UTTAR PRADESH
RAJARSHI TANDON OPEN UNIVERSITY

Block

5

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

EXPERTS COMMITTEE

Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah
Dhvanyaloka, Mysore

Prof. Meenakshi Mukerjee
JNU, New Delhi

Prof. M.L. Raina
Punjab University, Chandigarh

Prof. P.C. Kar
Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda

Prof. Issac Sequiera
Osmania University, Hyderabad

Prof. Mohan Ramanan
University of Hyderabad

Prof. Vinod Sena
Delhi University, Delhi

Prof. R.K. Dhawan
Delhi University, Delhi

Prof. G.R. Malik
University of Kashmir, Srinagar

IGNOU Faculty

Prof. Asha S. Kanwar

Dr. A.B. Sharma

Dr. Renu Bhardwaj

Dr. Anju Sehgal Gupta

Ms. Neera Singh

COURSE PREPARATION

Prof. Viney Kirpal — Units 1, 2, 3 & 5
Director Global Institute of Interaction Training
Former Professor IIT, Mumbai

Prof. Anjali Roy — Units 4 & 6
Professor IIT, Kharagpur

COURSE COORDINATION & EDITING

Dr. Renu Bhardwaj
IGNOU

PRODUCTION

Ms. P. Gupta, CE
Camera Ready Copy prepared by: Sh. A.S.V. Venkateswar, PA, IGNOU

September, 2001.

ISBN-81-266-0275-9

MEAN-07(2)/2

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

When Rushdie first published *Midnight's Children* in 1981, no one could have imagined what a turning point it would prove to be for the Indian English Novel.

The sheer energy, the innovations in the English language, form, theme and range of this big novel had a stunning impact. It surprised every reader across the world both in India and the West. When it won the Booker Prize, it became a bestseller anyway.

Today this novel is regarded as a trendsetter because of the influence it has had on the Indian English novels written ever since. Not only has it influenced novelists but it has also transformed the way fiction is being written in India now.

If for example you were to compare the post 1980 writers such as Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh with writers in the pre-1980's – Raja Rao or R. K. Narayan or Anita Desai or Arun Joshi - you would immediately mark the difference. And the work that has clearly been responsible for the change is *Midnight's Children* . So, today it is regarded as a very important novel. So important that every course on Indian writing in English has to include it. It may be interesting to know that soon after *Midnight's Children* was published and it had been seen by some critics as very influential book, there were a large number of scholars who still doubted its lasting value. They felt it was like a shining meteor that had blazed across the sky and would in time, die. But that was disproved when Rushdie won the *Booker of Booker's* prize for *Midnight's Children* in 1994.

So, you who are students of literature must be wondering on two counts. First, how does one judge the value of a book that has just been published. How does one evaluate a new writer? Can one or should one wait for the evaluation to come from others? Is there anything special about a new writer that set him apart and above the others? If so, what could that be? What I mean is, once a novelist is established, it is easy to say so but for any writer to get established it could take a lifetime, or happen after a writer's death as in the case of Henry James, the American novelist. Are there no parameters which can help us determine the worth of a just-arrived writer? And second, how does one decide whether a book is of lasting value? Is it the number of prizes it wins? Shakespeare's plays never won any prizes. What are readers looking for in writers they begin to admire and appreciate so much? Since the 1980s , a number of new Indian English novelists have published interesting novels and quite a few have even won national and international awards. Are we sure that these novelists are important and will last? Can all be considered as major authors? Some might say that awards are a measure of a novelist's impact. But is that the only criterion? Can't awards be manipulated, as some allege? Or, is there something else, something more fundamental that helps us decide these matters? So, are there any criteria which would help to assess texts of lasting value?

I will answer the second question first by drawing upon the example of Shakespeare since all of you would have studied some work of his. When you study Shakespearean criticism, you begin to realize that the way Shakespeare was read in his own times was very different from the way he was read in the 18th century or the way he is read today. Today, it is even possible to read him from a feminist or a post-modern perspective (though neither was available in Shakespeare's times) and yet draw substantial meaning and value from his works.

In other words, Shakespeare's plays are those works that can offer new meanings to readers of different centuries. They possess what Rene Wellek in the *Theory of literature (1976)* has called "multivalence", i.e., despite a changing readership, they have a special value for everyone. This then is the criterion for judging a well-established work.

But what about a criterion for evaluating a new work? Here, I am going to borrow from Victor Shlovsky's concept of "defamiliarization" as discussed in his essay "Art as Technique"(1917).

According to Shlovsky, great new books make unfamiliar what is familiar to readers; by using techniques which "obstruct" rather than help understanding; they force the reader to redouble her efforts to perceive its value. Such works draw attention to their strangeness through different literary devices such as word-play, syntax, metaphor, its etc.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* was just such a work and those of you who have read *Midnight's Children,* will have noticed that it has all the characteristics of "defamiliarization". It conveys the familiar through the unfamiliar, it defies comprehension, it has innovated daringly and it is certainly not an easy book to read. Its highly imaginative quality, its unconventional word-play, the disarranged syntax and spirited metaphors, its stunning fusion of oral narrative, history, fiction, non-fiction, journalism, Hindi film songs, fantasy, realism, the stream-of-consciousness make you work hard to understand what the novel is about. So, this rich, multi-layered, complex, episodic, loose and meandering novel well qualifies as a great new work of art.

Midnight's Children made a great impact when it was published. It still continues to surprise. But whether it is the greatest Indian English novel ever published, will be proven in time to come; I've given you the criterion for that already.

So get set to study this challenging and unusual novel and make up your own mind about its worth. For your help, we've provided you a detailed discussion of its major aspects through six units in this Block.

Unit One introduces you the life of Rushdie, his works and the critical reception of *Midnight's Children*. Unit Two discusses the use of English in *Midnight's Children*. Unit Three focuses on its themes. Unit Four examines the technique in *Midnight's Children*. Unit Five throws light on characterization, and Unit Six discusses this novel as a literary event and its influence on the Indian English Novelists of the 1980s and after.

Through the different Units we have tried to provide you an overview as well as to give you the guidelines on how to read the novel closely. If you complete the exercises, answer the questions set at the end of each unit and do the essential prescribed reading, you will enjoy your study of *Midnight's Children* very much. On this note let me wish you the very best and hope you enjoy reading the units and the book.

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, the attempt is to make you feel excited about studying *Midnight's Children*. I will, therefore, give you a brief background about its author, his other works, and the critical reception of this novel.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Until the year 1980, no critic had dreamt of the magnitude of the great turnaround that the Indian English Novel would make with the publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981. There was a comparative creative quietness in the 1970s after some of the best works had been published in the 1960s. Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* with its East-West encounter as a theme became a much-discussed book, soon after its publication in 1960. Western and Indian critics wrote about it in national and international journals. The 1960s also saw the rise of a major Indian woman writer, Anita Desai. However, the 1970s gave no major writers and while a steady output kept flowing, there was nothing spectacular happening.

Midnight's Children was published in 1981 and it took readers all over the world, by storm. As the novel went on to be read in different quarters, it was clear that a very different and original talent had indeed arrived. The novel not only made an impact as a presence but it also influenced a number of writers who followed Rushdie. Consequently, it has proved to be a seminal work which has changed the very way in which Indian English novels had been written before its advent. What was so special about this novel, or so unique about its author, is what you should be able to recognize at the end of the different units that constitute this Block.

It is a well-recognized fact today that words mean different things to different people. So it is with texts be they novels or films. Everyone who reads a text, becomes its "author", as one of the contemporary critical theories goes i.e., each reader interprets a text from his own world view, value system, beliefs and perceptions so that the book is read very differently from the book wirtten by the author himself! Thus, it was with *Midnight's Children.*

The West which first celebrated its arrival and impact, admired *Midnight's Children* for very different reasons than did the readers on the Indian subcontinent. The West saw in *Midnight's Children* the influence of writers such as Gunter Grass, Milan Kundera and Gabriel Marques – writers that it had appropriated for its own. The West noted it for being the first book to come from a "Commonwealth" writer (Rushdie

hates that label) that was written in style, English and sensibility that the West wanted.

Rushdie himself has categorically denied the literary influences mentioned above and has been at pains to explain the difference. For him, "books are about the world" whereas in western postmodern writing, "the world outside the text does not exist." He has also been saying so ever since, that his book is not the product of only western (or written) literature but also of the oral narrative traditions of the east.

In the West, *Midnight's Children* was read by the lay person for being a novel that was cosmpolitan in its outlook; in India, the focus was on the veracity of the historical, politcal realities that Rushdie had presented. So much so that Rushdie had to face a court case from Mrs. Indira Gandhi for defamation and was asked to expunge an entire chapter from the novel.

Some Indian readers also contested Rushdie's use of mythological references and found fault with his novel till he clarified that the "errors" were deliberate, and a part of his technique. At the same time, there has been a large number of readers who have loved the book, loved it for the Bombay it depicts, loved it for its liveliness, creativity, innovations, and its uniqueness.

The point that I want to make here is that this novel has held an appeal for different segments of readers in different parts of the world, albeit for different reasons for the last 20 years.

What you must try to answer at the end of these Units is the question: "Do I like *Midnight's Children?*" and if the answer is "yes" than ask yourself whether or not the book has spoken to you in a certain special way and how that is different from the way it has been read before.

Having provoked you to think, I will give you some biographical details about Rushdie so that you begin understanding the making of *Midnight's Children*. However, you know why I'm asking you to give me these answers, it is ncessary that you read the book quickly at one go. My teacher for my M.A; , Professor S. Nagarajan, Head of the Department of English at Poona University, used to always say, "Before you go to any critic, first read the text." Most students do it the other way around but I found, when I followed my teachers advice, that my understanding of the text was far superior than had I depended only on critics. That's how I learnt to read a text independently of critics and their views. I would like you to do so too because you are M.A students, by which I mean you are students preparing for a career as a teacher or as researcher and for both these fields, you need to read deeply and read widely. Throughout my discussion on a *Midnight's Children* I have referred to the Picador edittion of the novel.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF SALMAN RUSHDIE

Salman Rushdie (1947-)

Here's a picture of Rushdie. As you can see, like the author who began the practice of using autobiography openly in his fiction, I am going to begin this section with a personal anecdote.

I met Salman Rushdie on 22 February 1984 in Bombay soon after he had won the annual award of India's long-lasting magazine *Gentleman* and had been invited to deliver the *Gentleman's* Annual Lecture. The award had been shared between Rushdie and Michael Fererira, the Billiards world champion. Rushdie had been invited to speak by *Gentleman* in Bombay and Delhi and this talk was organized in Bombay's Hotel President. The hall was packed to capacity. Everybody had come to see and hear the young handsome novelist of the Booker Prize fame.

Rushdie began his speech characterestically by drawing parallels between himself and his own character Saleem (*Midnight's Children*). He said that very much like Saleem who had shared the hour of his birth (with Shiva, another character in the book), so had Rushdie shared the *Gentleman's* award with Michael Fereira. Thus on a light note, Rushdie set the magic of his hard-hitting one hour talk rolling before a spell-bound audience. Rushdie spoke on "Politics and the Novel." In this lecture, he mercilessly criticized the position of passive acceptance for writers propagated by George Orwell in his famous essay "Inside a Whale". Orwell felt that it was useless for a writer to try to fight oppression and that it was wiser to "simply accept it, endure it, record it."

Rushdie was angry at the quietism proposed. He felt that as a writer, though one is not obliged to write about (his) politics but he also could not ignore it " we are radioactive with history and politics is history's present tense," he asserted. No writer worth his salt should tolerate political injustice. A writer need not write about his own political views but he could certainly criticize the politics of his times as the Russian novelist Solzenhytsin had done.

Of *Midnight's Children* he observed that though he had not planned it that way he could not keep away from the influence of contemporary history from its making (*Indian Express* 24 February 1984). Repeatedly he emphasized the role of the writer as an activist. The talk was excellent. Rushdie was clear and thought provoking, his words had been chosen with great care. After the talk and the question and answers session came to an end everybody began walking swiftly out of the hall and towards the lift, as is the Bombay manner. Rushdie stood alone in the foyer. No one was with him (Unthinkable today because of the heavy security around him). Just then I looked up and found myself face to face with him. I was delighted. I introduced myself and spoke to him for a couple of minutes. I don't quite remember what we spoke of but he replied pleasantly and then it was time for me to move on.

I have begun with a personal note to bring you close to Rushdie, the man and not just the famous writer around whom a lot of mystery and aura has been built up in the last decade because of his works and especially because of the fatwa imposed on him by Iran. Many of you will recall his surprise visit to India after an interval of twelve years on 14th April 2000 to attend Commonwealth Writers' Prize ceremony. Rushdie had won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best Book (Eurasia Region) for his novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and nobody knew till the end whether or not he would attend the function. What was later reported was the stunning fact that he had been in India since a week ago. He had been travelling in India in disguise and even made a visit to the Taj Mahal accompanied by his strapping young son, Zafar, to fulfil an old promise to him! So, no one knew where he was and whether or not he was coming to the ceremony.

But the moment he entered the lounge of Hotel Oberoi In New Delhi :

> "..it was as if a tidal wave had hit the 150 odd assembled glitterati. A battalion of TV and press cameramen and reporters surged forward towards Rushdie,....everyone rubbernecked to catch a glimpse of Rushdie's bald pale pate gleaming with perspiration and his thin-lipped face suffused with a huge smile" (Trivedi, "In Conversation" TBF)

If I were to draw a parallel between the effect Rushdie has on the audience it would not be wrong to compare it to the effect on the audience were Shakespeare to walk into the room. In other words, Rushdie, like Shakespeare, is now a writer, whose reputation precedes him wherever he goes. After this personalized account, I would like to tell you some more factual details about Rushdie's life so that you can relate them to the impact he has made on the post 1980s on the Indian English Novel in 1980s and after.

Salman Rushdie was born – no, not on 15th August 1947 (The birth date of his protagonist Saleem) but on 19 June 1947. He was born and educated in Bombay in St. Cathedral until the age of fourteen. He has described the city of Bombay as "the most cosmopolitan, most hybrid, most hotch potch of Indian cities." Its influence on him has been so deep that he made it the major setting of *Midnight's Children.* Indeed *Midnight's Children*, becomes the first of the Bombay novels, which have become quite common now, the novel having started a new trend in Indian English Fiction since the 1980s. A number of other Indian English novels since then are Bombay novels.

Not only did Rushdie begin the trend of writing the Bombay novels but writers after him have been quick to write the metro-centric novel, with Delhi, Calcutta and Toronto as their setting. This has been a major departure from the earlier Indian English novels that were usually set in small towns or villages. You will recall the fictitious Malgudi of R. K. Narayan's novels. Interestingly though Malgudi very closely resembles Mysore where Narayan has lived all along, he took pains to conceal its name. Rushdie takes pride in locating the familiar landmarks of Bombay by name, thus striking on immediate and autobiographical sense of identification with the reader, especially the one who knows Bombay well.

Now, why do you think Rushdie wrote about Bombay and not about a village or small town? Wouldn't it have been easier to write about something everybody was writing about? One explanation is that he was brought up in Bombay. But that alone would not suffice. Bombay, for Rushdie is something special. It is his metaphor for a cosmopolitan Indian city where people of all religions live and mingle together freely. It is the city that according to him represents the multicultural, multi-religious Indian society. He was reacting to the rising strains of fundamentalism in India around that period. Bombay for him is representative of the truly hybrid and mixed nature of the Indian civilization.

Born to Muslim parents, Rushdie did not create a pure Muslim character who reads the Koran daily or visits the mosque. His main character Saleem, is partly Hindu, partly Goan, partly Kashmiri, partly Muslim, partly British, suggesting thereby the intermingling of the different races which constitute the India that Rushdie adores.

What Rushdie did, therefore, with *Midnight's Children*, was to make a clean break from the metaphysical Hindu worldview of Indian English fiction. This paradigm shift that he executed, makes him a seminal writer at a time when nothing new was expected from the Indian novel, since it had last attracted attention in the 1960s. His influence on the writing that has followed since has been tremendous. It has opened the ways to novels about protagonists who belong to the minority communities –

Parsis, Christians, Sikhs, Jews, etc. This was never so in the pre-1980s Indian English novels.

Now, to come back to his life story, Rushdie left Bombay at the age of fourteen to study at Rugby in England. It was here that he tasted his first bitter experience of racism when one of the boys with whom he shared his study, wrote "Wogs go home" on the wall over his chair (Glendenning 38). So, hurt was Rushdie that he never wanted to return to England after that. But in 1967 his parents migrated to Pakistan. So, he spent some time there after the completion of his school education. His parents finally persuaded him to join King's College in Cambridge and he returned to England to study for his graduate degree with History as the subject of his specialization. After graduation, he worked for a while in England as a stage actor and then as a copywriter in an advertising firm. Meanwhile, he was also very seriously working at becoming a writer.

Rushdie had wanted to become a writer since childhood. His parents and his family say that it was from about the age of ten that he began to say that he would be a writer. Rushdie says that the first writer he knew was Faiz Ahmed Faiz a friend of his parents, "a kind of extra uncle" to him. As Rushdie read Faiz, he admired him for combining public and social awareness and responsibility with intense lyricism and he decided he would be a writer like him (Trivedi 12).

However, Rushdie's first novel was not *Midnight's Children* but *Grimus* a work of science fiction. It was written for a contest organized by Gollancz a publishing house. Liz Calder, an editor at Gollancz and a tenant in Rushdie's home in England, encouraged Rushdie to enter the contest. Rushdie did not win the contest but Calder persuaded Rushdie to publish the book. The novel was ripped apart by critics and Rushdie felt deeply hurt by the rejection.

However, he soon recovered and decided to write an " epic" novel about India, embodying its past, present and future. He undertook an extended trip to India along with his wife in preparation. This was his first visit to India in ten years. He says in an interview that although he wrote the actual novel in England, he could not have written it just sitting out there. So, he visited India and Pakistan and spent a considerable time visiting a lot of places that he had been to before and knew he would want to use. He also visited some places such as Benaras which he had never visited before but would want to use in his novel (Interview, Kunappi 18). In his essay "The Indian writer in England", Rushdie recalls how on revisiting his house in Bombay, he was "gripped by the conviction that I, too, had a city and a history to reclaim". It was in that moment of realization that, *Midnight's Children* was really born".

When it was published in 1981, the novel was an immediate success. It struck a familiar chord in readers in India as well as England. It came to be described as "one of the most important novels to come out of the English – speaking world in this generation", (*New York Times*). It was compared with the novels of Gabriel Marquez, Gunter Grass and Milan Kundera – all established names in the western world. In the same year, he won the prestigious Booker McConnell prize. It made him a celebrity overnight. The 10,000 pounds award (it is 20,000 pounds now) gave him the freedom to write without worrying about earning a livelihood. He was lionized by the media in England, and then in India, where huge crowds turned out to hear his readings and lectures.

As *Midnight's Children* become a household name, a book to own and discuss; it transformed the internal economy of the print market for Indian English fiction. It opened up the way for the pre-publication purchase of the exclusive rights of books by Indian English novelists. Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Pankaj Mishra all have since won huge advance royalties from their publishers in the west. It was almost as if this one novel had triggered off a new market for Indian English

writing and the Indian English novel had been transported from the periphery to the centre of the world .

Until Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* came on the scene, most writers including R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand had had great difficulties with getting their works published. The market wasn't just ready to accept them. Anand has put on record his dejection at not being able to publish his first novel, *Untouchable* , so much so that he even contemplated committing suicide! Until E.M Forster the author of *Passage to India* took the initiative to recommend the novel for publication. That this novel which was published in 1936 has gone on to be translated in over twenty world languages is another matter.

Similar was Narayan's sad experience as no publisher wanted to buy his book *Swami and Friends*. Graham Greene the novelist helped him to publish it at last. But the experience repeated itself with Narayan's next novel, *The English Teacher*. Disgusted ,Narayan decided to set up his own publishing house, *Indian Thought Publications* and himself began to publish every single book of his.

As a contrast, the publishing success of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and that of his successors have been a phenomena difficult to understand. And to think that Rushdie had to write his second novel to be able to experience this glory, his first *Grimus* having been totally rejected.

Rushdie's third novel was Shame. It was published in 1983. It is set in and about Pakistan. This novel was also short-listed for the Booker though it didn't make it. It was much acclaimed critically but was banned in Pakistan. Yet smuggled copies were read in large numbers by members of the intelligentsia. However, the book that got him into deep trouble was *The Satanic Verses* his fourth novel. It was published in 1988. It became his most controversial work. Even before the book hit the market, Rushdie caused a stir in the publishing world by receiving a very huge advance. While the book was well-received in the UK and the USA, it was banned in India since it hurt the religious sentiments of the Muslims and led to riots and killings in Bombay's Bhendi Bazaar.

Soon it was banned in Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, South Africa and countries with large Muslim populations. Rushdie's fate was sealed finally when on 14 February 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini announced his "fatwa" against Rushdie, exhorting "zealous Muslims" to execute him quickly. Rushdie went into hiding and lived so for over a decade, changing houses very often. He was living in England then. The world was outraged at the imposition of the fatwa. World leaders and writers came out with public statements denouncing Iran and Rushdie was catapulted into unprecedented fame. To give you a feel of the times when this happened I shall quote a few newspaper headlines in those months soon after the fatwa. With the world's leaders and writers behind him, Rushdie's fortunes seemed very similar to Saleem's in *Midnight's Children*.

- "US WRITERS COME OUT IN RUSHDIE'S SUPPORT"
  - Indian Post, 24 February 1989

- "MITTERRAND, THATCHER JOIN HANDS ON RUSHDIE ISSUE"
  - Indian Post, 1 March 1989

- "THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF SALMAN RUSHDIE AND HIS PUBLISHERS"
  - World Statement, a page length advertisement in Indian Express Bombay, 2 March 1989 signed by thousands of literary figures across the world .

These included writers, publishers, booksellers, agents and literary organizations. But none of this worked, nor did Rushdie's public apology to the Muslims. He won his freedom only recently in the year 2000 when the "fatwa" was officially called off by Iran. That's how he was able to travel to India in April 2000 and enjoy the pleasurable experience of revisiting the country he was pining to return to again. After the lifting of the fatwa, he also decided to migrate to the U.S., feeling quite bitter at the way the British government, he felt, had failed to stand up to Iran and get the fatwa annulled.

The most amazing fact about Rushdie and his courageous spirit is that even in captivity he continued to make secret appearances and write books.

Salman Rushdie, a death sentence put on him by Iranian leaders in 1989, takes his seat on Phil Donahue's set yesterday. He said his top-secret but very public book tour was a way to fight back at bullies who would silence him.

Salman Rushdie, a death sentence put on him by Iranian leaders in 1989 takes his sea on Phil Donahue's set to promote *The Moor's Last Sigh* in the U.S in January 1996. He said his top secret but very public book tour was a way to fight back at bullies who would silence him.

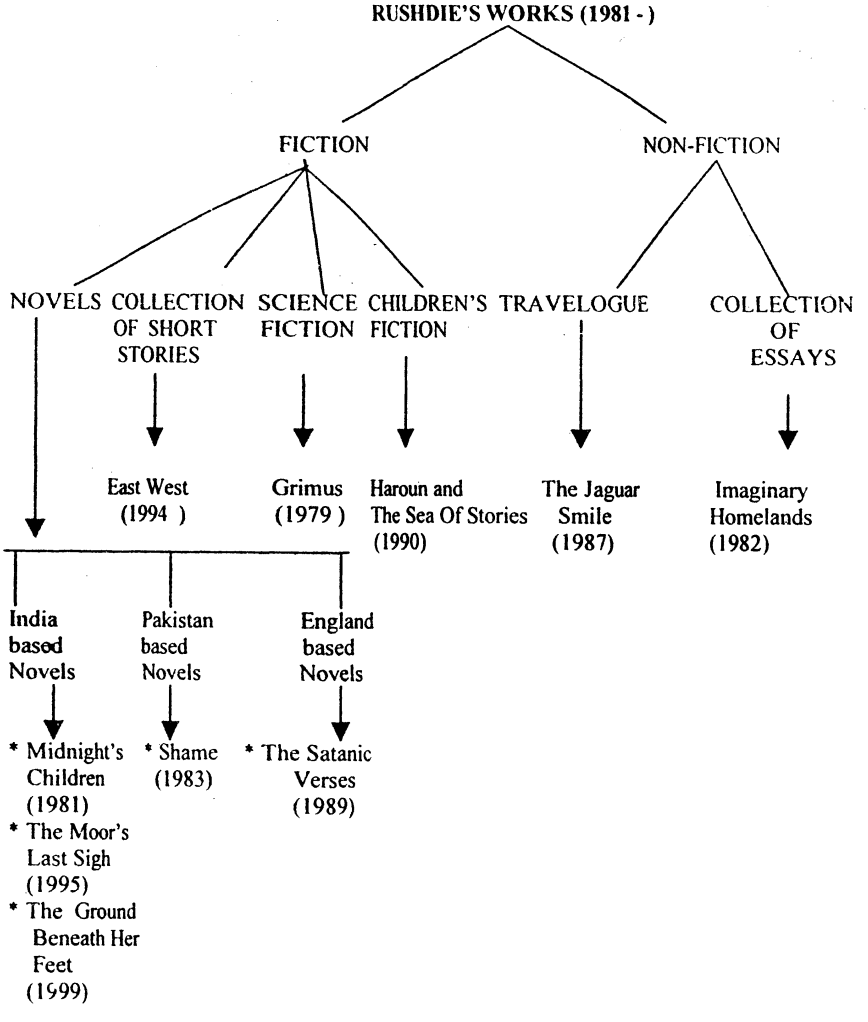
The book which he first wrote in hiding was *Haroun and the sea of Stories* (1990), a delightful "children's" book written for his son, Zafar, but which also fictionalizes his attack on the Ayatollah in the figure of Khatum Shud. The second book he wrote was *Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). This book was banned first in India and then released from the ban a couple of months later. The cause of the ban was Rushdie's open attack on Bal Thakeray a well known politician and leader of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. His fictional character wanted to convert India into a fascist Hindu state and Rushdie wanted to resist the rise of such a leader.

His last book to date, also written in captivity, is *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). The book was short listed for the Booker but it did not make it. It also won the Eurasian Region Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best Book but lost the overall prize.

However, the novel that has made real history by winning the Booker Prize not once, but twice, is *Midnight's Children*. The prize was first awarded to *Midnight's Children* in 1981, and again for being selected in 1994 as the best book among all the Booker winners in the 25 years of the Booker Prize, since the institution of the Booker Prize in 1969. *Midnight's Children* easily remains his best work. Doesn't that make you very eager to study it in detail?

THE OTHER WORKS OF RUSHDIE

In this section I am going to give you some more information about Rushdie's entire literary output. This will help you to place *Midnight's Children* in its midst as many of his themes recur. For the discussion, I shall focus only on his fiction here.



Since he published *Midnight's Children* in 1981 and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* in 1999 , Rushdie has written ten works . These include five novels, one work of science fiction, one work of children's fiction , one a collection of short stories , a travelogue and one collection of essays. He has given a number of interviews, written numerous articles, and made a documentary on Kashmir. Indeed his career has been a very prolific one.

Now the interesting thing about his work – like that perhaps of all major writers – is that despite the variation in form and subject matter, certain ideas, literary and thematic concerns appear repeatedly in his works. His essays and interviews are of great help because they explicitly affirm some of these ideas As in the case of T.S. Eliot whose essays help to understand his poetry, Rushdie's serve to explain his fiction. Although one may not trust the "teller" as essayist or the interviewee completely but the essays and the interviews certainly provide important insights. From his entire body of work, it is clear that the most recurrent ideas or themes are that of migrancy and the writer's freedom to challenge authority which appear hauntingly in all his works.

His view about his location as an expatriate or migrant writer is that he belongs to two cultures while being distanced from both. In " The Indian Writer in England" he rejects the idea of assimilation to the values of the host country, as also their absolute rejection (at the cost of idealizing the home country) which is typical he feels of most expatriates . For him , it is important that the modern day migrant must negotiate or choose selectively from the values of both cultures – the "native" and the "adopted" – and try to create a "new", " hybrid" identity (81).

However, despite his emphasis on the hybrid identity, almost all of his fiction keeps returning to Bombay in a nostalgic look backwards. His own migration has certainly made him think a lot about the subject and right from *Grimus*, his first novel, the theme has been repeated in every single work of his.

Grimus, published in 1979, is as I told you earlier a failed novel. Yet it is valuable for it contains the seeds of the competing claims of "native home" and " adopted home" for the migrant. The hero is Flapping Eagle, an American Indian in search of his lost sister, whom he finds on a Mediterranean island under the control of Grimus, a European magician.

Flapping Eagle leaves home because he has to. He is an outcast from his birth because his mother dies while bearing him and his community known for its religious fundamentals, shun him and his sister for seeking contact with the outside world. The novel speaks of Flapping Eagle "stripped of his past, forsaking the language of his ancestor for the language of the archipelagoes of the world" (36) very much like all the other novels speak about the choices made by his other protagonists.

Shame published in 1983, followed *Midnight's Children*. It is his second major book about the Indian subcontinent. It is based in Pakistan. The narrator in *Shame* is an expatriate who returns to Pakistan for an extended visit. As an outsider, who is also a cultural insider, the perspective he gives is a portrait of corruption and shamelessness among the ruling elite. The novel captures the abstract concept of shame on two levels – the national and the domestic. On the national level the main characters are thinly veiled caricatures of Zia ul Haq and Zulfikar Bhutto. On the marital plane, the men exhibit lack of sharam (Shame) in their oppression of the womenfolk. Both aspects are conveyed through the narration of the migrant visitor who describes himself as, a "translated man", standing between two cultures.

The Satanic Verses (1988) was meant to give voice and fictional flesh to the immigrant culture . It was also an attempt to explore the nature of divine relvelation (the Koran), from the point of view of a secular person. The novel deals with the life of immigrants from the formerly colonized third world countries, now living in

Britain. Expected to adapt, even re-make themselves, the immigrants respond in different ways including absolute refusal to get transformed. On the other hand, others like Saladin, Chamcha (one of the two heroes in the book) who come to England with contempt for Indians and with a keen desire to embrace English ways receive a severe beating in racist England. Chamcha"s attempt to become just a human being leads him to Bombay where he is reunited with his dying, until then estranged father / Fatherland.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) is Rushdie's answer to Imam Khomeini and his other tormentors. He may have in reality apologized to the Muslims for hurting their feelings but in his heart of hearts one can see him feeling that he had every right to write what he did. The book is a delightful children's story on one level but on the other it is the story of his forced imprisonment in an unknown place and the silence imposed on him by the sentence of death passed on him by Ayatollah Khomeini. In the book, Khomeini is King Khattam Shud who is the arch enemy of all stories and the Foe of Speech.

East, West (1994) is a collection of short stories most of which have been published earlier in different magazines. The book communicates through the classification of stories, Rushdie's ideas of East and West coming together ultimately in a hybrid identity. The first section runs the India stories, the second section carries the stories located in the West, and the third carries a mixed set and is subtitled "East, West."

The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) sees Moraes Zogoiby exiled twice. Once, when his mother turns him out of her house in Bombay and next when the forces of oppression seek him and he escapes to Spain. It's the story of a character on the run. The escape, the flight, the unending journey is an image that repeatedly occurs in all expatriate fiction (Kirpal 1988). One of the most poignant descriptions in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the one in which Moraes fears he will lose his sanity in the imprisonment imposed on him by his tormentor. The scene recalls the theme of the loss of a writer's freedom earlier explored in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999) is once again about exile, love, and loss . Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara meet when she comes from New York as a refugee. They fall in love and marry. But one day Vina vanishes from Bombay, from Ormus. Ormus, like Orpheus is doomed to search her. Symbolically, the search is for the nostalgic past, typical of expatriate writing.

1.4 THE TITLE : *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Midnight's Children draws its title from the hour of India's Independence, 15th August 1947. All the children born together at that momentous hour become in Rushdie's novel the children of the time : "Fathered, you understand, by history"(118). They represent "the highest of talents of which men have ever dreamed (199)".

Saleem's narrative tells of the joyous discovery of the midnight children through his protagonist Saleem's private "All India Radio" , his own miraculous telepathic gift which provides the communications centre for all the children, in all 1001 of them. But the promise of their potential is not fulfilled . "If there is a third principle, its name is childhood. But it dies, or rather it is murdered" (25)

The destruction of the *Midnight's Children* which Saleem believes is the deepest motive behind the declaration of a state of Emergency in India, is the heart of his black story. Their magical powers are completely destroyed by the widow, Mrs. Gandhi as they are all "test-and-hysterectomies" (438).This is Rushdie's way of saying that the imposition of Emergency emasculated, castrated the country.

Rushdie's wit shines through his interview of 1985 in which he speaks of how the idea of midnight children came about. Initially he says he began with one child. These then became two as he thought of swapping them.

> Then I thought that you can't have just two children in a country like India. It must be more and if it's more than two, why these two? I did a mathematical calculation about the birthrate of India, with calculators, and worked out that in fact, a thousand and one children is accurate" (Interview 18).

In writing a novel about the Indian subcontinent, Rushdie in one sense belongs with the novelists who came before him, novelists such as Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan and yet he is very distinct.

Rao's *Kanthapura* is the sthalapurana (or place legend) par excellence of India during its freedom movement. Gandhi is his real hero. Narayan's . *Waiting for the Mahatma*- different from Rao's novel is a mild satire on the average Indian's incomplete understanding of the Gandhi - led freedom struggle but still reverential of the Mahatma . Gandhi figures in *Midnight's Children* too but so faint is the historical memory of independent India that even the date of his assassination is incorrectly recorded by Saleem. The lapse only reminds the reader of the distance between the modern day Indian and Gandhian ideals.

The title *Midnight's Children* is both to be read for the promise that the 1001 children symbolized , and the failure of the post-independent generation to carry the mantle of creating an ideal society. In an act of real life imitating fiction, most English language newspapers in India felicitated the *Midnight children* born on India's fiftieth anniversary !

The number of midnight children is 1001. This figure might puzzle you. You might wonder why Rushdie chose to have 1001 children and not 1000, which is a round figure. Infact, Rushdie also says in that interview that the figure 1001 is on the low side and that probably there are twelve or thirteen hundred children being born every hour (Interview 18)! So, then why did Rushdie choose 1001? For the reason that the number recalls the 1001 stories that Scheherzade told every night in the Arabian Nights to save her life, and Rushdie's novel is about telling stories. You will find this trait of making connections between dissimilar facts and suggesting new ways of looking at things, very typical of Rushdie. That is why there is always an element of surprise that makes you think every time: "Oh yes, it is so. Now why didn't it occur to me earlier?"

1.5 THE BOOKER AND *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Since the first page of this Block, I have been mentioning that Rushdie won the Booker Prize for *Midnight's Children*. As a few other Indian English novelists including Arundhati Roy have also won it recently, the idea may not thrill us very much until we understand what winning the Booker Prize means and how it is awarded. So, in this section I'm going to give you this information.

The Booker Prize (or The Booker McConnell Prize, as should be called) was founded in 1969 by Booker McConnell, a multinational group of companies. Administered by Book Trust in the United Kingdom, this prestigious award is awarded to the best full-length novel written in English by a citizen of the UK, the Commonwealth, Eire, Pakistan or South Africa. This literary prize is sponsored by Booker McConnell Ltd. and looked after by the National Book League in the United Kingdom.

The way it is awarded is in two phases. In the first, publishers are invited to submit entries with scheduled publication dates between January and November of the award year. Earlier they could submit any number of entries. This has changed in the past few years; a publisher can now submit not more than three entries for judging. The time frame has changed as well, with the prize shortlist now announced in late September or early October and the deadline for entries being moved back to June 30. The prize itself (currently valued at 20,000 pounds Sterling) is awarded in late October Since 1999, shortlisted novelists also receive 1000 pounds Sterling.

In the second phase, the judges read all the entries submitted by the publishers. It appears that the judges in 1995 were asked to read 140 novels, and decided that was too much of a good thing and limited the number of entries to two a publisher. The publishers are not too happy it seems, claiming that their third entry was usually a long-shot. Perhaps a radical shake-up is in order to bring the whole thing back into perspective because while critics speak of the politics of the "Booker", others from the Commonwealth countries have charged it for discriminating against their Literature.

Anyway whether or not these beliefs are supported by facts, what is a fact however is that the author who gets selected for the Prize, becomes a celebrity overnight. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was awarded the Booker in 1981; and again the "Booker of Booker Prize" in 1994 . Now can you imagine a parallel achievement in recent times?

Question : Can you name the winner of the Booker Prize 2000?

Answer : It is The Blind Assassin by Margaret Atwood.

1.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as I've said earlier put the Indian-English novel on the world map in an unprecedented way "No other novel about India has had such an impact" (Ali 95). It also made Rushdie, at the young age of thirty-four into a major literary figure. Critical praise was showered lavishly on the work which was characterized variously as "an outstanding achievement" (Nazareth), "a novel of international importance" (Chaudhuri), a work that "sounds like a continent finding its voice"(Blaise), enormously creative in its "fecundity, extravagance, and scope" (Towers).

Rushdie's exuberant humour, brilliant wit, imaginative boldness, enormous talent, prodigious powers of storytelling, debt to Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gunter Grass, Laurence Sterne all became part of the vocabulary of critical acclaim that greeted *Midnight's Children*. It was not as if such praise was offered by reviewers in the West alone. Anita Desai, herself a leading Indian English novelist described the novel as being "of major interest to Indian readers," and went on to characterize it as a "great tour de force, a dazzling exhibition of the gifts of a new writer with courage, impressive strength, the power of both imagination and control, and sheer stylistic brilliance".

In the Indian subcontinent, the book gathered numerous favourable reviews as well. Its impact, in the subcontinent and the West, can perhaps be best gauged through the fact that the novel marks among other things the coming of age of a generation of subcontinental writers for whom English was their first language. The success of *Midnight's Children* led to a flood of novels by Indian English novelists and like this novel they too won numerous awards – national and international. When *Midnight's*

Children was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize, its critical reception more than made up for Rushdie's disappointment over his first novel *Grimus*.

With regard to more extended commentaries on his works and on Rushdie himself, you will enjoy reading the full-length critical study on Rushdie by Timothy Brennan: *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. It offers very insightful readings of each of Rushdie's fictional works including *Midnight's Children*, Brennan's terms for discussing Rushdie ("cosmopolitan writer" versus "frontline fighter"; "anti- colonial liberalism" versus "nationalism," to name some) provide an interesting context within which Rushdie's works can be read and understood. Brennan's analysis is especially useful for studying Rushdie's expatriate sensibility

Among the essays on Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* one of the most interesting, theoretically informed pieces worth mentioning are Rustom Bharucha's "Rushdie's Whale," which looks closely at Rushdie's linguistic innovations and wordplay to make the point that "Rushdie has added a new dimension to English by being idosyncratically true to the sounds of his birth and youth"(222). Other pieces to read are Makarand Paranjape's "Inside and Outside the Whale : Politics and the New Indian English Novel" and Arun Mukherjee's "Characterization in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*.

Mukherjee critiques the novel from a feminist perspective and argues that Rushdie's attitudes are distinctly patriarchal. Kum Kum Sangari's "The Politics of the Possible," is a comparative analysis of Garcia Marquez and Rushdie which examines how Western readers classify the "magical realist" narratives (i.e., narratives that combine realism with fiction) of the two writers under the term of postmodernism and conveniently ignore the political activism in the works of these writers.

These are just a few examples. The total number of essays written on *Midnight's Children* is indeed mind-boggling. They reflect a great variety of perspective and interpretations suggesting thereby that *Midnight's Children* is that kind of work which can offer different meanings to different people all the time. Such is its universality.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In Unit 1, I have introduced you to some of the important biographical details about the novelist, given you a brief summary of Rushdie's other works to highlight his pet themes and concerns. I have also discussed the significance of the book's title and the Booker Prize that it won. The unit also describes the nature of reception that the book received in critical circles and shares with you a certain approach of reading the book which may make you relate to *Midnight's Children* better.

1.8 GLOSSARY

advent: arrival

expatriate: a person living in a foreign country

quietism: passivity

seminal: influencing others in a new way, original

postmodernism: historically the phase in Western civilization that follows modernity but has also been interpreted as a concept that emphasizes indeterminacy, wordplay, hybridity, fragmentation and so on.

1.9 QUESTIONS

1. Name five Bombay-centric Indian English novels published in the 1980s. Give the names of their authors and their dates of publication?

2. What characteristics of Rushdie do you gather from the way he describes his having created 1001 midnight children in the novel?

3. Remember the question I had posed to you in 1.1? Let me repeat it. How can we judge the impact of a just published novel on which there is no criticism available yet? Any suggestions and ideas?

1.10 SUGGESTED READING

Brennan, Timothy *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*

Dingwaney Anuradha. "Salman Rushdie" in Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson, *Writers of the Indian Diaspora.* Westport : Greenwood Press, 1993 : 363 - 85

Glendenning Victoria. "A Novelist in the Country of the Mind." *Sunday Times* (Oct 25, 1981) : 38

Kirpal Viney. *The New Indian Novel in English : A Study of the 1980s* New Delhi : Allied Publishers, 1990.

UNIT 2 *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*: THE DE-DOXIFIED ENGLISH

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will first look at the challenges and difficulties experienced by Indian English novelists to forge an English which was distinctive from British English and American English. Then we will examine how far Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* has carried on with, or broken away from the tradition created by these writers. I shall conclude the unit by discussing Rushdie's experiments with the English language in *Midnight's Children*.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Till this day, the most recurring and the most passionate debate in any seminar on Indian English writing is about the use of English by Indian writers. Don't be surprised if this should happen to you. Very typically, what happens is that first a seminar on Indian writing in English is organized. Then the papers and proceedings continue in English for a while until suddenly someone among those present will get up and launch an emotional attack (in English) on Indian writers for writing in English. The charge usually is that authentic Indian writing exists and can be written only in the regional languages.

Though no one offers to explain what 'authentic' means, a few knowing heads bob up and down in agreement. At the same time, the other half of the participants now get ready to uphold the use of English by Indian writers. The debate then turns quite bitter until the Chairperson of the Seminar intervenes to put a halt to it. Why does this happen. Why does this continue to happen? Perhaps because ever since Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhiji pronounced (during the Nationalist Freedom movement) that the use of English is an unpatriotic act and its users lacking in creativity, Indian intellectuals have seen writing in English as an un-Indian act, and so possibly the critical debate in post-Independence has remained inconclusive.

Now, what critics think is one thing but what writers do may be another. It is therefore, important for you to understand why Indian English novelists have

continued to write in English without experiencing the dilemma that some of the critics do.

2.2 THE BEGINNINGS

Indian English novelists have had two kinds of predecessors. The first set of novelists were those who began writing in the pre 1930s. They were those who wrote English with stiff correctness, always conscious that it was a foreign language. Their works and their English were imitative of the British novelists of the times. Sir Walter Scott and W.W. Reynolds were very popular with them as models.

The other group comprised novelists such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Michael Madhusudan Dutt who began writing in English but who, influenced by the rising feeling of nationalism, later switched to writing in their mother tongue, Bengali.

However, the novelists who rose in the 1930s, novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao were those who made a conscious decision to write in English as if it were an Indian language. Perhaps, they did not regard it as a foreign language since it had been domiciled in India for over a hundred years. However, where they were different from their predecessors was in their objective of re-making British English very much like American and Irish writers such as, James Baldwin and J.M. Synge had already done before them. Their self-assurance that they were using an Indian and not a foreign language gave them "the confidence to bend the language to their will" (Mukherjee, 167). Perhaps, the use of English by these writers was their way of asserting their right to write in English by giving it a new and distinct identity.

The first major novelist to experiment with English for writing fiction was Mulk Raj Anand with his novel *Untouchable,* a work that you are studying in this course. Then came G. V. Desani, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Bhabani Bhatacharya. Experimentation with the English language has continued without a stop since their days.

What Anand did was to experiment with the diction, dialogue and the syntax of the English spoken by his characters. While he did not alter the English he used for his remarks as a narrator, in the dialogues uttered by his Punjabi characters he literally translated from Hindi and Punjabi words and idioms even at the cost of disrupting the grammatical conventions of British English. For example in *Untouchable* you will have noticed a generous use of expressions and phrases such as "eating the air" (to take a stroll), "breaking the vessel" (to expose a secret) or "black in the pulse"(something fishy) which are very common in Hindi or Punjabi but which when rendered in English appear odd and unusual. While reading the novel, you must have wondered why Anand had done this, what does he achieve with such usage, and does he succeed?

Those of you who have read *Untouchable* will agree that he succeeds in spite of the oddity of such expressions because he was trying to capture the vigorous speech of Punjabi peasants. He conveys the Punjabi farmer's sensibility without a doubt though you may also feel disturbed at the violence he does to the grammar of English. This brings us to the question whether this approach is recommended. The next section which discusses the problems experienced by writers including Anand, Narayan and Rao who were trying consciously to forge a new English for Indian creative writing will perhaps answer the question for you.

2.3 PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE POST 1930s NOVELISTS

Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan are regarded as the three major writers of Indian English Fiction because they set the operative sensibility which has more or less continued to the present. The leads that they set in the use of English will be discussed in this unit before I analyse Rushdie's innovations.

