young soldiertothe acumen of a farmer well-versed in the brass tacks of farming.As a soldier, he travelled on the Royal Commissions' assignments to inspect whether situations were conducive for imperial consolidation in the white colonies of South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and aided the takeover of the Transvaal (South Africa).As a practical farmer, he steered a two-year investigation into factors that problematisedagriculture in England. Haggard was knighted in recognition of this philanthropic contribution.

Haggard's incredible versatility is reflected in his sizeable literary output as well,which**,** apart from more than fifty novels, includes a dozen of nonfictional books on sociology, agriculture, and religion. Haggard's locus as an author was centred on the literary reaction against the romantic realism of authors like R. L. Stevenson, George MacDonald, and William Morris. Following the slump in popularity in the 1940's and50's, interest in Haggard was resurrected in 1960 with the publication of Morton Cohen's biography,*Rider Haggard: His Life and Works* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).

## Colonialism in Haggard's work

Haggard's work, a candid mirror to his imperialist mindset, is steeped in the ethos of colonialism. Haggard's unabashed advocacy for Britain's colonial conquest has earned him the definition of the foremost colonialist among novelists driven by the perception that it was Britain's holy duty to occupy and rule inferior peoples to sustain civilisation across the human world.

The success of Haggard as an author consists primarily of providing a greater reach to the imperialist romance which was founded on the expansionist philosophy. The expansionist codemotivated European explorers to lay siege over the various corners of the world inhabited by the so-called uncivilised races and to bring them under the brute dominion of the colonial agency. *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*, two of Haggard's representative works of imperialist fiction,providedgreater grist the imperialistnarrativewhile making its ideas the staple of the common reader.

*King Solomon's Mines* (1885) is undoubtedly Haggard's most renowned work and perhaps the strongest instance of the propagation of the imperialist ethos in the realm of popular literature. The first English adventure novel to be wholly set in Africa, *King Solomon's Mines* specimens its author's talent for architecting an engrossing narrative elicited from effortless integrationof a dual-layered yarn into one grand narrative. The main strand of the story concernsIgnosi, the native hero who returns, Lazarus-like, from the dead to his native Kukuanaland, to conquer the evil Twala, and is surrounded by Allan Quatermain and his companions, the English heroes who come to save the savage and superstitious land.Following a narrative structure in which the Quarter main storyline surrounds the Ignosi tale like an arc, the book begins and ends in the white-ruled Africa. AlthoughIgnosi is portrayed as a Christ-like messiah, he is shown to be virtually powerless to pursue his messianic mission unless the colonials come to his rescue. The black people are shown helplessly dependent on the white masters who are lionised by the author, white British or European hegemony is projected as the sole means for the salvation of human civilisation.

*She* (1887), Haggard's otherfamous and representative work, interprets the world from thetypicalperception of British imperialism. The book is an interesting blend of elements of imperial fiction and theGothictradition. Alongside articulating the anxieties surrounding the solidity of the British Empire, which, in turn, signifies Western civilisation against the eerie backdrop of the supernatural. She, a colonising force of foreign origin, further complicates the notion of imperialism. As a threat to the stability of the regime of Queen Victoria,Shesounds the tone and timberof the anxiety that underliesimperialism and European colonialism.*She* marks one of the first fictional attempts to conjure the spectre of the natural decline of civilisation,

particularly, British imperial power, which would continue to prevail with increasing domination over English fiction until WWI.

### Haggard: Salient Works

**Novels:** *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), *She: A History of Adventure*(1887), *Allan Quatermain*(1887), *Ayesha: The Return of She*(1905).

**Short stories:** *Allan's Wife and Other Tales* (1889), *Smith and the Pharaos* (1920)

**Non-fiction:** *A Farmer's Year* (1899), *The Last Boer Year* (1899), *The Days of My Life* (1926)

## 4.14.7 Summing up

Popular texts,with their increasing clout in the echelons of literature, are strongly proclaiming their proud and prestigious presence in the canonical arena of literature which even a few years ago solely comprised works that defined literature as an exclusively high-brow and elitist precinct. The inclusion of the popular variants of literature not only imparts diversity to its denominations but also lets in a refreshing whiff of democratic air. The selection of the three major writers of the early twentieth century as included here, namely Fitzgerald, Kipling, and Haggard,endeavour to hold popular literature and to encompass it within uniform parentheses of time, connecting to a timeline spanning fifty yearsapproximately, from near the end-nineteenth centuryto the 1940s. If Fitzgerald is the "last tycoon" of a decaying generation of American aristocracy, Kipling and Haggard represent that imperialist progeny which basks in the glory of the final glow of the setting sun of the British Empire. Together, they embody the mighty sweep of that special species of literature which epitomises the pallid patina of a time that was in its last throes, dying yet panting for one finalflourish which was not to be.