This exercise is necessary so that you understand the creation of the literary tradition inherited by Rushdie, and the unique contributions made by him in *Midnight's Children*. In fact, it is difficult to appreciate *Midnight's Children* without being able to place it in the literary history of the Indian English Novel. Hence let us try first to understand what it meant to be an Anand, Rao or Narayan writing in English about Indian society and characters. So, for this I'm going to request you to do the following exercise.

For a moment, place yourself in a time machine and go back to the 1930s. Imagine you are an aspiring writer who has been educated in English and has studied British Literature. You too want to write a novel but your awakened nationalist feelings do not allow you to imitate British novelists. You wish to innovate with the themes, the English language and the narrative technique which would help you to write about a distinct Indian society but you do not have an Indian model to follow. So what would you do.

It is important to ask yourself this question because what we today take for granted was the result of great creativity, industry and personal struggle for the writers of the times. India was still a slave country. The aura of the British as superior in everything including ideas, systems, culture was yet strong among the majority of the English-educated Indians and these were the people who would read novels written in English.

However, these writers were equally eager not to write novels that were imitations. They felt inspired to show their countrymen and to the rest of the world that they too were writing novels that were important literature in its own right. But they were also aware of the close connection between the language they were using and the cultural baggage that went with it. So, each writer sought to re-define English and make it 'Indian' enough so that it could be used to communicate the Indian cultural and social values to English-speaking readers worldwide.

Try out this exercise. Describe in English any interesting custom or belief among your regional or linguistic community. You must take care to convey the flavour of 'Indianness'.

I'm sure you enjoyed doing that exercise. But I did also realize how challenging, if not impossible, the task was? And remember you find it difficult when you have scores of models before you while these writers/had none. So, now do you see how difficult and challenging the task must have been for these Indian novelists and the many problems they must have faced to be able to write fiction using English in a decolonized way. Luckily, these novelists being an expressive lot, they have documented extensively their efforts of how they tried to re-shape the colonizer's language and use it for writing about a non-white society. Thanks to their essays, we understand their experiments and struggles better.

Perhaps, the most important statement among these writers on the attempt to Indianize English for writing the Indian novel has come from Raja Rao in his Foreword to Kanthapura which was published in 1938. Can you recall what Rao had written ? He had written:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own ....(*English*) *is the language of our intellectual make up ... but not of our emotional make up.*
> (v; emphasis added)

The magnitude of Rao's achievement in changing the filter of English to accommodate the emotions, the culture, the values and belief systems of his characters and their society is understood only if we compare the following statements, only one of which is from the novel. The other is what the statement might have been had Rao not re-fashioned English. Please read them and list the difference that you observe between the two:

i. Kenchamma is a great Indian goddess who according to ancient lore is reported to have killed the demon that was preying upon the people of Kanthapura. So the people worship her till today.

ii. **Kench**amma is our goddess. Great and beauteous is she. She killed a demon ages **ago**, a demon that had come to ask for our young sons as food and our y**oung wo**men as wives.

(Kanthapura 2)

Did you notice that the first is an example of English used as an intellectual language but not as the language of emotions while the second with its oral rhythms, inverted syntactical structures and alliteration invokes a speaking voice and suggests a live audience? More important, did you observe the way in which the lines evoke the narrator's reverence and love for Kenchamma? Don't they foreground a typically traditional Indian cultural value system where one's neighbours are like one's family, and where different members share deep emotional bonds? The lines also evoke the felt horror at the demon's act on its transgressing into the lives, the self respect and honour of their big family("our young sons", "our young women"). The allegoric allusion also recalls the eternal battle between Good/the goddess and Evil/the demon that has always formed the core of traditional Indian thought and literature and which continues to live in the collective unconscious of the Indian people as an archetype. Even our films follow that pattern if you observe closely.

In the movie the good man (played by the hero)and the bad man (played by the villain) are locked in a conflict throughout the three hours. Only in the end does the good man defeat and win over the evil villain. Very much like the familiar pattern of our epics and other traditional literary works.

Kenchamma an imaginary construction of the writer is real and active. But she appears in the powerful imaginations of the people of *Kanthapura*. That thirty five words can achieve so much by clever alterations made in the linguistic and cultural structures of a foreign language and made to carry so much meaning is truly remarkable. Isn't it? Well that's what Rao has achieved. Do you know why?

Well, because English in India, as you know, is learnt by the rules of grammar. It is the language we use to study, read books, write exams, carry on intellectual debates. But it is not our mother tongue. It is not the language that comes to us when we cry out in pain. When in pain or grief an Indian might call out for his mother ("Ma") or for his God ("Hai Bhagwan"). Expressions of pain and grief are emotions. Most Indians won't use English to express their deepest emotions. So to use "English" for

expressing the emotions of Indian characters was a major challenge. And you've just seen how that was overcome by Raja Rao and his contemporaries.

The second challenge was that English is not the language you encounter on the streets. Your milkman or maid servant won't speak English nor will your rickshawwalla or your grandparents. The difficulty that Rao and Anand were experiencing was very real. How were they to write in English about people who do not normally speak English? The problem was accentuated when the novelist had to write dialogues or report the conversation among Indian characters belonging to different classes or castes of society.

Therefore, these three novelists – Rao, Anand and Narayan - experimented vigorously and tried to modify and invent new words and proverbs in English and make them "Indian" to represent the speech of their characters.

Rao successfully created in English the feeling that the characters were speaking Kannada. Indeed, he does it so effectively that even those who are not familiar with the rigid social structure of a South Indian village, will have observed in *Kanthapura* how a man's caste can be judged from his speech. He has tried to create this feeling in his novel. Similarly Anand tried to create punjabi-speaking characters in English by giving a literal translation of their dialogues.

R. K. Narayan does it in his own way. He tries to convey Tamilian society and characters in English in an almost unobtrusive way. He embeds Tamilian proverbs in translation or creates them so skillfully that you may hardly notice his experiments with English.

In *the Bachelor of Arts,* the typical Indian father tells Chandran that "rupees do not grow on trees" which is modification of the English idiom "money does not grow on trees", only it sounds more Indian. In another instance, he changes the idiom "it's no use crying over split milk" into "it's no use crying over split milk", and both these modifications are done so subtly that you may hardly notice them though the feeling remains that this is how Indian characters would speak. Of course, in Narayan there are present other cultural markers too - Tamilian customs, religious fasts and ceremonies that help the reader to grasp the regional origin of his characters.

In this context, let me share a funny episode with you. The year was 1977 and I was teaching the "Indian English Novel" to the First year engineering students at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. We had begun discussing *The Bachelor of Arts* and were well on to the fifth lecture. At the end of the class, a Tamilian girl student came to me and complained about the novel. She said "Narayan has brought in the Tamilian customs, beliefs, and proverbs that I see and practise in my own home everyday. How can this be a novel? What the young girl was saying was that the novel was too real to be called fiction! You see, therefore, what I mean by Narayan being very subtle with his experiments with English and using other markers to portray Indian society and people.

Thus, Narayan too bends the English language but he does it very cleverly. Rao and Anand do it more obtrusively, more consciously. Rao, like Anand, uses transliterations from the Kannada such as describing the family next door as the "That-House people". He constantly re-works his syntax to convey the speaking voice in *Kanthapura.*

However, what is common to these novelists and most of the others such as Bhabani Bhattacharya or G. V. Desani (whom I haven't discussed here) is that they use English to convey a small geographical area or regional reality.

They translate from Punjabi, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada or Bengali depending on the region from which they come. This had to happen since India is a large country and

the writers while writing their novels had chosen to write about the regions they were most familiar with. This may be seen as a limitation today since the advent of the pan – Indian English novels of the 1980s and after. However the efforts of the novelists to use their regional language to forge a new English were remarkable and represented an important landmark in the development of Indian English Fiction. The magnitude of the post 1930s Indian novelists' achievement in creating characters, their emotions, values, beliefs and caste and class relationships has to be appreciated before we can appreciate Rushdie's considerable contributions to the re-making of English in *Midnight's Children*. I hope this section has made their achievements and efforts quite clear to you.

2.3 RUSHDIE ON ENGLISH AND *englishes*

Ever since Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* won him the Booker Prize, Rushdie has been a popular speaker at seminars and press conferences. This has given him the advantage of speaking explicitly about what shapes his writing. From each of his talks the impression I gather is that he is a rather thoughtful writer who has reflected deeply on the way he would like to use the language to structure his fiction. This means that as his readers and critics we get a lot of information that enables us to apply it to his works and evaluate how far they mirror his artistic, literary objectives and philosophy.

Rushdie is the most articulate and important Indian English writer , after Raja Rao to have spoken about his aesthetics at such length. That is what makes one see parallels between them. Even though Rushdie has always denied Rao as a literary ancestor, both have been path-breaking novelists in what they have done to their use of English and in their technique. But more about techniqe in another unit. Here I'll be focussing on Rushdie's use of English and how successful he has been with what he has done with the language.

In 1984, in his lecture "Describing Reality as a Political Act", Rushdie described his views on English in a way that recalls Rao's views though he may have arrived at them independently. He stated that

> One of the changes has to do with attitudes towards the use of English, the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we cannot use it simply the way the British did that it needs re-making for our purpose ....

Rushdie spoke of the English used by the British as the English written with a capital "E" and of the different englishes (that were now being used in different parts of the world where once the British had ruled) as being written with the small letter 'e'. These 'englishes' were re-makings of the English inherited in the former colonial countries and societies by writers who aimed to use them for the purpose of writing about their own people and struggles in the aftermath of colonisation.

He describes this as the phenomenon of the "Empire hitting back" with a vengeance and says he finds these englishes to be more vibrant than English. He observes that the formerly colonised had re-fashioned English in a way that had decolonised the english language they had inherited from the British. Now, isn't this very close to what Raja Rao had said in 1938 in his Foreword? Although, Rushdie does not acknowledge his debt to Rao, the fact remains, as I said earlier, that changing the cultural baggage of the English language to represent their own societies has been the paradigm of Indian novelists (including Rushdie) writing in English. There is no other way to do it too perhaps because the novel as a literary form is the most society-centric of all literary genres. Poetry, drama can do without going into details

about a society but not the novel. It is so sociological in nature and people-centric that a reference to the culture, to the way that different peoples think, is inevitable. Hence the Indian novelist who chooses to write about Indian themes is forced to re-shape and modify the English language and make it a suitable medium to represent Indian society and characters. His precurssors did it and Rushdie has done it. The questions that we then have to discuss now are: What is the contribution of Rushdie to English? What is the difference between his use of English and the use of English by Rao, Narayan and Anand? I shall discuss these questions in the section that follows.

2.4 RUSHDIE AND THE HYBRIDIZED ENGLISH

Well, the one major difference that I can readily observe and I did point it out in an earlier section is that Rao, Narayan and Anand draw upon their mother tongues – Kannada, Tamil and Punjabi to create the English they need in their novels. They bring into their novels the regional flavour that places their characters geographically, culturally and linguistically. Rushdie entering the scene of the Indian English novel with his *Midnight's Children*, which is a book not about any one region but the whole subcontinent, uses English as a pan-Indian language and not as a regional language.

How does he do it? He does it by using "Hinglish" in place of any one regional language. "Hinglish" is a mixture of Hindi the national language and English. Did you know "Hinglish" is an artificially created language? No, it wasn't created by Rushdie, but by the famous Hindi film gossip magazine *Stardust*! The late Devyani Chaubal its spunky editor in the early 1970s first began using an English that befitted Bollywood gossip so well – "Actress X pataoes actor Y". This usage has become so common that many of you must have grown up using it in school, college and home. It is, like many things in India, hybrid in nature – Bhangra pop, for example. So it seems so natural today to use a hybrid English or "Hinglish" as it is called, for our daily conversations. "Come let's go for *chai* (tea) or "I've told her *hajaar* (a thousand) times to come on time" are all instances of Hinglish. Now, the beauty of "Hinglish" is that it is spoken and understood in different parts of the country. For one thing, the English-educated generations have overcome their colonial hang-up about using Hindi. For another, while people in the villages are trying to learn English those in the southern Indian states have picked up Hindi, possibly from TV serials! So, "Hinglish" is commonly used in the country today. It creates a sense of its being a pan-Indian language cutting across regional, religious and class barriers.

Rushdie, unlike the novelists who preceded him, uses the hybrid, pan-Indian "Hinglish" to communicate the worldview and emotions of his characters. It is very effective because it is easily recognizable as the speaking voice of the common man or woman in India. This was not so in the novels of Narayan, Rao and Anand. In their novels, you always had to consciously suspend your belief that the tongawalla or the sweeper were speaking in English. But look at this example from *Midnight's Children* :

> She (Padma) attempts to cajole me from my desk : "Eat, na, food is spoiling." I remained stubbornly hunched on paper .... Padma snorts. Wrist smacks across forehead. "Okay, starve, starve, who cares two pice."

Before I give you my interpretation, will you please write down in the space provided below what Rushdie has achieved in this passage through his use of English and how?

The first thing you must have observed is that Rushdie uses British English for the educated male narrator Saleem, and "Hinglish" for Padma (Saleem's uneducated beloved)so that gives us the knowledge that these characters belong to different-social classes. While the British English highlights the stubborn moody character of Saleem, as Padma tries to "cajole" him and persuade him to eat much like an Indian wife is likely to do, her "snorts", and wrist smacks across forehead reveal his and her frustration and his inflexibility. The Hinglish used here also suggests a number of things, First, the effect of both the sentences, - "eat na, food is spoiling" and "okay, starve, starve who cares two pice" implies that Padma is not speaking English. The reason is the use of the word "na" in the first sentence and the grammatical "error" ("food is spoiling" rather than "the food is getting cold") which are more likely to be used in the vernacular. Again, in the second sentence, the use of "starve" twice for emphasis definitely communicates that it is not an English utterance. In English, one never uses a word twice for emphasis. For example "I sang while I worked." This usage of the same word twice in succession is more common in the vernacular – "*Maine gaate gaate kaam kiya.*"

This, in a few sentences using some British English and some "Hinglish", Rushdie is able to convey a great deal about his character, their close relationship, personalities, emotions, social class, educational level and culture .

2.6 IS RUSHDIE AN INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELIST?

Rather intriguingly, in an interview he gave in 1982, Rushdie stated that there is no such thing as Indian-British fiction! He felt that writers like Narayan and Anand have "more affinities to Indian writers in the Indian languages than they do to a writer like me who just happens to be writing in English" (Interview 1982).

Now while the distinctive way in which Rushdie uses English is quite obvious but what is controversial here is his view that the Indian English novel, is not separate from British fiction. Does this means that Rushdie regards all literature written in English as an offshoot of the British novel while he considers those novelists like Rao, Narayan and Anand who borrow their regional languages as belonging to the vernacular Indian writers.

But interestingly in each of his novels, especially *Midnight's Children* he has used "Indian English" and not British English to represent the speech of his Indian characters. Indeed, if there is a difference between his forerunners and him, then it is this that while Narayan, Rao, Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya invariably were at pains not to use a single vernacular word, phrase or idiom untranslated into English, Rushdie often refuses to make such concessions for the western reader. Although he occasionally uses a Hindi or Urdu word in the original - the meaning of these unfamiliar Indianisms has to be derived largely from the context. The western reader has to work hard to decipher their significance which an Indian reader would recognize instantly because of a mutually shared cultural and sociological heritage. This method of embedding the English language with select Indianisms is a clear advancement in the Indian writer's attempt to use Hinglish as a decolonized form of English. In using it, Rushdie can be considered a pioneer in Indian English Fiction. Examine these two exchanges between Tai, the hoary boatman and the child Aziz Aadam :

> 'No, tell, Taiji, how old (you are) truly?... And now
> a brandy bottle, materializes from nowhere : cheap
> liquor from the folds of the great warm chugha coat.
> Then a shudder, a belch... 'How old? You ask how
> Old, you little wet-head, you nosey .... So, old nakkoo!' (16)

The inquisitive child wanting the white bearded Tai to tell him his age, and Tai not wanting to disclose it is a scene typically enacted between all children and their elders with the former ready to believe that any one older than them must be ancient, and the latter too ashamed to acknowledge the passage of age. The exchange reveals the offence taken by the old man and returned in the pejorative "you nosey" and "old nakoo", at the impudence of the disrespectful young boy towards an elder. The other Indianisms here include "*chuga*" coat and the ungrammatical use of the verb (to 'tell') without the subject ('me') and the use of the complement ('how old') without the subject and predicate ('you are'); they read like utterances in the regional languages.

That Rushdie wants to use English not merely as an intellectual's language but also to communicate emotions is clear from the opening of Chapter 6 titled " A Public Announcement":

> There followed an illusionist January, a time so still on its surface that 1947 seemed not to have begun at all ... (while, of course, in fact....) In which the Cabinet Mission – old Patrick Lawrence, clever Cripps, military A. V. Alexander – saw their scheme for the transfer of power fail. (But of course, in fact, it would only be six months until ...) In which the viceroy Wavell understood that *he was finished, washed up, or in our own expressive word, funtoosh* (64, italics added)

A slightly longer quotation but I want to use it to make two separate points. For the first point, please pay attention only to the italicized words. They communicate the emotional drain that the loss of India as a colony had meant to the departing English government. The words 'finished' and 'washed up' are not enough, Rushdie clarifies; such powerful feelings can only be communicated through our own expressive (vernacular) word 'funtoosh'.

My second point is to draw your attention to the use of dots and dashes in *Midnight's Children* which Rushdie admits he learnt from G. V. Desani in his novel *All About H Hatterr* (1948) Desani first showed him that it was possible to break up the English language and put it back together in a different way. He says in his interview:

> I found I had to punctuate it (*Midnight's Children*) in a very peculiar way,... I had to use dashes too much, keep exclaiming, putting in three dots, sometimes three dots followed by semi-colons followed by three dashes...That sort of thing just seemed to help to dislocate the English and let other things into it. Desani does that all the time in *Hatter*... (1982)

If you reflect on this carefully, you will observe that that's what all the Indian English novelists have really been doing with British English. They too have been dislocating it, breaking up its existing linguistic cultural patterns, introducing new cultural patterns into it and localizing it for creative use. Rushdie has been doing that too. So, doesn't it then make Rushdie belong as much to the Indian English literary tradition as the other novelists – Narayan, Rao and Anand? Clearly like them, Rushdie is not writing British fiction, but very much an Indian English fiction.

2.7 ENGLISH "DE-DOXIFIED"

Since the late 1960s, a major revolution has been underway to question the very way in which we perceive inherited ways of thinking about reality. It began in Paris in France with Ferdinand Saussure and Ronald Barthes and has since developed into a

full fledged school of Post Structural criticism and intellectual thought. Its influence has been felt in almost every area and discipline of study.

According to this school some ideas are actually formulated by society to preserve the position and power of society's politically, socially, economically dominant groups but these ideas are passed off as 'natural' or cultural in origin. In reality these ideologies have been created to justify the presence of inequalities so that the minority or marginalized sections may not challenge the dominance of the majority or the privileged groups.

For example, the Indian belief that one is born a *sudra* or a woman because of one's *karma*, is an ideology which reasons that we are where we are because of our past actions. Because this ideology seems incontestable, once we believe in the *Karma* theory, then the power groups continue to exercise their dominance while the powerless passively accept their dominance over themselves. What makes ideologies so difficult to dislodge is the conditioning since birth of the 'naturalness' of those unequal situations in societies.

When Barthes defined Poststructualist thought he was instrumental in challenging all such 'natural' constructions and exposing the political intentions of the powerful who were interested in keeping these ideologies and beliefs alive. He described these as the 'Doxa' or public opinion or the 'Voice of Nature' (Barthes 1977b) and questioned if in truth they were natural or were they man made.

Closely following Post structuralist thinking is Postmodernism in art and architecture which has given expression to upturning given traditional, cultural public opinion or 'doxa' by consciously re-writing the same script in reverse. The effect is sensational as it pulls down the powerful from their habitual position and places the powerless in their place. Let's consider Anand's novel *Untouchable* as an example to see how this works.

In *Untouchable* the well-built low caste Bakha is spat upon, abused and slapped by the short and thin high caste Hindu merely because he accidently touches him. Since you've studied that book, I want you to notice the special mention made in that scene of the fact that the strong Bakha could easily have beaten and overpowered the small and puny Hindu. And can you recall what run's through Bakha's mind at that time? That despite the inner rage he cannot retaliate because of his conditioning that his station in life does not allow him to beat up a high caste. Mulk Raj Anand by depicting an untouchable as the hero of his novel and by providing the narratorial comment about Bakha's conditioned state was creating history. But that is not revolutionary enough for postmodern writers.

What a postmodern work would do would be to represent the low caste as militant rather than meek. In a postmodern novel, Anand would have written the scene twice, once as he has scripted it in his novel and then again with the reverse script, wherein, he would have shown Bakha as returning the caste Hindu's slap with powerful blows that would have made the caste Hindu tremble in fear or run for his life.

This would mean rewriting a given socio cultural-script in reverse. Such rewritten reverse scripts create new realities that are as equally valid as the existing ones in which the superior group is privileged. Along these lines, an entire range of ideologies can be challenged. For example, one may challenge the superiority of man or over woman, sanity versus madness, white over black and so on.

Now when the writer re-scripts given assumptions, he needs to frame language in a certain way which is called 'de-doxification'. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* there is ample evidence of the use of 'de-doxification'. Consider this description of Jesus Christ by Tai the boat man where Jesus is spoken of not as a revered prophet

figure but as an imperfect, ordinary, fun-loving visitor having a great time in Kashmir:

> "Nakoo, listen, listen. I have seen plenty
> Yara, you should've seen Isa (Jesus) when
> he came, beard down to his balls, bald as
> an egg on his head.... And what an
> appetite!.... Saint or devil, I swear he could
> eat a whole kid in one go.... I told him eat,
> fill your hole....He just came here to live it
> up a little " (16)

Obviously a cooked-up tale. Yet, Coming from the lips of the bawdy, crude boatman, his irreverence seems very much in character. At the same time Rushdie achieves his poststructural purpose ; he challenges the usual practice of privileging prophets over ordinary men. Here he does it unobtrusively but in *The Satanic Verses*, he did it so openly that it got him into severe trouble as you all know.

2.8 RUSHDIE'S USE OF ENGLISH IN DESCRIPTIVE SCENES

Rushdie uses the English language to describe landscapes or actions so that these acquire a three dimensional cinematic quality. He draws on the visual, auditory, kinesthetic senses and conveys images, feelings and sounds in a way that render them immediate and experienceable . In the passage quoted below Saleem tries to show off to Evie that he has learnt how to ride a bike. Evie is his neighbour on whom he has a crush while Evie is soft towards Sonny.

> Roundandroundand... finally, to please her (Evie) , I stammered,
> 'Okay... I think I'm ... let me ', and instantly I was on my own,
> she had given a farewell shove .... I heard her shouting. The
> brake ! Use the goddamn brake ya dummy !'- but my hands couldn't
> move, I had gone rigid as a plank, and there LOOK OUT in front of
> me was the blue two – wheeler of Sonny Ibrahim, collision course,
> OUTA THE WAY YA CRAZY .... (186-87)

Did you notice the use of capital letters to convey Saleem's inner dialogue and thoughts, and Rushdie's practice of joining three to four words without a hyphen (roundandroundand) to communicate uninterrupted motion? This use of language is present in many passages of the book. Can you find a few others?

Again look at the following description of the arrival of spring in Kashmir after a long snow-laden winter. The metaphor used is that of a newborn chick emerging out of its eggshell , bringing with itself a sense of something new, young, fresh, just born:

> The world was new again. After a winter's gestation in its eggshell of ice,
> the valley had beaked its way out into the open, moist and yellow (10).

The third scene that I share with you reflects Saleem's great sense of loss and pain at realizing that his parents don't want him back because they have just discovered that he is not their son but someone (born to a poor singer) had been exchanged at birth in Narlikar's Hospital by their ayah Mary Pereira :

> This, then, was the beginning of my first exile ...
> I bore it uncomplainingly.... I had been loaned out,
> like a comic-book from the Scandal Point Second

Hand Library for some indefinite period; and that when my parents wanted me back, they would send for me. When, or even if ...(240)

Descriptions such as these are not culture specific but universal in their reach to re-create basic human experience. Beyond the writer of Indian English themes, Rushdie is also a humanist in the best sense of the word.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, I have highlighted the different ways in which Indian English novelists have tried to the use the English language so that it could be different from the colonizer's (British) English.

I have also shown you how Rushdie , despite his disclaimer, belongs very much to the Indian English literary tradition, and have shared with you his numerous experiments and contributions to the re-making of Indian English in fiction.

Further, I have emphasized the difference between him and his forerunners in his use of 'de-doxified' English and showed him to be equally skilled in penning descriptive scenes and human experiences that belong to no particular time frame or culture.

2.10 GLOSSARY

articulate: to express clearly and effectively

embed: to fix something firmly and deeply (in a mass of surrounding matter)

forge: shape

genres: class of works of art or literature

ideology: a set of ideas

intriguing: interesting, provoking thought

irreverence: lack of respect

pan-indian: common across the regions and cultures of India

perjorative: word or phrase that suggests that somebody is worthless

predecessor: person who has come before someone else

privilege: special right or advantage given to a few

syntactical: by the rules of grammar used for ordering or connecting words in sentence

transliteration: to translate literally

unobtrusive: not seen or noticed easily

2.11 QUESTIONS

1. Attempt a detailed analysis of any two passages from the novel (other than those discussed here) so as to highlight Rushdie's particular talents with the use of English.

2. How far do you agree or disagree with my views on Rushdie's use of English in *Midnight's Children*? Discuss with illustrations of your own.

2.12 SUGGESTED READING

Kirpal, Viney. *The Postmodern Indian English Novel: A Study of the 1980s and 1990s* (Allied, 1996).

Parameswaran, Uma. Salman Rushdie in Indo-English Literature in *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 12:2 (July 1984).

Roy, Anjali. *Making New Words/Worlds: Options for the Indian Novelist in English* in (ed) C.D. Narasimhaiah's *Makers of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Pencraft, 2000.

UNIT 3 THEMES IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective is to help you understand what are Rushdie's main themes in *Midnight's Children* and how Rushdie has developed certain themes in ways which make him belong among other migrant Indian English novelists.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Whenever someone suggests that you read such and such a work or novel, probably the first question you are likely to ask is : "What is it about?" Of course the book may be about a certain philosophy or world view or may be stylistically or technically memorable but what every prospective reader (and I repeat *every* reader) is interested in, is the central theme, or loosely the story of the book.

E.M. Foster in *Aspects of the Novel* (Have you read it? If not, do read it) rightly says that it is human nature to be interested in a story. The moment someone says "I am going to tell you a story," no human being can resist gathering around the teller. What makes a story irresistible to the listeners is the element of suspense that the writer, especially a novelist, builds in his work with the help of what-happened-next and what-happened-next.

Thus, any novel that we take up for reading will have a series of events and situations and characters involved in those situations, so much so that the larger the novel, the more numerous will be the events and the people with their anxieties or joys. The story is made even more confusing with not only those characters speaking about themselves or to others, but also (unknown to them) there are others too who express their opinions about them and their actions and of how they feel affected by them. Over and above all this, there is the novelist himself who through narratorial comments or asides, or certain characters, is offering additional insights.

In the end, the most difficult question to answer about a book is "What is it about?" But if we are careful readers, as I believe you are, being postgraduate students, then the method is to very briefly summarize every chapter of the novel as you finish reading it. By the time you have finished reading the novel, you will discover that a few basic themes seem to emerge in the novel. This is because, at the foundation of every novel with its numerous events and happenings, lie just a handful of themes. If you can develop the art of recognizing the major themes in a novel, you will enjoy reading it so much more, besides actually feeling a sense of control over what you read. Does that make sense?

At the beginning of Unit 1, I had requested you to read the novel once through quickly. Did you do that? Do you think you can list some of its themes? Why not give it a try in the space provided below?

_____

_____

_____

_____

You will get my response soon enough but before that let me suggest one more aspect of the themes that appear in *Midnight's Children* or in any novel for that matter. Whenever we examine the total output of any novelist, we normally find that a limited number of themes seem to be repeated in his or her different works.

For example, in Raja Rao's novels the usual theme is the superiority of vedantic, spiritual India over the materialistic west. In R. K. Narayan's novels, the clash is between the traditional Indian values and the values from the west, and the choice of the protagonist to modernize Indian values by borrowing eclectically from the west. In the novels of Anita Desai - the novelist who hit the Indian writing scene in the 1960s - the definition of a person's identity as an individual (not as an Indian) prevails. Now why do you think that this happens?

I grant that the difference in the thematic concerns of Rao, Narayan and Desai originates in their distinct personalities. That does seem like a fairly natural answer, doesn't it? Since all of us are different, we choose to write about different matters. But I want you to consider this matter from another perspective. If two novelists had absolutely identical personalities would they choose to write of the same themes? Or, would the age, the period, the environment in which the writer was born or raised also influence her choice and interpretation of her themes? Further is it also possible that though a number of writers may have preceded or followed a particular writer, it is this writer's representation of themes that seems to touch and affect his readers more than that of the other writers? If so, what is it that makes for the difference?

Keep thinking about this question and try to find an answer. You will indeed, if you try. On this note, I'm going to leave you to reflect awhile, and then take you to the next section where I will discuss the first the major theme of *Midnight's Children*, which is "History and the Individual." Check out if you were able to locate it as a result of the exercise I set you in the beginning of this section.

3.2 HISTORY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Do you find it strange that in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie establishes a strong connection between the history of India and the life of Saleem, his protagonist as if the two were Siamese twins? I did, when I first read this novel and I am sure so did many other readers. Right from the moment of his birth, Saleem is described as being "mysteriously hand-cuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was no escape." (9) Thus, Rushdie sets the scene for us to believe a strange tale, if true, that Saleem Sinai by being born in Bombay on 15th August 1947 at the stroke of midnight, becomes the first child born in independent India, and that his story is the history of free India.

What makes it interesting is that though many Indians must have been born on 15th August 1947 at 12 midnight (one of my own cousins was, and you too may recall a friend or member of the family) but no one ever thought that such people carried within them the history of free India!

The connection that Rushdie establishes between every personal event in Saleem's life and that of his family, and the political and historical events that unfold in independent India is carefully maintained throughout the novel, even though sometimes it can sound a bit forced as in the latter part of the novel.

When *Midnight's Children* first appeared, this kind of connection seemed too far-fetched to many readers but you can understand how such connections are quite possible in contemporary times because of the reach of the media. You may recall a disturbing happening that occurred a few months ago. Riots broke out in Nepal after it was rumoured that the well-known Indian film star Hrithik Roshan had said in a TV interview that he disliked the Nepalese. Going by such incidents, it is no longer impossible to believe the connection between the individual and historical events nor is there any need to exercise "a willing suspension of disbelief," as we had to while reading fiction until a few decades ago.

Thus, as we read through Saleem's account, we see, among other things that Saleem was responsible for the language riots of the 1950s, that he played a pivotal role in the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 and that when in 1975 Indira Gandhi imprisoned political opponents and suspended the democratic rights of the people during the "Emergency" that she had proclaimed to save herself from going to prison over proven charges of corruption during the elections, he feels drained out and close to death.

Likewise, not only in free India but even before, a number of events are given an individual as well as a historical importance. For example, Saleem's grandparents Aziz and Naseem Sinai on their way from Kashmir to Agra, stop over in Amritsar, where Aziz experiences at first hand, the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre. I shall now quote a passage from *Midnight's Children* mainly to demonstrate to you the manner in which Rushdie captures one of the worst moments in India's colonial history - the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre - through the mock heroic description of the chilling effects it has on the individual, Aadam Aziz - who has lived through it all.

> As the fifty one men march down the alley way (to the Jallianwallah Bagh) a tickle replaces the itch in my Grandfather's nose. The fifty one men enter the compound and take up positions, twenty-five to Dyer's right and twenty-five to his left... As Brigadier Dyer issues a command the sneeze hits my grandfather full in the face. 'Yaaaahh-thooo! he sneezes and falls forward ... thereby saving his life .... Red stuff stains his shirt. There are screams now and sobs and the strange chattering continues. More and more people seem to have stumbled and fallen on top of my grandfather." (36)

Thus, while General Dyer is firing and shooting ruthlessly at unarmed Indians, Aziz sneezes and falls forward. And when thousands of trapped Indians are shot dead, "red stuff" stains his shirt. The massacre itself is heralded by an itch in his nose. The events are tragic and serious but the effect is described in a comic and non serious absurd way. This is how Rushdie keeps drawing the parallels between the life of an ordinary individual and major historical events through the 31 chapters of the novel. The day Saleem is born, his parents acquire the house of the Englishman, Mr. Methwold, (whose parents had established British rule in India and India gains independence). His parents, grandparents and an aunt are killed on 23 September 1965, the day India's Airforce bombs Rawalpindi. Shiva his powerful and violent enemy moves in to live with Parvati-the-witch in May 1974 on the very day that India explodes its first nuclear test bomb; their son Aadam is born on 25 June 1975, the day Emergency is declared for the first time in India. The book is full of examples that demonstrate Saleem's belief that he is linked to history "both literally and metaphorically" (238).

This method is very different from the way history books are written. If I were to quote a passage from the book of Indian history on the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre then the narration would focus on dates and facts such as the number of people dead, the impact of the massacre on British rule in India and so on. Or, if it were a passage on the Emergency in India, it would focus on the reasons – real and imaginary for its imposition, and on its consequences for India and Indira Gandhi. The way Rushdie does it is to treat history as fiction, that is not to take it seriously. So, nowhere does he retell history as fact. Indeed, the history that he narrates is full of mistakes in dates, and this Saleem argues is because it is derived from recollection and memory . In other words, Saleem Rushdie seems to be writing history as Saleem's autobiography.

Rushdie would like to show us that the history in *Midnight's Children* is as much fiction as any other and that it should not be seen as an objective chronicle of the times that form the backdrop of his novel. Unlike history which is usually linear and chronological, his narration is cyclical and he obviously shows a desire to so shape his material that the reader will be forced to accept its non-objective nature. The central rule is that the small errors in the text such as the wrong dates of important events including the date of Gandhi's assassination are clues indicating that Saleem is capable of consciously distorting facts.

Rushdie has bemoaned the fact that his book is often read as history rather than as fiction. But to read it as pure fiction would be to miss the point too. Saleem's absurd story linking the history of a nation with that of an ordinary family chosen at random, is meant at one level, to expose the absurdity of history and to challenge the confidence and pride of a historian and historiographer's attempt to explain to us what really happened in the past. Yet on the other hand, it is meant to capture the most difficult period in independent India's history namely the period of the Emergency . But more of that later.

In the novel Saleem cuts up seemingly important political newspaper articles at random and then rearranges them to constitute a new view of reality . He shows the power of re-made reality when he pieces together randomly cut out newspaper items, words, syllables and letters to form a message to Commander Sabarmati that his wife is unfaithful to him; the message leads the husband into murdering his wife's paramou. and being jailed. His absurd action reflects the absurdity of the historian's claim of presenting history as an objective truth and to show that history can be bent to serve dangerous and individual designs.

As I mentioned earlier, this book also represents Rushdie's great grief and sorrow at the turn of the events in Indian politics that lead to the imposition of the Emergency at the recommendation of the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975 to save herself from going to prison. The Emergency which lasted from 1975 – 1977 had spelt the gravest threat to Indian democracy since Independence, especially because of the version that Mrs. Gandhi had given to the nation for its imposition. The Emergency, she had persuaded the President of India, was necessary to save the country from external threat, while there was none. The years of the Emergency will therefore remain etched in Indian memory as the darkest period in the history of free India. Characterized by repressions, the censorship of the press, the imprisonment of the leaders of the opposition, the torture of activists including artists, dismissals from jobs, forced retirements and untold brutalities on the people of India, it was a time when the India had become a totalitarian state. No wonder it was a period marked by an overriding feeling of impotence and crippling despair for having lost to very powerful forces. By creating a non-heroic character and a family through which Rushdie gives us the history of India, especially the dark period of the Emergency, he is trying to dramatically re-create the close brush with dictatorship and the complete helplessness that almost every average (and hence powerless) Indian of the times had experienced. The book which ends with the imposition of the Emergency is

appropriately despair-ridden because no one at that time knew that Mrs. Gandhi would lift the Emergency and call for the elections, or that the angry people of India would vote her out and replace her with the opposition . This kind of personalization of history makes the events of the times live in the psyche of the reader, an achievement that is not possible in an ordinary book of history. Saleem's life from his birth to his near death-like condition, is meant to parallel the journey of free India from an optimistic nation to a comatose, submissive one.

It may interest you to know that many West Indian writers too (Have you read any?) have created the character of a child who grows up from childhood into adulthood and established a connection between the growing child and the new nation. For example George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* shows the child gaining adulthood even as West Indian society is alongside evolving a political consciousness of its own. The grown up young man represents hope , joy, optimism and opportunity as he sets out to build a new future for himself and his country. This motif of a growing and evolving child fits in beautifully with the fiction written about the "historyless", "traditionless" West Indies.

As you know the colonizers – the British, the French and the Spaniards--had destroyed the Caribs, the original inhabitants of the West Indies and transported slaves from Central Africa to populate these islands as cheap labour for their sugar plantations. Since the slaves were not allowed to stay together in families they experienced total disconnection from the groups they had once belonged to. Over a period of a century or two, the people who lived in the West Indies had lost all sense of history and tradition. So when the English-educated West Indian novelists began writing in the 1950s, they created the character of a growing child to suggest the growth of the West Indian consciousness of its own identity.

Unlike the happy, optimistic child of West Indian literature , Rushdie's growing child Saleem only grows older; he does not evolve. And as he grows older he gets more and more misshapen and ugly and closer to death. . He is emasculated and castrated during the Emergency, and he passively waits for death. He seems to have become a person who has lost all control over his life because of political circumstances and lack of will. Through this character Rushdie is trying to represent not a nation full of hope but a nation whose voice has been muzzled and which is in a hopeless state because of the historical-political events.

At the end of the novel you feel like asking : What is Rushdie really doing to history in creating a character like Saleem? Has any other Indian English writer before Rushdie used history as a theme? How is Rushdie different? Let us reflect a little on these questions.

The use of historical material in creative writing dates back to the times of the epics themselves. History was also used in the novels by Indian English writers such as Raja Rao, Khuswant Singh, Chamal Nahal, and Manohar Malgaonkar. While Singh, Nahal and Malgaonkar wrote about Indian independence and the Partition, they wrote from a perspective that suggested that there is such a thing as a history. Rushdie by contrast, is trying to suggest that history is a lie. Raja Rao, too was re-writing the history of the village *Kanthapura* , a counter history, and not just a history as narrated in history books written by British historians.

With *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao became the first Indian English novelist to write about the history of colonialized India in a way which subverted and undermined the colonizers' view of India. He wrote a history which was not chronological. It was without a proper beginning, middle and end and it talked about the oppression and exploitation of the common Indian in the 1930s. His history was far from British history which projected the colonizer as someone who had come to civilize India at great sacrifice and cost. Rao's "oral" narrative was a "narrative of resistance" to the British written history of colonization.

Frantz Fanon, the author of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) has described the three phases through which writers in the former colonies gradually mature. In the first phase, their works are imitative of the colonizer's literature. In the second phase, they attack the colonizer for the wrongs they have done to their country (Rao's *Kanthapura* belongs to this phase). In the third phase, the writers address and attack the political events and politicians in the newly freed country. (Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* mainly belongs to this stage, though he also makes forays into the second stage as well).

Together, Rao and Rushdie have in their own ways challenged received versions of history, though Rushdie has attempted the theme in a more complex way. His aim is to go beyond a mere attack of the British and the Indian governments to highlight the way in which history can be changed and manipulated by those in power. The difference also lies in Rao's perception of Indian society as a homogenous one, existing within a well-defined Hindu mythical religious frame work. By contrast, Rushdie's world view is secular, plural and modern. In *Midnight's Children* we are not reading about a Muslim character but about a character who is an Indian i.e., a product of mixed traditions and many races.

The individual since the 20th century has become a very small and powerless being because governments have become very, very oppressive and powerful. This postmodern insight is clearly seen in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem, is the centre of attention at the time of his birth – the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru writes to his parents; newspapers carry his pictures, celebrate his arrival and award him for being India's first midnight child. But as he grows older, he begins to lose his position, first in the Sinai household and then in the country itself. So much so that at 31, Saleem feels completely drained out and impotent having been forcibly castrated during the Emergency. Rushdie's treatment of the theme of the individual and history highlights the tragedy of being an individual in contemporary times.

To sum up what Rushdie has done is not easy because it is obvious that he is writing this novel where the life of the individual is fused with that of the nation, not as a fictional gimmick but as an attempt to create an emotional spot in the reader about the most sad and disturbing event in the history of free India. Interestingly and (and perhaps inadvertently), Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* triggered off a new mode of fiction writing amongst Indian English novelists. There have been over 20 novels since the publication of *Midnight's Children*, wherein the life of the individual runs parallel with the life of the nation. The new trend highlights the contribution of Rushdie to the Indian novel in English.

To conclude, Rushdie is the first Indian English novelist who consciously uses history in fiction to show its subjective, untruthful nature and its easy manipulation by modern day governments. He describes historical events through the emotions of his characters. To reveal the trivial role played by the individual in countering powerful modern day governments, he does it in a mock heroic, absurd way.

3.3 COLONIALISM AND NEO-COLONIALISM IN INDIA

What has set apart writers from former colonies has been among other things a desire to set right the record of their country's history, traditions and civilizations through their work. This has been specially so in the case of migrant writers. Most Indian migrant writers - and Rushdie is one of them – are what I would like to call activist writers. They carry their political challenges to authority into their books and simultaneously connect the books with the world outside.

Perhaps the distance in years from their mother country gives them the detachment necessary for writing about it as a theme. Moreover, their negative experiences with racism in the white host country have often triggered off in them a desire to offpit the strengths of their own country against those of the new country. In the process, these writers Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Kamala Markandaya have particularly attacked the phenomenon of colonization in India with a lucidity and directness that has not been available in the writings of the stay-at-home in the novelists, perhaps because of the closeness of the latter to local events.

Thus, most migrant writers tend to write books which are political acts and constitute , in my view, true postcolonial works, if by postcolonialism one means the "decolonisation of the mind". That's what freedom is and not just political independence – (which could be merely a physical gesture of handing over power to the original natives of that country).

The works of these writers challenge the ideologically-determined paradigms of historical relationships and try to free the non-white formerly colonized person from the awe in which he or she holds the colonizer. It is not surprising therefore, that these novelists have re-invented the English language and , the fictional form, and tried to re-write their colonial history in their fiction from the perspective of the colonies.

Rushdie is carrying on from where the precursors like Raja Rao left off *Kanthapura.* In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie attacks British colonialism and its representatives symbolised in characters such as Methwold with a ruthless clarity and makes every attempt to link up many of the ills in independent India to the mischief played by the British during their reign. The moral of his representation is that had the foreigner never come here to plunder and colonize, India would have been a beautiful country. This is the typical migrant writer's standpoint.

In chapter 7 titled "Methwold" , Bombay (or microcosm India) is represented in its pristine beauty and populated by the fisherfolk called the Kolis – its earliest inhabitants. Rushdie describes how this primeval world was overrun by different invaders beginning with the Portuguese who used the harbour to shelter there the merchant ships and their men-of-war. This was followed by the East India Company led by an officer named William Methwold who successfully realized a vision of a British Bombay when in 1668 the East India Company did get its hands on the island. The worst sufferers were the fisherfolk as the invaders changed the very character of the city (Read the country) they had begun to rule (92). Regret and nostalgia marks Rushdie's narration in this chapter, as if he would like to put the clock back physically.

The nostalgia turns to anger as his narrative challenges the myth created by the British of having come here to civilize India. Haven't we all grown up sincerely believing that British rule was a good thing for India? Our educational system, our books, our syllabus have been written from a Eurocentric perspective. So we have been subtly and gradually conditioned into accepting the superiority of the British, and appreciate their efforts to civilize us.

Rushdie's Methwold is a caricature, a symbol of evil and moral degeneration rather than a fully fleshed out character. Rushdie uses him to convey his views about colonialism. Methwold in the *Midnight's Children* is a descendant of the Methwold who was the first officer of the East India Company, and he is the last European to rule India before India got its freedom. This first and last Englishman thus becomes the direct object of Rushdie's anger as he symbolizes for him the entire colonial adventure of exploitation and demoralization. (Read Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* to understand the violent nature of the colonizing process).

Right from the beginning when Methwold or "Myth world" is described as" a six foot titan with a centre-parting in his hair, [His]face the pink of roses and eternal youth" (95), you get the message clear from Rushdie – " Here's a man not to be trusted. So, the centre-parting itself becomes a defining characteristic of the British, now only too well-known for their 'Divide & Rule' policy which was very much responsible for the cutting up of British India into an independent Pakistan and an independent India - one piece for the Muslims and the other for the Non-Muslims.

The myth of the Britain's civilizational mission is easily exposed when having identified Methwold as a liar, the reader edits every statement of Methwold's from the new perspective of mistrust. When Methwold describes to Ahmed Sinai (Saleem's father) how much the Indians owe to the British, the reader sees it as yet another fiction written by a ruler :

> "you will admit we weren't all bad; built your roads,
> schools, railway trains, parliamentary system, all worthwhile
> things ..."(109-110).

Methwold's, "we" is necessarily restricted to the British; he views his people as the men who were the civilizing influence on the Indian subcontinent and would like to remind the Indians about it on the eve of his departure. He is simply unable to acknowledge the existence of any culture other than his own. There is nothing on the Estate where he lives that would suggest anything other than European culture . The architecture used in the buildings resembles medieval England's "durable mansions with red roofs and turret towers in each corner, ivory white corner towers wearing pointy red tiled hats" (94) .

William Methwold had named the four mansions after the famous places of Europe—Versailles, Buckingham Villa, Escorial Villa and Sansouci Villa (108) – thus denying the existence of local architectural traditions. The act also exposes the colonizer's desire to superimpose historical European paradigms on the Indian landscape and consciousness and make the colonized pliant.

Methwold, like India's last Governor General, Lord Mountbatten insists that India should retain the economic and, political framework of the British. When the inhabitants are compelled to retain the estate and the four mansions with every piece of junk within them, what do you think they are being forced to do? "Lock, Stock and Barrel" Methwold said, "those are my terms. A whim, Mr. Sinai...you will permit a departing colonial his little game? We do not have much left to do, we British, except to play our games" (95).

This may seem unbelievable but it is a fact that those colonies were given independence earlier where Britain was certain that the new government would remain within its economic and political orbit. It is also a fact that the most lasting and intense warfare (For example, in South Africa) occurred where the freedom struggle was both nationalist as well as revolutionary, and where de-colonization would mean confiscation of foreign investments and severance of economic ties with the colonizing country. The politics of colonialism is well-documented today and you may want to read more on the subject.

Through the character and conditions set by Methwold, Rushdie is drawing our attention to this politics with a sharpness that has been common to most migrant writers from the former colonies. I want you to understand this point because Rushdie's choice of themes is very much influenced by his having lived in the former colonizer's country.

Rushdie makes us aware that the game that Methwold plays concerns not only names but objects as well. The names of the houses on his Estate are of course the names of famous European palaces which were either built at the height of absolute

monarchism in Europe or as an expression of a nostalgia of that kind of absolute power. Now, these names carry a history, an entire tradition of centralized authority and the rights of Kings. Thus, when Methwold seeks to preserve the traditions of the British Raj through the objects in his estate, his hope is that the objects will affect and influence the consciousness of the new occupants in such a way that the superiority of the traditions of the British will be permanently etched on the Indian psyche.

He also tells Ahmed Sinai that he wants to select a few suitable persons and "hand everything over absolutely : in tip top working order" (111) to them. The suitable persons he has in mind are obviously members of the Indian educated middle class whose consciousness he hopes to permanently imprint with the British value system and political, economic structures and life styles.

Rushdie is brutal in his attack through his exaggerated portrayal and caricature of Methwold. He not only exposes the myth of the so-called superiority of the British, but also the colonial games that the British had played specially since Macaulay's time to create Indians who were English in spirit and mental dependants on the British. It is too big a price to buy a house to live in but as Rushdie shows it was the price that the country paid for getting its freedom. The Estate symbolizes India, earlier possessed by the British, now being handed over to Indian owners (rulers), intact with the colonizers political and economic systems.

Methwold (The British) was not off the mark in his vision of colonizing the Indian mind because as Saleem admits "Methwold's estate is changing them". As Methwold joins them at the cocktail hour, his very presence elicits the imitative Oxford drawl among Ahmed Sinai and his friends (113). The departing British had through planned psychological conditioning ensured the continued slavery of the Indian. This is the meaning of the puzzling transfer of the Estate and the houses with everything intact in them that may have bothered you as you read through (chapter 7) of the novel. You might have wondered why a rich and polished Englishman like Methwold would want to sell his Estate on such strange conditions, You may also have wondered if Methwold wasn't a very nice and amiable Englishman who despite being the last ruler was mingling so freely among the Indian buyers of his houses. I hope it is clear through explanation that the amiability is only meant as a cover-up for deeper designs that Rushdie takes such pains to expose.

If you have read carefully, you will also recall Amina Sinai (Saleem's mother) expressing her surprise and horror at the strange conditions that Methwold was imposing on the new "tenants." " Everything ?" Amina Sinai asked. "I can't even throw away a spoon? Allah, that lampshade...I can't get rid of one comb?" (95). Rushdie has built into the text the questioning of Methwold's motives by a woman of good native commonsense, such as Amina but he also wants to suggest how she is effectively silenced by men like her husband Ahmed who had obviously decided to become the new Englishmen and benefit from their new role and position in society as neo-colonials.

Rushdie's Saleem notes in his narrative how Ahmed Sinai begins to grow fairer in complexion day by day. Indeed, there is this funny scene – Can you recall it ? - where a large numbers of Indian businessman including Ahmed get up one morning and find they have turned white! Rushdie has said in an interview (1983) that this is an imagery he had used to show that "They [Indians] were stepping into British shoes, their clubs, their drinks, etc... ."

Thus very much like other migrant Indian English writers, Rushdie consciously sets out to expose British colonialism and its longer lasting impact called "neocolonialism".In this section, I haven't asked you too many questions. So try to answer this one. What is the significance of the scene of Vanita's seduction by

Methwold in Chapter 7? What do you think Rushdie is trying to convey in that scene? Give it a try before reading my answer.

This novel, like many novels by Indian English migrant writers is an allegory. An allegory is an extended metaphor where a sustained parallel is drawn from the story, character, actions and scenery to suggest a spiritual, political or psychological confrontation.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is an allegory where the individual's life and history are offered in a sustained parallel. Methwold, the Englishman is an extended metaphor for British colonization. His seduction of Vanita in the absence of her husband the street accordionist , Wee Willie Winkee, is a metaphor for appropriating and exploiting what rightfully belongs to another; which is also the meaning of colonialism. In every colony the ruling British officers had seduced and raped the wives of poor natives and left behind them the mixed products of their irresponsible union. Saleem is the son of Methwold and Vanita a child born of just such a union and raised by the Sinai family because of his having been exchanged at birth. Otherwise, he too would have been left to be raised in extreme poverty, like his "twin", Shiva . We have been conditioned to think of how fair and honorable the British were. Rushdie rips off the mask without remorse. Beneath the brilliantined black hair with its centre – parting, Methwold was " shiny – pated! Revealed : the deception which had tricked an accordionist's wife" (114).

To conclude this section. Rushdie is very much preoccupied with the theme of India's colonization and its lasting impact on the Indian mind as neocolonialism. He has used symbols and allegory to convey his strong feelings against this overwhelming phenomenon. His being a migrant has certainly heightened his feelings – even though he will always deny it.

3.4 FRAGMENTATION, MIGRANCY AND MEMORY

It is not surprising that Rushdie has concerned himself with the themes of colonialism and neo colonialism and Independent India's political history in *Midnight's Children.* A thematic examination of this sort is typical of all migrant novelists from the Third World You may want to know why . So first, I'll spend a few minutes elaborating this point because it has direct relevance to the three main themes in *Midnight's Children*, specially the theme of fragmentation, migrancy and memory which is the subject of this section and the underlying motivation of this novel.

In the 20th century began the largest -ever migration of peoples from the non-white to the white countries. It was around the 1950s that these migrations began – for economic reasons (i.e., for jobs etc). The trend has continued in the 21st century mainly because of the IT boom in the West.

However, that was not all. Third World writers have been migrating to the metropolitan capitals of London, Paris and New York to find a market for their works because readers in the Third World – would not support them. Thanks to the impact of colonization on their psyche, most educated people in the non-white former colonies felt that the great traditions of "culture" and "civilization" (Many of us still think so even today!) existed only in the West and that its literatures were superior to our own. The writers similarly looked for intellectual stimulation and encouragement

in the "ideal" environments of the West. While some writers actually migrated from the Third World, others like Raja Rao and Rushdie went to study in western universities and then stayed on for the same reason. Migration is not a simple phenomenon. Every migrant who stays away from his mother country, begins to experience an acute sense of homelessness and anxiety after the initial pleasures of being in the new land begin to fade away. This is the normal pattern of behaviour because the migrant suddenly begins to miss the familiar frame of references and relationships back home. In the case of migrants from the non-white colonies (such as India, W. Africa, E.Africa, the West Indies etc), these experiences have often been compounded by rejection in the host countries (usually white) on the basis of colour and race. Race riots keep erupting every now and then, even now, perhaps because members in the host countries feel threatened that they will be overrun and overtaken by former slaves, in their own country.

George Lamming, the famous Barbadian writer of the masterpiece *In the Castle of My Skin* (you remember I mentioned this book earlier too), has written an equally famous non-fictional work. It is called *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). It highlights, with sensitivity, the terrible dilemma and the divided feelings that a migrant (especially a writer) from the Third World experiences in the West. The dilemma is : it is painful to stay but it is as difficult to return. The migrant belongs to both worlds and at the same time to none. You recall how Rushdie expresses similar views in his novel *Shame* (Do read it if you haven't) and in the character of Aadam Aziz in *Midnight's Children.* But more of that later.

Interestingly, most migrants (including writers) try to cope with this sense of homelessness and rejection and their own inability to return, by over-idealization of home, or by the use of satire. Thus, they either tend to praise their mother country in superlatives or they satirize it and poke fun at its flaws to justify why they can't return.Rushdie belongs to the category of typical migrants.

Despite protestations to the contrary, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is as much a self-conscious expression of the expatriate writer's sensibility as any other, including Raja Rao's . All his novels, beginning with *The Serpent and the Rope* are self-conscious expressions of migrancy. Rushdie, if you recall, had attacked Rao for his nativist view of India.

Rushdie has always regarded himself as different from earlier migrant writers in the sense of being free from the idealization of nostalgia. But the fact is that beginning with *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has made Bombay or Kashmir the location of virtually all his novels. He also has chosen the method of satire to write about the political history of India and about colonialism, the two themes of *Midnight's Children* already discussed in this unit.

Fragmentation, migrancy and memory his third theme can perhaps be called the central theme of not just *Midnight's Children* but all his novels. Rushdie who is aware of its centrality in his life, his written extensively on this subject, some of which I am going to draw your attention to now since it will help us understand his treatment of the theme better.

In his article "Reclaiming a City and a History" (1984), he has said that while it is natural for a migrant writer to throw a backward nostalgic glance at his mother country and to imagine that he will be able to recover the country of his past fully, he can never do it. Because of his physical alienation from that country, the migrant writer can only "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind."

This means that when a migrant writer tries to unlock the gates of the past, as he has tried to do in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie found himself writing "a novel of memory and about memory," which is why perhaps, he made Saleem into an unreliable narrator. Saleem makes mistakes of memory, and his vision, which is affected by his(personality and)circumstances is fragmentary. In other words what

Rushdie was saying was that no matter how hard an Indian writer tries to write about India "authentically", he can't because he lives outside, and he is dealing with a reality "whose fragments have been irrretrievably lost." However, on the positive side he feels it is exciting for the migrant writer as she tries to reconstruct the past from the "broken pots of antiquity" because it is very much like what archaeologists try to do, that is, an act of imagination and creativity. As expatriate, Rushdie's concern is with "damaged reality" and the reconstruction of a whole reality which has been lost. Saleem laments the loss of his clairvoyant powers, and the loss of his security in childhood as the child of his parents. He laments the "disintegration" of his family in India and Pakistan after Partition, and "every thing which can sanely be called real." Saleem grows up viewing reality through a "perforated sheet," one bit at a time and the piecing together of a suppressed reality is his mission. Denied information, Saleem resigns himself to an alternative method – cognition or knowing through "memory's truth" : "Well then I must content myself with shreds and scraps : as I wrote centuries ago, the trick is to fill in the gaps guided by the few clues one is given.... by the other remaining shards of the past lingering in my ransacked memory – vaults ... (*Midnight's Children*., 507). Now it's time for a question. Did you notice that as Saleem writes his "novel of memory," he makes a liberal use of the images of fragmentation? Can you list some?

How many did you find besides "the perforated sheet"? Did you list at least three to four? Good! Now it's my turn. Here goes my list.(i) Saleem refers to his "fragmented being" (ii) Aadam Aziz, his grandfather confesses to having a permanent "hole the size of a melon inside me " (22) because he can never completely rid himself of his alienness. (iii) He describes himself as " a half-and-halfer" (18). The images of fragmentation ("hole; "half") highlight his predicament as a person who has fallen between two stools having been exposed to two very different cultures – the Indian and the Western. In deference to his past (his mother; Tai the boatman) he tries to be a good Muslim but he only hurts himself and the "hole" persists; he feels oppressed by narrow thinking and religious bigotry. It is the cause later, of his estrangement from his wife, Naseem, also called Reverend Mother in the novel. (iv) India is partitioned into Pakistan (v) Pakistan is further partitioned into Bangla Desh and Pakistan (vi) Saleem has several parts of his body lopped off from a finger, to his sexual organs. (vii) Families fragment, (viii) marriages break up (ix) Fragmented parentage makes it possible for Saleem to claim: "Child of an unknown union, I have had more mothers than most mothers have children; giving birth to parents has been one of my stronger talents," (291). Emotionally insecure, Saleem labours under the "fear" of losing his parents' love except under certain conditions of acceptable behaviour : "the idea that his parents' outrage might lead to a withdrawl of their love (198).

Saleem's obsession with the tracing of an ancestry is attempt to come to terms with the problems of a "divided identity", intellectually, he is drawn to the West while his emotional being looks for moorings in the mother-country. Saleem is apparently descended from the ancestral line of Aadam Aziz, himself an alienated "half-and halfer" Kashmiri Muslim. His being the child of William Methwold, the last Britisher in India, and Vanita, compounds the Kashmiri alienation with the colonial's. Being a bastard is Saleem's literal situation. Metaphorically, it echoes the typical migrant condition of a lack of belonging. Exile undoubtedly shapes and colours Saleem's perspective on life. Repeatedly confronted with conditions of exile, Saleem begins to ponder its shocks and dents upon his personality.

As Saleem becomes a homeless wanderer; his sadness and gloom echo the expatriate's. His first exile (of which he is unaware) is in losing the home of Vanita and Wee-Willie-Winkle from his very birth. The discovery that his blood group belongs to neither his father Ahmed nor his mother is responsible for another exile –

his being sent away to his Uncle Hanif and Aunt Pia's home. This displacement – inexplicable to the boy- gives him a shock he never recovers from.

Again when the family moves from Bombay to Karachi, Saleem is exiled from Bombay, the place he dearly loves: "I never forgive Karachi for not being Bombay." Forcibly exiled from home and place, Saleem ponders over another exile. He loses the voices of the *Midnight's Children* after a nasal operation he is tricked into undergoing by his own parents, under the pretext of being taken out on a picnic. Saleem's exile is forced and compounded with the dishonesty of others. It is not difficult to see how it leads to his disintegration. Expatriate concerns figure importantly in the novel. Memory is his guarantee against the loss of a valued childhood being. It is the expatriate's guarantee against fragmentation and loss of touch with self and reality.

"Memory's truth" teaches Saleem who he was and is. In the absence of any other trustworthy member in the family, Saleem arrives at a position where memory though "it select, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes glorifies and villifies also," is more dependable than "someone else's version (253).

Saleem says he narrates his story because he fears absurdity : " I admit it" above all things, I fear absurdity" (9). He fears the meaninglessness of not belonging to family or country, and that is terrifying. Like an angst-ridden modern writer Saleem / Rushdie tries to impose order and meaning on a meaningless existence through his writing. Memory helps him put together the fragments from the past, that migrancy had taken away from him. Fragmentation, migrancy and memory figure in *Midnight's Children* in a significant way.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

Thus, in this unit we have examined the manner in which the three recurring themes of the History and the Individual, Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism in India, and Fragmentation, Migrancy and Memory have been dealt with. The discussion has also established the connection between the themes and the migrant sensibility of Rushdie, the writer and the circumstances of his having lived away from India.

3.6 GLOSSARY

Absolute:	having limitless power
Angst:	anxiety caused by considering the sad state of the human condition
Appropriate:	steal
Castrate:	sterlized
Clairvoyant:	one who has the power to see and understand objects and Events not directly present to the senses.
Comatose:	deeply unconscious
Countering:	opposing
Elicits:	draws out
Gimmick:	a trick object used to attract attention
Ideology:	a set of ideas, especially if typical of a social or political Group

Inadvertently:	by accident
Impotent:	(of a man) unable to perform the sex act.
Imprint:	leave a mark on something
Lament:	strong expression of grief
Monarchism:	ruled by kings and queens rather than elected leaders
Nostalgia:	fondness for something formerly known
Oppression:	the condition of being treated in a hard and cruel way
Paradigm:	pattern or framework
Pliant:	yielding to the wishes and commands of others
Plunder:	loot
Primeval:	of the earliest period of the earth's existence
Pristine:	pure, unchanged from the condition when first created
Repression:	the state of being put down by force
Subvert:	to try to destroy the power and influence of especially a governing body
Totalitarian:	system where a single person or political party controls all thought and does not allow opposition parties to exist
Undermine:	to weaken by stages

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the theme of History and the Individual in *Midnight's Children*?

3.8 SUGGESTED READING

E.M. Foster. *Aspects of a Novel*, 1923.

Dieter Rimenschneider "History and the Individual in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" in Ed. Viney Kirpal. *The New Indian Novel in English* : A Study of the 1980s. Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1990.

Viney Kirpal. *The Third World Novel of Expatriation*. Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 198.

UNIT 4 TECHNIQUE IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will take a close look at the narrative technique that Rushdie has used in *Midnight's Children* and how it is a subtle fusion of western postmodern devices and Indian oral narratological methods.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Midnight's Children is classified in a category of fiction that goes by the name of magic realism. *El realismo magical*, or magic realism, was born in Latin America and has followers all over the world. Today, whenever one thinks of magic realism, Salman Rushdie's name first comes to mind. Rushdie himself defines the term, in his essay on Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He describes it as a development out of Surrealism that "expresses a genuinely 'Third World' consciousness". Rushdie's novels may equally be traced back to a home grown magic realism, as we will see as we move along. Yet there is a lot in common between societies that Naipaul has called "half-made societies", which nurture a particular brand of realism. What Rushdie says about Marquez's novel is true of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and the novels that follow: "in the world he[Marquez] describes, impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under the midday sun".

Midnight's Children follows a technique that resembles Gabriel Garcia Marquez's style in *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Many had speculated whether Rushdie was influenced by Marquez in the writing of his best known novel. But Rushdie claims to have come upon Marquez's fiction only after having sent *Midnight's Children* off for publication. Perhaps Rushdie came upon the same style following a different route, which we shall trace in a while.

The first thing one notes about magic realist novels in the west is that they move away from the world we know as the real. They are set in an unreal world that might have nothing in common with the real world we inhabit. This genre is a reaction against 19th century realism. Different people at different times and places have debated on the place of real and unreal in art. For example, Plato wanted art to be banished from his Republic because he believed that art was thrice removed from reality. But, in India, art has often involved an element of the magical and the fantastic.

Literary realism in the west began to have a value to be cherished in the 18th century. It coincided with the development of a rational and scientific outlook and resulted in the death of Romance. Realism reached a peak in the 19th century, particularly in the writing of fiction. Over the years, its birth in response to the particular socio-cultural conditions came to be forgotten and realism became the main criterion for judging the worth of fiction. Magic realists question the demand that fiction must always imitate reality. While acknowledging the value of 19th century realism, they wish to show that fiction can mimic forms of reality other than the empirical. In fact, they try to challenge our notion of the real and the unreal. In this, they are influenced to a large extent by new paradigms in science. As some of you might be aware, new paradigms in western science have turned the notions of the real and the unreal topsy turvy. This has set off a large scale crisis about the nature of reality in the western world. Fiction's turn away from reality reflects this crisis. Fiction becomes the form for investigating the nature of truth. Fiction mocks at 19th century conventions to show that truth is always made up. *Midnight's Children* takes up each of the conventions for fiction writing and turns them inside out. Why does Rushdie do this? Do you agree that Rushdie's novel is cast in the magic realist form? If so, how is it different from western novels in the same genre?

4.2 THE STRUCTURE OF *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

What do you think of *Midnight's Children's* structure? Does it remind you of anything you have read, or heard, before? Let me share my first impressions of *Midnight's Children* when I first read it as a Master's student. I was hard put to slot it into a fixed category as it seemed to be a real pot pouri. The analogy that came to my mind, and has been used quite often by others, was that of the Chinese box. Stories within stories. Does it ring a bell? Stories within stories are nothing new to us who have grown up listening to similar stories on our mother's knees. Isn't this how the *Panchtantra* tales are strung together? I hear you ask. You are absolutely right. Not only the *Panchtantra*, but all famous collections such as *Kathasaritsagar*, *Arabian Nights* or epics are welded into a whole through a frame tale. The frame tale is usually about how the various stories came to be written, or rather, told. For example, the frame tale of the *Panchtantra* is about how the 80 year old Brahmin Visnu Sarma took up the challenge of educating three daft sons of King Amarshakti by telling them these tales. *Midnight's Children* also has a frame tale in which other stories are embedded. This is the story of Saleem Sinai's travails as he puts his novel together. How is Rushdie's structure different from that of ancient Indian narratives?

Midnight's Children is difficult to classify because it recalls another fictional genre – of metafiction. Metafiction is a form of fiction in which the process of writing fiction is the theme. This form developed to question the reality premise of 19th century fiction. It has largely been used to investigate the relation between art and life. Salman Rushdie weds the two separate genres by filtering ancient narrative structures through the postmodern. This brings us to another important question. Where does Rushdie belong? To the postcolonial or to the postmodern? Rushdie has conveniently planted one foot in each tradition. Some allege that he exoticizes India for the West's consumption. They say that his is, at best, a tourist vision of India. Others have been more charitable in including him among Indian writers while decrying his appropriation by postmodernism. Rushdie is happy to play along with postmodern theorists, which adds to the problem.

4.3 BEGINNINGS WITHOUT ENDINGS: *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* & EPIC STRUCTURE

Novels, they say, must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But they don't always begin at the beginning. *Midnight's Children* meticulously follows the rules for writing novels by announcing the hero's birth. Does this beginning remind you of any novel you have read before? Rushdie has borrowed this trick from the 18th century English novelist Lawrence Sterne whose *Tristram Shandy* begins in an almost identical manner. While you wait breathlessly to meet the hero Saleem Sinai born on the midnight of 15th August 1947, the garrulous narrator(Saleem Sinai himself) leads you astray - into a maze of stories.

Is Rushdie's novel about the problem of writing fiction or about telling a story? Or is it about writing a novel about the problems of telling a story? Rushdie has the narrator, Saleem Sinai, complaining about not having a listener to whom he can narrate his story or a scribe who can copy down a story. You also hear Scheherezade in the background. What is Rushdie up to? Is he writing the epic tale of the *kaliyuga*? Saleem has a grand illusion about writing a magnum opus equal to that of Valmiki. But he has his facts all mixed up. For it was Ved Vyas not Valmiki who dictated the epic *Mahabharata* to Ganesha. Rushdie came in for a lot a flak for his near fatal error. But he came up with a smart way of covering up by blaming the narrator. He cited this error as an example of why we must not take the narrator at face value or the novel as the definitive history of India. Like his narrator, Rushdie is well versed with Hindu traditions though he was born a Muslim. In constructing *Midnight's Children*, he claimed to have been influenced by the *Panchtantra*. But his careless error in having Valmiki dictate the Ramayana to Ganesha set off a volley of objections. Rushdie's borrowings cut across linguistic and sectarian divisions for us to trace back his novel to a particular source. But they all add to a structure that is typical of ancient Indian narratives. All these tales have a teller who narrates his story to a listener. This is also true of the dramatic mode, which uses a *sutradhar* to narrate his story to a *nati*. Since well known Indian tale collections are reductions of different retellings, it is natural that they retain oral features. But why should Rushdie carry over the conventions governed by the contingencies of the spoken medium. As Walter Ong has explained, the spoken word can be retained only in its transmission to another person. The writer, however, composes in isolation. He addresses an imaginary reader with whom he has no face to face contact. While Rushdie creates the illusion of a warm speaking voice, he cannot be a storyteller in the same way that Valmiki or the unknown author of the *Panchtantra* could be. For one, he has to resort to the written word, which means the death of sound. Secondly, his literate, cosmopolitan background cannot transport him to the mind set of a culture that relies entirely on speech. Rushdie, the writer, has travelled too far into the West to come back home completely. He filters the epic tales of his Indian childhood through his postmodern frames. His adoption of Indian oral narrative structure is, therefore, self-conscious. Slightly tongue in cheek. And put along side a totally different metafictional tradition from another time and place. Why do you think Rushdie turns back to ancient Indian storytelling techniques? What effect does the mixing of these techniques with metafiction have on you?

At the very outset, Saleem Sinai creates an *Arabian Nights* ambience. He insists that he has many "stories" to "tell". These stories, as Saleem Sinai explains to Padma, have a way of "leaking" into one another. The 19th century novel has clearly defined beginnings, middles and endings. Like Sterne, Rushdie parodies the convention of beginnings by beginning with the birth of the hero. But before the hero can be born, the narrator strays into countless digressions, asides, interruptions. You are made to listen to many tales, placed under chapter headings such as the "Perforated Sheet", "Mercurochrome", "Hit-the-Spittoon", "Under the carpet", "A public Announcement", "Many-Headed Monsters" and "Methwold", before the narrator gets back to the original story of Saleem's birth. This takes roughly 100

pages. With Padma you complain, "you better get a move on or you'll die before you get yourself born"(38). But you, too, take an unmistakable delight in the embedded tales. This is how storytellers get you to listen to stories you did not set out to hear.

Oral narratives delight in love of detail and the joy of telling. This is very different from the novel's tight structure with each bit fitting tightly into the other. Saleem proves himself to be a master storyteller like Scheherezade by getting Padma "hooked" to his story. Like Scheherezade, he knows when to "leave the narrative hanging in mid-air" and when to speed it up, when to build suspense and when to linger on the details to expand the narrative. The story works on the simple principle of "what-happened-nextism" that E.M. Forester has talked of in *Aspects of the Novel*. At the same time, it is bound by the novel's tight structuring. Rushdie adheres to 19th century novelistic conventions with a loyalty that borders on the ridiculous as he also keeps digressing to break those conventions.

Besides digressing and breaking up the tight structure, Saleem also has the habit of jumbling up the sequence of events. Endings often precede beginnings. Given that he spills the beans years in advance, is there any point in continuing with the story? This is again a feature that Rushdie has borrowed from oral narratives. Since oral narratives often narrate an already known story, they need not worry either about sustaining suspense or maintaining sequence Rushdie's motive in following this methods to make a mockery of the logic of causality favoured by 19th century realism. He wants to show that the pattern in art is the creation of the artist. As usual, Rushdie brings out the ridiculousness of the cause and effect logic by exaggerating it.

For instance, the perforated sheet forms the link between Saleem's and his grandfather's story. Just as Hummingbird is seen as the thread that would lead to the ghetto of the magicians. Later, his teacher Mr Zagallo's pulling out his hair leads to Homi Catrack's murder and his uncle Hanif's death and culminating in his grandfather's retreat to Kashmir. Salim even has the cheek to claim that the purpose of the 1971 war was to "re-unite me with an old life, to bring me back together with my old friends"(373) Rushdie's aim is to show that fiction is not reality. Because it can be shaped the way its author wants it to be. This fact is ignored in the adherence to the logic of causality.

Repetition is the favourite device of the storyteller. Rushdie is equally fond of using the "once upon a time" formulae. But his use of repetition is not dictated by the need for an on the spot composition and retention of subject matter. Rushdie uses these formulae and repetitive structures to place his novel in ancient Indian storytelling traditions. Thus , he breaks with the obsessive fixation with clock time in western fiction. Rushdie juxtaposes the two temporal schemes – the chronological and the cyclical to show the conventions of Western fiction to be rooted in Western linear time. Ancient Indian storytelling structures use a repetitive pattern, which echoes the cyclic time of Indian thought.

Midnight's Children uses formulaic constructions such as repetition, invocation to the deity, allusion to omens and portents, call and response tactics. But its parodic tone alerts the reader to the novel's distance from oral structures. There are several other hints that the novel cannot be a story. Salim is writing his story , we are often reminded, which he reads aloud to Padma because she is illiterate. Though Salim often uses phrases, ("in those years, you see", "I intone earnestly", I don't want to listen") which indicate that the story is being told , he feels compelled to "confide in paper, before I forget" (37);
"Nevertheless, whether [Padma] is listening or not, I have things to record. (118);
"Condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments," I wrote and read aloud (121).

4.4 SUTRADHAR AND NATI: SALEEM AND PADMA

What is Padma's role in the novel? Is Saleem using Padma merely as the mandatory listener to imitate the telling style of the epics? No doubt, Padma is the *nati* to whom the *sutradhaar* Salim narrates his story. Having Saleem tell Padma helps Rushdie simulate the storytelling situation he wishes to create. At the same time, it is very clear that Saleem is writing down the story, which Padma cannot read. The use of Padma is an excellent strategy.

Padma does several things at once. First of all, she is still rooted in the storytelling tradition from which Saleem has been uprooted. She naturally expects Saleem's story to follow the rules of all other stories she has heard before. However, she has no clue as to how novels are written. This gives Saleem the perfect opening for giving her a lecture on how novels should be written. More important, Saleem is as much a babalog as Rushdie or the readers. The story Saleem is writing "in an Anglopoised pool of light" might stretch the credibility of his anglicized readers. Padma, however, fits totally in the miracle laden universe. Saleem as well as Rushdie are always a bit hesitant in the presence of the incredible. Padma's love of superstitions, however, co-exists with "a down-to-earthery". Padma stands for the view of the ordinary uneducated Indian people who do not question the marvellous the same way as anglicized Indians do. Rushdie and Saleem both need a Padma character to make the marvelous events in the novel credible. The gap between the Saleem consciousness and the Padma consciousness also shows how Saleem is distanced from the knowledge system of his people. Saleem valiantly attempts to enter Padma's world, which he almost does by marrying her in the end.

4.5 SALEEM, UNRELIABLE NARRATOR

Saleem and his creator Rushdie have so much in common that they have been confused with one another. Both are *Midnight's Children*, having been born in the year of India's independence. Both share a Kashmiri ancestory and an upper class anglicized upbringing. Saleem follows Rushdie's route from Peddar Road to Pakistan though the circumstances might have varied.

Most First novels are autobiographical. Other first novels like George Eliot's *Silas Mariner*, D H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and closer home Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* have too much of the author. Even though the authors go to great lengths to deny the overlaps between fiction and fact, critics manage to explain events in the novel in the light of similar happenings in the author's life.

Something similar has happened to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children.* Unfortunately, the confusion of fiction with fact has continued to plague him. The use of the first person narrator often makes the author vulnerable to the criticism that is really directed at the narrator. Rushdie was blamed for all Saleem's mistakes and opinions. Particularly glaring was the mistake about the Valmiki/Vyasa confusion on the very first page. "If you're going to use Hindu traditions in your story, Mr Rushdie", he was asked by a reader, "don't you think you could take the trouble to look them up?" His readers displayed a particular pleasure in catching the writer out. They were particularly incensed by what they perceived was an irreverent use of Hindu traditions.

Rushdie's readers had to wait for the publication of his next few novels to know that Rushdie's "malice for all" is not reserved for any particular religion or tradition. Most of these objections came from their looking at the novel as a definitive history of

India. At that point, very few realized that the use of a first person narrator was also part of Rushdie's narrative strategy. Authors often create a persona who is their mouthpiece. But this is not so with Saleem. Saleem's magniloquence and delusions are as much subject to the author's irony as the reader's ridicule. Rushdie came to the reader's rescue in "'Errata': Or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*". He made a detailed reference to all the errors he is said to have made including getting his dates and statistics wrong. While he owned up to some of the unintentional errors he made in the novel, he warned the reader that "Saleem Sinai is an unreliable narrator". And that *Midnight's Children* is far from being an authoritative guide to the history of post-independence India."

Rushdie went on to explain his method. He began by feeling embarrassed and annoyed by *his* mistakes. But gradually he found that "the mistake feels more and more like Saleem's; its wrongness feels *right*." Rushdie goes on to explain that he went to the trouble of introducing mistakes in originally error free passages. Why?

Because during its writing the novel turned out to be very different from what Rushdie had set out to write. Rushdie wanted to write a novel of memory, as I have mentioned in Unit 3. But somewhere along the way he got interested in the process of filtration. The role that filters play in remembering. "So my subject changed, was no longer a search for lost time, had become the way in which we re-make the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool," he explained. Rushdie called attention to Saleem's filters that played a large role in the design of the novel. He links the pattern of the novel to Saleem's need to *write himself*, to imbue his life with some meaning. Saleem shapes the material, according to the author, to give himself a central role. There are several examples of Saleem "cutting history to suit himself". Every significant event in post independence Indian history coincides with the life of the protagonist, the most important being his birth. His grandfather Aadam Aziz accidentally loses his way into the Jalianwallah Bagh tragedy in Amritsar. In Delhi, his father is held to ransom by the Hindu arsonists while his mother holds centrestage in a communal riot. The hero is born as Nehru is announcing the birth of the nation. Saleem is around to plan the strategy for the 1965 war; he is also packed off to take an active part in the Bangladesh war. He is held up during the slum clearance campaign during the Emergency and forced to undergo sterilization. One notes several. These are designed "as clues, as indications that Saleem is capable of distortions both great and small."

Rushdie points out that all these errors are strewn about as a warning to the reader that Saleem is not to be taken at his word. The Ganesha error, for example, is calculated to deflate his pomposity. Considering that Saleem is boasting about his knowledge of Hindu systems, his monumental error shows that he is not to be trusted. Rushdie wants to tell us that Saleem is not a detached or dispassionate observer. He has a vested interest in projecting events in a certain manner which is to make himself appear as the hero of the story.

Saleem gets quite a few facts wrong. Here too Rushdie has an explanation . He says he wants to distinguish between truth and remembered truth. With this Rushdie takes us into some of the currently raging debates in historiography. What is the place of truth in history? What value does memory have in the telling of history? Historians like Hayden White show that the particular development of scientific history shuts out all other ways of writing history. Western history has placed an undue emphasis on verifiable truth since the 19th century in its attempt to make history writing closer to science. Other histories, however, have given as much importance to what is believed to be true as what is recorded as true. We have been led into thinking that historical documentation based on observation is the most unbiased method for presenting facts. This hides the fact that the selection and interpretation of facts is not objective. Saleem's method provides us with an inkling of how facts may not only be selected to fit a certain theory but also distorted to promote certain interests. Saleem's mistakes unmask the design of written history to

us. How certain facts favourable to certain groups are selected and passed off as the history of the entire community. Rushdie shows that unlike his novel which clearly reveals how history is made, official histories hide the fact that they are also stories.

"History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of being given many meanings." He concludes.

This is equally true with respect to the way human beings organize their lives. Like Saleem, they use the logic of memory to reconstruct their pasts. Naturally, in remembering things they screen out the unpleasant while retaining their happy memories. This causes a some amount of distortion. Rushdie is trying to say that remembered truth is as valid as literate truth and that every one has the right to their own version of truth. If you read this section with reference to the earlier unit, the point becomes very clear.

4.6 INTERPLAY OF FANTASY AND REALISM

In the past, fantasy was often dismissed as being fit only for children. After centuries of oblivion, fantasy is suddenly centrestage in the Western world. Why? The new status of fantasy has to do with the present crisis about the nature of reality. The crisis is set off by new discoveries that show that reality cannot exist independent of the observer. The West, it looks like, is having second thoughts about the solidity of the factual universe it earlier swore by. What appeared to be facts are also shown to be stories. In the new thinking that goes by the name of constructivism, science is also proved to be a story. This has obviously sent the stock of the unreal soaring. Along with it has come the recognition that our understanding of what can *be* is not universal. It depends on the world we inhabit.

Eric Rabkin tried to define fantasy. He called it a genre in which the protagonist displays a hesitation in the presence of the supernatural. He cited *Alice in Wonderland* as one of the best examples of fantasy. He categorically left out tales like Arabian Nights because they did not display the mandatory hesitation in the presence of the marvellous. Instead, they took the marvellous for granted. What do you think of *Midnight's Children*? Does it take the marvellous for granted? You'll find your answer in the section describing magicians ghetto and the seer's predictions about Saleem's birth to Amina Community.

Going back to what Rushdie said about Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can help us understand Rushdie's novel. In Marquez's novel, the arrival of a train is greeted with utter incredulity. Whereas the ascension of a character called Remedios the Beauty to Heaven is not. Rushdie named this the "village" world view. Now in Rushdie's novel you might have come across several characters who share this world view. You couldn't have missed the reference to Padma's response to the Reverend Mother's ability to enter her daughters' mind.

> Padma accepts this without blinking; but what others will swallow as effortlessly as a laddoo, Padma may just as easily reject. *No audience is without its idiosyncrasies of belief.* (italics mine)

Later, when he speaks of "the fog of guilt" hanging around his mother's head, he is certain that "Padma would believe it, Padma would know what I mean."(158) We need a Padma to make the marvellous real. The birth of prodigious children, blue skinned Tubriwallahs and half snake-half human doctors, strange prophecies, the central fantasy of Salim's gift for hearing voices are seen by Padma or Mary Pereira. What is true according to Mary includes fortune tellers prophesying the birth of a two-headed son, sadhus awaiting the arrival of the Blessed One, little girls speaking

in the language of birds and cats. This does not necessarily have to correspond with truth written in an "Anglopoised pool of light". One could dismiss these beliefs as the superstitions of the illiterate. The problem comes when a Prime Minister is spotted soliciting the help of astrologers in drafting the country's first Five Year Plan, or when a young woman with a consciously secular upbringing succumbs to the prophecy of a Ramram Seth with the cobrawallah, monkeyman, bone-setter surrounding him. Instead of hesitation, one finds a belief in the supernatural that cuts across class, caste and gender lines. As Saleem puts it, even a "literate person in this India of ours" is not "immune from the type of information I am in the process of unveiling". (197)

In the Western idea of fantasy, the supernatural is explained as a projection of human fears. Saleem insists that he is "not speaking metaphorically; what I have just written and (read aloud to stunned Padma) is nothing less than the literal, by-the-hairs-of-my-mother's head truth"(200). Saleem might be a sceptic like his creator Rushdie, but this does not make him immune to the uncanny mysteries of the marvellous. Along with Rushdie, Saleem holds out for the "village" world over the urban like Marquez is alleged to have done. The difference lies in that where a Padma or Mary might swallow marvellous happenings without the slightest hesitation, Saleem might require to justify his position through philosophical argument. But the entire thrust of Saleem's arguments is to uphold and accentuate the existence of other perspectives on what *is*, which might violate secular notions of truth, "Reality can have metaphorical content, that does not make it less real".(200)

Unlike the original tellers and listeners of tales like *Arabian Nights*, Rushdie cannot take the marvellous for granted. Saleem uses a technique replete with "matter of fact descriptions of the bizarre, and its reverse, "namely heightened, stylized versions of the everyday" to show a difference in "attitudes of mind"(218) - a technique and attitude that he confesses to have borrowed from Shiva his twin midnight's child. While he allows Padma and Mary to participate completely in the marvellous, Saleem/Rushdie remains at a distance.

In Rushdie's novel, postmodern scepticism is carefully counterpoised against pre-modern belief through the brilliant use of the working class interlocutor Padma. Her credulous responses to Saleem's sophisticated self-consciousness give evidence of the "miracle-seeking consciousness" of the Indian masses. Though Rushdie parodies the pre-modern, he does not cease to have affection for it. He combines the condition of fantasy - "the reader's hesitation in the presence of the supernatural" with a supernatural explanation of events as in pure marvellous. Against Saleem's cynicism is Padma's faith in all things miraculous, like new moons strange happenings, prophecies, strange coincidences.

The use of fantasy by magic realists is as I said earlier, intended to question the place of reality in art. Considering that three fourths of the world's literature does not satisfy the reality requirement of 19th century fiction, it can only be a period concept that needs to be discarded. Rushdie's magic realist mode is, by his own admission, a strategy to overcome the limitations of the historical testimony of a young boy's unreliable memory. But his strange "commingling of the improbable and the mundane" can also be seen as an attempt to give us a glimpse into other aesthetics in which art does not need to imitate life. Oriental narratives grow out of a semi-mythical universe. Here the strange and the improbable is not only the natural subject matter of fiction but the bizarre and uncanny is also accepted as the 'real'. Miracles and improbabilities, of the kind *Midnight's Children* abounds with are accepted, at certain levels, without scepticism.

However, the novel places the two perspectives side–by-side suggesting that it is not possible to translate one in terms of the other. This is different from fantasy where a delicate tension is maintained between a natural and supernatural explanation of events. Rushdie's solution is to juxtapose the two perspectives through Saleem and

Padma to uphold the supernatural as an equally valid perspective even though some might not be able to access it.

4.7 MYTH IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

By now Rushdie's readers are familiar with his carefree manner, which spares no one. At the time of the novel's publication, however, his particular brand of irreverence irked many, particularly those who hold tradition in great awe. Rushdie's allusion to Hindu myths became a serious point of debate. Could a Muslim draw on Hindu tradition? If he did, wasn't it his moral duty to educate himself and use them accurately? What is the difference in the use of myth and tradition by the earlier generation of writers and Rushdie and his children? For example, as Viney Kirpal has pointed out, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura's* uses the language of myth and folktale to write a modern day *sthalapurana or place legend, the way there is a place legend about Ayodhya, the birthplace of Ram.*. Writers of Raja Rao's generation share the mythic consciousness that Professor C D Narasimhaiah saw as characteristic of India – habit of perceiving the presentness in the light of the past. As mythological archetypes have a "meaningful presence" in Indian social life, the novel might rightfully be structured around a well known myth. Writers such as Rao could structure *Kanthapura* around the *Ramayana* myth with Sita (India) being rescued from Ravana (The British) by Rama (Moorthy). They could do so because the Ram-Sita Ravana myth was a living presence in Indian society. It helped Rushdie to explain the natural freedom movement in the light of the ancient past which has great meaning for the people in India.

However, writers of Rushdie's generation have adopted a parodic stance towards their mythic material, perhaps for the reasons I have discussed above. It is not possible for Rushdie, like Saleem Sinai, to participate in the "myth-laden universe" without hesitation. Rushdie's irreverent use of myth has earned him the reputation of a trickster. Something of an imposter. Do you agree? Actually, he is not as I have explained in the previous units.

But let us here examine his use of the Ganesha myth and see for ourselves. As we found out earlier, the howler about Ganesha was Saleem's not Rushdie's and was intended to deflate Saleem's belief in his erudition. Saleem uses other Indian allusions with the same rebellious careless nonchalance. His play on Padma's name, for instance irritates her. For he chooses to interpret her name not through its mythological associations but through its everyday, scatological meaning. The central myth holding the novel together is the myth of Shiva. Rushdie evokes Shiva in his destructive avatar, born to banish evil from the world. In Rushdie's novel, Shiva gradually evolves into an evil force whose sole motive is to destroy the hero Saleem for robbing him of his real parents. Only through some far fetched association can one link Shiva's actions as revenge for the evils of emergency. Rushdie reinterprets the Shiva myth like all others as it suits him: eternally playing on the meaning of words; referring to the original association of the myth; and turning it upside down.

This has a nagging connection to postmodern irony and play. Salman Rushdie has become the darling of the postmoderns for his playful treatment of all he touches. And the *bete noire* of the postcolonials for the same reason. Rushdie has protested against the uniqueness of "Indianness" in terms of tradition in "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist". He felt that to describe a work as authentic or inauthentic in relation to its faithfulness to Indian tradition was to succumb to an essentialist definition.

But more important, Rushdie's treatment of myth in *Midnight's Children* questions the realism premise of fiction. Is fiction bound by the rules of accuracy as life? What is the relationship between fiction and fact?

As Linda Hutcheon has pointed out parody need not necessarily rule out affection. The postmodern writer cannot participate in the world of tradition in an unqualified manner. He needs the distancing of parody. Yet the objective might not be to mock at tradition. Like Kirpal puts it, he can destabilize tradition to reinstall it. It is not fair that Rushdie should be singled out for his ironic attitude. Therefore, the writers that follow have also adopted the same route. Look at Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* where he subjects the Mahabharata myth to the same ironic treatment.

4.8 LET'S SUM UP

Now you know that the structure of *Midnight's Children* is not merely a gimmick. The novel's form is inseparable from the theme. The novelist employs a particular manner of telling a story because he wants to show how stories are made, and that history too is a fiction, a story. We have found out why and how Rushdie uses the epic structure. We learn that Rushdie's errors are the unreliable narrator's. We also discover how magic and realism have been blended by the author, to merge the postmodern's faith with the oral narrator's "village" world view.

4.9 GLOSSARY

Bete noir:	sworn enemy
Bizarre:	strange happenings
Delusion:	holding a false belief
Enfant terrible:	incorrigible person
Erudition:	great learning
Filters:	to remove
Historography:	writing of history
Irony:	use of words or course of events which are clearly opposite to one's meaning.
Incense:	very angry
Magnum opus:	masterpiece
Magniloquence:	in a grand sounding manner
Meticulous:	very careful with attention to detail
Persona:	a character playing the role of the author
Pomposity:	foolishly self-important
Replete:	completely full

Scepticism: habit of not believing a claim

Uncanny: mysterious

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. How do you respond to Rushdie's "strange commingling of the real and the probable"?