## 4.14.8 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What is the relationship between popular literature and colonialism?
  2. Briefly discuss how Britain's colonial agenda was deeply ingrained in the narratives of Fitzgerald and Kipling.
- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What do you understand by "white man's burden"?

2. Can *The Great Gatsby* be called a work with racist overtones?
3. How does the adventure genre deal with colonial issues?

- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What are the salient features of H. Rider Haggard's work?
  2. How does Kipling represent the colonies in his novels?

## 4.14.9 Suggested Reading

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# Unit-15 □ Indian Science Fiction and Postcolonial Identity Formation

*Structure*



## 4.15.1 Objectives

This Unit has been designed with the intention of offering an insight into the impact of these prominently subversive efforts found in the domain of Indian Science Fiction on the formation of Postcolonial identity in Indian context. In order to explicate the topic with adequate clarity, the genre Science Fiction and its links with Colonialism will be explained in brief in the course of this Unit.

## 4.15.2 Introduction

As explained in the previous Unit of this Module, many exponents of Popular Literature evidently acted as a perpetrator of Colonial discourses. Nevertheless, it is inaccurate to associate this aspect with the entire body of Popular Literature across the globe. What Kipling or Haggard did maybe typical of a large number of works of Popular Literature written during a significant period but as the genre went on being enriched by the contribution of writers originating from nations like Africa or India, a notable paradigm shift took place. These writers made a conscious attempt at subverting the tropes and templates of Western Science Fiction for indigenizing the genre.

## 4.15.3 Colonial Undertones

It is difficult to determine whether Science Fiction is essentially a Western phenomenon but as suggested by John Reider, Science Fiction of a particular of nineteenth century at large, derived its crux specifically from Western discourses of a particular nature. The West had garnered a notable body of largely accepted notions about the new worlds they had started evading and conquering since the fifteenth century. Collectively these ideas projected Europe as the epicentre of scientific development whereas the colonies were imagined to be regressive and at times atavistic of the ugliest kind imaginable. Science Fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth century recurrently presented the figure of the Scientist as a Western man and by endorsing their superiority, justified the West's civilizing missions. The colonies were either shown to be storehouse of raw materials required for scientific experiments, as found in Michael Crichton's *Congo* or they were shown by drawing parallels to unexplored extraterrestrial places that await a colonizing mission. In Rocket Ship Galileo by Robert A. Heinlein for instance, the Moon is invaded and claimed to be a territory of the United Nations by three young teenagers who eventually 'free' this new found land from the Nazis who had developed a secret base therein. Even the alien invasion narratives like H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, which apparently look like a critique of invasions, have undercurrents of a problematic nature. As suggested by Reider, a novel like this not only makes the colonizers look at themselves as the colonized but it also shows the developed Martians to be a developed version of the Western civilization. In doing so, it suggests the difference between the colonizer and the colonized to be something unalterable, which helps in indirectly endorsing the superiority of the Western civilization.

## 4.15.4 Science, Technology and Postcolonial Identity Formation

It seems necessary to at first explain the term 'Postcolonial' before talking about Postcolonial Identity itself. Contrary to the commonly accepted meaning signified by the prefix 'Post', in this case 'Postcolonial' does not simply mean 'after the end of colonial rule or the post-independence' any longer. Rather, as suggested by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, the term 'Postcolonial' began to be used for talking about "the various cultural effects of colonization" (168). This quoted observation by the trio presents the

postcolonial developments in general to be a continuous process which chiefly involves an interaction between the foreign culture brought in by the ruler and the indigenous counterpart of the ruled. Mary Klages' insightful observation brings out the impact this Postcolonial condition is likely to have on the identities of people who underwent colonization. According to her:

> Colonialism exists as ideologies and practicesthat assume the dominance or rightness of the colonizing culture;these ideologies and practices do not end when the colonists leave.Rather, "postcolonial" may refer best to the time period when a previously colonized culture wrestles with the meaning of its identityas an independent entity.