2. What is the role of the epic structure in the novel?

3. Does Rushdie have the right to use Hindu myths? Why does he use them in the particular way that he does?

4.11 SUGGESTED READING

Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91,* Delhi: Granta. 1991.

Mark Currie(Ed and Intro) *Metafiction* London: Longman. 1995.

Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction", in *Metafiction* . Ed. Mark Currie. London : Longman. 1995.

Viney Kirpal, "An Overview of Indian English Fiction: 1920-1990s", *Mapping Cultural Spaces :Postcolonial Indian Literature in English*(Ed) Nilufer E Bharucha and Vrinda Nabar New Delhi : Vision Books. 1998.

Anjali Roy, "Fantasy and Fiction, Myth and History: The Real/Unreal Dichotomy in "*Midnight's Children*" *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 2 July-Oct 2000.

UNIT 5 CHARACTERIZATION IN MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, I first plan to discuss the critical concept of characters and characterization in Western fiction. Then I shall discuss the different characters in *Midnight's Children* and show how Rushdie's characterization borrows also from oral narratives.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Whenever we discuss a novel, we focus mainly on its characters, obviously because they are the main players in the story. So normal and routine is to discuss these 'people' in the novel, that we rarely ever pause to even ask ourselves : What is a Character? Of course, we all have a rough idea about what we mean by "Character" but a short discussion on this subject will help to clarify our ideas and enable us to read literary works better. So let me begin by requesting you to write down your definition of Character as a literary term :

Was that easy? Well, here is how literacy critics would define a Character; you may want to compare it with your effort.

Characters are described as the persons presented in narrative or dramatic works that are interpreted by the reader as possessing certain moral, personality and emotional qualities that get communicated through what they speak (i.e. the dialogues) or what they do (i.e. their actions)or what other characters tell us about them. The reasons for the character's temperament, aspirations and moral values reflected in speech and actions lie in what is called *motivation.*

Some characters such as Mr. Micawber in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* , or Gafoor, the taxi driver in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* may remain unchanged in outlook and nature. Others may undergo a radical change because of a gradual

process of development and motivation. For example, Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations* changes because of his desire to become a gentleman worthy of Estella's love. One simple expectation of a character whether in a realistic work or in a fantasy is that the character is "consistent". That is to say, the character should not break off suddenly or act in a way which is not convincingly founded in his or her nature or temperament as we have already come to know it.

For example, if Raju in *The Guide* were to change suddenly from jailbird into the wise sage that he becomes at the end of the novel we would not find him a consistent or convincing character. However, by introducing the *motivation* for the change in him, Narayan very ably persuades us to accept Raju's gradual transformation. Can you think of some other fictional characters you've come across in your reading recently whom you would call 'consistent' in their development ?

Do you think Saleem is a consistent character ?

You remember I mentioned Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* in Unit 3? Did you get to read it ? Do so, at the earliest if you haven't so far. It gives a good insight into the craft of the Novel. Forster in this book has developed the distinction between *Flat* and *Round* characters. And what he says is very interesting. A *Flat* character or a "type" is a "two – dimensional" or "cardboard" character, built around "a single idea or quality". It has no depth. It is presented without much individualizing detail and therefore such a character can be adequately described in a single phrase or sentence. For example, the accordionist Wee Willie Winkie or his wife, Vanita in *Midnight's Children* is a flat character ; he is just an accordionist – we have no idea how he thinks and feels, or what makes him act. Can you mention a few others?

A Round character is complex in temperament and motivation. It is presented with subtle particularity. Such a character is therefore as difficult to describe with any adequacy as a person in real life. Like real persons, they also have the capacity to spring surprises on us. Saleem, for instance, is a Round character. What is Padma : *Round* or *Flat*?

Almost all novels have some characters who are *Flat* and serve merely as functionaries, and some who are *Round* and are well characterized. It will be interesting to see how Rushdie handles his characters and their characterization in *Midnight Children*. Are the *Flat* characters only flat or are they given some individualities as well? Similarly, are the *Round characters* really "three – dimensional" or do they also share some traits with Flat characters ? What is your opinion? Interestingly, characters in Indian English fiction are often neither just Flat or Round. They could be described as metaphorical representatives or symbols, frequently of ancient *ideals.* Moorthy in *Kanthapura* is an ideal character, very much as Rama in the *Ramayana* was an ideal (ideal son, ideal king).

Do you think Saleem and Shiva are realistic human beings or symbolic representations? You'll find your answer in the appropriate section of this unit.

5.2 SALEEM AS INDIA AND INDIA AS SALEEM

It is very interesting to study the character of Saleem in *Midnight's Children* . For, right in the beginning of the novel, he identifies himself with India, its histories and its destinies. Indeed he is at pains to tell us that by being a midnight child, a special responsibility had been thrust upon him. So close is the bond between him and India that he clearly hints to the reader that there is a resemblance between his face and the map of India. Look at that passage from *Midnight's Children* to see how he does this by using words such as "region", "eastern", and "western" used for cartography and not for describing human features:

> Baby-snaps reveal that my large moon-face was too large; too perfectly round. Something lacking in the region of the chin. Fair skin curved across my features – but birthmarks disfigured it; dark stains spread down my western hairline; a dark patch covered my eastern ear .... Baby Saleem's nose : it was monstrous; and it ran. (124)

In an interview, Rushdie explains the reason for Saleem's big nose.

> One day I was looking at the map of India, and all of a sudden for me [it] resembled a large nose hanging into the sea, with a drip off the end of it, which was [Sri Lanka]. Then I thought, well, you know, if Saleem is going to be the twin of the country, he may as well be the identical twin and so he sprouted this enormous nose. (1985)

If you compare Saleem's description of his own face with Rushdie's comment, you'll note a big difference. While Saleem is very serious and intent on promoting his greatness, Rushdie's tone seems lighthearted. Why do you think this is so? You needn't answer just now as there are many other similarly "awe-inspiring" descriptions that Saleem gives of himself.

Consider the manner in which he pays attention to the process of birth – his own birth, the birth of Independent India and the birth of the midnight children. Even the description of his mother's pregnancy and the growth of the foetus in her womb is as strange a description as any other in the book, perhaps even more so because the embryo is described as having two heads and other rather abnormal features. Further, did you notice that the cluster of metaphors Rushdie uses to describe this process of growth and development of the child is metaphorically the development of a literary text or the whole language. I'll quote it for your recall :

> What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia even a whole language. (115)

Is Saleem a country, a character, a paragraph, a chapter, the novel or just a narrator? These questions keep cropping up in the mind and add to the existing list. A few pages later, are details of his diverse "inheritance" (126). These details mention a number of factors responsible for his temperament but not all of them originate in his genetic make-up. Rather their cause lies in a whole range of social and political events. He establishes the belief that the history of his life is the history of the country and that he is India and India is Saleem.

Going further, some of the events which Saleem narrates have only a sensationalistic value; they are less important for their meaning than their dramatic appeal. Saleem makes great claims for the interconnection between people and events, even though the connection between some events and some people in his life is not clear. For example, his assertion that Homi Catrack was "the second human being to be murdered by mushrooming Saleem" (244). This is no more than sensationalism. This naming of himself in his own narration as "Saleem" and not as "me" is another. He also tells you that the first person he murdered was Jimmy Kapadia simply because he had dreamed Jimmy's death. Such a serious matter as two murders are mentioned and resolved very quickly by Saleem in his narration thus suggesting that he is prone to exaggerating his claims to fame and notriety.

Though Rushdie makes Ganesh his mythological ancestor(Ganesh's parents were Shiva and Parvati) , Saleem experiences a grave sense of loss when he discovers that his family are not his family and he is sent off to Uncle Hanif and Aunt Pia's home while Amina (mythological Parvati) tries to assure Ahmed Sinai (mythological Shiva) that Saleem is indeed "her"son Ganesh.

The discovery that he is not his parents' son is a turning point in Saleem's life and he feels shattered.. Again when these "parents" die in Pakistan he is really left on his own. Rushdie says he did it deliberately. He was poking fun at Saleem who believes he is India, that he is incharge of her history and destiny when in reality he is its victim ("he is castrated") and when he makes this discovery towards the end of the book, he just can't recover from this knowledge. This contradiction is hinted at quite clearly in the Chapter titled "The Kolynos Kid" which follows the description of his exile to his uncle and aunt's home :

> " From ayah to Widow, I've been the sort of person to whom things have been done; but Saleem Sinai, perennial victim, persists in seeing himself as protagonist" ...(237)

Far from being India or its history or destiny, Saleem is therefore a passive and weak character and this is brought home to us through the aside provided in the passage quoted above. Saleem can't outgrow the habit of seeing himself as the centre of the world, a stage which every child goes through and must outgrow in order to be taken seriously.

Saleem is very well aware of his role in the novel : he knows there are two Indias, the actual India and his own personalized India which he refers to as 'my India' (198), or the India discovered within his mind. He knows that he has placed himself at the centre of his story, and that his story is coloured accordingly. He also knows that his role is that of a storyteller and entertainer and no more. He wants us to believe that he is in control when in reality he is a non-entity. He is both a storyteller and a parody of one. And most certainly he is not a historian nor the great character destined to play a special role in India's destiny. He is just a person suffering from self-delusion, having lost his "family" moorings and roots. One of the lowest points in Saleem's life is reached when he becomes a sniffer (man-) dog in the Pakistani army's officially non-existent Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities.

So the question comes up : Why does Saleem exaggerate his importance and assume a mantle of responsibility which no one has given him? Have you thought up the answer by now? I'll give you a critic's explanation below.

Nancy E. Batty in her essay "Rushdie's Art of Suspense in *Midnight's Children*" has a very convincing explanation. She argues that Saleem's dilemma is that of any autobiographer; who has to "accomplish a circular journey from himself to himself". Since Saleem's life is so insignificant, he has to make it seem to be "either very important or very interesting" or he will lose his reader's interest. Saleem is not a known figure in history or in any other sphere. He is only a fictional autobiographer having no claim to fame in "real life." So he tries to accomplish this fame in his narrative by linking events of his own life with those of his country's history and sensationalizing his own role in these events and in the lives of the people he knows. Only Padma, his friend and confidante keeps on repeatedly undermining his claims to importance and drama and we get the hint that Saleem is not to be taken too seriously because he is not an objective autobiographer.

Saleem's self-delusions of being India parallels that of an actual Prime Minister of India. Saleem cites the slogan that had become quite famous during the Emergency – *Indira is India and India is Indira* (427) and wonders how Mrs. Gandhi could have even tried to snatch away from him the position her own father, Jawaharlal Nehru, had reserved for him. Had she :

> "not read her own father's letter to a midnight child, in which her own sloganized centrality was denied; in which the role of mirror– of -the-nation was bestowed upon me?" (427)

As Saleem questions the broken promise it becomes clear what Rushdie has been attempting in the character of Saleem. He has been trying to convey that if Saleem believes he is India and that India is Saleem then this is the mere delusion on the part of a pathetic and unimportant fellow. The belief of a political leader (Mrs. Gandhi) that she is the nation, was similarly also a delusion.

Mrs. Gandhi was as much sensationalizing her role and importance in India's history as the protagonist Saleem, and Rushdie has sympathy for none.

5.3 PADMA : BELOVED NATI

Although the previous section (5.2) was entirely devoted to a discussion of Saleem's Characterization, and in this section , I have discussed the character of Padma who is both his friend and his narratee, it will be difficult to talk of her exclusively without reference to Saleem. Her companionship completes Saleem's life as a man and her role as his narratee completes his narration.

Padma is the narratee or audience for Saleem as well as his beloved. As a beloved, she is assertive and demanding and coming from the working class, her liaison with Saleem symbolically represents the ideal of "marriage" of the classes. As one who comes from the working class, Padma has few inhibitions and speaks openly on all matters with Saleem, including taunting him about his "useless other pencil." Saleem is attracted to her in spite of her emotional outbursts against his ineffectiveness as a lover, and narrator. As Saleem's narratee she is an index for the way the reader is responding to his story, much like King Shahryar in *A Thousand and One Nights* to Scherherazade's tales . Both the teller and these tales are explicitly mentioned in *Midnight's Children* so as to recall them as a reference point for the reader.

Padma's scepticism undermines Saleem's autobiography as he makes big claims for his importance and centrality in the country's events. Padma who has a mind of her own is not just a narratee. She not only shows up Saleem's successes and failures as an autobiorgrapher but also plays an important role in the deflation of his character and the creation of his story. Do you agree?

Saleem himself recognizes this when he accepts inability to dispense with Padma though she is (according to the upper class and anglicized Saleem) superstitious and ignorant. Her relationship with Saleem is complex and complementary; she cannot be reduced to the status of the chorus in Greek drama, or just a narratee who can be replaced by another member or narratee.

Despite their uneasy relationship, she and Saleem have great personal chemistry. One can't do without the other. Padma briefly disappears from Saleem's life (but not his narrative because he keeps talking of her) over a disagreement regarding Saleem's use of the word "love" to describe her feelings towards him. Saleem's pronouncement – " I know now that [Padma] is ...hooked.... My story has her by the throat "(38) is borne out when Padma does return to his side to fulfil her role as his narratee and confidante. This should not surprise you because if you read the narrative closely, you find that Saleem is constantly tailoring his narrative to retain Padma's interest. As Nancy Batty points out , his efforts are very much "like a lover engaged in a sexual conquest". He doesn't want her to desert him. So, he keeps her "hooked" to his story by adjusting his narrative strategies so that he keeps getting the

right response from her. Thus, he keeps playing this victim-seducer game with her very much like the traditional storyteller did with his audience.

A question comes to my mind here. What would *Midnight's Children* be without Padma? Perhaps, a lot less lively. Don't you think so ? Padma represents a lively and spirited woman, a loyal friend with a carefree, untamed nature. She adds depth to the narrative by her queries and responses in a way which is very different from the way characters in western fiction do. Padma is indispensable to the novel because she is his *nati*, the live interactive audience of an oral narrative who both listens and creates a traditional storyteller's tale.

5.4 THE MIDNIGHT CHILDREN – SHIVA, PARVATI AND SALEEM

The story proper begins with Saleem becoming aware of his ability to read the minds of other people and of the existence of the midnight children who are also uncommonly gifted. Three of them prove to be outstanding. They are triplets and a discussion of Shiva and Parvati almost inevitably turns towards mention of Saleem.

Most critics have discussed Saleem as if he were a realistic character for whom the readers are expected to feel tragic emotions. But, actually he is allegorized so extensively, as Arun Mukherjee has stated that he becomes just a device in the narration of the story. Thus, though Saleem describes himself as the greatest talent of all the midnight children, he is replicated and multiplied in other midnight children, without whom he is also incomplete.

Saleem is "the greatest talent of all" ; he had been endowed with "the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men" (200). Then there is Parvati-the-witch who is the most powerful female midnight child, next only to Saleem and Shiva because she was "born a mere seven seconds after midnight on August 15th, [and] had been given the powers of the adept, the illuminatus, the genuine gifts of configuration and sorcery ..." (200). The third is Shiva, who like Saleem was "born on the stroke of midnight" and had been "given the gifts of war." He is Saleem's alter ego. Shiva is also his adversary. The reason for Shiva's resentment and enemity with Saleem originates in his having been exchanged at birth with Saleem without the knowledge of his parents. Though he was actually the son of Amina and Ahmed Sinai (while Saleem's parents were Vanita, a poor musician's wife and Methwold) he was condemned to a life of poverty and crime. These three children are closely linked to each other. Saleem's power to communicate with all the midnight children makes his head "a kind of forum in which they could talk to one another" through Saleem (227). Only Shiva can close off from me any part of his thoughts he chose to keep to himself (226).

Saleem with the help of Parvati becomes the leader of the midnight children, against Shiva's wishes.

Saleem is convinced that the midnight children must be there for a special purpose since each had been bestowed with supernatural or superhuman gift .But in the end they are all destroyed and contribute to India's fragmentation. The children symbolizing India's potentiality to build her future for each of its citizens, to build "the noble mansion of free India, where all her children may dwell", as Nehru had once declared (118). They not only differ in their ideas, but they also through jealousy, strife, narrow-mindedness, regionalism and communalism cause India's disintegration into small linguistic states, mirrored in the disintegration of the *Midnight's Children*'s Conference (MCC). Shiva had scoffed at the idea of the MCC, "the club- shub stuff ... for you rich boys (228). He also has no patience for Saleem's search for the purpose and meaning of their lives because poverty leaves no

room for idealistic philosophizing : Rich kid, "Shiva yelled," you don't know one damned thing! What *purpose* , man? What thing in the whole sister – sleeping world got *reason* , yara ? Where's the reason in starving, man?" (220). Saleem unable to retort to Shiva's cynical analysis of the world, takes refuge in the idea that "if there is a third principle its name is childhood. But it – dies; or rather, it is murdered"(256). His rationalization hardly helps him find an answer to his search for meaning. His and the children's downfall is brought about in Benaras, symbolically one of the most holy places of Shiva worship in India, where all of them are castrated and thus, disconnected from their linkage with the country's history.

Saleem withdraws into a private shell. His downfall sees the rise of Shiva who incidentally creates a new race of children who are bastard products of his illegitimate relations with numerous "society ladies."

The story of the midnight children is really about "broken promises."The lost opportunity of these children occurred because Mrs. Gandhi, tried to project herself as the greatest Indian leader, a Durga, and thus maintain and strengthen her hold on power. Rushdie in an interview (1985) admitted that if *Midnight's Children* had any purpose ... "it was an attempt to say that the thirty-two years between independence and the end of the book didn't add up to very much, that a kind of betrayal had taken place, and that the book was dealing with the nature of that betrayal."

Saleem is left to ponder on the concept of history as perceived in Hindu cosmology. History, he says, "in [his] version" is inextricably "bound to the age of Darkness, Kali-Yuga". He consoles himself that by Hindu cosmological law, this is "a period of decay resulting in the perversion of all values and virtues." The history of man or a nation are a meaningless fraction of the moments in Brahma's life and hence constitute only an illusion. Thus, Saleem resigns himself to the reality -illusion philosophical concept. According to Vedantic thought, to believe that man or the world around him is real, is a human being's *avidya* or ignorance.

Mrs. Gandhi was instrumental, to a large extent, in destroying the democratic institutions of independent India. She reinforced it by using the Hindu notion of the repetitive cycle of destruction and regeneration, for explaining modern political processes.

That is why in the novel, the generation that follows Saleem's chiidren of midnight, the generation represented by Aadam Sinai, is symbolically born of the traditional gods, Shiva and Parvati – the great figures of the past who are part of the cycle of destruction and regeneration as expressed by the mother goddess.

This also explains why Kali and Parvati, two names for the same goddess are seen to engage in two distinct activities in the novel. While Kali the Widow (Mrs. Gandhi) castrates the midnight children and drains them of their hope, Parvati gives birth to the next generation. Thus, the mythical cycle of destruction and regeneration continues in the present when the same traditions are called upon to justify contemporary actions. Shiva and Parvati are modelled after traditional Hindu "ideals" rather than the *Flat* or *Real* characters of Western fiction.

Saleem refers to the dangers of nostalgically reminding "a new-born, secular state" of its religio-mythical traditions. It results in a nation which is divided along linguistic, regional, communal lives. It is a nation :

> .... in which democracy and votes for women were irrelevant...
> so that people were seized with atavistic longings, and forgetting
> the new myth of freedom [revert] to their old ways, their old regionalist
> loyalties and prejudices (294)

The evil Shiva and children like him were responsible for the disintegration of India which you see being physically enacted in Saleem who is seen "cracking up." These were the children who under Mrs. Gandhi's revivalism of the traditional past, lost their real potential and betrayed the idea of the unified , plural , hybrid India with their growing parochialism.

5.5 FAMILY AS CHARACTER

In an interview given four years after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie made a very significant observation. He said that "because family is so central to life in India" it was impossible to write an epic novel on a monumental scale and not place the family "near the centre" (1985). He also noted that one could write a novel about Western society and not give the family a central place, and it wouldn't seem strange. But in an Indian novel this was almost a necessity. What do you think? Those of you who have been seeing the family serials *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki* and *Kabhi Saas Bhi Bahu Thi* on Star TV will agree that family centred stories do pull us as a nation. Indeed, the high TV viewer ratings that these family stories have been fetching have proved threatening to many other, perhaps more slickly produced shows and serials. Almost every home in India switches on the TV for these two serials and identifies with the joys and troubles of the two joint families.

The centrality of the family is therefore, reflected in a number of Indian English novels even those written much before Rushdie and stories woven around a family hold the reader even till this day. Rushdie was quick to seize this fact and play around a bit because his book is supposed to be "a comic epic." The epic dimensions are reflected in the stories of the different generations. Yet while wanting to involve the family in his story in a central way, he didn't want it to be a mere tale of different generations as is *The Forsythe Saga* or the family serials that I mentioned above.. His intention was "to undermine this convention." So he wrote about families in almost a mock heroic and comic way.

For this, he introduced certain surprise elements in his story. First there is the Bollywood style baby swop where the reader is shocked to discover after one hundred and fifty pages of reading about a family, that the family he had been reading about is not the family of the child, whose life history he had been engaged with, but somebody else's family . The other lies in Rushdie killing off Saleem's "family" when there were still one hundred and fifty pages left to go. If you recall, just about every member of the family dies in the bomb that falls on their house in Pakistan. The third is to bring in the Nehru-Gandhi family as characters in the book – a very daring act in itself, because they were very much around and in power.

This is something very interesting because he wanted to show how Indira Gandhi, the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, (India's first Prime Minister), and herself a Prime Minister and mother of two sons –Sanjay ("the second most powerful figure in India") and Rajiv (a future Prime Minister) sought to project herself and her family as being larger than life. He wanted to expose her attempts at "self-mythification."

In an introduction to Tariq Ali's *An Indian Dynasty : The Story of the Nehru – Gandhi Family* (1985), Rushdie describes how in a planned way the first family of India had set about "self-mythification" (xiii). This attempt at myth-making reached its height in 1975 when an Assamese minister sychophantly coined the campaign slogan, "India is Indira and Indira is India." This "historical" fact is included in *Midnight's Children*. Its inclusion clearly exposes Indira Gandhi's political manoeuvres as part of a major strategy to aggrandise herself and her family as the family of India's greatest leaders. This attempt at self-mythification reached its peak during the Emergency.

As I have said earlier, "the Emergency" was independent India's most shameful hour. You, who were probably not even born then may wonder why such a "fuss" is made about its imposition. Indeed when I was teaching *Midnight's Children*, in IIT Bombay, a final year B.Tech student of mine, asked me just this question. In answer, let me share, with you, what I told him, having lived through the period of the "Emergency" myself that too on a university campus. Let me share an incident with you . The CBI once visited my department to check on the antecedents of a wellknown history professor simply because someone had complained about her anonymously . How would you react if the present Indian Government were to suspend our fundamental rights overnight and impose censorship on the press, TV and radio? With horror and fear? Well something like this happened on 26 June 1975 when for the first time in free India's history, the fundamental rights of her citizens were suspended and 140,000 Indians were detained without trial : what became a common phrase then was the dreaded "midnight knock" that every right-thinking Indian feared.

The police was known to come suddenly to anyone's home and take away the person to prison. And because the citizen had not rights, he could not appeal before a court of law. Many intellectuals including university professors and activists were thus thrown into jail and tortured. In the words of *The Shah Commission Report on the Emergency*, "[T]housands were detained and a series of totally illegal and unwarranted actions followed involving untold human misery and suffering" (in Ali 186).

These were the facts of history that were swept away by Mrs. Gandhi's attempts to aggrandise herself and retain power. The illegal detentions and the enormous human suffering that she caused are precisely those details that were suppressed as she pursued her ambition to re-write India's history with herself at its centre.

Rushdie's despair and rage become very clear in his characterization of Mrs. Indira Gandhi as the murderous Widow. Let's look at the descriptions that he offers of her in Saleem's narration. The widow first appears in a terrifying dream that Saleem has during a bout with fever. Here she takes the form of a huge, voracious monster who gathers children in her hands, rips them apart, and rolls them into little green balls that she hurls into the night. Saleem also describes her as having green and black hair; her "arm is long as death, its skin is green the fingernails are long and sharp and black"; and the "children torn in two in Widow hands which rolling rolling halves of children roll them into little balls" (249).

The Widow, in this guise, most closely resembles the goddess Kali , who represents "Death and the Destroyer." In pictures, Kali is shown standing with protruding tongue, garland of skulls and hands holding weapons and severed hands. Rushdie through his narrator Saleem, clearly indicates that the Widow, Indira Gandhi, had conflated her own image with that of the traditional mother goddess. At the same time, however, Rushdie wants to show the consequences of performing such acts. The Widow, Saleem declares, "was not only Prime Minister of India but also aspired to be Devi, the Mother goddess in her most terrible aspect, possessor of the shakti of the gods."

Rushdie's characterization might at first seem extreme; surely Indira Gandhi did not conceive of herself literally as a mother goddess. However, it is clear that she was perceived in this fashion by many Indians during this period. The famous Indian artist M. F. Husain did paint a triology of her during the Emergency that depicts her as Durga or Kali. The point to be made here is not that Indira Gandhi went about proclaiming herself as Devi the mother goddess, but rather that her swift and cruel actions during the Emergency were perceived to be similar to the actions of Durga or Kali, and this was a role that "Mother Indira" did not repudiate.

The characterization of Mrs. Gandhi is the most scathing of all characters in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie's novel is in part, an examination of the "betrayal" of India by the independent Indian government beginning with Nehru.

The Nehru-Gandhi family as a character in *Midnight's Children* acquires a special meaning. By creating Saleem, Rushdie places the artist in opposition to all historians including politicians who re-write history to suit their own ambitions. The writer has to speak up and protest and Rushdie's protest rang out loud throughout the world.

As a critical historian of India, Saleem upholds three principles. First, he acknowledges the importance of the traditions of democratic and representative forms of government. Second, he acknowledges the teeming millions of the Indian populace that are forgotten in most histories of India which tend to focus on the great figures of history(as will become clear in section 5.6).

Third, he believes in the power of the writer's imagination that helps him construct suppressed "realities" and "truths". He calls this "the chutnification of history", the power to produce counter-histories, to protest against the powerful governments of the day. To protest is a writer's duty as he said in his lecture "Inside the Whale" that I shared with you in Unit 1.

To conclude this section, the characterization of the family in *Midnight's Children* goes beyond domestic space into the space of manipulative history and politics. It is the most difficult to understand and also the most complex. I have for obvious reasons, therefore, spent more time on discussing the Family as dynasty than the family of Saleem .

5.6 COMMON PEOPLE AS CHARACTERS

In most novels and plays there are a number of faceless people who also populate the world in which the main characters live. For example, in a Shakespearean play such as *Julius Ceasar*, besides the protagonist, Ceasar, Brutus, Cassius and Mark Anthony, there are the huge crowds of commoners whose comments constitute the spirit of the times, the belief systems that prevailed and the world in which the former lived. So, through the remarks of some unknown persons we know so much more about the society in which these Shakespearean heroes live. The times in which Shakespeare lived were marked by a strong belief in astrology and the people were superstitious. His common people have no names, no distinct personalities or identities; they are *types*. In technical jargon they are called the *rhubbarb;* they represent the "masses" in the novel or in a play as in real life. This has also been the case with all the Indian English novels until the advent of *Midnight's Children*.

In *Midnight's Children*, for the first time, Rushdie acknowledges the millions of common people and diverse groups that make up India's population. He does this by recording the many voices and perspectives that are almost never mentioned in most narratives, and history books. As Saleem says, "To understand just one life, you have to swallow the whole world"(126).

Rushdie avoids the typical historical and fictional approach of placing the primary emphasis on the "great" figures. For example, one would expect to find Mahatma Gandhi figuring prominently in a novel about the making of modern India – the way it happens in *Kanthapura* , but in *Midnight's Children*, the Mahatma hardly appears. Instead, Saleem records the daily activities of different "common" people and reproduces their wonderful language and unique qualities.

One of the most fascinating commoners is Tai, the boatman. Do you like him? He chatters non-stop, spins grand and fantastic stories for the child Aziz and has a

wonderful relationship with him until the adult Aziz returns from Germany – as a fully qualified doctor. Aziz and he initially revive the childhood friendship but Aziz gradually distances himself from the old boatman for his orthodox views, especially his views on Aziz's meetings with Naseem whom Aziz visits regularly in Tai's boat much against Tai's wishes. Tai feels protective and wants to save Aziz from getting trapped in Landowner Ghani's designs. Tai's fantastic ideas, his abusive language and temper, his unwashed coat and stink, his coarse repartee – all make him an unforgettable character. Lifafa Das is the second unusual common character who as the peepshow man in Delhi becomes a victim of religious fanaticism . A hardworking imaginative young man who is described as "invisible until he smiled, when he became beautiful" (75).

Lifafa Das keeps on adding postcards to his peepshow so that the children can really see the whole world. A symbol of plurality and cosmopolitanism, his chance visit to a Muslim Mohalla on a tension filled day just before Independence becomes nearly fatal for him. A small girl reminiscent of children in Hitler's days – incites the crowd by identifying him as Hindu. Through wild rumour he is seen as a rapist of Muslim women. He is chased by a mad crowd and would have been lynched, but for timely intervention by Saleem's mother, Amina. If you recall, as Lifafa Das knocks at her door for refuge, she lets him in and stands defyingly between him and the angry crowd. When her reasoning fails to convince the crowd, she challenges them to touch a woman who is about to become a mother. Responding to the traditional respect for an Indian mother-to-be, the crowd melts away and Lifafa Das's life is saved.

Lifafa Das, Tai, even Mary Pereira, Saleem's ayah the one who swops Saleem for Shiva to ensure a good life for a poor child – are all memorable commoners who share significant space with the main characters because of recurring references made to them in the novel and because of their unique qualities and unusual stances.

This is an important contribution because for the first time an attempt has been made in Indian fiction to bring a large number of socially marginalized people to the centre. Can you recall another earlier novel where the writer tried to level all of them with the hero of his book? Yes, it is Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* where Bakha a low caste became the hero of the book much to the surprise of the reading public in the West. Perhaps the origin of these revolutionary steps in Indian fiction by Anand and Rushdie, lies in their marxist thinking. In addition, with Rushdie it could also be the influence of post-structuralism and postmodernism. Such characterization is an attempt to try to overturn existing inequalities by making a large number of the low borns share space with the upper class – or almost.

In fact, the many characters in the magician's ghetto (where Lifafa Das later takes Saleem's mother Amina to a soothsayer who prophesizes Saleem's birth and destiny) tend to give the city of Delhi a carnivalesque atmosphere and point towards the intermingling of languages and social practices that both include "high" (upperclass) and "low" culture. Again, during the war in Bangladesh which filters through the experiences of Ayooba, Saheed, Farooq and Saleem – common soldiers who witness the atrocities committed by the Pakistani forces -- the focus is on the common everyday experiences of average people. It is their experience in Rushdie's estimation, that comprises a more accurate history of India. Thus in creating common people as memorable characters in his novel, Rushdie has set off a new trend in Indian fiction writing. In subsequent novels that have been written by other novelists, it is fairly common now to foreground the role played by the average common person. Thus in this section, I have tried to highlight the important contribution made by Rushdie of bringing common people as characters in fiction, rather than as the rhubbarb.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen how Rushdie draws upon the methods of oral narratives to create characters. All his characters from Saleem to Tai are allegorized or are symbols. They are modelled more after characters in oral narratives than on those in western fiction and have a peculiarity to their characterization that defies the simplistic distinction between *Flat* and *Round* characters offered by western fictional literary criticism.

5.8 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the main features of Rushdie's characterization in *Midnight's Children.*

2. Analyze, with examples, Rushdie's characterization of the Family in *Midnight's Children.*

3. Discuss the characterization of three commoners other than those examined in this unit.

4. Examine Saleem's role in the novel as autobiographer.

5.9 GLOSSARY

Alterego: very close and trusted friend; literally, the other self.

Adversary: opponent or enemy

Aggrandise: power or rank

Cartography: the science or art of making maps

Conflate: to combine

Conceive: to think of; consider

Inextricably: which cannot be united or separated

Mythification: the act of creating an invented person, not a real person.

Ponder: to spend time in considering

Parody: a weak and unsuccessful copy of somebody or something

Retort: a quick, rather angry, and often amusing answer

Repuditate: to refuse to accept

Rationalization: to find reasons

Scepticism:	doubt
Scoff:	to speak or act disrespectfully; ridicule
Sycophant:	flatterer
Triology:	a group of three related books, plays, paintings etc.
Voracious:	eating or desiring large quantities of food.

5.10 SUGGESTED READING

Nancy E. Batty "Rushdie's Art of Suspense"in *Midnight's Children*, *Ariel* 18: 3, July 1987

Arun P. Mukherjee "Characterization in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" in ed Kirpal (1990).

David Price "Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" *Ariel* 25:2, April 1994

Dieter Riemenschneider "History and the Individual . Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Salman Rushdie's is *Midnight's Children* in Ed. Kirpal (1990)

Ed. Viney Kirpal *The New Indian Novel in English*, New Delhi : Allied Publishers, 1990.

UNIT 6 MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN AS A LITERARY EVENT

Structure

6.0 OBJECTIVES

My objectives in this Unit are to help you assess the contribution of Rushdie's novel to the body of English fiction. Does it signal a new moment in the history of fiction in English? In what ways has it altered our understanding of writing fiction? Do Rushdie's experiments set the trend for a new genre in fiction? What impact did it have on the novels that followed in its wake? What does the novel's enthusiastic reception bode for Indians writing in English?

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981 was hailed as a major literary event for reasons other than its winning the Booker for that year. You are aware that the earlier generation of novelists like Rao, Narayan, Anand, Desai or Sehgal had done their bit to put Indian fiction in English on the world map. But *Midnight's Children* blazed a different sort of trail. For the first time, a novel by a writer of Indian origin was seen as best reflecting the spirit of the contemporary West. The astounding reception of the novel in the West was both a sign and anticipation of the new prestige of the margin at the center. Though the space for a novel like *Midnight's Children* was created by a West willing to forfeit its claims to mastery, the novel played a crucial role in making voices from the margin heard. The novel and the writer have subsequently become the nodes for contemporary debates on multiculturalism, postmodernism, migrancy and hybridity raging in the Western world today.

Midnight's Children broke new grounds in many ways. A truly border-crossing work, its challenge to fiction, literature, history and reality called for new classifications. Its blend of fact and fiction, myth and history, storytelling and novelistic conventions defied all rules for writing fiction and to find a new genre. Linda Hutcheon has coined the term historiographic metafiction to classify Rushdie's peculiar concoction of history and metafiction. What is historiographic metafiction? As the name suggests, it is a kind of fiction that has elements of both history and metafiction. The novel is generically differentiated from history through its dealing with events that are probable but not true. Historiographic metafiction violates this distinction by straying into traditional historical territory. If fiction can be history can

history be fiction? While fiction is distinguished from historical facts, the probability premise of fiction steers fiction in the direction of verisimilitude. Can fiction be life? How is fictional truth different from truth? How about metafiction? Metafiction is defined as the kind of fiction that is concerned with the process of its own making. Metafiction, unlike other fiction, that labours to establish the veracity of its referents, unmasks the "machinery" of fiction to show its referents to be made up. In this manner, metafiction challenges the notion of mimetic realism that was often projected as the only mode of writing fiction. Metafiction shows that mimetic realism is only one mode of creating fiction. As fictional referents can never be real, it least matters which conventions it employs.

Rushdie's name figures prominently in Hutcheon's list of practitioners of historiographic metafiction that she sees as exemplifying the condition of postmodernism. This poses a problem because Rushdie is also seen as the paradigmatic figure of post-colonialism. Postcolonial critics claim that the strong political nature of Rushdie's writing underlines his participation in the oppositional counterdiscourse of post-colonialism. Rushdie professes to carry on the *Panchatantra* and *Arabian Nights* legacy in his writings that would make him something of an oriental storyteller. But he seems equally happy basking in postmodern glory. This fencesitting attitude has made Aijaz Ahmed see him as being complicit with both postmodernism and postcolonialism. To complicate things further postmodernism and post-colonialism overlap in so many ways that it is difficult to decide whose allegiances lie where. What do you think?

6.2 *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AS A POSTMODERN NOVEL

As Rushdie's novel shows a concern with the process of how it came to be written, we can perhaps classify his novel as metafiction. Like all metafiction, the telling of the story becomes a theme in *Midnight's Children.* Rushdie's narrator begins by sharing with his reader the problem of beginning the novel, introduces the theme of the kind of stories considered appropriate for storytelling and the role of the narrator. Have you read any novels similar to this?

When you read a novel you are so carried away by the story that you think it really occurred. You scarcely pay attention to how it was created. What effect does Rushdie's calling your attention to the behind the scenes activity of his novel have on you? Does it spoil your fun? Rushdie not only destroys the illusion of reality that you normally expect of fiction or film but also kills the suspense by spilling the beans much ahead. What do you make of this? Like Padma, you would like to know what happened next. Similarly, when Saleem keeps referring to events that happen much later, your curiosity is sufficiently aroused to make you request him to go on. At the same time, as you already know the ending, all that leads up to it seems merely an explanation. You feel cheated out of the story. Gradually, you begin to realize that your interest in the story takes a back seat to the story making and its telling. The narrator lets you in one by one into the tricks used by storytellers to tell stories. He tells you about beginnings, middles and endings proper to a novel. He tells you about Sheherezade's eternally delayed endings. He lets you in the art of building up to a climax. You also learn about the chain through which events are linked to one another.

Having exposed the machinery, does Rushdie stick to the rules he has outlined for you? Yes. In fact, he does so in such an exaggerated fashion that you begin to wonder what's up. He appears to follow each of the novel's conventions to the letter, which gives you the feeling that he is being tongue in cheek. Remember how he reduced the notion of fiction beginning with the birth of the hero to absurdity.

Remember the middles and endings that preceded the beginning? Remember the absurd explanation for events? Why does Rushdie do this?

Rushdie does this to mock at the conventions of nineteenth century realism. In turn, he makes us examine the question of fictional realism. The debate about whether art can depict life accurately has been going on since the beginning, though the status of mimetic realism keeps changing. Mimetic realism rests on a belief in the ability of art to imitate reality accurately. Now this had become a value to be cherished, above all in 19th century fiction. Rushdie takes up this aspect for close examination. Let us go back to the definition of the novel to understand the point better .

The novel is defined as a narrative of certain length that depicts events that could probably have occurred. Realist fiction takes this aspect very seriously. Very often, you have admired a piece of fiction because it seemed so lifelike. It is exactly like it might have happened in your own life. Compare this with Rushdie's story. Saleem warns you that he is going to tell a tale that is "a strange commingling of the real and the improbable", which turns the real unreal dichotomy topsy turvy to question the probability criterion of fiction. Rushdie talks of events that are unlikely to have occurred in a Western reader's life. Unlike 19th century realism, which goes to great lengths to convince us that the events depicted there really happened, this novel highlights the bizarre and the uncanny. Magic and the supernatural are quite common in Romance but seem like an unlike setting for fiction. But 19th century fiction that developed as a reaction to romance worked hard at producing verisimilitude. For some reason this quality of 19th century fiction that goes by the name of mimetic realism came to be the standard by which other novels were judged. The undue emphasis on realism overlooked the fact that art can never be likelife. The conventions of 19th century, therefore, are another set of conventions that might be substituted by any other. Metafiction bares the tricks used by writers to show that novels are all made up. It shows that fiction forms its own autotelic universe that does not correspond to anything in the real world. Unlike the writer of realist fiction, metafiction does not pretend to create an illusion of truth.

This exposure of the made up nature of fiction has unraveled other truths that were unshakeable. Take the truth of history. History is presented as an objective document of observed facts. One is not made aware of the biases that the selection and interpretation of facts is highly subjective and that facts may be distorted to serve the interests of certain people. Which means that the truth of history that we have held sacrosanct is also a made up thing. It was easier for you to accept that fiction is made up. But to think that history, too, could be made up?

Rushdie and other practitioners of historiographic metafiction parody how writers make up their stories to show how history could also be a made up story. Their crossing into the territory of history in their fictional works is intended to close the division between the two. *Midnight's Children's* strange juxtaposition of history and fiction where historical facts coincide with the life of the protagonist Saleem Sinai creates a unique combination. We shall return to *Midnight's Children* as historical fiction in another section in detail. For the moment, let us look at how the novel fits into the mode of historiographic metafiction that Hutcheon celebrates as the true postmodern genre. Rushdie plays with historical incidents and conventions to show them to be as "unreal", as fictive as things that fiction refers to.

Now let us move on to the postmodern crisis of reality. Having found out that both fiction and history are different kinds of stories, it is not difficult to grasp that reality also could be a made up thing. This idea of reality as being made up by the observer is called the "constructivist" view of the universe. The problem of postmodern fiction is not merely to challenge the view that art can accurately depict reality. Or that while selecting facts, the historian chooses to tell the stories that appeal to him or promote his interests. One is talking about a different understanding of reality that throws what we take to be the real world into doubt. Postmodern fiction, by calling

attention to the made up nature of fiction and history, shows us that reality itself is of our own making. We too arrange our lives and construct our own reality in the way Saleem constructs the novel by selecting and arranging events that make him the hero. Rushdie keeps harping on the fact that the India he portrays is Saleem/Rushdie's vision of India and might be an India of the imagination but none the less true. He also shows that he is not interested in writing a history of post independence India. Rather he is keen to understand how humans "filter" reality. We all remember things that we choose to remember. Memory works by playing up all that is pleasant and pushing unpleasant happenings into the background.

Now we must recognize that postmodernism is not a global but uniquely Western phenomenon. It is either a reaction or a development of Western modernity. As a critique of modernism, postmodern concerns often spill over to post-colonial anxieties that make them appear similar. But postmodernism is a deep reaction against Western modernism, and the crisis of reality experienced by the West today. Crisis in the nature of reality has also brought down the stock of realism in literature. When reality itself is shown to be a made up thing, what can fiction possibly imitate? Postmodern Western fiction reflects and is shaped by the postmodernist crisis in the West. Postmodern fiction no longer has a story to tell. Instead, it unmasks the process of its making constantly calling attention to its made up status.

This contrasts with 19th century fiction's obsession with verisimilitude that made a religion out of mimetic realism. On first sight, it appears that Rushdie is working in the metafiction tradition. But then one thinks of several Indian collections of stories in which the writing of the stories is a theme. The occasion and the travails of telling and making the story have always formed the central story in most Indian narrative collections. True, in *Midnight's Children*, the theme of the problem of writing a novel runs through the length of the novel. And Rushdie parodies 19th century fictional expectations to expose them to be mere conventions.

But Rushdie's narrative does not stop at showing fiction as forming its own reality that need not have a one to one correspondence with what we take to be reality. As in other metafiction, the emphasis on the artifice in storytelling opens our eyes to the fact that fiction can never be life as realist conventions might lull us into believing. Art has its own truth and its own reality. The uncertainty about what we take to be real has certainly changed our ideas about fictional realism. The understanding that fiction is "an infinite play of signs" that do not stand for anything outside is strengthened by the role that language is increasingly given in shaping reality. One is happy to note that unlike other postmodern novels, Rushdie's novel is not an empty play of signs. Rather it is rooted in a very real history and is grounded in the particular problems and dilemmas of a particular society.

6.3 *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AS A POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL

For a writer who has one foot in the postmodern and the other in the postcolonial world, it is difficult to separate the different strands. More so, because postmodern and postcolonial agendas collide in different respects. In what ways is post-colonialism similar to or different from postmodernism?

Postcolonialism, like postmodernism, is a critique of modernism. But unlike postmodernism, it attacks modernism from a post-colonial angle. While postmodernism is a reaction against modernism, post-colonialism is an attempt to show the irrelevance of the western division of pre-modern, modern and postmodern to non-Western societies. In every field, postmodernism attempts to reverse , extend or project the movement of modernism. This could be seen in the postmodern return to history, in its ethic of indeterminacy, or in the rediscovery of intuition and

imagination in preference to modernity's technorationalism. But the most important aspect of postmodernism is the collapse of universalizing claims of modernism. This opens a space view other than the western. This postmodern space has been liberating for postcolonialism for the simple reason that postcolonialism has been particularly concerned with revealing that what the West passes off as universal. Thus post modern dictums are actually its own models. For example, to be modern was to move in the direction of the West. This has been rejected by postcolonialism, which shows that different people can become modern in different ways. Postmodern fiction is a natural extension of modern Western fiction just as postmodernism is a growth out of modernism. Both reflect ,and are shaped by the trends of their times. Just as it is believed that non-Western societies should trace the Western route towards modernity, non Western fiction is expected to follow the movements in Western fiction.

While postcolonial fiction is bound to have some Western influences, it has grown in response to very different socio-political currents. Helen Tiffin made a very important distinction between postmodernism and post-colonialism when she pointed out that unlike postmodernist fiction, post-colonial works have a strong political content. Postcolonial fiction is deeply embedded in the history and politics of its society. Though the postmodern and the postcolonial might have a lot in common, the postcolonial works in an oppositional manner. The Postcolonial can be seen as a "counterdiscourse" to postmodernism.

In postcolonial fiction, the opposition to Western norms comes through rejecting the norms of writing fiction as specific to the West of a certain period. Rushdie subverts 19th century realist conventions even as he challenges mimetic realism to root them in the Western tradition. You may recall that Rushdie juxtaposes the conventions of 19th century realism with the formulae of oriental storytelling. Each fictional convention is placed against a fairytale formula to show storytelling to be governed by very different standards from fiction. For instance, stories have a way of beginning afresh after every ending; they "leak" into other stories before they are completed; the links between them might be very tenuous. These formulae stand out when incorporated in fiction and have the effect of introducing the fiction reader to the norms of storytelling. At the same time, this strategy also heightens his awareness of fictional convention. Rushdie places fairytale conventions against those of fiction to show that while in the case of the fairytale we are aware of them being conventions we don't realize that fiction is also artificial. While the artificiality of the one has become apparent due to the fact that we are far removed from it, that of the other seems natural to us.

In addition to this, Rushdie confronts Western fiction with eastern storytelling to show that Western literary structures are not universal. He apprises the Western reader of other narrative modes that might differ from those of the West. The difference in the style of Western and non-Western narratives, according to Rushdie, might be due to their emerging from particular knowledge systems. Look at the linear movement of the novel and the cyclic pattern of eastern narratives. They parallel the Western linear and Indian cyclic time respectively. Similarly, while fiction belongs to the scriptural tradition, that is, writing, storytelling is part of the spoken tradition or orature. The convention of a narrator telling his story to an interlocutor that Saleem borrows from Indian epics tales also arises from the specific needs of speech.

Rushdie, therefore, contrasts one set of conventions with another set of conventions to show them both to be artificial. Rushdie does not merely confront Western literature with Indian storytelling. He contrasts one set of conventions with another to reveal 19th century realism to be another convention. Saleem claims to be following in the steps of Indian epic creators like Valmiki. Is Rushdie writing a modern day *Ramayana*? You may note that Rushdie adopts an equally parodic stance towards his Indian materials. He is too strongly grounded in the literate tradition to return unselfconsciously to pure storytelling. Rushdie cannot be an ancient storyteller. His novels filter the pre-modern through the postmodern. At the same

time, Rushdie's inability to participate fully in the storytelling tradition does not imply disrespect towards them. Rushdie's in-between status, as that of a postcoloniality is reflected in his attempt to challenge eurocentric traditions with indigenous traditions while being aware that they are lost to him.

This brings us to another problem postcolonialism is plagued with. Does post-colonial opposition draw on a pure tradition to confront postmodernism or should it be an opposition from within? Rushdie reiterates Western fiction's conventions in an ironic fashion to show their inappropriateness to the reality he wishes to depict. But he also seems to suggest through his irreverent treatment of his traditional materials, that the solution is not in a return to an autochthonous essence. Rushdie seems to follow the strategy that Stephen Slemon noted in postcolonial resistance. He repeats the givens of Western discourse to work them outwards. Saleem's exaggerated attention to the rules of creating fiction achieves this purpose. While he builds in the Indian storytelling parallel, he does not propose them as an indigenous alternative. For a return to a pre-colonial essence is an impossibility for many like Rushdie. The compromise lies in turning both the pre-colonial and the Western inside out.

Take the much celebrated play with reality that goes under the name of magic realism. Magic realism is the most exciting thing that has happened to Western literature since the days of the Romance. But that is because of the West looking at realism as the only relationship between life and literature. Like someone said, if this were so, we would have to leave out three fourths of world's literature. *Midnight's Children* draws on one such literature - of Indian epics, tales and legends, which don't take the realist premise of Western fiction as axiomatic. Unlike realist fiction, these narratives consistently transgress into the unreal. Most of these have magical settings and characters with magical powers.

Midnight's Children also shuttles between the real and the unreal. Strange and bizarre things happen and characters engage in improbable actions. Why does Rushdie juxtapose the stories with unreal settings and the real world of novels? For two reasons. First, he wishes to show that as fiction is always made up, it does not matter whether you abandon all pretense at realism as in fairytales or labour at accuracy. Novels can't do more than tell stories. Secondly, he wants to challenge the notion of reality itself. Here we are treading a more dangerous territory. For societies differ in what they believe to be real. There is a world of difference between *secularized* societies view of the real and *non-secularized* societies view of the unreal. The difference between the two is captured in the way of thinking of Padma and that of Saleem. "Real" and "true" are different, according to Saleem. Common Indian folk like Padma and Mary are embedded in the "miracle laden" universe of India. Saleem and his maker Salman merely dream of it but cannot see it in their "Anglopoised pool of light."

While an English speaking reader might find it difficult to accept the miraculous happenings in the novel, Rushdie shows you that these appear as perfectly natural to Padma or Mary. As with other differences, Rushdie contrast Western and non-Western perspectives on reality to expand the outlines of what the West takes to be the real. While Rushdie, like his anglicized narrator Saleem, might hesitate in the presence of the supernatural, he admits persons who greet the supernatural with total belief. What do you make of this? Like everything else, Rushdie challenges the universalism of West's understanding of the unreal by giving us a glimpse into belief systems that have a different relationship with the unreal.

6.4 *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AS A HISTORICAL NOVEL

Now let us return to the novel's relationship with history. As we discussed earlier, history deals with facts while novels deal with fiction. But historical fiction is a

genre that uses historical events and figures as a backdrop for a fictionalized story. Can we classify *Midnight's Children* as historical fiction popularized by its practitioners like Sir Walter Scott? Rushdie does not merely employ a historical setting; he turns to history as a theme. Rushdie takes up the history of postindependence India ending in the Emergency as his main theme. The history of India runs parallel to the life of the narrator Saleem resulting in a unique coupling of the private with the public. Readers of *Midnight's Children* have pointed out discrepancies and anachronisms in Rushdie's account. Rushdie, on his part, claims that he never intended to write the definitive history of India. When apprised of the "errors" in his rendering of history, he sought refuge in the device of the unreliable narrator. Why does Rushdie introduce errors intentionally? Is it merely to show that fiction cannot be confined to history? This is partly so. Rushdie is more concerned with the process of history making than showing the difference between fiction and history.

The "reclaiming" of history in postcolonial fiction has a specific political agenda. The post-colonial writer's concern with the restoration of his people's history grows from the imperialist projection of postcolonial people a people without history.

The myth of the lack of "historical consciousness" among "natives" was based on two presuppositions1) the natives had no written records 2) they had no way of systematically studying the past. Now writers like Rushdie are trying to disprove the lie. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie juxtaposes the "remembered" truth against recorded truth and establishes the validity of the former. Oral history proceeds by the logic of memory, which works by selecting, distorting , adding. This would seem a very imprecise manner of recording events compared to scientific history. But Rushdie tries to show that even the so-called objective history involves a selection and representation of events in a manner that distorts and alters them. This is not made obvious as history is written. Rushdie takes us through the process of history making.

As we follow Saleem fitting historical events to suit his thesis, we realize how objective histories too impose a pattern on related facts. You might have noted the "errors" in *Midnight's Children*. You might have noticed how Saleem provides a certain motivation to events to write himself into a central role. A similar process occurs during the process of interpretation of events in recorded histories. By showing how histories are made up, Rushdie closes the gap between Western and *Puranic* histories. He tries to show that the perceived absence of history in nations like India is due to the difference in the historiography that lingers on the status of facts. *Puranaitihasa* accords value not only to what happened but what is believed to have occurred. Rushdie holds up the truth of the imagination when he argues for his version of India based on memory or has Saleem make a case for the truth of memory.

While the role of memory and imagination in oral histories is known, we are not aware of the "imagined" nature of historical communities. Rushdie takes us back to the moment when the Indian nation was imagined. His use of the words "myth" and "dream" underlines the imagined nature of the national community. The fact that the nation is imagined into being, does not make it any less real for those who live in it. Rushdie uses this comparison to show that mythic history and scientific history are not different as they are made out to be. Both are, to a certain extent, made up. But while one enjoys the status of truth, the other is dismissed as a fantasy. This is so because one conceals its made up status while the other does not. Rushdie himself adopts *puranic* historiography to call his reader's attention to other historiographical methods that were not deemed worthy of serious study. Writers like Rushdie use these methods to restore the history of India. You might have noticed that Saleem prefers to attribute a divine motivation- the method of *Puranic* histories - to the causality of scientific history. And places *Puranic* truth along with historical calendar time to show that there are two alternative methods of preserving memory.

6.5 THE NOVEL OF THE 80'S

Viney Kirpal, in *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s*, notes that the Indian English novel since the 1980s is different from its precursors both in technique and sensibility. Do you agree with her?

The most traumatic event in post independence India was the imposition of Emergency in 1975, which left an indelible mark on the novels after this event. Apart from *Midnight's Children, The Great Indian Novel* and *Such a Long Journey also* place the Emergency as a climatic event in their plot.

Kirpal links the historical obsession of the 1980s novel to this political event. Vrinda Nabar in *Three Indian English Novels* of the 1980s traces it to a global rediscovery of history, which began in the 1960s. The debate on the status and methods of history, the universalistic claims of Western history has culminated in the revisionist project of the Subaltern Studies group in India. This project deconstructs Western historiography from a postcolonial perspective and suggests alternate perspectives. The fiction of the 1980s reflects the novelists' engagement with similar concerns. As Kirpal puts it, "official versions of history, patriarchal versions of womanhood, institutionalized versions of the subaltern are the discourses that are being contested and undermined by the post 1980s Indian English novelists".

In terms of technique, the 1980s novel demonstrates the destabilization associated with postmodernism. Kirpal believes that "writing of tradition and destabilizing it, turning it on its head and installing an alternative has given a new freedom to the Indian novelist's technique and style". Many of the features typical of 1980s' fiction are epitomized by *Midnight's Children*. The novel has become so strongly reflective of the temper of the times that it is difficult to disentangle the two. Kirpal warns that the superficial resemblances between this fiction with postmodern fiction should not lead us to equate the two. This is very important because the novel of the 1980's is still rooted in the Indian material reality. Rushdie himself made this distinction when he asserted that "books are about the world". Postmodern fiction, on the other hand, is a linguistic construct with a precarious relationship with the world outside.

6.6 THE CHILDREN OF *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Whether one believes that Rushdie "labeled a generation and liberated a literature" with Shashi Tharoor or dismisses the novel as "one great, big confused bluff", Rushdie's influence on the novels that followed cannot be wished away. Not only has the novel been used to benchmark others, younger writers appear to find it difficult to step out of the Rushdiesque mode. It is difficult to think of novels that do not carry the unmistakable Rushdie stamp. From *The Great Indian Novel* to *The God of Small Things*, the *Midnight's Children* factor is never absent. One notices the same irreverent play with words and conventions, the retreat into the bizarre and the uncanny, the epic sweep, the historical ambitions, the blend of private and public that Rushdie began. Many of these novelists are too talented to blindly ape their distinguished compatriot. But few have been able to resist the Rushdie magic and attempt, at times unsuccessfully to replicate it. Do you think that the similarities in the 1980s' fiction spring from the temper of an era or do you attribute them to the overpowering presence of Salman Rushdie? One could conclude that Rushdie invented a new genre of fiction that has been carried forward with varying degrees of success by the younger Indian writers. But it could also prove to be limiting for those who want to break free of the Rushdie mould. Some talented writers have not

received their due because Indian writing in English is expected to be the exotic masala khichdi that Rushdie patented.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

You are now in a position to understand how *Midnight's Children* set up a new genre in fiction writing. Rushdie's novel has been appropriated by both postmodernism and post-colonialism because it articulates their intersecting concerns. Whether one likes the novel or not, one is forced to concede that *Midnight's Children* has been the most significant publishing event of the last decades of the 20th century. Do you think it deserved the Booker of Booker?

6.8 GLOSSARY

Appropriate: to set aside for some purpose / suitable

Agendas: subjects to be considered at a meeting

Apprises: to inform

Axiomatic: self-evident

Anachronisms: person or thing that appears to be in the wrong period of time

Allegiances: loyalty

Artifice: clever skill

Bizarre: strange, peculiar

Collide: to meet and strike violently

Complicit: to be a partner in a crime

Culminated: reach the highest point

Constructivism: the view that reality is always constructed artificially

Discrepancies: difference

Disentangle: to free from confusion

Exotic: strange and unusual

Eurocentric: European literary practices

Epitomized: a person or thing who has the essence of a certain quality

Harping on: to talk a lot about something

Historiographic Metafiction: Fiction that blends history with metafiction

Intersecting: a point where roads, lines, cross

Interlocutor:	The person who is talking to someone
Indeterminancy:	not fixed
Indigenous:	native
Indelible:	which cannot be rubbed out
Metafiction:	Fiction concerned with the process of its own making
Patent:	invention
Precarious:	unsaved
***Postmodernism*:**	Historically the phase in Western civilization that follows modernism but has also been interpreted as a concept that emphasizes indeterminacy, play, hybridity, fragmentation and so on.
Postcolonialism:	Has been interpreted as the period following colonialism, as decolonization or a state of being pervaded in the world today shaped by the colonial encounter.
Revisionist:	derogatory reference to an existing Marxist political system
Referent:	that which is referred to
Stance:	a way of standing
Scriptural:	according to a holy writing
Subverts:	to try to destroy the power and influence
Sacrosanct:	sacred
Secularized:	secular
Technorationalism:	the elevation of rationality in a technocratic age
Tenuous:	very thin
Transgress:	to go beyond
Tongue in cheek:	saying or doing something one does not seriously mean
Travails:	p s of giving birth to a child
Unraveled:	ake clear
Verismilitude:	ality of seeming to be true
Wished away:	want the absence of something

6.9 QUESTIONS

1. What is historiographic metafiction? Does *Midnight's Children* belong to this kind of fiction?

2. Do you consider *Midnight's Children* a postcolonial or a postmodern novel?

3. Do you think Rushdie has set the trend for a new genre of fiction? If so, how?

4. How has Rushdie's novel influenced the novel of the 80s and the 90s?

6.10 SUGGESTED READING

Mark Currie. *Metafiction* (Ed and introduction by), London: Longman, 1995.

Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative · The Metafictional Paradox* Ny: Methuen, 1984.

Christine Brooke Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Fantastic* Cambridge: CUP, 1981.

Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* London: Methuen, 1981.

Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* NY: Methuen, 1984.

Viney Kirpal, (Ed. and Introduction by) *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s,* New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1990.

Nilufer E Bharucha & Vrinda Nabar, (Eds) *Postcolonial Indian Literature in English.* New Delhi: Vision Books, 1998.

UTTAR PRADESH
RAJARSHI TANDON OPEN UNIVERSITY

MAEN-07
INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Block

6

THE SHORT STORY

EXPERTS COMMITTEE

Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah
Dhvanyaloka, Mysore

Prof. Meenakshi Mukerjee
JNU, New Delhi

Prof. M.L. Raina
Punjab University, Chandigarh

Prof. P.C. Kar
Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda

Prof. Issac Sequiera
Osmania University, Hyderabad

Prof. Mohan Ramanan
University of Hyderabad

Prof. Vinod Sena
Delhi University, Delhi

Prof. R.K. Dhawan
Delhi University, Delhi

Prof. G.R. Malik
University of Kashmir, Srinagar

IGNOU Faculty

Prof. Asha S. Kanwar

Dr. A.B. Sharma

Dr. Renu Bhardwaj

Dr. Anju Sehgal Gupta

Ms. Neera Singh

COURSE COORDINATOR & EDITING

Dr. Renu Bhardwaj
School of Humanities
IGNOU

BLOCK PREPARATION

Dr. Aruna Sitesh
Principal I.P. College
Delhi

PRODUCTION

Ms. P. Gupta, CE,
Camera Ready Copy Prepared by: Sh. A.S.V. Venkateswar, PA, IGNOU

July, 2001

ISBN-81-266-0195-7

MEAN-07(2)/82

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Have you ever thought that in order to really live, we make up stories about ourselves and others and about the personal as well as social past. This way we are turning our lives into stories. Barbara Hardy, Louis M. Rosenbalt, Wolfgang Isex, Frank Smith and Norman Holland have premised that a narrative is constructed or performed through a series of interactions at any given moment with self-accumulated and self-correcting impressions which get snowballed upto a point. Barbara Hardy has gone to the extent of saying that narrative is a 'primary act of mind' through which human consciousness operates.

Children are the first recipients of stories. These help them to reckon the world-mother's, granny's, folk-tales, radio and television, car stereos and later on teachers, comics, printed books and even advertisements. All these contribute to the conventions of fiction in terms of a constructed whole with a beginning and an end. We become used to repetitive patterns called Story Grammars (Bower, 76) Stein and Glenn have experimented with children who were familiar with the story grammar of their respective cultures. They not only made sense of New Stories from different cultures but also added 'missing conventional elements' when they re-told these stories.

Psychologists believe that one holds on to stories to make sense of an otherwise confusing world. We not only learn through stories but also see our way through to maturity with their help. Therefore, storytelling, story making are integrative in nature and help unite disparate bits of information into a whole which helps sustain the reader's/listener's interest.

It is, hard to find a common thread which appeals to us most while reading a story. Of course, we shall discuss issues like content, form, meaning or stylistic devices, but it is the effect that the stories produce on us which is what is important. Anton Chekhov said that reading a short story is like swallowing a glass of vodka. It hits you in the guts. It changes the way the reader looks at the world (Casterton, 86). Novels, poems and plays too have an impact but in the short story everything is subordinate to the change.

What is crucial for you, therefore, to understand is the developing response of the reader/interlocutor or the responder in the holistic sense. The effect of stories on us is comprehensive. The response stories trigger off is not just cognitive, but affective and psychometric at the sametime. The mind invokes previous experiences, relates and responds to new experiences to shape a universally verifiable world,. This process broadens horizons, cultivates empathy and promotes bridges across time and culture. Therefore, meaning and significance and value are not to be described externally as qualities of a text or ministrations of experts but as events, experiences of readers/listeners.

Such a view rests on you, the respondents, and not on teaching, administering instrumentalities of the experts or the written texts. Therefore, discover yourself by reading the stories in this Block.

The block consists of six units. The stories discussed are all written by Indian writers writing in English. **Unit One** looks at the history of short story, basic elements such as plot, characterisation, atmosphere, narrative techniques, point of view. **Unit Two** examines two stories of R.K. Narayan: *An Astrologer's Day, Engine Trouble.* **Unit Three** discusses cultural dualism in the stories of Arun Joshi *'The only American from Our Village* and Manoj Das's *A Trip into the Jungle.* Thereafter in **Unit Four** we have taken up two stories by women writers - Subhadra Sen Gupta's *The Fourth Daughter* and Raji Narasimhan's *A Toast to Herself.* In **Unit Five** we examine one

story each of Shashi Despande - *The Miracle* and Gita Hariharan's *Gajar Halwa* and help you to understand the broad concerns of Indian women short story writers. **Lastly, Unit six** identities essential features of story writing for children by introducing you to the art of Ruskin Bond in his stories *NoRoom for a leopard, Copperfield in the Jungle,* and *An Island of Trees.*

Questions are provided at the end of each unit so that you can ascertain your positions on the various issues discussed in the units. Please read the stories carefully before you start reading this Block.

Suggested Reading

H.G. Bower. "Experiments on Story Understanding and Recall", Quarterly journal of *Experimental Psychology,* Vol.28, 1976. pp. 511 -34

J. Casterton. *Creative Writing: A Practical Guide*; London, The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1986.

B. Hardy, "*Tellers and Listeners*", Athlone Press, 1975.

N.N. Holland. "*Poems in Persons*, Norton, New York, 1973.

Iser Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading*, Routle & Kegan Paul, 1978.

L.M. Rosenbalt. "*The Reader, the Text, the Poemm,* South Illinois, 1978.

F. Smith. *Writing and the Writer,* New York

N.L. Stein, and Glenn, *"An Analylsis of Story Comprehension in Elementary School Children"* in Roy O. Freedie, ed. *New Directions in Discourse Processing.* Ablex. New Jersey, 1979, pp. 53-120.

UNIT 1 ABOUT THE SHORT STORY

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to familiarise you with the genre of short story – how it has evolved over the centuries all over the world – its form, its meaning, its readability, etc. We shall pay special attention to the significance of the atmosphere in a short story because a proper setting and authenticity of atmosphere lend meaning to a story.

We would also like to illustrate how choosing the right characters and their convincing development add to the over all effect of a short story. Then do not forget that great masters of the short story have adopted different narrative techniques and styles to make their stories effective and interesting. Finally, you must know that an author wants to convey something to the reader – s/he writes from a particular stand point which lends meaning to a story. Last but not the least, try to study your own developing response to stories. See how far your response is a natural process of selection and elimination based on previously held experiences. Therefore, meaning significance are not to be described qualities of a text or ministrations of experts but as events, experiences of readers/listeners.

1.1 HISTORY OF THE SHORT STORY

The desire to tell stories and to listen to stories is inherent in all of us. According to Somerset Maugham, the short story began when the hunter narrated to his fellows, by the cavern fire, after they had eaten and drunk their fill, some fascinating incident he had heard or witnessed during the day. Curiosity might have killed the cat but the insatiable desire to know what happened next certainly ignited the imagination and skill of the teller and the suspense and patience of the listener. The oldest known tales are said to be of the *Shipwrecked Sailor* written on Egyptian Papyri (about 400 B.C) or the *Book of Jonah* from the Old Testament (350-750 B.C).

The earliest written stories seem to be *The Thousand and One Nights* or the *Arabian Nights Entertainments,* written originally in Arabic but made known in Europe in the early 18th century by Antoine Galland's translation into French and Edward William Lane's translation into English. Though the source of the tales is uncertain, the framework appears to be of Persian origin. It is mentioned by Al Masudi (a.d.944), an Arab traveller and historian, as occurring in a book called *Hezar Afsane*, attributed

according to tradition, to Artaxerxes 1 (465-424 B.C). [they tell the story of the king who had his wives killed successively on the morning after the consummation of their marriage, until the clever Sheherzade, the princess saved her life and that of many others by the never-ending, suspense-filled tales she told him]. The tales were probably systematically collected in Egypt sometime in the 14th-16th centuries.

Boccaccio's tales collected in *The Decameron* were written between 1348 and 1358 and were very popular throughout the Renaissance. Their setting is interesting. Florence is in the grip of a severe plague in 1348. Seven young men flee the city for the beautiful neighbouring villas, entertain each other with stories, each one telling one tale each day. These are one hundred tales in all.

These tales, relying mainly on the oral tradition, are basically discursive, focusing on a moral point. The major difference between these and other such prose tales and the more recent nineteenth century short story is the artist's consciousness and treatment of his or her tale as a distinctive art form. In the nineteenth century the short story acquired a currency and character it had not had before.

Some critics have claimed that the short story is an American invention. Peter S.Prescott claims, "The thing itself is ours, invented by us a century and half ago, and dominated by Americans ever since." [1] While this is obviously not the case, we have to admit that nowhere else has the short story as an exacting, complex literary form been so assiduously cultivated as in the United States, consequently, profoundly influencing short story writers the world over.

The Indian short story, as distinct from the fables of the *Hitopadesh* and the tales of the *Panchatantra*, has a comparatively short story of existence. The first Hindi short story for example, is said to be *Dulai Vali*(1907), though some critics consider *Rani Ketaki Ki Kahani* (1800-1810) to be the first Hindi story. What is remarkable however, is the strides the form has made in almost all the Indian languages, so much so that it now seems to be the major form of expression of litterateurs. Fragmentation of experience as a result of the increasing complexity of social changes, seems to make the short story an apt vehicle for exploring the dark places of the human spirit and disembodied states of being. Short stories have found special favour with readers too in recent times, perhaps also because of the inability to cope with voluminous works. The frenetic pace of modern life leaves all of us exhausted – physically and emotionally. Perhaps this explains the splurge of short story collections in recent years.

The beginnings of the Indian short story in English were made under the influence of the Britishers. The Indian short story writer in English is, therefore, an inheritor of the British legacy bequeathed to him by such eminent practitioners as O.Henry, John Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham, and Rudyard Kipling who themselves were greatly inspired by the French author, Maupassant. The Indian writer shares at least three of Maupassant's intrinsic traits –uninterrupted narration, preservation of curiosity, and the resulting clear picture of life.

The history of the Indian – English short story began towards the close of the nineteenth century with the publication of Kamala Satthianadan's *Stories from Indian Christian Life* in 1898 followed by K.S.Venkataramani's *Paper Boats* (1921) and *Jatadharan and Other Stories* (1937), A.Madhaviah's Kushika's *Short Stories* (1924) and K.Nagrajan's *Cold Rice* (1945). S.K.Chettur and G.K.Chettur evoked a sense of awe and the supernatural through their short fiction. The most notable of the five collections of stories by A.S.P.Ayyar was *Sense in Sex and Other Stories*(1929) dealing with the evils of sex and marriage faced by the Indian women of the day. Shankar Ram's two volumes were *Children of the Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1932). Most of these writers were basically reformists or sermonisers aiming at moral instruction and social amelioration.

The first artistic work in this genre was Mulk Raj Anand's *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934) voicing the concerns and predicaments of the lost ones and the sufferers in our society. Other significant names of this era are Manjeri Isvaran, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. With their humanism they lash out at the lies, shams and hypocrisies of our people. Narayan's sustaining power is his abiding comic sense and pure delight in the art of living. (We will be discussing two of his short stories in detail in a seprate unit). Raja Rao evokes the Indian thought and tradition and writes mostly on social and political themes with a philosophical slant. Not at all prolific, he has made a mark in this genre with just two collections – *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978). In his nine volumes of short stories such as *Naked Shingles* (1941), *Shivratri* (1943), *Angry Dust* (1944), *A Madras Admiral* (1959), etc., Manjeri S.Isvaran confines himself to the life of the low and middle classes in the erstwhile Madras State and excels in the sympathetic revelation of the female psyche. With Independence a new consciousness was noticed in writers. Khushwant Singh made his debut with *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories* (1950) launching a scathing attack on our blind beliefs and contradictions in life. Another title story "A Bride for the Sahib" is a tragic tale of the schism between an Oxonian and his docile Indian wife.

Another significant name in the world of contemporary Indian - English short story is that of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala who is a Polish by parentage, a German by birth, an English woman by education and an Indian by marriage. Her four volumes of short stories convey her near total depression and disillusionment in India, which she calls a country of 'heat and dust', of slow movement and activity, of indolence and laziness.

Other memorable short-story writers are K.A.Abbas, G.D.Khosla, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Bunny Reuben, Chaman Nahal, Shiv K.Kumar, K.N.Daruwalla, Bala Krishnan, Ruskin Bond, Arun Joshi, Manoj Das and Usha John. All of them have contributed significantly to the growth and expansion of this genre. Ruskin Bond. Arun Joshi and Manoj Das we will be discussing in detail.

Margaret Chatterjee, K.N. Daruwalla and Shiv K. Kumar basically poets have experimented with this form. Anita Desai, renowned for her novels, has dealt with some deep-hidden human motives and emotions in her stories. Shashi Deshpande, Raji Narsimhan, Subhadra Sengupta and Geeta Hariharan are other significant women writers in this field whose concerns and contributions we will be discussing in detail in this Block.

Currently, one can confidently say that women writers in English are making distinguished contribution to the short story. Though Anita Desai remains a conscious experimentalist, others are attaining a new level of psychological complexity in story telling and technical innovation. They may not be debating crucial cutting edge questions as those of personal identity, self and society and the meaning of emancipation, of freedom, they do focus on the vulnerability to defeat that results from their attempt at relating themselves to others on their own terms or at withdrawing into themselves so as to preserve the autonomy of their selves.

"But they have stopped short of exploring 'the interplay between self-knowledge and social role', (which is, indeed, a pity!)"[2] Shashi Deshpande puts it squarely when she confessed that she is not an expressly or outspokenly feminist writer. The women writers we have chosen work within the framework of tradition-bound, male dominated Indian middle-class society. The women they depict are conscious of

> "their predicament; they are victims of inequality they are creatures of conventional morality: they are the ones who are unfairly abused, misused and ill-used. But they believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of familial concord."[3]

1.3 WHAT IS A SHORT STORY?

A relevant question that may occur to you is how to define a short story. One may hasten to state that the best course is to recognise it by brevity, economy of words, short length. But then the short story is not just a story that is brief – it requires a particular kind of literary construction. Though Edgar Allen Poe feels that it should be easily read at one sitting in order to preserve its unity of impression, it is not a quickie, nor a novel on a reduced scale. In his review of Hawthorne's *Twice –Told Tales*, Poe defines a good short story thus:

> 'A skilful literary artiste has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents: but having conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be brought out, he then invents such incidents – he then combines such effects as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentences tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed....'[4]

A broad analysis of a short story signifies three characteristic elements:

1. Recognition of the familiar – vivid details to create the illusion of reality and actuality, of course, suggesting undercurrents of meaning. Though familiar, the writer has to rid it of any kind of banality, cliché or formula. A short story is, after all, not a transcription of life but a dramatization of it.

2. Empathy: Identifying ourselves so sympathetically and closely with the characters and situations as to feel a part of this actuality – the well worn theme thus gets vivified by being individualized and

3. Readability: The good yarn pleasure tale – being absorbed by the fascination of the tale, we are unable to put it down until we have found out what happened. Of course, beyond the yarn lies a whole range of meaning to be explored.

The traditional notions associated with the short story such as design, continuity, effect, change etc. are likely to be questioned by present day critics and practitioners of this form who do not think that readability is/should be an essential ingredient of a short story. Not the contemporary short story anyway. And they do have a point. We can have a story without a storyline. Even without the formal narrative parameters, a story can be exciting and evocative. And it doesn't have to lead anywhere. Not necessarily, that is. Because of new fissures and new frictions, new expectations and new equations at every level, personal, family, state, national, international, the modern short story has traversed new grounds both in content and form. A short story is a voyage of discovery, of self-discovery, of self-realisation for the character, but more than the character, for the reader.

1.3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF A SHORT STORY

Having grappled and remaining cross – purposes over how to define the short story as a literary form we wish to lead you away from abstract generic debates and move towards discreet principles of writing a short story. Even though there can be no rules

for the good story, for any story for that matter, there can only be certain general principles – to establish a sense of the relation of the story to life.

The storywriter tries to give a definite form to the inchoate world. A story has to have a formal *plot* or *structure* and the skill of the author lies in making it appear as natural, as lifelike, as spontaneous as possible. The artist wants to make incidents or situations appear natural rather than contrived. A well thought out plot is one in which nothing is superfluous or superficial. A story has to have a beginning and should convey a constant sense of movement. Therefore, an ideal structure would make the story interesting and true to life as also build up suspense and arouse the readers curiosity to know what happens next or how the situation gets resolved at the end. It should also give meaning to the narrative.

A good short story should strive for a unity of effect – a "single effect", to use Edgar Allan Poe's phrase. That is, a story should be compressed and economical the way a poem is, free from digressions and irrelevancies, and marked by its intensity. It should be complete in itself and must have unity, wholeness. A story is meant to be read at one sitting; a novel may take days to read. So the story's effect must be sudden, powerful, revealing: whereas a novel can involve readers at a more leisurely pace, slowly illuminating complexities and nuances.

But then stories also convey psychological reality. Much of what happens in the modern story happens in the character's minds, in the interior world. Therefore, in attempting to reveal the drama of human consciousness, many modern writers have stopped stressing the orderly progression of plots, have played down external action, and have often abandoned photographic realism in favour of a more complex psychological realism.

Do not also forget that the stories require focused attention. In a novel we may skip over the descriptions, especially descriptions of setting. No such skipping is possible in a short story without losing some part of its meaning.

Also, you should know that there is a difference between the events and episodes in a novel and those in a short story. In the novels of Dicknes and Thackeray for example, there was a strong element of episode – each part of the serialized publication had to be complete in itself and also prepare the ground for what was to follow. In a short story, on the other hand, there is nothing to follow, nothing to look forward to. The end of the short story is the end. It is marked by a sense of finality, of definiteness, of tautness from beginning to end. It is self – contained. Its compression induces a feeling of expanding into life, an awareness of life expanding into our consciousness, enlarging our consciousness. In this sense a short story imparts the sense of a discovery. We shall continue in greater detail our discussion on the elements of a short story in the subsections to follow:

1.3.1 Plot

Whereas a simple narrative account is sequential, open and truthful account - a rendering of external events as they happen in time, a plot is not a simple narrative account. A plot is constructed. A plot is composed. The author of a story has in his mind, a simple narrative account but he does things with it. He may rearrange the events in time, he may tell the end first and then relate how events led up to it, he may withhold some information to arouse and sustain our curiosity and interest, he may be biased in favour of or against some of the characters and overplay or underplay certain facts to reinforce his stand. A plot is what an author does to the simple narrative account to make it a story, to give it a meaning, a purpose.

E.M.Forster made the distinction between a simple narrative account and plot very clear when he said, "The king died and then the queen died is a story. The king died, and then the queen died of grief is a plot." [5] The author has in mind causality, a

hypothesis, a point of view. He has a vision of the occasion. The simple sequence of events has been given a meaning. "A plot, then, is a narrative account, artfully manipulated for artistic purpose. To give pleasure and to signify meaning," [6] according to Jack Carpenter and Peter Neumeyer.

Plot implies the idea of unity – various individual events hang together, jell of together. To begin with, there is the matter of cause and effect – we expect to find logic, a reasonable connection between the parts. This logic is not a mechanical thing. Many human responses and nonhuman things may enter into the logic of a story – in the end the central logic we are concerned with is the logic of human motivation. How do human needs and passions work themselves out? Plot then, is character in action. The various stages in terms of plot are 1) exposition 2) complication 3) climax and 4) denouement.

1.3.2 Characterisation

Not all short stories, however, have or need to have perfectly worked out plots. As the writers Wallace and Mary Stegner have stated, "The short story as a distinctive form has turned away from plot, and has tended to become less a complication resolved than what Henry James was to call 'a situation revealed'."[7]

Aesthetic pleasure can be evoked in ways other than the manipulated narrative imitation of a conflict. The highest aesthetic satisfaction may come from the reader's growing recognition and understanding of the characters and their situations. The presentation of human beings or of human situations, and the revelation of the truth inherent in that human being or in that human situation leads to a "gradual, slow illumination", of facts which is more satisfying than a manipulated plot with a neat beginning, a middle and an end. Insights emerge from the encounter between two very different characters representing two points of view.

E.M.Forster classified the characters as "flat" and "round". Flat characters stand for an idea, an attitude, a point of view. They don't grow at all in the course of the story. They become static or stereotypes. Round characters, on the other hand, go through many inconsistencies, anxieties, contradictions, etc. revealing new facets of their personality each time they deal with a new situation. They are dynamic. Flat or stock characters are often used to act as a contrast, or foil to the round characters.

Not all characters are treated equally – a clear understanding of their relative importance in the story will help us develop a proper perspective. In keeping with the central idea of the story we have to distinguish between minor and major characters.

So important is character to fiction that one may approach the story by asking, "Whose story is this?" The domain of fiction is the world of credible human beings, though an amazingly diverse and varied world. All abstractions must be made credible and significant for the reader to identify himself with. They have to be made believable.

A writer can present his characters in two ways – by telling or by showing. If he tells us about a character directly, his method of characterization is expository. If he allows his characters to be revealed indirectly through thought, dialogue and action, it is dramatic. Most writers use a combination of the two to bring their characters to life.

"One of the most important modes for character revelation is speech – the way the characters talk. All of us have our own vocabularies and our ways of putting words together. An author, in order to be convincing must have his characters speak "in character".[8]

1.3.3 Atmosphere

Atmosphere establishes lifelikeness and wins the reader's willingness to accept the world created by the storyteller. It creates the mood as well as the psychological and

physical effects essential to the theme of the story. By providing an apt locale and local colour, the author ensures verisimilitude and authenticity. A short-story writer cannot delineate in a leisurely manner or at length. His word pictures or strokes have to be economical and yet evocative.

The information given has to be to the point and yet revealing. Notice the way the place setting in *An Astrologer's Day* is evoked. "He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways...". A perfect setting for an astrologer "a bewildering criss-cross of light rays and moving shadows."

The period stories and ghost stories, in particular, depend for their interest mainly on atmosphere-exotic lands, moss covered castles and abbeys, pointed arches, haunted alleys, wild torrents, thick forests, etc.

Notice how Arun Joshi has created an atmosphere of pain and deprivation with the minimum use of words by highlighting the thwarted expectations of the father and the resultant tension and trauma. Nothing dissipates the feeling of depression. Atmosphere thus controls the overall effect of the story. It is created by setting, description and dialogue.

1.3.4 Narrative Techniques

Narration is one of the most important elements of a short story. Have you noticed that the most obvious ways to make the story appear lifelike is to tell in the first person. This ensures intimacy and immediacy – making it easier for the reader to identify with the characters. The third person narrative, on the other hand, gives the author greater freedom to move back and forth, and act as an omniscient presence. A story in the first person is supposed to emphasize subjective reality at the expense of objective reality much more than a story in the third person. In the third person narrative the author can draw back from the main character at any time and tell us things that the character cannot know or does not understand.

So, "the first person point of view adds credibility, immediacy and life likeness to the story. The author seems to disappear, leaving the reader in the hands of the narrator. The effect is that the reader comes so close to the action that he begins to share the character's perception of the world. The reader begins to so completely identify with the narrator's vision that he abandons his own critical intelligence and escapes into the character's life."[9]

Some readers assume that the first person narrator and the author always share similar moral perspectives, when in fact the narrator's may be radically different from his creator. A narrator's perception of an experience may be limited, one-sided even biased. The reader may know much more about the significance of the narrator's actions and thoughts than does the narrator himself. A first person narrator is only a character in the story, not necessarily a spokesman for the author;

Some stories have trick-ending to take the reader by surprise. We are not talking of mysteries and thrillers but stories like *An Astrologer's Day* that build up a certain suspense in the mind of the reader regarding the circumstances that had compelled the protagonist to leave his village all of a sudden without any plan or preparation and take to astrology to eke out a living in the town. The revelation at the end comes as a surprise. It goes to the credit of the author though that this sudden revelation unties many knots merely hinted at earlier and weaves the parts into a unified whole. It is a logical climax reached dramatically.

Then we have stories, which may be termed comedies of manners. The author shows us what the characters are doing in such a way that we can understand why they are doing it. Out of the details of what they do and say the authors build up the conflict

and tension. It would weaken *A Trip Into the Jungle*, for example, if the author tried to describe directly the feelings that lie beneath the utterances and actions of his characters or if he intruded into his story with explanatory comments of his own.

Stories written from a particular point of view to denounce a practice or bias are more concerned with ideas than characters. Stock or stereotypical characters reinforce the point they are attempting to make. While analyzing a story we need, therefore, to ask: who is telling the story? What is his/her angle of vision and relationship to the events? Is he/she detached or involved? Is his/her view of the experience trustworthy? Is the narrator's view of the experience complete, or is it limited? Is the narrator presented ironically? How does the point of view help the writer organize his materials?

Dialect or slang is used to place a character in a particular setting. *The ashtamp farosh in Arun Joshi* is closer to the heart of the matter than any other character in the story and is assigned the role of shaking Dr. Khanna out of his cruel apathy towards his father.

In keeping with our world crammed with strange, uncanny and fantastic events, the form of narrative underwent radical changes. The chronological sequence is no longer necessary. The unity of time is no longer necessary. A story does not necessarily have to have a beginning, a middle and an end. Resolution of the complications is also not necessary. After all, life offers no solutions, nor does it follow any system or sequence. Experimental stories of today raise questions and leave the answers to the imagination of the reader. Time is no longer linear to be measured by the clock. Ever increasing complexity of human motives and actions, myriad levels of psychological and objective reality have necessitated exploration of new narrative techniques and devices.

1.3.5 Figurative Language

Writers have a way of using words to convey more than they do on the surface – beyond their literal meanings. Such a use of words is generally called figurative language. Some of the common figures of speech are simile, metaphor personification, symbol, imagery, irony, paradox, satire, antithesis, allegory, euphemism, hyperbole, eulogy, understatement. (You may refer to Block 5 of EEG-01 of IGNOU's BDP Programme) we have explained these terms in the Glossary of this unit as well. For a stylistic appreciation of a short story, an understanding of how the writer has used language to signify something beyond itself is important. Every word will count toward the sum total of that story's significance.

1.3.6 Point of View

Happenings in stories may look lifelike and historically accurate, at the same time they are strongly marked by the authors' feelings about what happens, by their conviction that the essential reality of things is created by what people feel about them. The significant reality is in the hearts of people, hence the emphasis in these stories is on how and what the authors feel about what happens because what ultimately counts is not the events themselves but what we feel about them. Thus The *Only American...* is not really about the brilliant Dr.Khanna settling down in the USA but about the devastating effect of this event on his father. The range and subtlety of the normal dilemmas so effectively dramatized by both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das highlight the intricate codes and mores of our time and the authors' point of view in this regard.

Similarly Subhadra Sengupta and Raji Narsimhan expose our deep-rooted prejudices and preferences causing irreparable damage to filial relationships.

The point of view is thus the interpretation of persons and events, the pervasive and unifying view of life embodied in the narrative. It is what we are to make of the

human experience rendered in the story – always involving directly or indirectly, some comment on values in human nature and conduct. The question most of us invariably ask about life is "What does it mean"? We like the story to work itself out into a unity – just as we feel a need to have our own lives make sense. We all work out our own scale of values and live by it. Different points of view enlarge our vision and help us gain a new perspective. We can and do make, even in disagreement, the imaginative effort to realize what underlies the logic of another's point of view, the logic by which a theme unfolds. Given below is a detailed glossary of terms you will encounter in your critical readings of short stories.

1.4 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Action: Aristotle says that any literary form that tells a story involves the imitation of human action(praxis). A series of events having unity and significance.

Allegory: In allegorical stories the characters and events stand for a set of ideas or moral qualities or abstraction. Realistic plots are not important here.

Allusion: A reference in a story to a generally well-known person, place or event or situation outside the literary work. Allusions to memorable ideas and people expand and enrich the meaning of the work. The most notable sources of literary allusions are history, literature, mythology, legends, etc.

Anecdote: A brief narrative account of some incident or event.

Antagonist: The character in opposition to the protagonist or central character. Agon is a Greek word meaning 'public performance' or 'contest'

Anticlimax: A break in the climatic order of events or effects, a falling off from the expected intensification of effect.

Antithesis: which uses a contrast of ideas

Atmosphere: The mood of the story created by the plot, character, setting and diction. It is distinct from tone, which refers to the author's attitude towards his subject and the audience.

Character: A person in a story. Individual beliefs, habits, mindsets, moral choices and motivation distinguish one fictional character from another.

Cliché: Usually used in reference to a phrase which has lost its force because of continual use. It is applied occasionally to fictional situations or events which have become hackneyed and stereotyped.

Coherence: The hanging together – the interconnectedness – of the parts of a piece of fiction. Truth of coherence has to do with the internal consistency of a piece of literature.

Conflict: An encounter between opposing forces creating interest and suspense. It can be between a good person and a bad person, between tradition and modernity, between ambition and obligations, etc.

Connotation: The cluster of meanings implied or suggested by a word, as different from its literal or denotative meaning.

Denouement: A French word referring to that part of the plot in which conflicts are finally resolved. The final resolution or untying of the plot.

Diction: The words, the vocabulary used in a particular story.

Didactic: Meant to teach or instruct the reader. Parables, fables and allegories are didactic; their moral theme determines the choice of characters and the plots.

Eulogy: High praise of a person or his qualities

Euphemism: Substitution of an inoffensive expression for something that is explicitly offensive

Exposition: That information about characters and events which is necessary for the reader to understand the developing action.

Figurative Language: Language which uses figures of speech, simile and metaphor being the most common, to create special effects and expand the meaning.

Flashback: Interrupting the chronological sequence presenting an event or episode that happened earlier.

Foil: A contrast.

Genre: A French word to denote a literary form such as tragedy, comedy, epic, lyric, novel or short story.

Hyperbole: an exaggerated statement (for comic or dramatic effect sometimes) not to be taken literally

Image: Words and phrases, which suggest concrete, physical or descriptive details, presenting a sense experience.

Imagery: Figurative language which expands the theme of a literary work.

Irony: Contrasts or discrepancies between what seems to be and what actually is, what is said and what is meant.

Metaphor: comparison between two things not usually thought of as similar without using *like* or *as*

Narrative Technique: Methods of telling a story.

Paradox: which uses a contrast of ideas

Pathos:	The sense of pity. The author must see to it that the pathos in a story emerges legitimately and naturally from the situation given. There should be reasonable basis for the pathos in character and situation.
Personification:	giving of human characteristics, powers or feelings to inanimate or non-living objects
Point of View:	Loosely used to refer to the author's basic ideas; for example, one may speak of a detached point of view, a sympathetic point of view, etc.
Satire:	which ridicules vice or folly, or attacks an individual with some kind of non-literal use of language
Simile:	Comparison between two things to present an effective word - picture by using words as *like* and *as*
Symbol:	A sign, a mark, a word or an object looked upon as representing something
Understatement:	A statement which is not strong enough to express the facts or the feelings with full force
Verisimilitude:	Means trueness to life.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have given you a brief account of the history of the short story world-wide and the basic elements of a short story such as plot, characterisation, atmosphere, narrative techniques and points of view. At the end of the unit we have listed Glossary of important terms that will help you with your critical readings of short stories.