On the basis of the observations mentioned above, Postcolonial Identity maybe defined as a reactionary cultural formation generated by an interaction between the variousmanifestations of foreign and indigenous cultures. An uncertainty regarding the aim of such a formation arises from its link with what Klages calls a 'wrestling' with the culture of the colonizer. On the one hand, we presume that Postcolonial Identity formation is all about rejecting foreign culture. But as the material conditions of these colonies in globalisedtimes show, the reality is quite different. Infact postcoloniality is no longer just a temporal term in the sense of beyond colonialism; it is infact the reality of our times. Naturally, technological advancements are integral to this postcolonial condition. The rulers certainly gave technological uplift a great deal of importance for ruling the colonies with a greater ease but in reality their investments had a wider effect. Indigenizing these foreign technologies and more importantly, amalgamating the discourses of Western Science with the pre-existing native culture became an important part of Postcolonial Identity formation of all colonies and India is no exception.

## 4.15.5 Indian Science Fiction and Postcolonial Identity Formation

Critics like Debjani Sengupta, Tarun K. Saint, Suparno Banerjee identify nineteenth century Bengal as the originating point of Indian Science Fiction. The writer Kylas Chunder Dutt is arguably the first amongst the writers of the genre. Although these writings hardly managed to occupy a position of significant importance in the various accounts of Indian writings due to their popularity as Children's literature, recent retrospections of these narratives reveal their cultural importance. In this section a few important aspects of this genre, which indicate its role in the formation of Postcolonial Identity in India will be mentioned.

In the Indian context, the encounter with the British culture during the colonial era initially created a binary that depicted the British to be scientific, progressive, and technologically advanced, whereas the Indians were shown as superstitious, regressive, and at times resisting development associated to technology. Science Fiction by Indian writers in general attempted to do away with this binary in varying degrees. Therefore, the most basic feature of Indian Science Fiction was its foregrounding of Indian protagonists who are capable of handling technology and more importantly, invent new devices. The character of Professor Shonku created by Satyajit Ray maybe mentioned as one of the best examples of this aspect of Indian Science Fiction. In Shonku a significant blending of the Eastern and the Western ideas about technological advancement can be noted. For instance, the medicine discovered by him named 'Miracureall' is derived from a herb mentioned in *Charaksanhita*. Shonku is shown to always treat Eastern metaphysics or magic of any kind with great seriousness. He has a superstition-free mindset which is normally associated with the British scientists but that never makes him ignore the potential of the world outside Western science. As interpreted by Suparno Banerjee, Amitav Ghosh's *Calcutta Chromosome* too functions in a similar manner by relating Ronald Ross' discovery with an ancient Indian cult's ideals. Banerjee also alerts about the potential problematic aspect of this trend of foregrounding the excellence of native knowledge by showing how in certain cases this leads to a fantasizing about the glory of the India of the past and a wholesale rejection of Western science.

Jayant Vishnu Narlikar's brief discussion on Indian Science Fiction echoes Ray's thinking to a great extent. He treats the genre as a useful medium for fighting superstition and showing India's involvement in Science. For him Science "has no national boundaries" and he opposes the tendency to look down upon Science as something typically Western. If Postcolonial identity formation has to give importance to the nurturing of a progressive mindset, it is essential to get rid of the superstitions lying at the very basic level of the society. The British might have branded rituals in general as superstitions but the present day Indian mind has to rise above their politically motivated take on Indian culture and judge it neutrally. Awareness about the basics of science and a genuine interest in science are essential for this. Narlikar intends to use the genre to this end. In his latest Sci-Fi novel *Vaman Parat Na Ala* Narlikar is found to be creating awareness regarding the growing misuse of science in India. In short, a utilitarian and didactic usage of Science Fiction that intends to protect present day India both from superstition typical to the ancient India and misuse of science commonly exemplified by the West, is found in Narlikar's fiction.

Subversion of typical Western tropes of Science Fiction in Indian Science Fiction should also be mentioned for its relation with the mimicry of the Western culture in general. Debjani Sengupta identifies Leela Majumder and Sukumar Ray to be two chief exponents of this particular tendency. Sengupta shows how Leela Majumder presents a humane avatar of the explorer in her books like *Akash Ghati* and *Batash Bari*. In these stories the explorers are radically different from the Western template of explorers. They explore the world but not with the intention to conquer. Rather, they are more interested in loving and protecting the neglected. Sukumar Ray's *Heshoram Hushiyarer Diary* on the other hand shows mimicry of the Western template in a remarkable manner. The eponymous character Professor Heshoram is based on Arthur Conan Doyle's Professor Challenger and the work is a parody of the novel *The Lost World*. While the Western writers always present the explorer as an infallible figure, Ray's novella debunks the myth by presenting his explorer as an eccentric character. Heshoram is Indian but his aping of the Western template of the explorer makes him an embodiment of the Indians keen on embracing Western ideals. He intends to conquer and map the world and hence is mocked so extensively.

In order to rise above the Western discourses about the world in general, a revision of the West's views about the otherized figures is necessary. In Indian Science Fiction, the friendly alien or the friendly robot recur, according to Debjani Sengupta, as a manifestation of this conscious effort to mark a departure from the Western culture. Particularly the writings of Satyajit Ray and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay feature these 'friendly others'. Western science fiction largely used aliens and robots for giving expression to their anxieties about the uprising of the dominated but in the Indian context, these entities appear to be friends of humanity. Moreover, an emphasis on the need to form camaraderie between the humans and these aliens or robots is also to be noted in these writings.

Development of the Postcolonial identity involves the emerging of the suppressed or marginalized voices as well. Science Fiction in India has functioned as a medium for giving voice to such groups in a notable manner from its early days. *Sultana's Dream* (1905) by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain used the genre with great perfection for presenting a feminist utopian world. Among the recent writers Vandana Singh is found to use the tropes of the genre in a similar manner. In her "A Speculative Manifesto" she proposes to utilize the 'revolutionary potential' of these stories that talk about " what cannot ever be, or what cannot be yet". The alien beings in these stories, according to her, resemble all those who have felt alienated due to "caste and class, religion and creed, gender and sexual orientation". Manjula Padmanabhan is also shown to be dealing with similar issues in her play

*Harvest* where individuals of oppressed groups of the Third World are found to be used as mere objects by the buyers of human organ from the First World. Tarun K. Saint draws attention to the creation of hybrid figures in Indian Science Fiction interpreting as a reflection of "the intellectual melding of two very different cultures" in India. Such hybrid figures too can be studied as a depiction of the Postcolonial figure of Indians created due to the negotiations between two cultures.

Overall, the genre of Indian Science Fiction seems to deserve a position of significant importance as an emerging field in the studies of the nature of the impact of the British culture on India.

## 4.15.6 Summing Up

After going through the above discussion students are expected to have formed a basic knowledge about the unique position occupied by Indian Science Fiction in the history of the genre of Science Fiction. The brief account of this Indian variant's cultural politics should also encourage the students to look at many of the Science Fiction stories they are already familiar with in a more critical manner, paying attention in particular to their Postcolonial ethos.

## 4.15.7 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Discuss the links between Western Science Fiction and Imperialism with suitable references.
  2. What is Science Fiction? Give a brief account of some of its most popular tropes and conventions.
  3. Write an essay on the ways Indian Science Fiction marks a departure from the Western trends and conventions.
- **Medium Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What is meant by Postcolonial Identity Formation? How does Indian Science Fiction contribute to the same in the Indian context?
  2. Briefly discuss the importance of the following writers/ texts in connection with the study of Science Fiction:

*Congo*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Lost World*, *Heshoram Hushiyarer Diary*, *Calcutta Chromosome*, Satyajit Ray, Jayant Vishnu Narlikar, Vandana Singh, Manjula Padmanabhan

- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What do you understand by the term *Postcolonial*? What is the difference between *Post-colonial* and *Postcolonial* if there is any?
  2. Do you believe that Science fiction can be an appropriate genre to challenge the colonial ideologies? Discuss.

## 4.15.8 Suggested Reading

*Science Fiction: A Guide for the Perplexed* By Sherryl Vint, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.

*Hoakland, Erika and Reema Sarwal, ed. Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World,*North Carolina, McFarland Publishers, 2010.

Chattopadhyay, Bodhisattva, Aakriti Mandhwani & Answesha Maity Ed. *Indian Genre Fiction: Pasts and Future Histories.* New York and Oxon, Routledge, 2019.