1.6 SUGGESTED READING

1) Carpenter, Jack and Neumeyer, Peter. *Elements of Fiction Introduction to the Short Story*, Iowa, WM.C Brown Company Publishers, 1974.

2) A.N. Dwivedi. (edited), *Studies in Contemporary Indian – English Short Story*, Delhi; B.R.Publishing Corporation, 1991.

3) Mizener, Arthur. (edited), *Modern Short Stories The Uses of Imagination,* New York, W.W.Norton and Company, 1979.

4) C.V. Venugopal. *The Indian Short Story in English*, Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1976.

5) E.M. Forster. *Aspects of the Nove*, U.K., Penguin Books Ltd., 1966.

6) R.P. Brooks C. Warren. *Understanding Fiction,* New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs. 1979.

References

[1] Peter S. Prescott. Ed. "American Short Stories" in *The Norton Book of American Short story*. New Delhi Affiliated East/West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1990. P-13.

[2] Balarama Gupta G.S. *"The Short Story Writers Self, Society and Emancipation"* in Kamini Dinesh ed. *Between Spaces of Silence* p.148

[3] Ibid; p.149.

[4] Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer: *Elements of Fiction. Introduction to the Short Story*. Iowa, WMC Brown Company Publishers, 1974. pp 18-19

[5] E.M. Forster. *Aspects of the Novel*, U.K. Penguin Books Ltd, 1966. p.93

[6] Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer: *Elements of Fiction. Introduction to the Short Story*. P.40

[7] Wallace and Mary Stegner. Eds. *Great American Short Stories;* New York. Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1957 p.15.

[8] Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Fiction*, New Jersey. Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs. 1979. p.109.

[9] Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer. p.184.

UNIT 2 R.K.NARAYAN

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine two stories of R.K.Narayan, one of the best known Indian English writers who appeared on the Indian literary scene along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao in the 1930s. This unit will help you understand Narayan and his style of story writing in a critical perspective.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As you have been told in Unit 1 of this Block, four main elements to be kept in mind while analysing a story are:

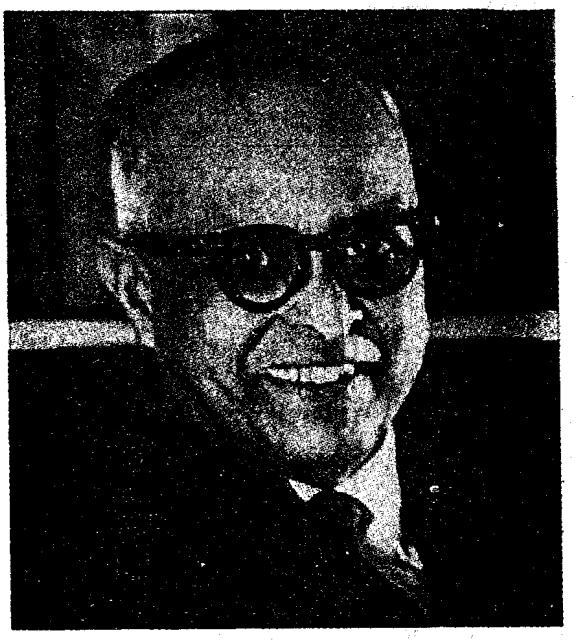
a. Structure - the form plays a decisive role in making it interesting
b. Setting and environment – the authenticity of atmosphere is an essential ingredient of a successful short story.
c. Characterisation – choice and development of characters within the constraints imposed by the form.
d. Meaning – author's message and comment, if any, should be inherent in the design and structure.

We are going to examine these in our appreciation of R.K. Narayan's stories – *An Astrologer's* and *Engine Trouble.*

2.2 R.K.NARAYAN

The Indian resurgence received a fresh impetus during the Gandhian Age(1920-1947) which witnessed a tremendous upheaval in the political, social and economic spheres. The freedom struggle reached its peak and there was an unprecedented awakening among sections of society – women, the youth and the down-trodden - which had long suffered under the weight of traditional authority. The major triumvirate of Indian

English fiction – Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao – began to write during this period.



R.K. Narayan (1907-2001)

As this Block goes for print, we have heard of the sad demise of R.K. Narayan. We reproduce the 'In Memoriam' by Dr. Louella Logo Prabhu, published in the *University Today* dated 1 June 2001, 455 no. to this great Indian genius.

In Memoriam – R.K. Narayan

India, and the world of letters, were orphaned by the death of R.K. Narayan. To a newer generation honed by the transcontinental success of Salman Rushdie. Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy he may appear a back number. In fact it was he who stormed the world of English letters when Graham Greene introduced him to Hamish Hamilton who became his first major publisher.

Greene was no Narayan what Yeats was to Tagore. The generously of the British Establishment, sometimes, is highly commendable. Without Yeats. Tagore may not have made it to the Nobel Academy. Narayan may have languished as teacher of English at Maharaja's School. It is ironic to note that when he failed in English, he took a year off to study it. His private readings developed his style and directly led to his trying his hand at creative work.

The postman, who called, would commiserate with yet one more packet arrived-with one more rejection slip.

Malgudi is to Narayan what Egdon Heath was to Thomas Hardy. He worked in the miniature to create a wholly imaginary town which is more real or feels more real that the place you live. Its nearest equivalent is Mysore. That is where his mind, his heart, his very soul lay. He came to all-India fame when one of the Nag borthers serialised his short stories over Doordarshan. It was one of DD's most popular serials ever.

As a nominated MP the one issue he took up was the weight of a child's schoolbag. Otherwise, unlike Shabana Azmi, was apolitical. He lived a long, full life up to the age of 96. It is sad that he has gone but his passing bears with it the plenitude of a life full of personal growth, the ability to take failure, with success, and in the end to be overwhelmed with an amplitude of honours.

R.K.Narayan – as is the practice in Southern India, the two initials preceding Narayan stand respectively for the village from which Narayan's family comes and the name of his father. R is for Rasipuram, a taluq in the district of Salem, to which Narayan's ancestors belonged. By the time Narayan was born (10th October 1907), the family had moved to Madras. Soon after his birth, his father Krishnaswami Iyer got a job in Mysore as schoolmaster and moved there.

Narayan knew only two languages – Tamil and English, but having stayed so many years in Mysore could manage to understand Kannada.

Narayan has produced a sizeable body of work -- more than 10 novels and 6 collections of short stories – which makes him one of the most respected writers in the British Commonwealth.

His first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) made an instant appeal to some of the leading writers and critics in England. Graham Greene hailed it as "a book in ten thousand".

Narayan wrote steadily ever since.

Narayan claimed that his purpose in art was to convey unambiguously the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities, who flourished in a small town named Malgudi (supposed to be) located in a corner of South India.

Narayan wrote chiefly about the Indian middle class because he was a part of it and understood it best. This is the middle class where people are not too well – off to be unworried about money or brutalised by the total lack of it.

Given below are the titles of his major works:

Novels:

Swami and Friends (1935)
The Bachelor of Arts (1937)
The Dark Room (1938)
The English Teacher (1945)
Mr.Sampath (1949)
The Financial Expert (1952)
Waiting for the Mahatma (1955)
The Guide (1958)
The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962)
The Sweet – Vendor (1967)

Collections of short stories

Malgudi Days (1941)
Dodu and other stories (1943)
Cyclone and other stories (1944)
An Astrologer's Day and other stories (1947)
Lawley Road and other stories (1956)
A Horse and Two Goats (1970)

Others

Next Sunday (1956, Sketches and Essays)
My Dateless Diary (1960, an account of his journey to America)
Gods, Demons and Others (1965, a retelling of some classical myths)

2.3 AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY

An Astrologer's Day' appeared for the first time in 1943 in Narayan's third collection of short stories, *Cyclone and Other Stories*. Subsequently in 1947 an other volume by the same title '*An Astrologers* Day and Other Stories' was published.

Like the astrologer, Narayan had "a working analysis of mankind's troubles : marriage, money and the tangles of human ties". We may add caste, poverty, man's harshness to man, and a view of life dependent upon a profound unquestioned religious mentality.

2.3.1 Structure

"All art is an order to form", said noted art-critic Herbert Read. The artist captures the inchoate world in a certain form so that it makes sense, some sense. A well thought-out design implies an effective arrangement of incidents and situations without the slightest hint of contrivance, to make the narrative both interesting and authentic. An Astrologer's Day is an example of a perfectly worked out story with a taut control of the author.

2.3.2 Atmosphere

Narayan has an eye for detail, any significant detail. With his keen observation and "talent for the particular", to use Henry James' words, he creates an atmosphere of a perfect work place for the astrologer. His professional equipment consisted of "a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook, and a bundle of palmyra writing". The boughs of the spreading tamarind tree, the surging crowd moving up and down the narrow road morning till night, the variety of traders – medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians, auctioneers of cheap cloth, and vendors of fried groundnut – vociferously vying with each other to attract the crowd, the light and smoke of the crackling flare above the groundnut heap and hissing gaslights take us actually into the midst of a bewildering criss-cross of shafts of lights, moving shadows and deafening din. Just the right setting for an astrologer. The atmosphere thus prepares us for what is to follow and lends authenticity to the entire episode and experience.

2.3.3 Characterisation

In the beginning of the story we are introduced to only the astrologer. All others transacting their business nearby are there to create the right atmosphere and provide the setting necessary for the development of the plot. The astrologer whose name we don't know (and it doesn't really matter that we don't know it) has the basic intelligence to know how to go about his profession. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermillion, and he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed because this attracted people to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks, and he knew it. He also knew what his clients wanted to hear. You can tell anyone, absolutely anyone, that he is not getting the fullest results for his efforts and get away with it. Clever as he was, he never opened for at least ten minutes which provided him enough stuff for "a dozen answers and advices".

The only thing the astrologer didn't know anything about was astrology. "He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. But it didn't seem to matter at all. He said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice and shrewd guesswork."

We thus have a perfect portrait of an astrologer – the likes of whom we often come across, almost daily, in our own marketplace and township. And even though we may harbour doubts about their knowledge of stars, we do feel tempted to consult them to know what future has in store for us.

2.3.4 Suspense

In our discussion on the history of short stories we have told you how curiosity, and the desire to know the unknown provoked story telling and story making activities. It is the element of suspense that makes readability. Readability is of prime importance in a good work of art for Narayan. And suspense is one way of retaining the readers' interest. By way of the personal life or past history of the astrologer, all that we are told in the beginning of the story is that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life. He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. He had to leave home without telling anyone and he had to cover a safe distance of at least a couple of hundred miles before he could pause and recollect himself and his life. The distance of two hundred miles means something to a villager. We are also told that astrology was not his family business. If he had continued to live in his village, he would have tilled the land and tended his cornfields like his forefathers.

So there obviously was something in his past that had broken this ancestral cycle and forced him to leave all of a sudden. Not only suddenly but also stealthily. Without informing anyone.

At this point in the story we may gloss over this past, so taken in are we with the business of astrology and how our protagonist goes about it but we would obviously want to know these details before the story ends.

The narration continues at its normal expected pace. One night just as our protagonist gets ready to call it a day and picks up his cowrie shells and paraphernalia to put them back into his bag, he looks up and sees a man standing before him. Sensing a possible client the astrologer uses his time-tested gimmick and offers to mitigate his worries if only he sits down for a chat. This obviously means an extra buck coming the astrologer's way. And he wouldn't like to let this God-sent opportunity slip by.

It being a late evening hour, our shrewd astrologer haggles over the amount to be charged, not realising that this is no usual casual client wanting temporary respite from the routine burden of life. The stranger has specific queries and he wants specific answers. No generalities. No soothing platitudes. No bluffing, in short.

The atmosphere becomes significant all of a sudden. The nuts vendor had blown out his flame and gone home. The astrologer didn't have lights of his own. It was dark all around except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground. Obviously it was not constant. Against this background of semi-darkness, the astrologer had obviously recognised the man facing him and now ruthlessly insisting on getting his money's worth by way of satisfactory answers. But as the stranger lit his cheroot, the astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the matchlight. For some obscure reason (obscure to the reader) the astrologer now felt very uncomfortable and tried to wriggle out of the whole thing, his voice shaky, almost faint. But now the stranger won't let him go. "A challenge is a challenge".

What the astrologer says hereafter takes him as well as the reader by surprise. He was left for dead, a knife had passed through him once, he was pushed into a well nearby in the field. The effect is further heightened when the astrologer even gives out his correct name. Guru Nayak is now completely stumped. He asks the astrologer when he would be able to get at the man who had stabbed him and left him for dead. Very confidently the astrologer tells him to give up the hunt -- because the assailant had died four months ago, crushed under a lorry in a far-off town. His parting/patronising advice is that Guru Nayak should take the next train and go home, stay put there and

never travel southward again. The episode leaves us with new-found admiration for the astrologer. How could he so correctly read the stranger's past and even know his name? Had he studied the stars and mastered his art, contrary to the common belief? Did he possess some uncanny powers, which could be put to good use, when needed?

The story takes yet another twist when the astrologer reaches home around midnight and talks to the waiting, anxious wife. After dinner, he tells her that a great load is off his chest. All these years he had thought that the blood of a man was on his hands. That was why he had run away from home, settled here, and married her. But the man he thought he had killed was alive. She gasped. So do we. So this was the reason why the astrologer had to leave his village without any plan or preparation. And this was how he could so correctly talk of Guru Nayak's troubled past. Everything begins to fall in place.

Guru Nayak didn't expect his assailant to take on this new garb. It was semi-dark. He could not recognise the astrologer, with his forehead resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion and a saffron-coloured turban round his head. But the astrologer had recognised him by the matchlight when the latter had lit his cheroot. That's when he had started to feel uncomfortable, shiver and pull out of the deal.

But long practice had taught him how to handle such trying situations, to his advantage. Not finding a way out and having won Guru Nayak's trust he advised him never to leave his village, never to travel southward again. Thus he ensured for himself a safe and secure life hereafter. Convinced that his assailant had been crushed under a lorry four months ago, Guru Nayak would not want to venture out of his village especially when it forebode grave risk to his life.

The story thus ends with an incredible twist : "a murdered man" turns up to consult his "murderer" regarding when he will be able to have his revenge; the "murderer" recognises him but he cannot recognise his old enemy in his garb as an astrologer, is astonished to be told his previous history, and meekly agrees to give up his search for his enemy declared to have been crushed under a lorry months ago. Prof. Percy D.Westbrook in his essay entitled *"The Short Stories of R.K.Narayan"* dismisses this as a gimmick. But we have to concede that the author has blended the atmosphere, the setting and the protagonist to perfection.

2.3.5 Meaning

Narayan is a master of irony. The story is as much a comment on the astrologer's crafty ways as on the gullible masses. He knew nothing about astrology but enough about the common man's psychology. And that has pulled him through all these years. His "eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted". A comment on the ways of the simple folk and how they allow themselves to be taken for a ride. An ironic comment on how the science of astrology has been misused by these conmen in our society. An unfortunate consequence has been intelligent people's distrust of astrology and astrologers.

There is an element of social satire also in the story. As youngsters, silly youngsters, the astrologer and his friends drank, gambled and quarrelled badly. What happened one day and how it affected their lives henceforth is for all of us to see. Life could never be the same for anyone of them. We should never let things go out of hand. And yet, such things do take place every once in a while. Only the repercussions are not always so grave. According to K.R.Srinivas Iyengar "there are no good or bad characters in Narayan's works. Human nature is presented veraciously and interestingly and memorably and there is no overt condemnation or praise."

2.4 *ENGINE TROUBLE*

'Engine Trouble' is taken from the collection *An Astrologer's Day* (1947). A man draws a lottery ticket at a fair, winning a road engine. At first he is delighted, thinking that he has made a fortune but with each passing day the engine proves to be a useless burden, costing money to occupy space and to move. Just as the owner is deciding to leave everything and flee from Malgudi, an earthquake occurs, shifting the road engine into a disused well belongings to his creditors. The engine fits the well like a cork and everyone is delighted.

Both the theme and plot are very simple here: the road engine, a heavy inanimate object, attaches itself to the man and influences his living, his human individuality until the balance is restored in the end. There is a firm story-line and the movement is circular.

There is an element of autobiography here in that Narayan has been terrified of Arithmetic in real life and this reflects his incapacity to handle machines. Narayan failed several times in Intermediate and Degree examinations and could not graduate till he was 24. He is inept with mechanical contrivances, electrical gadgets and the camera -- almost anything requiring the use of hands. The winner of road engine in the story under discussion cannot even think of handling the engine himself, with some help and guidance.

In one of Narayan's stories, 'Crime and Punishment' an over-pampered young boy forces his private tutor to act as a stationmaster. Instead of learning the table of 16 the boy opened the cupboard, took out his train set and started assembling the track. He wound the engine and put it down, and it went round and round. The teacher got tired of the game soon enough and got up, much to the displeasure of his pupil. Luckily for him the engine also suddenly refused to move. The boy handed it to him and commanded, "Repair it, Sir". The teacher turned it about in his hand and said, "I can't. I know nothing about it...". The teacher was desperate. He could not turn the simplest screw if it was to save his life. So, *Engine Trouble* is a motif hunting R.K. Narayan since his childhood.

2.4.1 Atmosphere

If you have read *Engine Trouble* you must have gazed that a very natural description is given of the things that take place on the Gymkhana Grounds or RamLila Maidan or Gandhi Chowk of any small town. First the mela-style Gaiety Land with all sorts of fun and gambling and sideshows, with performing parrots and daring motorcyclists looping the loop in the Dome of Death, the cattle show, the breath-taking yogic feats of the Swamiji, the Cosmopolitan Club with its tennis court, the temple, the railway station and the station-master, the mail train. The fifty coolies pushing the road engine take us right into the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

The success of the story lies in the visual images evoked by the narration. The image of a mela comes alive before us with its shooting galleries, Dome of Death, different booths for fun and gambling. We can really imagine a long line of lottery ticket – buyers waiting with baited breath for the draw results. We can also visualise our poor protagonist looking fascinatedly at his engine and its shining brass and patting it affectionately.

The next striking sight is the temple elephant yoked to the engine by means of stout ropes, with fifty determined men pushing it from behind and Joseph sitting in the driver's seat. A huge crowd collecting around and watching in great glee and letting out a joyous yell when the engine runs straight into the opposite compound wall is a familiar enough experience.

The jam-packed town hall spellbound by the Swamiji's miraculous feats, the police inspector making his dramatic entry into the eager crowd flaunting a brown envelope just as the last part of the grand show was about to be enacted, the Swamiji and his assistant leaving the accursed place in great rage – create a highly evocative dramatic scene.

2.4.2 Characterisation

With his intimate understanding of the place and keen observation, Narayan introduces us to a plethora of characters. We begin with the clever showman of the Gaiety Land. The fellow who had brought the road engine here had to be paid a hundred rupees for the job and five rupees a day thereafter. The showman, therefore, sent him away and made up his mind that if no one was going to draw the engine, he would just leave it to its fate. He had got it down just as a novelty for the show (and the move had obviously paid rich dividends). That explains how the road engine came to be included among the prizes.

The Municipal Chairman, Secretary of the Cosmopolitan Club, the sympathetic priest of the local temple, friends and well–wishers pouring in to congratulate the protagonist on his latest acquisition – not knowing how much a road engine would fetch but convinced that there was a lot of money in it, the dismissed bus–driver Joseph, the mail engine- driver pointing out that he had his own locomotive to mind and couldn't think of jumping off at a wayside station for anybody's sake, the Swamiji and his assistant, the police inspector and the owner of the compound wall, a good part of which was reduced to powder by the elephant's kick – recreate for us the entire township, alive and vibrating.

About the protagonist we don't know very much except that he was talkative (how else would he recount the tale of his woes in such great detail !) and that like Mr.Micawber in David Copperfield, he kept hoping against hope that someday there would come his way a lump sum to make amends for all this deficit and suffering. He is not in command of anything, not even his life anymore- he is a man trapped by circumstances so much so that feeling totally defeated and dejected he decides in his weaker moments to leave everything to fate and disappear one fine night.

His wife represents a typical Indian housewife. Unable to suffer her husband's idiosyncrasies (or so they appear to every wife) anymore, she threatens to write to her father to come and take her away.

No names of persons or places are given because they are not important. What is important is the turn the circumstances take to bring about a near devastation in the life of a common man. Even so, the author doesn't miss out on any detail – when the protagonist went to meet the Municipal Chairman, he went with great trepidation and buttoned up his coat as he entered the chairman's room.

Talkative man is the narrator of many a short story of Narayan.

Talkative Man (1986) claimed to be a short story by the blurb, but described by Narayan himself as a long short story of 116 type – written pages, is the story of an amateur journalist proud of calling himself Talkative Man (TM) who narrates the story of a futurologist, Dr. Rangan, Rann with a double 'nn' who proves to be an expert not so much in futurology as in the fraudulent art of Caspanovism, sowing wild oats around.

2.4.3 Meaning

What does the story convey to the reader? Only after the protagonist manages to get rid of the road engine by another quirk of fate, is he able to get his life back on its track. With the engine off his neck and all his dues having been taken care of by the

owner of the compound wall and well, he can hope to be rejoined by his wife. Life returns to an even keel with the protagonist gaining nothing but experience from the entire drama.

The story has a much wider appeal. Hasn't it happened with many/all of us sometime or the other that just when we thought our troubles were coming to an end, they were in fact, just beginning?

At the social level, Narayan makes fun of the municipality and its lack of concern for the people it is supposed to serve.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Narayan wrote that it was one of his principles in telling his stories 'to compress the range of observation and subject the particle to an intense scrutiny' [3]

An innate sense of irony, humour and the complete absence of pomposity and pretence is what makes Narayan the writer he is. Narayan's good – humoured irony as a firm ally of serious moral concern creates thoughtful fiction which has its centre in Malgudi but has a circumference embracing the entire human condition. "Irony is like shot silk showing different colours as it catches the light at different angles, and Narayan is above all a master of irony," [4]
His world may be regional in that it conveys an intimate sense of a given place but it is not parochial or shuttered. His works create a comedy of sadness, suffused with a pure and unaffected melancholy but also lighted with the glint of mockery of both self and others. William Walsh sums up Narayan's art as "exact realism, poetic myth, sadness, perception and gaiety... It is kind but unsentimental, mocking but uncynical, profoundly Indian but distinctively individual. It fascinates by reason of the authenticity and attractiveness of its Indian setting, and engages because of the substantial human nature which it implies and embodies." [5]

Laxmi Holmstrom sees the commonality of themes of the two stories we have discussed as follows: "In both these stories the pattern is cyclic: a man stands outside a whirlpool of events and commitments and is drawn into it by ambition, by falling in and out of love or by accident. He is swept round with the current and thrown out of the whirlpool, having achieved nothing returning to the point where he began". [6]

Both these stories have a dramatic twist -- human beings pitted against social and/or non-human forces but the dilemma is resolved at the end. The astrologer lives happily hereafter knowing full well that Guru Nayak will not leave his village ever again and the Talkative Man will get back to the business of living with the road engine safe inside the well and the mouth of the well neatly cemented up.

2.6 QUESTIONS

(a) The story has been narrated by the owner of the engine. Rewrite the story from the point of view of the engine.

(b) What would you do if you were to win such a prize?

(c) Of the two Narayan stories discussed above, which do you prefer and why?

(d) Attempt a character sketch of the astrologer. Does this story evoke sympathy or anger for him in you?

2.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Dwivedi, A.N. *Studies in Contemporary Indian English Short Story.* B.R.Publishing Corporation, Delhi. 1991.

2. Holmstrom, Lakshmi. *The Novels of R.K.Narayan* A Writers Workshop Publication, Calcutta 1992.

3. Sundram, P.S. *R.K.Narayan*, Arnold- Heinmann India, New Delhi. 1973.

4. Walsh, William *R.K.Narayan : A critical Appreciation,* Heinemann, London. 1982.

References

[1] Percy D. Westbrook. "The Short Stories of R.K. Narayan" in Journal of *Commonwealth Literature* July, 1968.

[2] K.R. Srinivas Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1984. p 86.

[3] R.K. Narayan. "English in India" in *Commonwealth Literature*, p. 122.

[4] P.S. Sundaram. *R.K. Narayan.* New Delhi, Arnold Heiremann – 1973, p.122.

[5] William Walsh, *R.K. Narayan A Critical Appreciation* London: Heinemann 1982, pp.168-169.

[6] Laxmi Holmstrom, *The Novels of R.K. Narayan,* Calcutta, Writer's Workshop 1973, p.86.

UNIT 3 ARUN JOSHI AND MANOJ DAS

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine closely one story each of Arun Joshi and Manoj Das, two major Indian writers writing in English. This unit will help you understand the concerns of these writers from the perspective of cultural dualism and all its deeper implications.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed earlier stories have to be analysed keeping in mind the distinct parameters that govern form and meaning. The three main questions that we will address ourselves will be:

What is the story about?
How has the author organised the material?
Do the devices employed succeed in generating the desired effect and meaning?

Do not forget that these are open-ended narratives. This mode tries to communicate the complexity of life by its refusal to provide neat conclusions. Both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das have taken the dynamics of cultural interaction as the matrix of their vision. We will try to understand in the course of our in-depth analysis of the stories whether the intercultural tension is situation-based or character-based.

3.2 ARUN JOSHI: AN OVERVIEW OF HIS WORK

Arun Joshi (1939-1993) was educated in India and the U.S.A. Although he occupied a very senior position in industry at the time of his untimely demise in 1993, he is regarded as one of the important contemporary fiction writers with the following four novels and one collection of short stories to his credit:

The Foreigner (1968)
The Strange case of Billy Biswas (1971)

The Apprentice (1974)
The Last Labyrinth (1981)
Survivor (1975, short stories)

Arun Joshi (1939-1993)

An existentialist novelist writing in line with Albert Camus and Franz Kafka, Arun Joshi shifted his focus from social realism to psychological realism. Existentialism was a twentieth century phenomena which challenged the then established order of the universe as a divine moral absolute system. Instead it pointed out the aimless existence of a man who is indifferent to everything and alien to everybody. Forces of industrialisation and urbanization have exerted a deleterious influence on the life of man. Joshi has explored the depth of the psyche of an individual trapped in the matrix of decaying human values. "Arun Joshi's works are an illustration of the Indian variety of existentialism" [1]

Multiculturism is today a universal phenomenon. The most distinctive lineament of a commonwealth writer is the duality of selves—the native consciousness and the acquired consciousness. According to A.A.Sinha there have been three different kinds of responses to this cultural multiplicity. "For writers like D.F.Karaka this confrontation has not resulted in any tension creative or otherwise. For the second group the intercultural tension exists but does not seriously affect the course of events in their fictional world. R.K.Narayan and K.Nagarajan have their Malgudi and Kedaram without any marked intrusion of an alien culture. The third group comprises writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi who have transmuted the encounter of cultures in their fiction in different distinctive ways" [2]. In Arun Joshi's fiction the encounter of cultures is wrought in the conflict of tradition and transition and in the juxtaposition of the materialistic, rational view of life and the traditional spiritual, emotional stance. *The Foreigner* is the story of Sindi Oberoi who saw himself as an "uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except himself.... his alienation from the world is not merely one of geography or nationality; it is rooted within his soul like an ancient curse and drives him on from crisis to crisis".[3]

Arun Joshi has never been a prolific story-teller. He has published only a solitary collection of ten short-stories entitled *The Survivor*. There are two other stories, 'The Only American from Our Village' and 'Kanyakumari', which are published separately. The only American from Our Village is included in *Contemporary Indian – English Stories*, ed. Madhusudan Prasad.

3.3 *THE ONLY AMERICAN FROM OUR VILLAGE* – A DISCUSSION

In this story Arun Joshi brings about the predicament of a diaspora and his subsequent mental agony. Dr.Khanna, the most outstanding immigrant physicist at the University of Wisconsin (the finest of all physicists, immigrant or native in his own opinion) decides to visit India with wife Joanne and two sons, fifteen years after he had left it (for higher studies and other prospects presumably).

The four–week trip was a success by all accounts. His fame had preceded him. He was received by an official of the Council of Scientific Research, addressed a conference on Inter-planetary Radiation, inaugurated three well-attended seminars, met the President and the Prime-Minister and was offered many jobs, each of which he politely declined.

His wife and children were worshipped by his relatives whom they had never met before. In the typical tourist style they had brought for them Gilette razors, pop-records and lots of one-dollar neck-ties. Gifts brought by way of a ritual, a formality. Inexpensive gifts. What else do you bring for people you have not met before and are not going to meet again, in all likelihood. And in the true Indian style the razors were greatly prized, by the women who saved them for their teenaged sons. Anything with a foreign label is a prized possession for the majority of us. In the typical tourist style Mrs. Khanna and the children went off on a sight-seeing tour towards the end of their trip and Dr. Khanna delivered his final talk at a college in his former hometown. A perfect finale to a perfect trip, one would think. But this is where the anti-climax comes in the form of Mr. Radhey Mohan, an ashtamp farosh (seller of court paper in front of District Courts) who knew Dr. Khanna's father. He insists on talking to Dr.Khanna despite the embarassed Principal's unsuccessful intervention because he has come here only to meet him. In the course of his long monologue he tells Dr.Khanna how much his father longed to go to America to spend time with his son and what a tragic end he brought upon himself once forced into sad realisation that his eminent son could spare no time or emotion even for his ailing father.

His story concluded, the ashtamp farosh disappeared shuffling through the dark. Dr.Khanna however, could not be his confident, carefree self again. He had done nothing but stared at his feet thereafter. And he told a psychiatrist that he had periods of great burning in his feet. His output of research had been zero ever since he came back.

The story obviously raises a very pertinent, a very contemporary question: how is making money or holding a chair or presenting brilliant papers at seminars and conferences more meaningful than doing your duty, your filial duty? Self-fulfillment. At what cost ?

In *The Apprentice* Ratan Rathore reflects, "That is a terrible sensation. My friend – may God preserve you from it – the realization that one's life has been a great mistake; without purpose, without results. There are many sorrows of a wasted life...."(194)

Wasted life! Father's or son's in this story? Out of sorrow and guilt is Dr.Khanna forced to grope for the meaning of life? What is the meaning of life? The story is a scathing comment on Western emancipation and oriental indolence.

The protagonists of Arun Joshi's two other stories "A Trip for Mr. Lele" and "Survivor" are survivors of the cataclysms and disasters of the so-called progressive society. Can individuality and personal freedom exist in a vacuum? The story seems to indict the dehumanized morals of the modern society and points to a quest for a

humane society filled with natural love because it is only love that sustains human relations and imparts meaning to human existence. Depicting human angst it involves us in an exploration of the deeper sources of inner strength in the midst of contemporary anarchy and obs(:sion with self-aggrandizement.

3.4 CHARACTERISATION

The story is not so much about Dr.Khanna as about his father, about how the latter suffered because of the callous indifference of his only son. Like a typical Indian father Kundan Lal was proud of his son, telling everyone what all the son had done, getting angry if one was not interested in the son's achievements. Dr.Khanna had left for America at the age of 25. He was unmarried at that time. Like any typical Indian father, Kundan Lal too must have hoped that the son would come back after completing his studies or assignment, marry a girl of a respectable family with his father's consent and blessings and hold a big position bringing contentment and comfort in the life of the old man. He used to say the son would be a big government man when he came back. He would say the son was coming back in one year, two years, anytime.

When the son got married there, he was quiet for many months. His dreams shattered, hopes belied. But a brave man, he started talking again – saying the son was the only American from that village. Had he realized at that time itself that by marrying an American the son would never come back – to his father, to his roots? And so he consoled himself believing and telling others it was an honour for the village. That the son had settled in America? Married an American lady?

A proud man Kundan Lal didn't want to discuss his son or his doings with the villagers. Didn't want to ask his son to send him a ticket so that he could visit America, see his son and his wife. Must have thought the son would do it himself. This was the least the son could have done. That's why he started to shave everyday, bought two new shirts and a suit. When his childhood friend, the stamp-seller asked him why he was doing all that, he took him aside and confided with a twinkle in his eyes that he was expecting a ticket, a return ticket from his son, Kundan Lal going to America: It was not something people could laugh away. The whole village knew about it before the daybreak. But the ticket never came. He drowned his grief and humiliation in religion, in hymn-singing. Hoping perhaps that God would make his son send him a ticket or at least a letter. But that was not to be.

Kundan Lal had been a very bright student. His name was on the school Honour Board. He had stood third in the state. Standing third in forty thousand boys was no joke. He won a scholarship as usual. Made a mark even in Lahore where he went for higher studies. But that didn't get to his head. He loved his mother. After her death he locked up the house and went away. He had seen very hard days. Crossing half a mile of boiling sand in May without shoes every morning and evening must have been harrowing. Tying dhak leaves on his naked feet with a string and then crossing the cho required exceptional guts and imagination.

And Dr.Khanna? We are not even told his initials. He has completely negated his ties as a son, as a brother. When informed telegraphically about his father's illness, he sent an ordinary letter saying that he had to attend a conference. The letter didn't say when he would/could come. When the stamp-seller suddenly asks him why he had not sent his father the ticket, Dr.Khanna replies, "I could not. I did not have the money." But in the very first paragraph of the story we have been told that he was among the dozen or so best-dressed men on the campus.

Dr.Khanna's indifference to his father is chilling. He obviously didn't come when his father died. That would have been sheer sentimentality. Expensive and unnecessary.

If the theory of archetypes has any validity whatever, it is only to be expected that so universal a drive as the Search would provide that collective unconscious with a number of related archetypes. The Quest pattern involves, to begin with, the call to adventure, to explore new territories. Obeying the call to adventure traditionally involves the severance, real or, symbolic, of whatever ties may serve to connect one with the past. Besides the Hero, another archetypal character likely to figure importantly in the Search pattern is one whom Jung designated as the Wise Old Man – a character generally beneficent, whose function is to act as a kind of guide to the erring Hero. According to Jung, "The old man... represents knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness and intuition on the one hand, and, on the other, moral qualities such as good will and readiness to help." The ashtamp farosh is the archetypal Wise Old Man who reunites the son with his father, if only symbolically. In a way the father's quest for his son is also brought to fruition by him.

3.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Radhey Mohan, the narrator, forces a complacent and smug Dr.Khanna to hear of his father's woes and travails. And thereby fills him with remorse and repentance. Can he be seen as his father's alter ego? Some trick of the old man, a slant of the lips, a glint in the eye, the accent -- all these reminded him of his father and made him uncomfortable. Had he been alive today, Kundan Lal too might have worn a greasy jacket with eyes heavy with cataract, with no one to look after him. And during the course of their conversation Dr.Khanna had the unreasonable feeling that the old man was going to slap him (as his own father might have).

The only native word used in the story is ashtamp farosh and it is used 16 times to reinforce the native sensitivity and sensibility of both Radhey Mohan and Kundan Lal. Contrasted with this is Dr.Khanna whose training in the new civilization had been perfect.

Is Radhey Mohan the troubled spirit of Dr.Khanna's father who couldn't rest in peace even after death till he had met and talked to his son on his own soil?

Does the father win in the end by making Dr.Khanna realize the futility and hollowness of his whole life? *The Foreigner* vividly depicts the cultures of Boston and New Delhi. In *The strange case of Billy Biswas* the scene shifts from New Delhi to the Satpura hills in Madhya Pradesh, the two geographic locations representing two different cultures – the sophisticated and the primitive. Here Kundan Lal and Dr.Khanna embody two different approaches to life and relationships.

Unlike the two stories of R.K.Narayan which end on a happy note with a final resolution of the tension built earlier, this story is open-ended. Dr.Khanna keeps staring at his feet and complains of burning sensation there. Like his father he too seems to have lost his mental balance. At least temporarily. Will he regain his sanity? Will he return to his research and earn more laurels?

These are questions only time will answer. Will Joanne continue to be with him and nurse him back to normalcy? Given the American life style and values? Is Dr.Khanna doomed to share and suffer his father's loneliness? Only time will tell.

3.6 MANOJ DAS – AN INTRODUCTION

Manoj Das was born in Balasore, Orissa, in 1934. A Professor of English at Sri Aurbindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, he also edited for years the now defunct monthly *The Heritage*.

Besides collections of short stories and novels for adults, he has written children's tales and fables, and a booklet on Sri Aurbindo. He writes both in English and Oriya. *A Bride Inside a Casket and Other Tales. Man who Lifted the Mountain and other Fantasies, The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* and *Cyclones* (a novel) are his better-known works.

Manoj Das (1934-)

His first book, *Satabdira Artanada*, in Oriya, was published in 1948. At the age of 15 he had launched the monthly *Diganta*, a reputed Oriya magazine.

A recipient of the Sarala Award, Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award and Central Sahitya Akademi Award and Saraswati Samman, Manoj Das regularly contributed a column, *The Bunyan Tree* to *The Hindustan Times* for years.

An authentic story-teller, he is also a social critic. Despite the ambience of fantasy, hard core realistic predicaments and problems underline his vision. His stories linger in the mind because of their satirical undertones which though never cruel or unkind are true enough to be telling.

A Trip into the Jungle was originally published as *The Jungle* in The Illustrated Weekly of India in 1971.

3.7 *A TRIP INTO THE JUNGLE* – A DISCUSSION

A group of five – Raja Sahib, Mr. and Mrs. Mity and, Mr. and Mrs. Chakodi – went to the jungle, to turn primitive for a night as men and women must have been a million years ago, to gorge, to romp and to be violent. Mr.Chakodi, who claimed to be an

authority on the benefit of such occasional explosion of passions had lectured before they began drinking on the philosophy of such deliberate relapses.

Raja Sahib had arranged the outing and had spruced up his almost abandoned bungalow inside the jungle for his guests. They were driven here in the jeep by Shyamal, Raja Sahib's handsome half-brother, one of the numerous illegitimate children of the late Raja but quite low in status as his mother had not been a regularized concubine.

While they all went out hunting, after a round of light refreshment and drink, Shyamal declined to accompany them. Despite Raja Sahib's threats. Mrs.Mity stays backs too, ostensibly to get over the disappointment of losing the deer on the way.

Once left alone, Mrs.Mity managed to fall into Shyamal's arms and made him play her game of flesh. He obyed and obliged her. Stung by the smile of irony dancing on his lips all through and to shatter Mrs.Chakodi's suspicions she concocted an alleged assault by Shyamal, now sound asleep in a corner of the hall, as soon as the party returned. Predictably they all marched towards the sleeping chauffeur and began to kick him frantically. All except Mrs. Mity. Amidst their wild blows and kicks Shyamal swooned away and was dragged into a small room where they had just deposited a half-dead boar. Then they retired into the high-walled kitchen garden, made a fire, sat around it and drank. And then dancing around the fire they cut out and ate slices from the boar, which they had thrown into the fire half alive. Long into the night they ate half-roasted slices from it and sang and danced.

But the next morning when the watchman's knocks wake them up and Raja Sahib advances towards the room into which Shyamal had been thrown last evening so that tea can be arranged, Mrs. Mity stops him half-way. Suppose he opens the door and finds the boar instead of Shyamal there? But didn't they roast and eat up the boar last night? But suppose they see the boar instead of Shyamal in the room? Two hours later they return, Mr.Mity driving the jeep. They didn't look into the room, after all. Bringing Shyamal back is none of their responsibility. He is only a chauffeur, after all. But the suspicion that in their drunken stupor they might indeed have roasted and eaten up the badly thrashed Shyamal instead of the boar sends shivers down our spine.

3.8 CHARACTERISATION

Degeneration of the worst kind is common to the characters of this story. Raja Sahib was ugly, drained of all life from reckless indulgences, of late content with hovering around and brushing against and sniffing women. It was just for this benefit that he had arranged this outing. When Mrs. Mity wakes up the next morning she describes Raja Sahib as a pile of fifth, half a dozen flies hovering around his bloated lips.

Mr. Mity and Mrs. Chakodi had fallen into stupor on the floor, trying to crawl closer, Mrs.Chakodi had called Mr. Mity a wolf on an earlier occasion. Her words sounded innocent but she left the atmosphere sick everytime she spoke.

Mrs. Mity is a bundle of hypocrisy and pretences. When an injured butterfly got crushed under a wheel of their jeep she gave a shriek, her face all butter with pity. Mr.Chakodi used the moment to sympathise with her but actually try to come as close to the buttery face as possible. Mrs. Mity calls him a snob who snores as a pig grunts. The same kind-hearted Mrs. Mity accuses Shyamal of impudence and vulgarity when he refuses to shoot a pregnant deer. Shyamal had his barrel pointed right at the head of the deer. But didn't shoot. And to the five pairs of venon-spitting eyes he explained that the deer was pregnant. But it means nothing to Mrs. Mity – the same Mrs. Mity who had shrieked when an injured butterfly got crushed under a wheel of the jeep. She can't forgive Shyamal for his impudence. Deep anger and frustration clog her

voice. She is again on the verge of a breakdown. Not because a pregnant deer was about to be killed but because the impudent chauffeur didn't shoot the deer despite clear orders to do so, pregnancy or no pregnancy. So much for her delicate concern for the butterflies and beasts! She sat beside Shyamal, the impudent young man who seemed not to care two hoots for their sentiments

Inside the bungalow she manipulates to be left behind with Shyamal. Manipulates to fall into his arms. Manipulates her game of flesh. She has no qualms about telling lies. To punish Shyamal for his ironic smile and to set at rest any suspicions Mrs. Chakodi might have nursed on this account, she concocts an alleged assault and has the unsuspecting, sleeping Shyamal brutally bashed and kicked. She herself stands afar and laughs hysterically. A woman devoid of any morals, any conscience.

The trouble is all them are the same – total moral degeneration has left them hollow.

The trouble also is that they represent a growing section of our society doing the same.

3.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Unlike 'The Only Amerıcan....' We do not have any central narrator here whose identity; presence and comments could contribute to the meaning of the story. The narrator here is unknown. The effect is situation based. Situations, which expose all the characters in their true light.

The author builds up suspense to the point it becomes almost unbearable and leaves us there. Leaves us to draw our own conclusions.

'A Trip into the Jungle' reminds us of a very famous story 'Lady or the Tiger'. The protagonist in that story had the choice of entering one of the two doors – one leading to the beautiful lady and the other to the ferocious tiger. But no one, absolutely no one knew which door led to heaven and which to hell. And no one knew what fate awaited the protagonist once his choice was made. He could have lived in sheer bliss, he could have been devoured by the tiger – the audience were left guessing. We are also left guessing (and gasping !) by Manoj Das at the end of his story. Is Shyamal alive or dead? If alive, the chances are quite remote, how will he manage to come out of the locked doors? Will the watchman help him? Once out, will he let the bygones be bygones or take revenge? He was left for dead, if nothing else. Was he eaten up, as Mrs.Mity feared? All these questions are left unanswered. That's why we call it an open-ended story. The narrative is quite straight-forward.

3.10 LET US SUM UP

In both these stories the authors offer a critique of modern progress and advancement. In the rat race for name and fame Dr.Khanna forgets his father – the man who must have made all imaginable sacrifices to provide his son with all possible facilities to reach the top. The group of five in Manoj Das' story are brutal to the hilt. These men and women of means are devoid of any ethics or concern for others. They live only for themselves. Both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das compel us to look around, peep inside ourselves and assess the role money plays/ should play in our lives and relationships. And the havoc that the power of money can bring about ! And the arrogance of the moneyed people. Both these writers are deeply concerned with values – values that are fast disappearing from our lives and society. Values like love, filial dedication, familial commitment and concern for the under–privileged.

Awareness leads to understanding and understanding hopefully to a solution, sooner or later.

3.11 QUESTIONS

1. Would you prefer stories with neat, clear resolutions to the ones that raise many questions and suggest many possibilities but leave everything dangling in mid air at the end?
2. Do you agree that both these stories are a close reflection of the life around us today?
3. Why did Dr.Khanna's father hasten his end and that too in such a tragic manner?

3.12 SUGGESTED READING

Rajendra Prasad. *The Self, The Family and Society in Five Indian Novelists: Rajan, Raja Rao, Narayan, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai.* New Delhi, Prestige, 1990.

Tapan K. Ghosh. *Arun Joshi's Fiction The Labyrinth of Life*. New Delhi, Prestige, 1996.

R.K. Dhawan (Ed.). *The Novels of Arun Joshi.* New Delhi, Prestige.

R.K. Dhawan (Ed.). *The Fictional World of Arun Joshi,* New Delhi, Classical Books, 1986.

A.A. Sinha. *The Novels of Kamla Markandaya and Arun Joshi*, Jalandhar, ABS Publications, 1998, p.2.

References

[1] J. Tapan, K. Ghosh. *Arun Joshi's Fiction, The Labyrinth of Life* Prestige, New Delhi, 1996 p.11.

[2] A.A. Sinha. *The Novels of Kamla Markandaya and Arun Joshi,* Jalandhar, ABS Publications, 1998 p.2.

Ibid; p.5.

UNIT 4 SUBHADRA SEN GUPTA & RAJI NARASIMHAN

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to closely examine one story each of Subhadra Sengupta and Raji Narasimhan, two contemporary Indian women writing in English. This unit will help you understand the concerns of these writers as women. The stories we have selected attempt to draw your attention to the plight of the girl child and some of the problems women face in our society today. These are stories written from a particular point of view.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Women continue to be trapped by tradition. Prosperity has not brought social progress with it. Son worship continues unabated. Both these stories are concerned with some of our social mores and modes with all their ethical and human implications. The three basic areas of our concern will be:

i. What does the story try to stress?
ii. What narrative devices does the author use to draw our attention to the issues raised?
iii. Does the story succeed in generating the desired effect?