Saint, Tarun K. (ed)*The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction*. India, Hachette, 2021

'Early Bengali Science Fiction' by Amardeep Singh (https://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/2006/05/early-bengali-science-fiction.html)

'Recentering Science Fiction and the Fantastic: What would a non-Anglocentric understanding of science fiction and fantasy look like?'by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay (http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/recentering-science-fiction-and-the-fantastic-what-would-a-non-anglocentric-understanding-of-science-fiction-and-fantasy-look-like/)

'Postcolonial Identity' by Heather Sofield(http://www.postcolonialweb.org/zimbabwe/sofield/6.html)

# Unit-16 □ Youth Culture and Popular Fiction

*Structure*



## 4.16.1 Objectives

This unit aims to understand what we mean by youth culture and how it is shaped by popular literature and vice versa. The learners are given a brief overview of contemporary young-adult best sellers and the kind of themes these stories predominantly deal with. Moreover, learners are encouraged to look at the various mediums which contribute to the formation of popular culture from comic to graphic novels to pop music and video games.

## 4.16.2 Introduction

Youth culture and popular fiction share an almost symbiotic relationship. Fiction, as a genre of literature, conforms to one of the foremost significances of literature: the reflection or representation of the immediate social as well as cultural milieu and surroundings in which a literary work is born. Popular fiction, those novels that are phenomenal favourites with the masses, mirrors the prevalent socio-cultural trends among which the movements or tendencies of the youth occupy a position of major significance. In actuality, both are bound to each other in a bond of mutual dependence for their respective existences and sustenance.

## 4.16.3 Youth culture and popular fiction: Key Concepts

Essentially a subculture, **youth culture**, refers to those processes and symbolic systems shared by young people that are, to some degree, distinctive from those of their parents and the other adults in their community.Youth cultures have not been part of all societies throughout history; they appear most frequently where significant realms of social autonomy for young people become regularized and expected features of the socialization process.

**Youth culture**, as a concept distinct from adult culture,originated in North America and Europein the 1950s, after the concretion of 'teenagers' as a distinct social entity,identified by their own music, lifestyles, fads, and characteristic slang. Prior to that, anyone reaching the age of puberty was expected to conform to the norms of the larger adult culture.

Apparently self-explanatory, **popular fiction** as a literary genre actually defies easy definition. Popular fiction includes genre fiction, such as crime, action adventure, graphic novels, romance, mystery, sci-fi, fantasy and so on. The mainintent of popular fiction is to entertain readers, keeping them glued to the pages that unfold the captivating narrative and compel the reader to an immersive experience as they surrender themselves to a hypnotic page-turning oblivion of the actual world.

## 4.16.4 Youth Culture and Popular Fiction: the Inter-relationship

Youth culture and popular fiction both are manifestations of popular culture which is the culture of the masses–the culture of the day-to-day existence of the larger population of a society or community. Graffiti, comic books, mainstream cinema, popular music, sports, the open spaces of the city, etc are representations of popular culture.

Initially and for a considerable span of time, popular culture was despised and disregarded as specimen of the inferior and pejoratively termed 'mass culture', in contrast to the culture which the elite represented. As the culture of the well-heeled minority went on to be esteemed as the 'standard' or 'true' culture, the blinkered outlook ignored the choices and preferences of the larger number of the population. Change in the perception occurred in the 1950s and 1960s as popular culture gradually started to be accorded attention to.

Young culture, viewed from the perspective of popular fiction, is known today largely as young adult literature. But the evolution of literature meant for the young into the young adult genre, as it is known today, has been an has been a developmentin concurrence with the concept of the young adult itself, something that didn't happen until the late 1930s and early 1940s, with the emergence ofayouth culture populated by kids called 'teenagers'. A term that first appeared in the September 1941 issue of the magazine *Popular Science Monthly*.

Popular culture took note and teenagers quickly became a staple feature of radio and motion pictures, often presented as stereotypical figures of fun—boys were depicted as socially awkward, blushing, stammering, and accident-prone, while girls were giggly and boy-crazy. Teenagers, as found by the editors at the new *Seventeen* magazine in 1945, were also consumers with their money to spend. As a result, the entertainment industries began creating radio programs and motion pictures targeted at teens, offerings like *A Date with Judy, Meet Corliss Archer,* and—for boys—*The Roy Rogers Show, Hopalong Cassidy*, and *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*. That quintessential teenager Mickey Rooney became a star of the Andy Hardy movies, while Deanna Durbin emoted for girls. Teenagers clearly were more innocent then–or so parents hoped.

Librarians first began calling teenagers "young adults" as early as the mid-1940s. In 1944, librarian Margaret Scoggin wrote a journal article introducing the term, and arguing that the group constituted a new service population. Thereafter, the two designations—"teenager" and "young adult"—were typically used interchangeably by librarians and educators. The practice of referring to "young adult" literature was formalized in 1957 when the American Library Association created its Young Adult Services Division, which focused librarians' attention on how to serve this new population.

The publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*, the popular and controversial novel by the American novelist J. D. Salinger (1919–2010), in 1951, heralded the emergence of an autonomous youth culture with an iconoclast protagonist, Holden Caulfield, who became the other name for the new teenage persona—a combination of teenage angst and rebellion as well as an arrogant irreverence towards conventions and restrictions. Caulfield became the prototype for the teenage figure that was shortly thereafter perpetuated in all kinds of media (magazines, songs, television programmes, and movies), taking on a social life of its own.

Colin MacInnes's novel *Absolute Beginners*, published in 1959, gave a powerful representation to the youth and youth culture of the new generation of the 1950s. One of MacInnes's most celebrated works and designated as 'The cult novel of the year' (*Sunday Times*), *Absolute Beginners* is a novel essentially about

teenagers. Devoid of a structured plot or even a proper beginning or ending, the novel reads like an excerpt spanning four months (June 1958 to September 1958) in the life of the unnamed nineteen-year-old photographerprotagonistthrough whom the reader gets an insight into the teenage world, itsradical lifestyle, its hopes, anguish and struggles.

Proud to be a first-generation teenager and desperate to be different, the protagonist thrives on casual work as a photographer taking pictures from the high society and his teenager friends. He abandons his parental home and lives in a room in Napoli, a London district with a predominantly poor population,so that he can live a life based on his own ideas, opinions, and conditions, isolated from the class-conscious social circle of his parents. Living in Napoli gives him the opportunity to create his individual personality and build his own identity away from the influence of his parents.Deep down, he knows that one day he will be an adult and belong to the society, which he hates intensely, probably hoping his behaviour as a teenager to influence or even change the society. He is proud to be respected by the other teenagers and even serves as a role model for some of them.

Though in the 1940s and 1950s the book world had a teenage readership,it lacked a literature to appeal to the evolving interests and the socioeconomic, emotional, and psychological needs of that burgeoning generation of readers. The genre fiction that was epidemic in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s could not hope to do that—and the Young Adult Services Division recognized it with books meant written for *all* adults, such as Isaac Asimov's *Fantastic Voyage* (1966), Charles Portis's *True Grit* (1968), and Ray Bradbury's *I Sing the Body Electric!* (1969).

In 1967, the publication of two novels aimed at a young readership by two other American authors made a major contribution to the growth of youth adult literature. S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* and Robert Lipsyte's *TheContender*.Before these two novels, literature for 12-to 18-year-olds was largely inconsequential, formulaic, genre fictionmostlycomprisingromance, science fiction, adventure tales, and novels about sports, cars, and careers. Almost universally set in small-town and representing solely white America,these novels featured teenagers whose biggest problem was finding a date for the senior prom.Once *The Outsiders* found favour withitstarget readers, publishers awakened to mine this lucrative new genre,flooding the book market with an increasing supply of novels written in the new realistic style.

However, it wasn't until 1970—three years after the formative publications of *The Outsiders* and *The Contender*—that the emergence of a newanddedicatedserious young adult literature was acknowledged. The first actual YA novel to be included

on the official list of books of the genre was Barbara Wersba's *Run Softly Go Fast*, the story of a teenage boy's love-hate relationship with his father.

Small wonder, then, that this newly hard-edged, truth-telling, realistic fiction filled such a need. Seemingly overnight, a new genre, young adult literature, sprang into being. Within two years, noteworthy novels such as Paul Zindel's *My Darling, My Hamburger* and John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It BetterBe Worth the Trip* had embraced real world considerations like abortion and homosexuality, respectively. In 1971, Hinton wrote about drug abuse in *That Was Then. This Is Now* and in 1973 Alice Childress joined her with *A Hero Ain'tNothin' But a Sandwich*, which told a story of heroin addiction.

In 1974, the publication of one of the most important and influential novels in the history of young adult literature, Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*. It was arguably the first literary young adult novel to appeal to teens with the portrayal of the harsh and tragic truth of their existence.

Post-1970s, new trends developed in youth cultures. A mass "kid" culture is seen to emerge as marketers moved more definitively to segment pre-adolescents as a separate market. Because of the limits on this group's mobility and autonomy, new analytical tools are needed for investigations. Finally, new communication and media technologies, particularly the Internet, create spaces for new youth cultures to emerge. Teenage computer hackers and phone "phreaks" had already appeared during the 1980s, but the Internet allows for a much more expanded notion of cyber-cultures detached from everyday off-line identities. The Internet, like "lovers' lane," is a more or less unpatrolled wilderness that has allowed new cultural affiliations to be formed.