These are problem–based stories. Characterisation is not as important here as the problems stated. The main concern of the authors is to make the readers conscious of the prevalent social ills and their ethical/personal dimensions. It is hoped that awareness will lead to understanding and some possible remedy. It is not necessary to provide a resolution at the end. It is inherent in developing the right perspective.

4.2 SUBHADRA SENGUPTA - AN INTRODUCTION

Subhadra Sengupta was born in 1952 and received a Master of Arts in History from Delhi University. She has been writing regularly since 1976, and her first collection of short stories titled *Good Girls are Bad News* was published by Rupa

in 1992. She also writes fiction for children. The Children's books are Good Times at Islamgunj (1982), The Mussourie Mystery (1986), and Bishnu, the Dhobi Singer (1996) and its sequel Bishnu Sings again (1998) set in the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar, History Mystery Dal and Biryani (2000). She has also written a non fiction book Devalya, Great Temples of India (2000).

Subhadra Sengupta lives in Delhi where she works as a freelance writer and copy-writer.

Subhadra Sengupta

4.3 *THE FOURTH DAUGHTER* : SOME ISSUES

"A mother refusing to feed her newborn child. It was something Parvati Bai had never heard of before".

Nor had we. So much is said and made of a mother's love for her children that no one can believe it, no one can imagine it happening under any circumstances. Well under certain circumstances it may happen. If it is a daughter, if it is a fourth daughter. It does not matter that the parents and the grandparents are affluent. They too need a son. Perhaps more than the common people. Because they need an heir to inherit and take care of their vast empire. The family mansion and the jewellery shop of Seth Bhagwan Das in this case. And the logic is simple. If there is no son to carry on the line, their money would be scattered among relatives. Surely that's a thought no one could possibly bear.

But refusing to feed her own child? Rejecting the child just because she is a daughter? Abandoning the famished crying child just because she is the fourth daughter? Affluence should bring generosity, here it only brings cruelty.

The obsession with sons is deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche, particularly in the northern states. Thanks to rising consumerism and escalating dowry demands, nobody wants a daughter. Even in the most prosperous houses the girl child has little value in comparison to her brother. Traditionally the bias towards sons manifested itself in the neglect of girls during infancy and at times in infanticide by smothering or poisoning newborn girls. Today, modern diagnostic techniques enable selective abortions of female foetuses. Even after the ban on the amniocentesis test in 1994 by many state governments in the country, the situation has only worsened.

Tests are now conducted clandestinely at ultrasound clinics. Ultrasound makes the detection of the sex of an unborn child easier than amniocentesis and at an earlier stage of pregnancy. Those baby girls who are not aborted have a difficult life ahead.

Therefore, Mini, the fourth girl, began her life by nearly dying. If there is a God, then he sent her into the world with every disadvantage he could think of. Her mother was fair and exquisitely beautiful. But Mini was born with her father's dark skin and plain looks. If she had been a cuddly, pretty baby, maybe her mother would have relented. But for the mother of four unwelcome daughters there was nothing to warm up to in the thin, dark squatting baby with huge accusing eyes.

And so Mini, the unwelcome fourth daughter, survived because Parvati, the maid and family driver's wife took her up to the room over the garage, carrying a bowl of milk from the kitchen, while her teenage son went running to the market to get a feeding bottle.

And Mini continued to live because Parvati, the maid, hunted through her trunk for her children's old clothes and put them on her. Mini survived because whenever she fell ill Parvati's husband would rush to get a doctor. Mini learnt to smile when he got her a rattle. And she learnt to love because Parvati's son carried her around with him like a favourite toy and paced up and down with her in his arms when she cried at night.

So Mini grew up in a misty place between the garage room and the big house. No one ever kept her away from the house but instinctively she knew it was not her home. Her three sisters tolerantly allowed her to play with them but at meal times she would sit beside Parvati in the kitchen to eat. And at night she would follow Parvati up to the room above the garage.

And all this while her own mother, the mother who had given her birth, lived on the first floor in perfect comfort and luxury. Who says blood is thicker than water? Radha never felt anything for this child of hers, not even when Parvati told her one fine morning that Munia had said her first word and that it was 'Ma'. But even this failed to touch Radha's heart.

And Mini's fault? She was being punished for being a daughter, for being a fourth daughter. As if it was her doing. As if she could have altered it. Well, this is the fate that awaits hundreds and thousands of girl children in our country. Unwanted. Unwelcome. Neglected. Spurned. Sweets are freely distributed on the birth of a son. Sweets and greetings and smiles. But tears and silence and perhaps consolation (even condolences) await the birth of a daughter.

: least Mini was lucky to have Parvati and her husband for Amma and Babuji. And rarvati's son was her beloved Bhaiya. Most other girl children don't have even that compensation.

The irony is that her parents and grandparents were rich enough to afford a large family, to afford the education and upkeep of four daughters, to afford even their dowry. Instead they choose to abandon this fourth daughter. Three are bad enough. And Parvati, the maid, without means, without money, decides to bring the child up as her own. The child can't possibly be allowed to die.

There is thus a subtle suggestion that affluence dries up the milk of human kindness and leaves one utterly callous, even cruel. The poor, on the other hand, still have certain values and emotions intact. That explains why Radha didn't want Mini to study at all. Until Parvati, the maid got angry, Radha's argument was that Mini was only fit to be like Parvati. Working in the kitchen. But when Parvati heard about it, she went and yelled at Radha, her mistress. Parvati obviously forgot that she could be turned out of the house for this impertinence. And at her age it might not have been all

that easy to find another job. But these considerations become secondary. Her primary concern is Mini's education, Mini's future. She couldn't let this girl starve to death, years ago. Today she cannot let this girl be denied even the basic perquisites to lead a decent, honourable life.

She cannot let this girl be denied what is her due. And this when Mini is not her own daughter, not her kith and kin. Mini's future means nothing to Radha, her real mother. Mini's future means everything to Parvati, her foster mother. And Mini's foster father, the family driver, would do his utmost to convince her that she is their best daughter, the smartest, prettiest and his favourite. With his arguments he convinces her that one's dark complexion is no limitation, no handicap. Mini is beautiful despite her dark complexion. And she also has brains. Unfortunately, those who gave her birth failed to see or chose not to see her bright intelligent eyes, her quick mind, her chatter and laughter. In fact, they hardly noticed their daughters. All their time was spent doting on their son.

This is also ironic that girls learn to accept the discrimination early in life. Mini's sisters go to a local government school in a rickshaw but their brother, their only brother, will go to a convent school in the car. And they are grateful that they are at least being educated. They obviously don't mind the car carrying their brother driving past their cycle rickshaw morning after morning.

Most of the girls wait to get married - that would end this humiliation of theirs. Mini looked for her salvation in her studies, with a desperate determination. Radha's rejection of her only intensified with time. Mini's defiance only deepened it. Her brains became her weapon of defence and she topped among girls in the school leaving exams. Press reporters came to interview her and photographers clicked her pictures. But when she announced that she planned to study medicine, her real parents ordered her to stay at home and learn to cook and sew until a suitable boy was found for her. Mini tried to argue in vain, "Suppose your son had done well would you ask him to stay at home?" Radha's attitude was dismissive, as usual, "You're not my son".

Mini persisted, "I've got a scholarship. You don't have to pay for anything."

Even this failed to thaw Radha's stony heart, "No daughter of mine will..."

The reader doesn't know whether to laugh or cry at this statement. Is Mini really her daughter? Has she ever treated Mini as her daughter? Mini's retort is to the point, "But I'm not your daughter? Mothers feed and care for their children. When have you fed or cared for me"? The best thing for the parents is to let this girl, this impossible girl, do whatever she likes.

Mini proves to be a girl of substance – a truly modern girl. The son, the heir of the clan, the darling of the family, discovers the dubious pleasures of gambling, alcohol and women. He marries the best dowry he can find. The only condition of the deal is that he would go and stay in the bride's home as her parents do not want to let go of their only child. The son and heir happily agrees, packs his bags, gets into his sports car, waves goodbye and vanishes in a cloud of dust.

Radha and her husband watch helplessly.

Mini, now a full – fledged doctor, would check Radha's blood pressure when she fell sick, help the dark man, her biological father, with his financial dealings, run errands to the bank, etc. In a way, this unwanted, unwelcome fourth daughter-abandoned and abhorred by her own parents, her own people, proves to be the only support in their old age. She almost takes on the role of her brother – providing support and succour to her parents. Tradition and modernity are thus combined in the story to prepare the reader, as it were, for the parents' change of heart at the end. The end of the story

marks a real homecoming for Mini and her newborn son – her parents at long last waiting at the door to welcome her with open arms. Something they should have done many, many years ago. But all's well that ends well. Let's hope no more daughters undergo the hurt and humiliation that would have bruised and battered Mini's childhood and adolescence but for the kind intervention of Parvati.

4.4 CHARACTERISATION

The story has been written from a certain standpoint to highlight the plight of the girl in our country and the characters are more or less stereotypical. The grandparents and parents are thoroughly conventional – eagerly waiting for the birth of a son. The birth of the fourth daughter naturally is too much for them to bear. So the child is left to die. Well, almost.

The author has exaggerated, to a certain extent, the inhuman cruelty of these people. Ordinarily under such circumstances, parents and grandparents would curse the daughter, abuse her, admonish her but not starve her to death. Not in their own presence. Not in front of their own eyes. And the mother! Ordinarily she would curse herself, her bad luck but not the innocent child.

Similarly the kind love and affection of Parvati and her family has also been exaggerated to stress the sharp contrast. Parvati's characterisation is more natural – though kind, she is practical too. When Radha told her in clear words to take Mini away, she argued, 'Bringing up a child costs money.' And Radha dropped the cupboard keys into Parvati's hand without a word. That became the ritual every month. When Mini spoke her first word, Parvati tried once more to restore the child to her mother but met with only an irritated frown.

The sisters' apathy and indifference is also quite exaggerated – they must have learnt early on that Mini was their sister. Yet they never tried to recompense, even in their own childish, sisterly fashion for their parents' cruelty.

The son's complete volte-face does not come as a surprise. It is poetic justice. His development has not been shown at all. Only his falling on evil ways and days has been reported. The third daughter's death is literally a bolt from the blue.

The characters thus are either too good or too bad. And they remain static more or less. They represent an attitude, a rigid standpoint that the author wishes to discuss, disapprove and finally discard.

4.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The narrative is straightforward. It follows the conventional chronological pattern-- beginning with the birth of the fourth daughter and ends with the expected/ desired change of heart and perception of her biological parents who had so callously and cruelly abandoned her – to die.

Yet the simplicity of the narrative is deceptive. Following the conventional pattern it raises many unconventional questions and points to many unconventional possibilities.

Mini's childhood and adolescence have been described in great detail highlighting all the occasions where a rapprochement could have taken place between her and her

biological parents. The same occasions have been used to highlight the glaring difference between how Radha rejects her and how Parvati protects her.

Things move rather fast towards the end of the story. Mini's grandparents died. So did one of her sisters. Grandparents' death would be expected, more or less. Though both of them did not have to die in a quick succession. The death of Mini's sister comes as a big shock. Apparently she was the third daughter. Quite young naturally. We are not told anything about her ailment, if any. Did she die in an accident? But she is disposed of in half a sentence. Nor is there any mention of the effect of her sudden death on either her parents or Mini. It is too sudden and abrupt.

The son's departure is also too dramatic. His parents are rich. He is the only heir. He doesn't really have to fall headlong for someone else's wealth. Is he going to forfeit his own heirdom? Is that what his parents-in-law and bride-to-be want, may want? All these details have not been given because the purpose of the author is to stress the new equation Mini will henceforth have with her biological parents. And their sense of guilt and repentance. It is never expressed in words though.

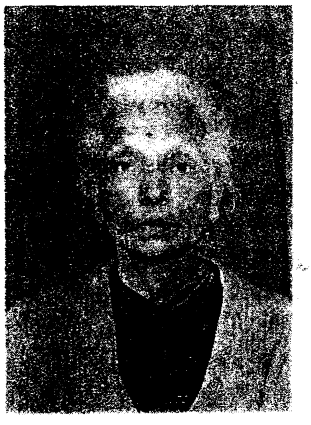
The ending is quite expected. The abandoned daughter alone comes to their aid. The darling son discards them almost as easily as they had discarded Mini many years ago. They welcome Mini back into the fold perhaps much too late. One doesn't know how long it will take Mini's scarred psyche to heal, completely.

The description of the reception Mini gets on reaching the house straight from the hospital along with her newborn son is strikingly identical to the celebrations accompanying her brother's birth years ago. "There were garlands at the door, *rangoli* on the floor" and Mini seemed to see the ghost of her grandmother feeding the beggars. The repetition reinforces the hurt Mini has nursed all these years.

The wheel has come full circle. Mini was abandoned. All the smiles and sweets of the family and friends were reserved for the brother. The brother has abandoned the family and it's only Mini proving to be a source of strength to her ageing parents.

But their change of heart? These celebrations at the end are for Mini or her son? The doubt lingers in the readers' mind and raises a series of new questions and possibilities.

4.6 RAJI NARASIMHAN – AN INTRODUCTION



Raji Narasimhan (1930-)

Raji Narasimhan was born in Madras, Tamil Nadu, in 1930. After her graduation she worked as a reporter and feature writer for *The Indian Express*. She left her job in the early '70s to take up full-time creative writing. In addition, she has been regularly reviewing books and writing critical articles for *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Literature*.

Her publications include four novels: *The Heart of Standing is You cannot Fly* (1973), *Forever Free* (1979), *Drifting to a Dawn* (1983), and *The Sky Changes* (1991). *The Marriage of Bela and Other Stories* (1978) is a collection of her short stories. Her book of criticism, *Sensibility Under Stress: Aspects of Indo-English Fiction* (1976) is recommended reading in the English literature department of some universities in India.

Her first story 'The Poor Folk Around Town' was published in *Quest* in 1969.

'A Toast to Herself' was first published in *Indian Literature* in 1986.

Her other interests are dance and theatre. For a long time she was the dance and theatre critic for *The Patriot*.

Raji Narasimhan lives in Delhi.

4.7 *A TOAST TO HERSELF* : SOME ISSUES

This story is about a writer. Priya's fifth book has just been published. She is expecting a review of it in the papers. Joshi of the *Herald* has told her he'll be publishing it soon. She is anxious and nervous. What if the review is bad? The fear is close and biting like a mask. One might argue that it should not matter to a committed writer like her. What is a review? Just words. "Will you stop writing if this review doesn't appear?" She asks herself sternly and hears herself whine, "Yes, I might." Every writer wants to be read and recognised. The reading public and the reviewer may not at times be aware of what their responses and reactions may mean to the writer. Stepping away from the full set of her books, Priya sees them huddled like children separated from their mother. Wrapped in their jackets, they do seem like her physical offsprings, sprung from the clay and kiln of her body. She celebrates the publication of her book as one celebrates the birth of a child. Drinking a toast means wishing happiness, success, etc. to somebody or something while raising a glass of wine. Here Priya wishes herself success and happiness drinking lemonade in the company of her mother and Dr.Kesavan under the navy blue sky.

Can one earn one's livelihood by writing in India? The answer apparently is no. Especially if it is not popular reading. Her writing brings Priya pebbles. Her mother tries very hard and persistently to make Priya realise that writing is for those with money. For people like Priya, it should only be a hobby. But Priya refuses to understand. Refuses to understand the hard realities of life. Two hundred, two fifty is the most she gets for an item – a story, an article. If she does four items a month, writing all the time, she must be making a thousand rupees. Priya knows a taxi driver makes more but she doesn't seem to mind. She wants little. Her wants have shrunk suddenly ever since she went into writing. Her books are more precious than any money she may get. Writing alone can sustain her now. This is why and how many writers continue to write and live in near penury. Writing becomes an end in itself. It becomes the be-all and end-all of one's life.

Economics however, plays a big role in our life today. Priya's mother keeps standing pressed to the gate looking out for the postman to bring her widow's pension for the month. It isn't due yet. The month isn't over yet. But she will stand there glued to the gate, forgetting to eat. Perhaps this money is her only safety. Priya may seek her

safety in writing but she slides off to a calculation of her mother's assets even in the midst of her anxiety about the review and the face of Kesavan prying in and out in a degenerate sexual recall. Obviously somewhere in the recesses of her heart, Priya is conscious of how little she has by way of worldly possessions and what it may mean in a moment of crisis.

Mother-daughter relationship and the generation gap have also been stressed. Priya was far too miserable following her divorce. But her mother hated her for that. Instead of sympathising with her or supporting her, she hated Priya – maybe for her guts, maybe for her refusal to tow the traditional line and accept whatever destiny had in store for her. She was jobless too and again, her mother hated her for it actively and openly. Priya has to repeatedly assure her mother that she doesn't need her pension, that she can fend for herself. The only solution the mother can think of - to pull Priya out of the mess and morass she has so willingly bound herself to, is second marriage. If Priya will somehow agree to marry Dr. Kesavan even at the age of 50, her economic hardships will end. And once married she may outgrow her passion for writing – writing which doesn't fetch her a single paisa by way of royalty.

For most of us, for most of our women at least, marriage remains the only goal, the only worthwhile goal in a woman's life.

Not only her mother, Priya might have herself liked to get married and happily settle down in life. After her divorce, years ago, when Kesavan had called her into his clinic when he need not have and had given her an injection in her buttock because there was virus raging in the air, she thought he was about to make a proposal. And she might even have accepted him. But he didn't. Even today, at 50 her thoughts slip to Kesavan and she admits that sex always lurks in some fold of her mind, vying with writing for the possession of her. While nervously waiting for the review of her latest book, she felt herself go woman and winding like a mermaid in the presence of Dr.Kesavan. She would have liked to rest her head on his chest and take the male comfort she had rejected all these years. She wished she could take a respite from the exacting taskmaster of writing to which she had bound herself. Writing or art, for that matter, can supplement life, it can't substitute it.

The story thus depicts Priya as a woman, as a woman writer and as a writer transcending, if only temporarily, all the pulls and pressures of sex and society.

4.8 CHARACTERISATION

There are only three major characters drawn sympathetically and sensitively. Mother and Dr. Kesavan are, on the whole, conventional. Mother's concern for this divorced, jobless daughter of hers is only natural. Today she is there to willy-nilly support her, look after her but what will happen when she is there no more? Every mother wants to see her daughter happily married and settled in life. This mother is no exception. Nor can she understand Priya's obsession with writing – what has it given her all these years? She is a typical Indian mother caring for her daughter and trying to ensure a secure future for her in her own conventional way.

Dr.Kesavan is a typical Indian male – wanting Priya and not wanting Priya. He is attracted to her but something in him holds him back. Maybe it is her divorce. Divorced women are seen as aggressive, assertive and offbeat. Maybe he is not sure she will make a good wife or he a good husband – to her at least. Priya is 50. He must in all likelihood be older – but no reason is given about why he chose not to marry. Not yet.

Priya is a strong, unconventional character. A divorcee, she does not seem to have any regrets. She would want to live life on her own terms. She knows this may be hard.

She knows she may have to pay a heavy price for it and she is prepared to pay it. Her wants have shrunk suddenly ever since she went into writing. She is above all normal plentitudes now, it seems. Writing keeps her cheerful even when hunger charges into her and chaps her lips. A crumpled *kurta* pulled out of the *dhobi's* basket makes up her clothing. When she assures her mother she doesn't want a penny of her pension, she means every word of it. How far she will be able to carry on like this is, of course, a different matter. She has her moments of weakness and fatigue and anxiety. She would like to rest her head on Dr.Kesavan's chest and take the male comfort she had rejected all these years. She is a new woman torn between her newfound freedom and ambition on the one hand and her natural urges on the other. She is a brave woman who knows what she wants from life and knows how to get it. She can celebrate today without unnecessarily and unduly worrying about tomorrow.

4.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

It is a simple, straightforward, third person narrative. But for a brief flashback telling us about Dr.Kesavan's possible interest inher after her divorce, it deals with the present. Raji Narsimhan uses word pictures to convey the meaning. We can really visualize Dr.Kesavan giving Priya an injection in her buttock or her mother standing glued to the gate, forgetting to eat, waiting for the postman to bring her her widow's pension for the month. Or Priya frantically trying to ring up Joshi. Priya coming out with a full set of her books and the doctor picking up the ones on top, feeling their girth and shape. And we can actually see Priya drinking a toast to herself with her mother and Kesavan joining in. All these pictorial images heighten the effect of the narrative and help us sense the tension within and without. Instead of detailed descriptions we have intense emotions and responses – pent up and suppressed. They tell us about "the duplicities of making art from life."

4.10 LET US SUM UP

The first story draws our attention to the status of the girl child in an Indian family, the blatant preference for a son and the resultant frustration and heartburns. The second story introduces us to the world of a woman writer – the odds she has to face at home and outside. Both these stories have for their protagonist women of substance, of firm determination and grit. These are women who defy the social code and convention, and shape, to a large extent, their own destiny. They have a purpose in life – to establish their worth and value as human beings and they achieve it. Their life is hard and arduous but it is satisfying and fulfilling. They take their own decisions and set their own priorities.

4.11 QUESTIONS

a) Do you agree that there is a widespread bias against the girl child in our society? Do you approve of it? Do you have any suggestions about how it can be removed?

b) Instances of divorce are on the rise these days. Whom do you hold responsible for it?

c) Did you know that a writer anxiously waits for the review of his/her book? What, according to you, are the characteristics of a good review?

UNIT 5 SHASHI DESHPANDE AND GITHA HARIHARAN

Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will closely examine one story each of Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan. Shashi Deshpande is a major Indian writer writing in English. Githa Hariharan has made a name for herself despite only three publications so far. This unit will help you understand the broad concerns of these women writers transcending gender and geography. The issues they take up are universal and perennial.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit the questions that we will primarily concern ourselves with are:

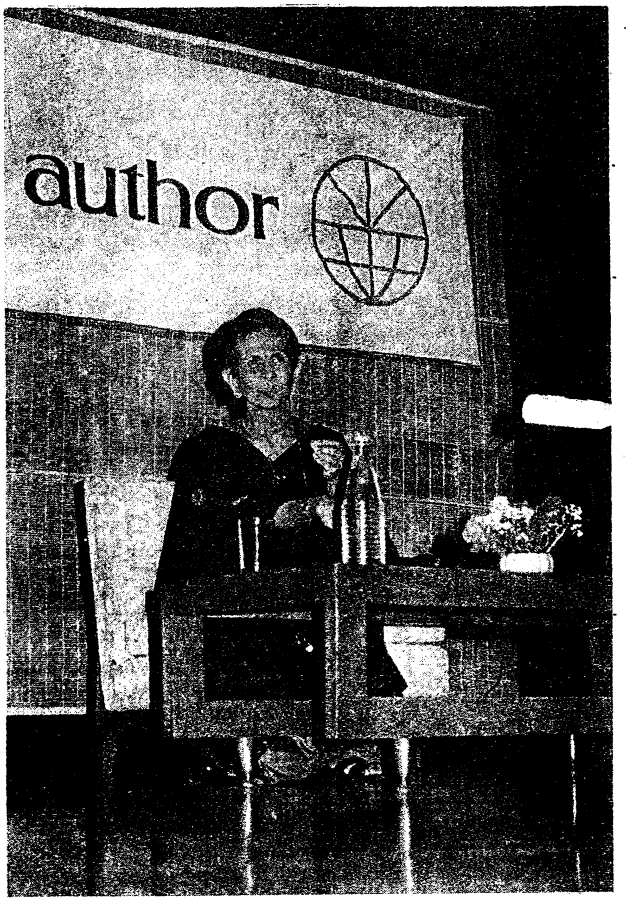
i. Do writers remain male and female and write from a fixed, pre-determined point of view?
ii. Do women writers write only about women's issues?
iii. Do writers ultimately rise above the immediate, narrow consideration and develop a broad vision encompassing the whole of humanity?
iv. Of course, the writer's own sensibility and sensitivity will determine the treatment of the theme and the direction it will take.

We have been examing stories in this Block keeping certain questions in mind. These could relate to the form or content of the stories. In the last unit we had discussed two stories written specifically from a female point of view – the plight of the girl child in a typical Indian home and the trauma and turmoil of an unmarried woman writer has to undergo, even at the hands of her own mother. Both these writers were attempting to draw our attention to certain social problems and compel us to think and do something about them. Sometimes even the recognition of something opens rooms for a dialogue or change of heart at a later date. It shakes us out of our inertia or slumber.

The writers of this present unit are also women but they are not confining themselves, in these two stories, to the issues related to women alone. They are talking of broader issues, of course, their sensibility is their own – giving a particular slant to the narrative.

Both Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan have dealt at length with the Indian stereotypes of daughter, wife, and mother – but in these two stories they concern themselves with things more basic and comprehensive.

5.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE – AN INTRODUCTION



Shashi Deshpande (1938-)

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Shri Adya Rangacharya. At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay, graduated in Economics from Elphinstone College, then moved to Banglore, where she gained a degree in Law winning two gold medals. The early years of her marriage were largely given over to the care of her two young sons, but she took a course in journalism from the Bhavan's R.P. College of Mass Communication, winning three medals including The Times of India Gold Medal she worked on a magazine for sometime. Her writing career only began in earnest in 1970, initially with short stories, of which several volumes have been published. She is the author of four children's books and seven novels, the best known of which *are The Dark Holds No Terrors, The Long Silence* which won the Sahitya Akademi Award and *The Binding Vine.* Shashi Deshpande lives in Banglore with her pathologist husband.

Shashi Deshpande's works are in their own way all about humankind and society -- the essential loneliness of being and the human predicament, a matter of interest to all humanity. She says that generally, she starts with an idea, a vague one really, and as she goes on writing she finds that she is going into other regions, exploring other ideas. Writing gives her a constant sense of discovery.

Following is the list of her novels and short--story collections:

The Legacy and Other Stories (1971)
It was the Nightingale (1986)

The Miracle (1986)
The Intrusion and Other Stories (1993)
The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980)
If I die Today (1982)
Roots and Shadows (1983)
Come up and be dead (1983)
It was Dark (1986)
That Long Silence (1988)
The Binding Vine (1992)
A Matter of Time (1996)
Small Remedies (2000)

5.3 *MIRACLE* – A DISCUSSION

This story is taken from *The Miracle and Other stories* published in 1986. Since the time of Descartes more and more people have relied exclusively on reason and adopted a quasi – mechanical conception of the universe, which is reduced to space, matter and motion, operating strictly under mathematical laws.

Modern medical science has managed to make remarkable strides and get phenomenal breakthroughs with the help of tests carried out on animals. The rationale is that these animals are sacrificed for a big cause – the future of mankind. Considering the ultimate gain, the price paid in terms of the animals losing their lives is not much. Cures are now available for illness considered fatal till only sometime ago. Medical research continues to conduct new tests, hoping to find remedies for many incurable diseases.

Shashi Deshpande recreates one such laboratory where two doctors, a male and a female, are deeply engrossed in carrying out some test on monkeys to find out why an innocent–looking thing growing everywhere caused a strange disease when people ate it. People ate it, fell sick and died. These doctors are feeding the monkeys with this to know what actually happens inside them so that a cure may be found before it's too late.

Fair enough, one would say.

The problem arises when one particular monkey, Raaja, doesn't die even after he is given all that poison to consume. All the other monkeys have died. And that convinced Narayan, an employee there, that this is not an ordinary monkey. He is Hanuman, the monkey god himself. He is reincarnation of the great god. That in turn means that he should not be killed, his devotees should save him. Narayan sees it as a miracle -- all other monkeys have died after consuming that poisonous thing. Raja hasn't. He refused to die. Surely that's a miracle. And who other than a god can perform miracles? And Narayan cannot just helplessly and passively watch Hanuman being killed mercilessly by this team of doctors.

The doctors are predictably aghast. A miracle? A mystery? How can anyone believe in miracles in this age? There is an explanation for everything. If this particular monkey whom Narayan insists on calling Raaja has not died, they will want to know why and they will find out the cause soon enough. It would, infact, help them understand things better. There is a scientific explanation for everything.

But Narayan's faith wouldn't let him give in. He obviously understands the importance of what the doctors are doing. He only wants this monkey, this particular monkey, this Raaja, to be let off, to be set free. He is no ordinary monkey. He is none other than Hanuman himself. For the doctors all this is "shoddy bogus, religious stuff"

and they are surprised that the typist girl who should know better, is pleading for Narayan, "You can't destroy someone's faith."

"But if it's built on sand?"

"Faith is always built on a rock. It's only if you stop believing that you see it as sand."

The next morning Raaja is missing from the animal house. He has escaped. Again a miracle! Well, if he is an incarnation of Hanuman, he can perform miracles, locks and keys can't keep in a god.

The doctor duo obviously suspect Narayan of helping the monkey to escape. Narayan vehemently remonstrates – he can't possibly afford to lose his job – what would happen to his wife and children? Though he does let out to the typist that he did have a hand in Raaja's escape.

The doctor is surprised that any educated person, anyone who can think, should believe in this theory of reincarnation. The typist is put off by his self—righteousness and retorts that she would "rather believe in that than in nothing". Forgetting for the time being that she is a mere typist who shouldn't talk that way to him, she asks him, "Do you think that one is born and that's the beginning. And one dies and that's the end. Is that all of it?"

"What else?' he asked me wonderingly.

The typist looks around. The shelves are laden with glass jars, and bits of human beings pickled inside leer at them obscenely. Obviously a doctor dissects a being and puts the bits under a microscope and thinks that he/she can find all the answers. She grows defiant now, "You can put me under a microscope and you will never find ME. A human being... that's a miracle. A baby's first cry.... that's a miracle. A monkey, will to live... that's a miracle!"

The female doctor laughs and makes fun of her but the male doctor begins to understand the point she is trying to make and quotes Walt Whitman, "And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels." He again shows better understanding and empathy when he talks of Raaja, thus recognising that a monkey can have an identity.

Raaja reappears at lunchtime on the windowsill but instead of trying to have him captured she offers him her banana and helps him disappear into the branches and leaves. However, she is shocked to notice that the male doctor has been standing in the door all this while and has witnessed her act of treachery. Soon she gets over her fright – why is she afraid? What is she worried about? Her job? Well, let it be. There are limits to everything.

Her surprise and joy are, therefore, beyond words when he confesses, "There are miracles everywhere if you only open your eyes." Raaja ceases to be a mere test animal for him, he becomes a monkey called Raaja, having an identity of his own. Narayan is no mere worker either. He is a man with two daughters and a son and faith in Hanuman should be accepted and respected as such.

And the doctor finds the typist too no less than a miracle. And they get married soon thereafter. They have different tastes. She loves strong coffee while he drinks weak tea. She loves bright colours while he just blinks his eyes at them. But love is accepting the other person with all his/her peculiarities and individuality. Love is recognition of the other person, other being, as an individual, as an entity. The last sentence beautifully sums it up, "Whoever heard of an incompatible Hindu marriage?" If you recognize and respect the otherness of the other person, where is the incompatibility? The secret lies in noticing life's miracles all around us.

The importance of science, of medical science, has not been denied or undermined. What is being stressed is the importance of faith in life, in human life. The two should co-exist, the two can co-exist. After all, it's love for mankind, for the human race that compels scientists and doctor and researchers the world over to confine themselves to the laboratories and test tubes – to find remedies for ailments hitherto considered incurable and thus ensure a better future for us all. And life cannot be reduced to tests or theories or formulae. Life still contains many miracles and mysteries which no scientific discovery or invention can claim to fully fathom or unravel.

5.4 CHARACTERISATION

There are only four characters in this story -- the male doctor, the female doctor, the typist girl and Narayan. The first three are not referred to by any names -- only pronouns. Narayan alone has a proper name. And of course, Raaja, the monkey.

The two doctors are busy working on the monkeys to find a remedy for the killer disease. Human beings, living beings mean only tests and experiments and findings to them. Logic is their guiding principle. Emotions are out. Faith is out – it is built on sand. Their intentions are noble – we can't fault them there -- except that a living being is much more than the bits of body pickled and preserved inside glass jars to be studied under a microscope. A human being, a living being is much more than that. The female doctor refuses to concede that, refuses to recognize that. She derides people like Narayan for their illogicality, for their faith. She is a doctor, a scientist, inside out, and her regret is that all their work, many months' work has been wasted because of this irrational fiath. She refuses to concede Narayan his individuality, his beliefs. She refuses to concede the possibility of any other point of view, different from hers. She refuses to even recognize the existence or presence of the typist in the room or around. She is depicted as a competent and committed doctor but without any emotions and any regard for others' feelings and sentiments.

The male doctor, on the other hand, is more human, more humane. Gradually he begins to see the other point of view, begins to concede Narayan's right to his faith. When Narayan and two others go to him in a delegation, he tries to explain things to them, tries to make them see reason. After the typist's outburst, he is quick to realize the limits of reason and research. Though very important, they cannot substitute life. Unlike his female counterpart, he remembers who Raaja is, and reconciles himself to Raaja's escape – accidental or intentional. He marries his typist and the two seem to be living happily hereafter.

The female doctor seems too conscious of her social, professional status. She practically looks down upon the typist, upon every one else. The male doctor, though equally engrossed in his research and experiments, treats his subordinates with love and compassion.

The typist is a proud woman. That explains why she has had to change jobs so often – ten jobs in four years. But she has been here for full one year – not because she loves her work but because she is in love with the doctor. She knows the doctor is hardly ever aware of even her presence. But that is love. Despite this weakness, she is a woman of substance who can and does take a stand, no matter how high the stakes are. She will do what she feels like doing. And if she loses her perks in the process, to hell with the perks. A new woman seeking and finding a space for herself – a woman who is capable, who knows her mind and who is willing to pay the price for her actions and decisions.

Both the typist and doctor are new women – women who have their own identity and individuality – educated, enlightened, independent in their own way.

Then we have Rajaa, the monkey, and the reincarnation of Hanuman as Naryan and others would have us believe. Shashi Deshpande makes his presence felt, his appearance and disappearance noticed. Huge and dignified, like a king, he daintily peeled the banana.... When he reappeared, he 'just sat there like a man unable to make up his mind'. Rajaa is not just a name, not just a presence in the background but a living being darting forward, jumping into the branches, forcing people to relate to him in their own way. It is because of him that there is this crisis, this commotion all around. He thus helps many people to relate to the larger, non-humane world. He helps to enlarge our vision and broaden our horizons.

5.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Shashi Despande shows a preference for the first person narration but her stories are free from distorting confessional fury and achieve a remarkable sense of objectivity. She has an eye for detail, whether this relates to physical sensations or workings of the mind and shows considerable skill in the choice of background and the creation of atmosphere.

The atmosphere inside the laboratory is very matter-of-fact, clinical. The two doctors discussing the tests and their results all the time. That they are not given any names only heightens the effect of the story. They symbolise an approach, an attitude. They are no ordinary human beings talking of mundane things, of everyday routine. They can only talk of and think about research and logic and reason. Their not really recognising the typist is quite in place. They do not do it on purpose, they do not do it to humiliate or embarrass her. She has a role in their scheme of things and beyond that she does not matter.

Narayan has a name. He has his faith, his individuality, his family. He tries to defend them all. His assertion, his courage makes even the typist girl give up her fences, her reservations and come out clean with what she thinks about it all. The monkey has been portrayed without any sentimentality, in a natural manner. He does not perform any supernatural deeds, does not act larger than life. He eats bananas -- something all monkeys are known to do and relish. It is this no-nonsense, natural depiction of Rajaa that makes the narrative plausible.

Shashi Despande makes effective use of language. When the doctors said, "an interesting case," the typist said, "poor child." When they said, "that bronchogenoic carcinoma," she said, "that poor man with the three children". The contrast is made amply clear. Human beings are only medical cases for the doctors – they see them in terms of their ailments. The typist sees them as human beings.

The male doctor's change of perception is clearly indicated when he quotes Walt Whitman in support of the typist. Literature is emotions, human beings, and relationships. Something reason seems to negate or at least undermine. This incident successfully breaks the barrier between the doctor and his typist and proves to be a turning point in their relationship.

Shashi Deshapnde uses colours also to highlight contrast. The typist is always dressed in brightly coloured *saris*. The male doctor walks past a flaming gul mohar tree in May without an upward glance. But when at long last he notices her and concedes that she is another miracle, she is dressed in a bright yellow sari. On the other hand, the female doctor always moves about in her white coat, on flat slippers. Colours denote life, zest for life.

The extreme simplicity of the styleless style hides consummate craftsmanship: the stereotypical characters reveal unexpected strength of character and conviction. The disarming quality of the narrative is only a way of bringing home basic truths about life.

5.6 GITHA HARIHARAN – AN INTRODUCTION

Githa Hariharan grew up in Bombay and in Manila. She was educated in these two cities and later in the United States, where she worked in public television. Since 1979, she has worked in Bombay, Madras and New Delhi, first as an editor in a publcishing house, then as a freelancer. Githa Hariharan has published several short stories in magazines and journals. *The Art of Dying and Other Stories* (1993) contains twenty of her short stories. Her two novels are : *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), and *Where Dreams Travel* (1999) *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994). The thousand Faces of Night her maiden novel, won her the prestigious Commenwealth Writers Award for 1993. She has also edited *A Southern Harvest* a collection of short stories translated into English from four south Indian languages. She lives in New Delhi with her husband and two sons.

Geeta Hariharan (1954-)

5.7 *GAJAR HALWA* – A DISCUSSION

This story is a moving account of young Perumayee's life in Salem and out of it. Life for her was extremely hard in Salem. The parents didn't get along. Mother was always screaming. So the father left. It didn't seem to bother his wife one bit. 'We're well rid of him, he's a lazy drunken bastard, she said. She went to work everyday, even on days when she was sick or when her stomach was empty, to the highway they were building near their village. She would leave at six in the morning after drinking the strong, sweet tea Perumayee made for her. She coiled a rag on her head, ready for the baskets of gravel she would carry all day. On her hip she held the youngest child who was still breast-feeding. We don't need much imagination to know the extent of her drudgery to fend for her four children.

And Perumayee! Young Perumayee would get her brother Selvan ready for school, feed him his gruel, oil and comb his hair, and wave at him from the door of their hut. Then, along with Thayee, her baby sister, she would begin her chores for the day. Chores which included collecting the firewood, the water queue that got longer and longer (that's where she learnt to fight and push and shove), scrubbing the clothes hitting them again and again on the, rocks near the river. Her reward! 'That Perumayee is like a little mother, everyone said, the irony is too obvious. At an age when she should have gone to school, she was taking care of her siblings. And we

cannot blame her mother either. She is doing whatever she possibly can, whatever the circumstances allow her to do, to keep herself and her children alive – so that they can have some rice or gruel or once in a while a handful of dal in lots of tamarind water.

No one could think things would get worse. They did. The highway was built after eighteen months of backbreaking work. No more work thereafter. The rains failed for the second year, making life still harder, provisions costlier.

Around that time their neighbour's cousin Chellamma was talking five of the village girls to Delhi with her. It was decided that Perumayee should go too so that she could earn something and send it home. That perhaps was the only way out.

Perumayee stuck to Chellamma like a leech on the train and didn't look at anyone's face. Then they reached her home, a small room in Munirka (a locality in Delhi) that smelt of urine. The room was actually a scooter garage but even this small, dark hole with no tap for water and no toilet, Chellamma has got after years of working for the same memsahib in the colony.

Chellamma has no difficulty finding a job for Perumayee for two hundred rupees a month. Cooking, cleaning, washing, looking after the baba. Perumayee has to give Chellamma, her mother now, fifty rupees from her salary every month. The rest she can send home.

At the milkbooth, which reminds her of the fights at the water-tap in the village, Perumayee makes friends with girls who work in the flats in the same colony. Their memsahibs are a lot like hers. They themselves are not very different from her. One can imagine the kind of childhood they have had and the family circumstances that have compelled them to take to this drudgery.

Githa Hariharan has very effectively portrayed the plight of the poor in rural India forcing them to reach Delhi in search of a better life, in quest of a dream. The hard realities of life take away their childhood, their innocence.

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. Necessity makes us invent lies, falsehoods. It makes us conceal the truth. Necessity to find a job for Perumayee makes Chellamma tell the memsahib that the girl can cook, sweep and swab and look after children even though she knows full well that Perumayee has never cooked anything more than rice or gruel or perhaps a handful of dal once in a while. Telling the truth would mean getting fifty rupees less. It might also mean not getting a job and consequently taking the first train back to Salem.

Necessity not only forces Perumayee to learn enough Hindi in a few weeks but also forces her to learn how to shirk work, how to swab quickly, skipping corners and under the beds when the mistress is not around or to just squeeze out the baby's stinking clothes with the yellow stains drying in crust on the diapers whereas back at home in Salem she used to scrub and scrub the clothes, hitting them again and again on the rocks near the river. Or she would steal a quick look behind her and pop bits of something or the other into her mouth. The chores she is supposed to do included peeling and grating mounds of carrots, or so it seems like to this young girl, for halwa. Scraping so many carrots leaves her arms stiff. Her fingers feel as if they will never straighten out again. And then stirring the pan of milk (with all these grated carrots) on the fire, round and round, scraping the sides of the pan again and again her arm becomes numb with pain. This is an indication of the life ahead of her.

Githa Hariharan has also managed to bring out the north-south contrast. The language problem, to begin with. It suits Perumayee in the beginning because she does not have to reply to memsahib's questions. She can pretend not to understand her instructions or queries and just say yes or no, hoping it is the right answer. Even though she quickly picks up enough of Hindi, she cannot pronounce gajar correctly. She must call

.. kaachar. And she is justifiably hurt when the mistress laughs at it. Her memsahib calls her Prema. Despite her education and ability to drive the car, she can't say Perumayee, the girl argues. Perhaps Perumayee doesn't realize that it is not her memsahib's inability to correctly pronounce her name, it is some kind of a social convention, social custom to shorten the name of your retainer. The change in weather has also been indicated. The sun doesn't shine properly for days in Delhi. The water freezes Perumayee's fingers. In Salem, they obviously didn't have this problem with lots and lot of sun for most part of the year. The situation demands adjustment on various levels – physical, economic, emotional.

5.8 CHARACTERSIATION

The story is mainly about Perumayee – the young girl from Salem – and what all she goes through, in Salem and then in Delhi. It's also about her evolution and initiation into the city life and its ways. When Perumayee comes to Delhi, she feels she should speak the truth, tell her prospective mistress that she cannot cook anything more than rice or gruel and maybe dal. Quickly she learns the Delhi ways, learns to swab quickly, skipping corners and under the beds when the mistress is not looking, learns to just squeeze out the baby's stinky clothes without properly washing them. She learns not to slave for her memsahib, learns to shut the kitchen door, turn the gas knob to high and hold her hands over the onions sizzling in oil to feel warm and safe. Learns also that in six months, once she has picked up the basics of city housekeeping, she can get a job for double the money in a richer colony. In a few years' time she may be no different from our wise, fawning Chellamma, bringing young girls from the village and supplying maids to the city folks making, in the process, a quick buck or two herself. Chellamma, we are told, had brought five village girls with her to Delhi. We can safely surmise that the other four girls would be as quick at adapting themselves to the Delhi ways as our protagonist. We can also safely guess what Chellamma would have been like the first time she herself came to Delhi. The process goes on – as long as the circumstances don't change, Delhi will continue to entice the poor villagers. And the young village girls will continue to become part of the metropolitan system sacrificing their simplicity and innocence.

Chellamma knows how to bargain what, to say and when, how not to give in. She knows the exact words that would please or soften the memsahib. She knows the mistress is needy but she also knows that she should not stretch things too far. She is no good Samaritan – Perumayee has to pay her fifty rupees a month for her services and liason work.

Then we have the mistress. We are not told her name. That's not important. What's important is that she badly needs a domestic help to do the chores and look after her baby. Perumayee is just a servant girl. No more or no less. The relationship between the two is very formal, matter-of –fact. She asks Chellamma her age – perhaps to gauge how much she knows, what all she can manage. She does not ask her name, does not ask her anything personal. Does not want to know why she has come all the way to Delhi at such a young age. Does not want to know if she misses her mother. Being a mother herself, she could have shown some emotion, some concern for the girl. But she does not do so. Perumayee is coming to her as a maid – she should prove herself to be a good maid, and that's that. She is a typical mistress and the mistresses in other flats in the colony are a lot like her. Other maids are not very different from Perumayee either. So we can conclude that they too would be having more or less similar relationship with their employers. Education and affluence do not necessarily bring in understanding and compassion.

Perumayee's mother has been portrayed in detail. An unhappy woman. A hard-working woman. She went to work every day, even on days when she was sick or when her stomach was hungry, to the highway being built near the village. She would

leave at six in the morning after taking just a cup of strong tea. On her hip she held the youngest child she was still breast-feeding. And she would carry on her head baskets of gravel all day long. Her husband of gravel all day long. Her husband was lazy and a drunkard. Obviously not bothered about his responsibility as the head of the family. Not bothered about his wife and four children. No wonder Perumayee's mother was always screaming. She couldn't possibly see the children starve to death. She couldn't possibly watch the husband squander money on drinks – whatever little money there was. And so he left. A very familiar scenario! And she is left to fend for her four children. Again these characters are not given any names. This could be any couple in rural India. What is important is the situation, the compulsions of the situations. She is a brave woman who faces the situation with courage – accepts this backbreaking work and when even this tunnel is blocked, takes the bold decision to send Perumayee with Chellamma in search of a job.