## 4.16.5 Representative YA novels

This list only represents a select few Young Adult novels that have remained popular despite changing times and taste. It is influenced by the Times 100 Young-Adult Fiction Bestsellers list and is not exhaustive to these few mentioned here. Learners are in fact encouraged to read the books and delve into further discussions on what can be considered as a "popular bestseller".

(Source:https://time.com/collection/100-best-ya-books/)

***Little Women*** (1868), considered a classic in contemporary times, had become an instant hit with young readership back in the nineteenth century.While so much about female adolescence has changed since the mid-19th century—and yet *Little Women*, a novel about four teenage sisters published in the 1860s, endures.

That longevity derives in large part from the timeless archetypes each March girl embodies. There's marriage-minded Meg and saintly, sickly Beth. Amy, the youngest, blossoms from bratty child to one tempered by experience emerges out to be a much mature painter. But it's Jo whose influence has really rippled through the centuries. A brash, boyish creative force who lived to write, broke the mould for female characters; and, in mirroring the book's fiercely independent, proto-feminist author, became an icon for future generations of budding artists. Over the past century, there have been several cinematic and television series adaptations of the same, from Katharine Hepburn to Winona Ryder to Saoirse Ronan embodying the character in films directed by George Cukor, Gillian Armstrong and Greta Gerwig.

***Anne of Green Gables*** (1908) by Lucy Montgomery has been a favourite of young adult readers since the early 20th century. The character of Anne Shirley, with her signature red braids and straw hat, is instantly recognizable to so many for a reason. Whether she's losing her adoptive mother's treasured amethyst brooch or mistaking wine for raspberry-the imaginative, headstrong and relentlessly optimistic heroine broke down Victorian ideals of a gentle woman. *Anne of Green Gables*, the series debut, was an immediate success upon its publication in 1908 and has never gone out of print since, managing to sell 50 million copies worldwide. Marking its everlasting popularity, Netflix and Canadian CBC network adapted the series to screen in 2017.

***The Catcher in the Rye***(1951)**,** the popular and controversial novel by the American novelist J. D. Salinger, is about the adventures of its sixteen-year-old narrator, Holden Caulfield, a New Yorker, before the previous Christmas, as narrated by him from a sanatorium.Caulfield wants to be the 'catcher in the rye'—someone who saves children from falling off a cliff, a metaphor for entering adulthood. The book's prime focus is onthe loss of innocenceas circumstances that tend to preclude adult, second-hand description, compel Caulfieldtoleave his prep school in Pennsylvania and go underground in New York City for three days. At once too simple and too complex, Caulfieldremains anenigma too difficult to penetrate.

***The Lord of the Flies*** (1954) though predates, like *Catcher,* the coinage of the term 'young adult,' Golding's debut absolutely qualifies for the genre with the drama centring on a group of pre-adolescent boys stranded on an island and their attempts at survival with disastrous consequences. In the middle of an unspecified war, the boys' plane crash lands on an uninhabited island, and the survivors initially work together to organize and build a society which deteriorates at a terrifyingly fast speed as the boys lose their grip on reality and morality. Aside from being a horrifyingly gripping read, this is a hauntingly dystopian classic.

***To Kill A Mockingbird*** (1960),Harper Lee's masterpiece, is an unforgettable novel of a childhood in a sleepy Southern town and the crisis of conscience that rocksit.became both an instant bestseller and a critical success when it was first published in 1960. It went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and was later made into an Academy Award-winning film, also a classic.

Compassionate, dramatic, and deeply moving, *To Kill A Mockingbird* takes readers to the roots of human behaviour-to innocence and experience, kindness and cruelty, love and hatred, humour and pathos.

***The Outsiders*** (1967)**,** S. E. Hinton's coming-of-age novel, is a first-person narrativeby Ponyboy Curtis, a 14-year-old, spanning two vital weeks in his life that strongly impact his growth through struggles with right and wrong, leading him torealise his status of an outsiderin his society. The murder of a soc by his friend JohnnycausesPonyboy'sworld view bifurcated into the greasers (the outsider, disadvantaged and imperilled) and the socs (the privileged) and his pride in being a greaser to crumble, whilemakingrealisethat pain feels the same whether a soc or a greaser.The story brings under prominent focus burning teenage issues such asestablishingone's own identity, the ability to 'fit in',andthe unfairness of life towards teenagers alongside practices and addictions prevalent among teens of the day, including smoking, drinking, and teen pregnancy.

***The Chocolate War*** (1974)**,** Robert Cormier's unforgettable bookpublished in, places the teenage reader face to face with the unsavoury realities of their existence. The 17-year-old protagonist Jerry Renault steadfastly refuses to sell chocolates for his school—an act that subjects him to dire consequences. Cormier leads his readers into the darkness of adolescent anxiety, and turns on the lights, revealing a bleak moral landscape. In *The Chocolate War* and 14 other novels that followed, Cormier continues to dare to disturb a too-comfortable world view by exposingadolescenceas a traumatic phase, the baggage of which we carry for the rest of our lives.

***The Perks of Being a Wall Flower*** (1999), by Stephen Chbosky, is a heartfelt coming-of-age story comprising letters written by its introverted teenage protagonist Charlie to an unknown recipient, which address his struggles with mental illness, sexuality, repressed memories and drug abuse. Set in the early 1990s, the novel follows Charlie through his freshman year of high school in a Pittsburgh suburb and details his unconventional style of thinking as he navigates between the worlds of adolescence and adulthood, and attempts to deal with poignant questions spurred by his interactions with both his friends and family. The novel addresses themes permeating adolescence, including introversion, sexuality, drug use, and mental health. Though mostly ridden with angst, *Perks* balances its darkness with oddity and brilliance.

***The Book Thief*** (2005) by award-winning author Markus Zusak, isset in pre-WW II Nazi Germany and revolves around Liesel Meminger, almost ten years old when we first meet her. Liesel's life undergoes drastic transformation when she picks up*The Gravedigger's Handbook* by her brother's graveside, her first act of book thievery. Thus begins a lifelong love affair with books and words, as Liesel, with the help of her accordion-playing foster father, learns to read. Soon she is stealing books wherever she can lay hands on one. But when Liesel's foster family hides a Jew in their basement Liesel's world collapses.In superbly crafted writing that burns with intensity Zusackgives us one of the most enduring young adult novels of our time.

***13 reasons Why*** (2007), is one of the immensely successfulyoung adult novels of recent time, by debutant author Jay Asher. It is the story of a young high school student'sirrevocabledescent into despair, culminating in her suicide. She details the thirteen reasons that drove her to end her life in her own voice in a set of seven audio tapes which is mailed to a friend two weeks after her death. *13 Reasons Why* received wide acclaim and awards from several young adult literary associations, and the paperback edition reached No. 1 on the *New York Times Best Seller List* in 2011.

***The Hunger Games*** (2008), the first book in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, followed by *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010), is a dystopian novel by the American writer Suzanne Collins narrated by the 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen, who lives in the future, post-apocalyptic nation of Panem in North America. It is the Capitol, a highly advanced metropolis where the government forces 24 randomly-chosen teenagers to fight to death in the wilderness as a nationally televised annual spectacle. The novels' scrappy teenage heroine Katniss Everdeen volunteers to take her little sister's place in the game, and her fight for survival becomes increasingly complex and politically-charged as the series continues.

## 4.16.6 Summing Up

This Unit has provided the learners a brief historiography of the evolution of young adult fiction as a genre. We have attempted to address its impact on the culture of its respective audience, otherwise regarded as youth culture. Themes such as diversity within the industry, audience progression and expansion, as well as the development of young-adult fiction's reputation as best-sellers to literature of substance have also been debated. However, it is important for the learners to continue the discussion further in terms of how globalisation impacts youth-culture and the making of young-adult literary genre. The continuously evolving genre is

also greatly influenced by the changing mediums of publications; especially with social media and OTT platforms contributing greatly to fan-culture or community culture.

## 4.16.7 *Comprehension Exercises*

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. How would you relate youth culture with popular fiction?
  2. How does popular fiction represent the state of the young-adult generation?
  3. Would you say the Young Adult fiction can adequately capture the generational gap?
- **Medium Length Questions:**
  1. *Why is "mass culture" considered to be inferior? Do you belief there is a "proper literature" as against "popular literature"?*
  2. *How do Television adaptations of popular young adult narratives contribute to the shaping of young minds?*
  3. Write a short note on Colin MacInnes's novel *Absolute Beginners.*
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Write a brief essay on teenage readership.
  2. Critically discuss the term Young Adult.

## 4.16.8 Suggested Reading

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