In a way all these are stereotypical characters but together they create a very vivid, moving picture of our society, of our times.

5.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Gajar Halwa – a common home made sweet-dish in winter in almost the whole of north India. A favourite dish. Githa Hariharan uses it as a very effective imagery. Making it requires a lot of hard work. Hours of peeling and grating and stirring. The young maid does it all – it gives her stiff fingers and arm numb with pain. Ofcourse, the great red gold warmth of the grainy, syrupy thickness, once it's ready, spreads all over her and she becomes part of it. It symbolises the city life, the new life for Perumayee. Hard yet tempting. Like the carrots absorbing, sucking in and swallowing the sugar, the ghee and the milk, the city sucks in and absorbs numerous Chellammas and Perumayees who become part of its thickening red sweetness.

The device of contrast is also used to highlight the rural migration to the city. Back at home all that Perumayee has seen is rice or gruel or maybe a handful of dal and tamarind in the good days. She has never seen such a pile of carrots before. Nor so much of milk and sugar and ghee. There is a gas stove and fridge, and they have meat thrice a week. Almost a dreamland. And then the water queues getting longer and longer in the village contrasted with the cold, fresh water gushing out of the city kitchen pipe, never ending, as if the entire river lies inside it. Scarcity and abundance! Her mother carrying the baskets of gravel on her head all day-long and the memsahib driving a car and ordering her around. The backbreaking work her mother did to provide two (?) square meals for her children and the smooth, pink skin of her memsahib who has been to school just like her brother Selvan. To a much better school. Who wouldn't want to come over?

The city has other attractions too! Before sending any money home, Perumayee would like to buy a sweater, a blue one with shiny, beaded flowers the kind she saw a girl wearing at the milk – booth queue, for herself. Then she wouldn't have to sleep with the thin, lumpy mattress on top of her, pretending it is a blanket. Quite fair and natural, one would say. Except that her mother and siblings back in the village might not even have a morsel to eat, given the miserable conditions there. But Perumayee forgets that. This is what the city does. Saps human emotions, human ties, and human bonds. Perumayee forgets, if only temporarily, the pressing needs of her family. Her memsahib forgets that she is a frail, young girl -- too frail and too young to do this kind of work.

Language has been used to denote moods and stress points. Peel, peel, grate, and grate. The repetition conveys the size of the pile pf carrots and the hard work involved. Stir, stir, the memsahib says. And then – stir, stir, she barks. This one word conveys her anger and authority.

Colours have been used to heighten the over -- all affect. The peeled carrots, freshly washed, dazzle Perumayee's eyes. Later, great red-gold warmth spreads all over her bones. The gajar halwa sucks in everything, likewise the city sucks in everyone. And the earlier spluttering becomes a faint but steady heave of red, like a heartbeat, then gentle sighs. And you eventually get used to it, accept it, and become part of it.

In a way both these stories are concerned about how women deal with the sanction of space in the Indian society and the possibility or absence of choice in the broad context of our ethos and social mores.

5.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen that the women writers in India do not confine themselves to women alone issues – we have read that Shashi Deshpande refuses to be called a feminist. As such the two stories have broader concerns. In a way the two stories show how women make the best out of the limited space they have in Indian society. Their choice or possibility of choice, as said earlier, remains in the broad context of Indian ethos and social mores.

5.11 QUESTIONS

1. The Miracle highlights man's cruelty to animals. Have you heard of the SPCA? Do you love animals? Which character impresses you the most in this story?

2. What is the essential message of this story?

3. Why does the doctor marry the typist at the end of the story?

4. Are education and faith mutually exclusive?

5. Perumayee feels that her father left them because her mother was always screaming. Do you agree with her analysis?

6. Do you agree that 'Gajar Halwa' offers a scathing comment on our social inequalities?

7. How do you view Chellamma's role in the story? Does she try to take advantage of the situation in her own way?

5.12 SUGGESTED READING

Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal. *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction in Indian Writers series General* Ed. A.N. Dwivedi, B.R. Publishing Corporation New Delhi, 1998.

Sarbjith Sindhu. *The Image of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* New Delhi, Prestige, 1996.

Anuradha Roy. *Pattery of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers*. New Delhi, Prestige, 1999.

UNIT 6 RUSKIN BOND

Structure

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to identify essential features of story writing for children – suitable themes, the role of fantasy, the language and technique, the significance of illustrations and the induction of moral and contemporary values in such tales by introducing to you the art of Rskin Bond's story telling.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the course of our discussion on stories by Ruskin Bond for children we are, going to acquaint you with the art and craft of story writing for children. But, first we need to mention the distinctiveness of this form of writing. Writing for children is a special branch of literature. Its requirements and qualities are different from adult literature. The old Indian classics are rich in material that can be exploited for writing children's stories. Nevertheless children's literature is still scant in our country though, of late, efforts have been made to promote and popularise this specialized genre. Ruskin Bond is one of the few major writers writing for children.

6.2 WRITING FOR CHILDREN

In recent times, writing for children, a specialised form of writing, has grown into a distinct genre. The writer has to select his themes very judiciously because of the special target audience he is addressing. A different approach is required for different age groups. Animal stories, fantasies, fairy tales, heroic adventures, mountaineering, sea-faring, dacoits, bandits, police, exploration and travel, space odysseys, stories of children's courage, self-reliance and initiative are generally children's favourites.

Books for children explore and portray themes which children can identity with and find relevant and meaningful. Thus this literature abounds in child protagonists undertaking all manner of journeys, voyages and adventures and negotiating the complex environment they are thrown into.

These stories are not very lengthy because of the limited retention span of children. Lively and often colourful illustrations add to the over-all effect of the story.

The world of wonder, often ignored by the adults, fascinates every child. Adventure and excitement, dangerous and exciting situations make the child want to know what happens next. Curiosity and suspense hold the child's compassion and concern for others.

Children go on imagining things. They create a world of fancy and an atmosphere of magic and unreality. It's a world in which unreal people and creatures roam about doing unexpected things and encountering unreal adventures. But even in a fantasy there can be a moral. It must not however, be made too obvious.

Entertaining the child is the primary aim of a good story. At the same time, a streak of virtue must run through the story. Love and kindness towards animals as well as other human beings, and triumph of good over evil in the end are essential qualities in every good story written for children.

The genesis of story-writing for children lies in our long tradition of folk tales and the stories told by wandering story-tellers and by grandmothers in our homes at bedtime, drawing heavily on classics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharath*, the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesh*, the *Kathasaritsagara* and the *Jataka* stories. The tradition of oral story-telling puts a lot of stress on moral teaching and hero-worship.

Despite a rich tradition of creative writing for children in our country has not been very rich or even satisfactory.

Till sometime ago, writing for children was not considered a significant or serious activity. It has deemed to be a child's play, a secondary kind of writing. There were very few magazines for children. Generally speaking, parents didn't think it worthwhile to spend on books for children, apart from textbooks. It was considered a wasteful expenditure.

Of late, though, Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, has done considerable work to promote and produce good children's literature. The animal fantasy of modern times started with the *Jungle Book* and *Just –so Stories* of Rudyard Kipling. Kipling and A.A.Milne in *Winnie the Pooh* created a unique world of jungles and beasts. The animal world was later expanded by such imaginative writers as Beatrice Potter, Kenneth Grahame, Margery Sharp, C.S.Lewis, Llyod Alexander, Michael Bond and Robert Lawson. Jim Corbett's *Man Eaters of Kumaon, More Man –Eaters of Kumaon, The Temple Tiger* and *The Man – Eating Leopard of Rudra Prayag* have left generations of young readers breathless. Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland*, L.Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, and Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio create a very different kind of fairy tale with all kinds of eccentric characters. In Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* very different animals form a friendship.

Many contemporary authors have written fairy tales with a new twist. Jay William's *Practical Princess* slays the dragon and lets the prince out. In another of William's story the Princess insists that she will help the prince only when he promises to shed his laziness. The traditional image of a helpless young girl quietly sitting in an ivory tower patiently waiting for the prince charming to come on horseback and rescue her has been dismissed and discarded to keep pace with the changing times. Young men alone need not display bravery or chivalry. Modern girls can take care of themselves and others.

In Roald Dahl's famous *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* too, despite its overriding surrealism, a touch of modern-day reality has been introduced in the portrayal of the poor Charlie. Of course, in the end Charlie emerges the winner and Willy Wonka declares him his heir purely on the basis of his endearing qualities of head and heart. While children's literature has evolved from a world ruled over by parents and teachers into a freer world for today's boys and girls, earnest effort is being made to inculcate domestic, ethical and social values.

Writing for children is more difficult than writing for adults because in case of the latter we can speak in our own voice, as adults. But children belong to a phase of life we have long passed. We have to thus put ourselves back in time and constantly remind ourselves of what it was like when we were eight or nine or ten years old.

Great writers of children's works do not speak as adults, always write from children's point of view, never adopt a condescending tone, use simple but vivid language and avoid clichés and complex structures. Ruskin Bond goes a step further. His child

protagonist seems to show the adults the drawbacks in their approach to nature and the animal world.

6.3 RUSKIN BOND : A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ruskin Bond (1939-)

Ruskin Bond is a long time resident of Landour and Mussoorie, a beautiful hill station in Uttar Pradesh of India. He is a prolific writer of poetry, fiction and non-fictional essays, and has published some 70 odd books to date. He has weekly English language columns in leading Indian newspapers. Ruskin Bond was born in 1939. As he lost his father at an early age and had to grow up in his step-father's house, he became rather an introspective reticent person who immersed himself in a world of books. As a child he spent long periods with his grandparents in Mussoorie and imbibed a love for nature and animals from his Grandfather. Ruskin Bond started writing at the age of ten. His novel *The Room on the Roof* won him the prestigious John Llewell Rhys Prize when he was only 18. in 1992 his collection of stories *Trees Still Grow in Dehradun* got him the Sahitya Akademi Award.

Ruskin Bond's works mainly depict children growing up and maturing through adversity and experience. The natural scenic hills of Dehradun and Mussoorie almost invariably form the setting of his works and reflect his ardent faith in the healing powers of nature.

Now at 61, Ruskin lives at Landour, Mussoorie along with his adopted son's family, surrounded by pines, the blue firmament, the sun kissed dew-drenched buttercups, vine and children. And he still continues to pour his heart out in his writings. He said in a recent interview, "I don't always write professionally or for money. It is something I feel I have to do to relate my impressions in the day-to-day life that I see around me."

Major Works of Ruskin Bond :

1999 *A Season of Ghosts.*
1994 *Delhi is not far : the best of Ruskin Bond.*
1994 *Quakes and flames Bond.*
1992 *An island of trees : nature stories and po Bond.*
1992 *Mussoorie and Landour : days of wine and R Bond.*
1991 *Snake trouble.*
1989 *Time stops at Shamli and other stories.*
1988 *Beautiful Garhwal : Heaven in Himalayas.*
1988 *The night train at Deoli and other stories.*
1986 *The adventures of Rusty.*
1985 *To live in magic : a book of nature poems.*
1980 *A flight of pigeons.*

1977 *A girl from Copenhagen.*
1975 *Lone fox dancing : lyric poems.*
1972 *An axe for the Rani.*
1972 *It isn't time that's passing.*
1969 *Strange men, strange places.*
1968 *My first love and other stories.*
1967 *The neighbour's wife and other stories.*
1957 *The room on the roof.*

6.4 *NO ROOM FOR A LEOPARD* : A DISCUSSION

This story was first published in *A Bond with the Mountains* in 1998. It is a very moving account of the killing of a trusting leopard by a group of shikaris. Leopard skins were selling in Delhi at over a thousand rupees each. Of course, there was a ban on the export of its skins but there were always ways and means ... Because of such unscrupulous persons, the leopard, like many other members of the cat family, is nearing extinction in India.

Because of deforestation taking place in the hills and surrounding areas, many animals have been driven into the valleys inhabited by human beings. This exposes them to grave risks and fatal encounters – one such encounter has been described in this story. But for the rapid deforestation the shikaris would not have caught and killed the leopard so very easily. In the familiar surroundings of the forest the leopard would have found a safe haven.

Of course, this deforestation has brought one indirect advantage too – of bringing humans and non-humans closer to each other. The protagonist – we are given neither his name nor age – came into close contact with the folktails, kaleej pheasants, langurs, red foxes and even a sinewy orange–gold leopard. As he had not come to take anything from the jungle the birds and animals soon grew accustomed to his face. They began to recognize his footsteps. After some time, his approach did not disturb them. The birds would no longer fly away, they would remain perched on a boulder in the middle of the stream while he got across by means of other boulders only a few yards away. The langurs in the oak and rhododendron trees would just watch him with some curiosity and continue to munch up the tender green shoots of the oak. Not only that, when one day they saw a leopard poised on a rock about twenty feet above the young narrator, they tried to warn him of the hidden danger by grunting and chattering. They thus showed their concern for him. A deep bond thus got established between the narrator and the animal world without their ever exchanging a single word.

The difference between the children's thinking and the adult thinking has also been brought out. Children love nature. They love all the birds and animals. It comes naturally to them. No ulterior consideration enters their innocent minds. They can never ever think of harming the animals or exploiting them for their personal gain or profit. But the adults are solely driven by mercenary considerations. If a leopard's skin can fetch them a good price, they would not think twice before killing him. Compassion, trust, love .... these mean nothing to them. An idyllic world stands shattered because of this selfish cruelty.

The young narrator loved every bird and animal. He meant them no harm. They in return trusted him and accepted him and cared for him, in their own way. But their acceptance of his presence, of human presence proved to be their undoing. The leopard became trusting, became less cautious, took the shikaris also to be friends. And lost his life. Hereafter at least animals stopped trusting human beings. And this distrust soon spread far and wide. Even though all men are not selfish and cruel, many

of us deeply love animals and care for them but the act of shikaris will make the suspicious forever.

A long and hazardous journey in pursuit of something noble is often the theme of good and absorbing children's stories. The perilous journey exemplifies the value of cooperation and the quality of friendship. Here the young narrator crosses the forest and the small stream at the bottom of the hill every morning and evening, all by himself. We are not told why he does so. It is left to our imagination. Perhaps he goes to school, though his bag of books or satchel is never mentioned. But that is not important. What is significant is the trust that develops between him and the animals and the subsequent breach of that trust.

The best in children's literature has a double purpose. While it entertains the young reader and the adult as well, it also teaches something – helps understand the norms of the society in which we live. Transmission of ethical and social values is skillfully woven into the texture of the story. Ironically, in this story, the ways and thinking of the adult world are censured. At the end of the story the child does not stand enlightened, he stands embittered, disillusioned. In a way this story is a comment on the modern world and its life style. The adults no longer provide role models for our children. Models of right thinking and right behaviour. Children are making them aware of their misdeeds.

In the last few decades we have become increasingly aware of the evils of deforestation and other environmental imbalances. And the havoc these changes are playing in our lives. This story thus takes up a very contemporary and a very relevant theme that concerns all of us today. Filtered through a child's consciousness it becomes all the more poignant and pressing.

6.5 *COPPERFIELD IN THE JUNGLE* – A DISCUSSION

This story was first published in *Tigers For Ever* in 1996. It is an autobiographical story. It tells us how the young Ruskin Bond could never get interested in the hunting expeditions of his Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends. Perhaps he had inherited this trait from his grandfather who never understood the pleasure some people obtained form killing the creatures of our forests. Killing for food – most animals die that could be justified to an extent but killing just for the fun of it could not be justified or understood.

Even at the tender age of twelve Ruskin disliked anything to do with shikar or hunting. He also found it terribly boring. To illustrate this point he narrates an experience. Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends once took him on a shikar expedition into the Terai forests of the Siwalik hills. The prospect of spending one whole week in the jungle with several adults with guns only filled him with dismay. They would all the time be thinking and talking of hunting a tiger or an elephant and he did not at all look forward to it. So, on their second day in the jungle, he managed to be left behind at the rest house. And in a corner of the back verandah of that old bungalow he discovered a shelf of books – some thirty volumes, obviously untouched for many years. Much too young to know what was good and what was not, he would have read any thing and every thing with pleasure. However much to his delight the bookshelf contained, among others, P.G.Wodehouse's *Love Among the Chickens*, M.R.James's *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, Edward Hamilton Aitken's *A Naturalist on the Prowl* and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. This chance acquaintance with Mr.Micawber and family, Aunt Betsy Trowood, Mr.Dick, Peggoty and many other characters in Dickens's novel seemed to set him off on the road to literature. James's book had him hooked on ghost stories for the rest of his life.

Ruskin's imagination becomes active the moment he discovers the books. Who could have left them there? A literary forest officer? A memsahib who got bored by her husband's camp–fire boasting? Or someone who had no interest in the 'manly' sport of slaughtering wild animals?

At the end of the week the four men with guns could only see a spotted deer and shoot two miserable, underweight wild fowls. Sitting in the rest-house with his treasure of books Ruskin Bond saw not only the spotted deer crossing the open clearing infront o the bungalow but also a large leopard making off into the jungle with one of the dogs held in its jaws. Since the leopard had done it only to help itself to a meal, it did not disturb young Ruskin beyond a point and he returned to his reading. The hunting party however, refused to believe this, attributing this bit of information to his overactive imagination under the immediate influence of Dickens's vivid portrayal of Master Copperfield. Ruskin brings the half – finished novel back with him. David Copperfield, published in 1849-50, is Dickens's veiled autobiography.

6.6 *AN ISLAND OF TREES* – A DISCUSSION

This story is taken from *An Island of Trees* published in 1992. This is a dialogue between Koki and her grandmother. They are sitting on a string cot in the shade of an old jackfruit tree and Grandmother talks about her father and his great love for trees and flowers. She tells Koki that she was convinced that plants and trees loved her father with as much tenderness as he loved them. She recalls how sometimes when she sat alone beneath a tree
she would feel a little lonely or lost. But as soon as her father joined her, the garden would become a happy place, the tree itself more friendly.

Grandmother personifies the trees. Peepul trees are great show – offs. Even when there is no breeze, their broad – chested, slim – waisted leaves will spin like tops, determined to attract your attention and invite you into the shade. An old peepul tree had forced its way through the walls of an old, abandoned temple, knocking the bricks down with its vigorous growth. Her father rebuilt the temple around the tree. The tree protects the temple and the temple protects the tree. People believe that there's a friendly tree spirit dwelling there. Her father also believed that the trees are always trying to move – to reach out with their arms.

The same with the banyan tree. While its leaves were still pink and tender, it would be visited by the delicate map butterfly who left her eggs to their care.

Koki's great – grandfather had such a passion for planting trees that during the monsoons he would walk into the scrubland and beyond the river bed, armed with cuttings and saplings, and he would plant them out there, hoping to create a forest. And he told his daughter that he was not planting the forest for people to see. He was planting it for the earth and for the birds and animals who live on it and need more food and shelter. He also told her why mankind, and not only wild creatures, need trees – for preventing the banks of rivers from being washed away. But everywhere people are cutting down trees without planting new ones. This is the message that Koki's grandmother wants to convey to all of us. In "No Room for a Leopard" we have seen the grave consequences of such mindless acts. The thought of a world without trees is simply nightmarish.

At the end of the story Grandmother narrates an experience, which reveals the deep bond that grows between humans and non-humans if only there is love and compassion. After twenty years or more she returned to her parental house and one day walked over to the island where her father had once planted all kinds of trees. While a small spotted deer scampered away to hide in a thicket and a wild pheasant challenged her with a mellow 'who are you?' the trees seemed to know her and

beckoned her nearer. She ran her hands over their barks and it was like touching the hands of old friends. She noticed that many small trees and wild plants and grasses had sprung up under the protection of those whom she and her father had planted years ago. The trees had multiplied. The forest was on the move. Her father's dream was coming true – the trees were walking again, by multiplying, by spreading their shade and benign influence.

6.7 CHARACTERISATION

In 'No Room for a Leopard' and 'Copperfield in the Jungle' the protagonist is a young boy of about twelve years of age. We are not told his name. That is not important. What matters is his love of animals and complete affinity with

nature. In 'No Room for a Leopard' even his age is never mentioned. Only from the illustration do we surmise that he is no more than 10 – 11. We don't know why he crossed the forest every morning and evening. True, his cottage was just above the forest but we are not told why he travelled all by himself and why his people back home never worried about his safety. Surely they would have known about the many birds and animals frequenting that area. The shikaris show more concern when they tell him that there is a leopard around and he should carry a gun.

Nor are we told anything about the shikaris except that they were only interested in the money the leopard's skin would fetch them. We don't know their names or number. We don't know where they came from or where they went. They symbolise an attitude – selfish materialism. And it's contrasted with the child's spontaneous love for the animals.

In 'Copperfield in the Jungle' again, all that we know is that the protagonist is twelve years of age, dislikes hunting and loves reading. Why he has to accompany Uncle Henry and his sporting friends almost against his wishes is not known. Nor are we told anything about the shikaris except that despite their tall claims they managed to shoot only two miserable, underweight wild fowls at the end of the week. And they blamed it on the beastly weather. Of course, they use typical hunters' vocabulary. They constantly talk of bagging a tiger – that is, killing or catching a tiger, beating the jungle – that is, going into the jungle to drive out game for sport or shooting usually accompanied by drum – beaters and camp fire boasting – that is boasting of their past exploits, often imaginary, sitting around the fire made with logs in the open air at night. Only in 'An Island of Trees' Kokis's grandmother controls the narrative but she is throughout reminiscing about her own childhood, when she would not have been older than Koki herself. To make Koki understand the value of trees in life she recreates her past – her happy memories of a loving and caring father.

Not yet conscious of the burdens of life and several extraneous considerations, children easily relate to the natural world, establishing a spontaneous relationship with birds and animals and plants. These children carry a message for adults. If hunting for fun or profit goes on, if trees continue to be felled, the earth will become a desert in no time.

6.8 ATMOSPHERE

Since "No Room For A Leopard" is about deforestation and its accompanying aftermath, the story gives a vivid picture of the forest along with the magic of its flora and fauna. Trees, plants, birds, animals – they instantly grip the imagination of the young. Since the forest of oak and maple and Himalayan rhododendron was just

below the cottage of our young protagonist, he must have been frequenting it since his early childhood. It is not surprising, therefore, that he knows the place almost inside out and can mention each tree by its proper name. By nature children love birds and animals. A bond of understanding and trust soon develops between them and the protagonist who is never referred to by name because that is not important. He represents all children and their innonence is contrasted with the selfish cruelty of the grown – up shikaris who have also not been given any names.

A fantasy also must have a logical framework; may be not logical from our practical point of view but some way of thinking which the characters themselves have evolved. The leopard's quest for food, the quickening cry of the barking deer, the nervous and excited grunting and chattering of the langurs, the fireflies mistaken for the eyes of the leopard by the nervous child, his leart banging away against his ribs – all have a sound logic of their own. The young child venturing out all by himself every morning adds to the magic of the atmosphere and makes him a real hero. Against the tall trees climbing into the sky, a small figure in the foreground looks solitary and courageous – quite in keeping with the spirit of the hills and forests.

"Copperfield In The Jungle" also reconstructs the jungle atmosphere. The young protagonist accompanies his Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends on a shikar expedition into the Terai forests of the Siwaliks. We are not told his name but we know that he is twelve years of age and has inherited his deep dislike of hunting and killing just for the fun of it from his grandfather.

The terminology commonly used by the shikaris and the tall claims made by them are effectively used to stress the contrast between the adult thinking and the child's thinking. A bungalow in the jungle has its own magic. A shelf of books half-hidden in a corner of its back verandah is nothing short of a treasure for a twelve year old who has to look after himself during the long absence of his uncle and friends. Wiping the thick dust off the covers and examining the titles was really a treasure-hunt for the boy whose reading tastes had not yet formed. *The Ghost Stories, A Naturalist On The Prowl* and *Love Among The Chickens* only add to the child's world of fantasy. Reference to Jim Corbett earlier shows that the child was interested in books. David Copperfield establishes beyond doubt the autobiographical element. The protagonist of "No Room For A Leopard" also ends his narration with a line from D.H.Lawerence's poem.

In "An Island Of Trees" the narration is controlled by Kokis's grandmother but the grandmother is recounting and reliving her own childhood all through. There aren't very many birds or animals here except for an occasional map butterfly or hawk-cuckoo or ladybird or caterpillar. The importance Koki's great -grandfather attached to trees for life on earth is the focal point. The banyan tree gave shelter not only to the human beings but many birds during the monsoon – the gossipy rosy-pastors, quarrelsome mynas, cheerful bulbuls and coppersmiths and sometimes a noisy, bullying crow. All of them would feast on the scarlet figs. Even the dark flying foxes at night!

The illustrations, almost an essential part of a children's story, animate the mood. heighten the over all impact and reinforce the deep bond of friendship between nature and children, between animals and children.

And the fantasy in all these stories is as much geared to magic as to modern science and modern ways of living. These is none of the macabre hair – raising of a dyed-in-the-wool horror story. There are no ghost but the stories have a haunting atmosphere which stays with us for a long time.

MEAN-07(2)/144

We reproduce below the poem by D.H.Lawrence that is referred to at the end of "No Room For A Leopard":

MOUNTAIN LION

CLIMBING through the January snow, into the Lobo
canyon
Dark grow the spruce-trees, blue is the balsam, water
sounds still unfrozen, and the trail is still evident.
Men !
Two men !
Men ! The only animal in the world to fear !

They hesitate.
We hesitate.
They have a gun.
We have no gun.

Then we all advance, to meet.

Two Mexicans, strangers, emerging out of the dark
and snow and inwardness of the Lobo valley.
What are you doing here on this vanishing trail?

What is he carrying?
Something yellow.
A deer?

Que tiene, amigo?
Leon –

He smiles, foolishly, as if he were caught doing wrong.
And we smile, foolishly, as if we didn't know.
He is quite gentle and dark – faced.

It is mountain a lion,
A long, long slim cat, yellow like a lioness.
Dead.
He trapped her this morning, he says, smiling foolishly.

Lift up her face,
Her round, bright face, bright as frost.
Her round, fine-fashioned head, with two dead ears;
And stripes in the brilliant frost of her face, sharp, fine
dark rays,

Dark, keen, fine eyes in the brilliant frost of her face.
Beautiful dead eyes.

Hermoso es!

They go out towards the open;
We go on into the gloom of Lobo.
And above the trees I found her lair,
A hole in the blood-orange brilliant rocks that stick up,
a little cave.
And bones, and twigs, and a perilous ascent.

So, she will never leap up that way again, with the yellow
flash of a mountain lion's long shoot !
And her bright striped frost-face will never watch any
more, out of the shadow of the cave in the blood-
orange rock,
Above the trees of the Lobo dark valley-mouth !

Instead, I look out.
And out to the dim of the desert, like a dream, never
real;

To the snow of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, the ice
of the mountains of Picorisi,
And near across at the opposite steep of snow, green
trees motionless standing in snow, like a Christmas toy.

And I think in this empty world there was room for me
and a mountain lion.
And I think in the world beyond, how easily we might
spare a million or two of humans
And never miss them.
Yet what a gap in the world, the missing white frost-
face of that slim yellow mountain lion !

6.9 LET US SUM UP

It is important to remember that even in a fantasy there should be a moral. Of course, it should not be made too obvious. Children are indirectly and subtly taught certain virtues like love and kindness towards animals as well as other human beings, helping those in trouble, punishing or defying the wicked, truthfulness, respect for elders, etc. Paradoxically, these stories have a very clear message not for children but for adults. We, the adults, have to realise and remember what trees mean to us, to our future. We, the adults have to realize and remember what deforestation can and will do to our environment and ultimately to us. We, the adults, have to realise and remember the harm mindless killing of animals, for the fun of it or for monetary gains, will ultimately do to life on earth in the days to come. Children, the future of mankind, are asking the adults to ensure a safe future for them in a healthy environment.

6.10 QUESTIONS

1. Why does the young protagonist feel responsible for the killing of the leopard in 'No Room for a Leopard'?
2. What is the full implication of the leading hunter's remark in 'Copperfield in the Jungle', "Young Master Copperfield says he saw a leopard"?
3. What do you learn about Koki's grandmother in 'An Island of Trees'?
4. In the first two stories the young protagonists have not been given any proper names. Does it adversely affect the over-all effect of the stories?
5. What is the strength of these stories? How are they different from 'The Miracle'?

6.11 ADDITIONAL READING

1. *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, eds, Carpenter and Prichard, Oxford University Press, 1984.
2. *Writers, Critics and Children*, eds Geoff Foxetal, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976.
3. *Children's World*, a magazine published by the Children's Book Trust, New Delhi.

UTTAR PRADESH
RAJARSHI TANDON OPEN UNIVERSITY

MAEN-07
INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Block

7

POETRY

EXPERTS COMMITTEE

Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah
Dhvanyaloka, Mysore

Prof. Meenakshi Mukerjee
JNU, New Delhi

Prof. M.L. Raina
Punjab University, Chandigarh

Prof. P.C. Kar
Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda

Prof. Issac Sequiera
Osmania University, Hyderabad

Prof. Mohan Ramanan
University of Hyderabad

Prof. Vinod Sena
Delhi University, Delhi

Prof. R.K. Dhawan
Delhi University, Delhi

Prof. G.R. Malik
University of Kashmir, Srinagar

IGNOU Faculty

Prof. Asha S. Kanwar

Dr. A.B. Sharma

Dr. Renu Bhardwaj

Dr. Anju Sehgal Gupta

Ms. Neera Singh

COURSE PREPARATION

Prof. Makrand Paranjpe
JNU
New Delhi

COURSE COORDINATION & EDITING

Dr. Renu Bhardwaj
IGNOU

PRODUCTION

Ms. P. Gupta, CE,
Camera Ready Copy Prepared by: Sh. A.S.V. Venkateswar, PA

May, 2001

ISBN-81-266-0158-2

MEAN-07(2)/148

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Block VII of your course on Indian English literature. This Block deals with poetry. We are going to look at selected poems from the very beginnings of Indian English literature in the early nineteenth century to the present. Admittedly, this is quite a large spectrum to deal with in one Block, over 150 years of literature and culture. So what we have done is to look at some representative poets and poems.

We have eleven poets in all, starting with Henry Derozio (1809-1831), who is considered the first Indian English poet, and coming up to Keki N. Daruwalla (b. 1937), who is one of our leading contemporary poets. We shall study two or three poems of each of these poets.

Let me now tell you briefly how I have planned this Block. This will help you organize your own studies. In Unit I, which is the introductory Unit to the whole Block, I propose to examine some key issues that we should bear in mind when we study Indian English poetry. These issues concern not only how the discipline was formed and grew, but also how it regards and organizes itself now. I shall be concerned with topics like the identity of Indian English Poetry, the conditions for its growth and decline, its relationship with the other literary genres, its placement vis a vis other Indian literatures on the one hand and with Western, mostly English literatures on the other, and so on. We will also examine questions of periodization and thematics as we will the impact of publishing, media, and the market forces on this literature.

Here's a summary of what we'll do in these units:

Unit No.	Subject
1	Background to Indian English Poetry
2	Henry Derozio and Toru Dutt
3	Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu
4	Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das
5	A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, and Arun Kolatkar
6	Keki N. Daruwalla and Jayanta Mahapatra

In each unit, I'll try to tell you something about the lives of the poets we're studying. In addition, we shall of course discuss their literary careers, major publications, themes, techniques, and so on, before concentrating on the selected poems themselves. When it comes to reading and understanding the poems, I shall not only try to explicate their meanings but also explain to you how I read and relate to these poems.

Before going on to our first Unit, I thought we should spend a few minutes reflecting on the importance of Indian English Poetry. Why should we study it? Is there anything special about it? A simple, rather obvious, answer would be that we're studying Indian English Literature in this optional paper and poetry is a part of Indian English Literature, therefore, we need to study it. But this only begs the larger question of why we should study Indian English Literature at all. So, let me try to tackle this larger question before speaking of poetry more specifically.

We take English rather for granted today. It has become very much a part of our lives, wherever we may live in India. Several English words have entered Indian languages; many of the sign boards in our towns and cities are in English; we have a vibrant English press; the Government owned All India Radio and Doordarshan,

both, have several English programmes, including major news bulletins; the presence of English on the cable TV networks is, of course, even more pronounced; English is also used for a variety of official purposes; it is still used in courts and in Government documents; it is used in the Indian parliament, along with other Indian languages; it is the preferred language of advertising; it is used by our armed forces; it is also a major language of education, certainly of higher education. Besides this, English is an international language whose power and spread is increasing day by day. It is the lingua franca of the World Wide Web or the Internet as it is more commonly called.

All this, I realize, seems rather obvious, but is it? How is it that we are conducting this very dialogue in English, and not in any other language? If you give this a serious thought, you'll immediately see how remarkable this widespread use and presence of English is in our lives as Indians. The presence, even the dominance of English, then, is not some sort of natural fact, but the outcome of several powerful historical, social, and political forces. At once, it draws our attention to the colonization and domination of India, first by the East Indian Company, and then by the British Crown. In other words, the introduction and early spread of the language in India recalls to our minds our entire history of colonialism. If its introduction reminds us of colonialism, it stands to reason that it's continuing spread and demand today is linked to similar forces today. We may call these the forces of neo-imperialism or of economic domination, which goes by the name of liberalization and globalization, or of the continued ascendancy of a U.S.-lead coalition of advanced countries over the rest of the world. In other words, English thrives because the countries which use it, are together the most powerful group in the world today. Of course, we must not forget that there is a genuine need for an international language in a world, which is a shrinking global village and that English fits the bill more adequately than any other language. But the spread of English in India has another equally vital reason. One reason that English continues its position of pre-eminence in our national life, contrary to the pledges and predictions of the leaders of our freedom struggle, is that a certain class, with deeply entrenched privileges, continues to patronize it. This class, which occupies the top positions in most government and non-government sectors of the Indian life, is closely identified with English and refuses to give it up.

I admit that we could go on debating the position of English in India for quite a long time. Indeed, there have been some excellent books on this subject, which I shall include in your list of suggested readings. But I deliberately introduced this subject here so that you begin to think of it, more specifically, to be aware of the cultural dynamics of the way in which this language functions in India. But what does this have to do with our course on Indian English Literature, you may ask. Well, to put it directly, Indian English Literature foregrounds and problematises this issue better than any other discipline. Its very existence is dependent on the complex web of historical, social, and cultural forces, which have shaped the destiny of modern India. Therefore, to understand Indian English Literature is nothing short of trying to understand ourselves, who we are, how did we become this way, and where we might be heading as a culture. But, you may ask, can't studying English or American literature do the same for us? I would say, yes, but they do so only indirectly. True, we don't study these literatures as if they were foreign literatures. But, yet, we don't study them, as would native speakers of English either. In other words, even if the British had never come to India, we might still have studied English literature as we do German, Japanese, Russian or any other foreign language/literature, but we wouldn't be studying them the way we do today.. It is only Indian English, then, which is the direct offspring of this encounter, or if you prefer, clash of cultures and civilizations. This is one reason why studying it is so important. As I said earlier, it holds the key to our identity as modern Indians.

MEAN-07(2)/150 Another objection that you might raise to this argument is that I have stressed only on non or extra-literary factors so far. True, usually, the entire raison d'être of literary studies is the quality of the texts involved. At least this has been the principle behind

the study of great texts. These texts are supposed to be carriers of culture, embodiments of great literary quality and thereby of humanistic and cultural values. Studying them, then, is considered both entertaining and edifying. But, this has been precisely one of the arguments against Indian English Literature. Several critics have alleged that it is impossible to produce really great Indian English Literature because of some of the inherent limitations of the functional domains of English in India. I have deliberately avoided taking on this kind of stricture. No doubt, there have been some notable achievements in Indian English literature, but even if there weren't any, I would argue that this literature is still worth studying for the reasons outlined above. Of course, that it has a valid and fairly rich tradition is today being more and more widely accepted.

Now a few words about the importance of poetry itself. You know very well how for the last several decades, it is fiction which has dominated Indian English Literature. The spectacular success of Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy is just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. The fact is that fiction sells better than poetry. The result is that Indian English poetry is much less studied than fiction. But here is where the literary argument must be re-invoked: the quality of a text can obviously not be judged solely by the amount of revenue it generates. Poetry as a whole has fared badly in this century the world over. In the face of the onslaught of the mass media of cinema and TV, literature itself is now relegated to a secondary role in a global world order dominated by audio-visual media. But let us not forget that poetry has always played a crucial role in the preservation and protection of language and culture because poetry is the purest, most concentrated use of language. Besides the inherent and intrinsic value of poetry, we also need to bear in mind that for nearly the first hundred years of its existence, it is poetry that has led Indian English Literature. Its first writers were mostly poets. In fact, fiction did not really emerge as a serious literary genre till the 1930's.

To sum up, then, Indian English Poetry has a special importance for both literary and extra-literary reasons. The extra-literary reasons are ideological, political, historical, sociological, and cultural. The literary reasons have to do with both the intrinsic value of poetry and of its historical importance in the present case.

I do hope you enjoy this Block on Indian English Poetry. The wonderful thing about literary studies is that it embraces a wide range of concerns and questions. Of course, the literary text is our primary concern and thus of prime importance. But the text does not exist in isolation. In fact, it bears a close connection with the society that produces it. The various forces at play in this larger society or culture, thus, find their reflection in that which happens inside the text. That is why, when you study the poems in this Block, I would like you to always bear these larger issues in mind. What kind of society are we? How have we become this way? What is our relationship to our past? How are we related to the West? In a word, what is Indian about these poems and what is English. When you keep such questions in mind, I hope your studies will not only become more relevant to your daily lives, but more interesting as well.

Suggested Reading

Kachru, Braj B. *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India.*
Mehrotra, Raj Ram. *Indian English: Texts and Interpretation.* Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1998.
Rao, G. Subba. *Indian Words in English.* Oxford: Clarendon UP 1954.
Wadia, A. R. *The Future of English in India.* Bombay: Asia, 1954.
Yule, Henry and A. C. Burnell. *Hobson-Jobson.* London: John Murray, 1903.

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit I propose to give you an overview of the birth, growth, and development of Indian English poetry from the earliest times to the present. This will include a description of its historical, social and cultural backgrounds. The first section will discuss the origin of Indian English poetry. After that, I intend to explore, briefly, the impact of British colonization on Indian society. Then on to the vexed question of the identity of Indian English poetry. It would also be useful to see if the periodization and growth of Indian English poetry can be mapped out. Finally, I would like to speculate on its future possibilities. This, then, is the plan of this unit.
The origin of Indian English poetry

1.1 INTRODUCTION

How did Indians suddenly begin to write poetry in English, which was a foreign language? This question cannot but strike anyone who goes looking for the origins of Indian English poetry. Today, in the 1990s, English seems to have a very stable, even natural, place in India's social and cultural life. But even today, when we step out of our cities and go deep into the interiors of the hinterland, the foreignness of English at once becomes clear. Hardly anyone can really understand the language and if a few do, their command over it is questionable. That is why English, Americans and other native speakers of English continue to speak loudly, haltingly, or through interpreters when they are in India. But about 200 years ago, when British paramountcy was far from established in India, when the sight of Englishmen was a great novelty in the streets of Indian cities, the English language was very much a foreign tongue. Yet, the fact remains that nearly a quarter of a century before English education was institutionalised or the first Indian universities were founded, there was already a growing crop of Indians who chose English to write their poetry in. How or why did this happen?

1.2 THE ORIGIN OF INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

The first Indian English poet, by common consent, is Henry Derozio, who published his collection of *Poems* in Calcutta in 1827. But, perhaps, even this was neither as sudden nor dramatic as it may seem today. Indians had begun to learn English in earnest at least twenty-five years prior to that and some had even begun to write it.

M. K. Naik in his extremely useful *History of Indian English Literature* (1982) refers to Cavelley Venkata Boriah's "Account of the Jains" published in *Asiatic Researches* (London, 1809) as the first substantial published composition in English by an Indian. This essay was actually written even earlier, probably in 1803. Boriah's essay, twenty-eight pages in length, was a translation, yet it retains a historical importance as the first sizeable piece of writing in Indian English. The credit for the first original English composition by an Indian goes to Raja Rammohun Roy, for his essay, *A Defence of Hindu Theism* (1817). I will come back to Roy later, but what I wanted to emphasise is that Indian English poetry did not emerge suddenly, without any prior preparation; a community of Indians who knew and used English was necessary before it could be born.

Indeed, in my Introduction to *Indian Poetry in English* (1993), I observed: "Before Indians could write poetry in English, two related preconditions had to be met. First, the English language had to be sufficiently Indianized to be able to express the reality of the Indian situation; secondly, Indians had to be sufficiently Anglicized to use the English language to express themselves" (1). Perhaps, we should spend some time trying to examine and understand these two preconditions. After Vasco da Gama came to Kerala in 1498, the trade routes to India over the high seas opened up. With trade, several Indian words made their way into Portuguese, thence into English, especially after the charter of the East India Company in 1600. The British presence in India, however, remained marginal for another hundred or 150 years. But towards the end of the 18th century, after the East Indian Company transformed itself from a trading company into an incipient empire, a number of Englishmen and women began to use the English language to express Indian themes and subject matter. It was the Battle of Plassey of 1757 which was the turning point in early colonial history because it gave the British virtual control of one of the richest and most populous provinces of India, Bengal. Soon, the revenue administration also passed into the hands of the British. This forced them to undertake a systematic study of land records and other official documents so that they could rule more effectively. This, coupled with a curiosity to understand a culture as rich and ancient as India's, gave rise to a whole tradition of British Orientalist scholarship. Many of these scholars who were high-ranking British officials, well-trained in British universities, were assisted by native pundits and scribes in their efforts to understand and interpret Indian texts and traditions. Perhaps, the most significant and outstanding of these British Orientalists, was Sir William Jones (1746-1794). Jones became a judge in the Supreme Court in Calcutta, but was actually a poet, scholar, and man of letters, deeply committed to research in Indian literatures. He founded the Asiatic Society in 1784, translated Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* in 1789, and demonstrated the remarkable similarities between Indian and European languages. Jones may also be considered as the "pitamaha" if not "father" of Indian English poetry because he published in 1785 a series of hymns to Hindu gods and goddesses in English, thereby showing that the English language was suitable to express even such traditional Indian themes. These hymns to Camdeo, Prakriti, Indra, Surya, Lakshmi, Narayana, Saraswathy, and Ganga, though they sound quaint, bookish, and artificial today, may be considered as the real precursors to Indian English poetry.

The Anglicization of the Indians or, at any rate, of a certain section of the Indians which came into direct contact with the British, was an ongoing process, which grew in direct proportion to the rise of British power in India. In the beginning, the British tried to encourage traditional scholarship in India. Warren Hastings, the Governor General of Bengal, founded the Calcutta Madrasa for the teaching of Arabic and Persian in 1781. Similarly, Jonathan Duncan started the Sanskrit College in Benares in 1782. Those who favoured the promotion of native education in the classical languages of India came to be called the Orientalists. But, by the turn of the century, the tide of public opinion had changed in England. The Conservatives lost power to the Liberals; utilitarian ideas were in the air. Ironically, Conservatives like Edmund Burke had a higher opinion of Indian civilization than Liberals like Macaulay. There was also a rise in Evangelical movements, which aimed at spreading Christianity in

India. The Liberals and the Evangelists, then, became unlikely allies in the mission of revamping Indian civilization. Both attacked Indian civilization and Hinduism, from secular and religious considerations respectively. Schools set up by the missionaries were already teaching English by the beginning of the 19th century; now the imperialists too began to champion the cause of English education in India. English was seen as an aid to establishing the empire. In the end, the tussle between the Orientalists and the Anglicists resulted in the victory of the latter, signed, sealed and delivered, as it were, in the famous Minute of Macaulay of 1835.

Let us look, briefly, at the background and the content of the Minute. In 1813 the British Parliament passed an Act by which a sum of Rs. 1 lac was to be set aside "for the revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories." Thomas Babington Macaulay, as Member of the Council of India, headed the committee, which looked into the question of how this money was to be spent. His Minute of 2 February 1833 was decisive in tilting the scale in favour of English education. Macaulay shows his poor opinion of Eastern civilization by declaring that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." Macaulay, quite truthfully, admitted that he had himself had no knowledge of Sanskrit or Arabic, but that he had formed this opinion, on the basis of the translations he had read and the learned experts he had consulted. At any rate, Macaulay's assertion reflects not only imperial arrogance and self-assurance on an astonishing scale, but also his faith in the transformative role of English in India. He says that English can do for India what the revival of classical learning did for Europe during the renaissance or what the languages of Western Europe did for Russia. For him, English had civilizing and modernizing mission in India. Macaulay was already aware of the growing power and spread of the English language and almost anticipated its present eminence. He also observed that Indians seemed to have a special affinity for English, a language they mastered more easily than other Europeans themselves. He hoped that the new education system would "form a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, morals, and in intellect." Macaulay was also an extremely practical man, who noted how scholars of Arabic and Sanskrit had to be paid to study these languages, while the demand for English was actually increasing day by day.

Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833)

Macaulay, despite his imperial agenda, in fact had a good deal of support from Indians themselves. Rammohun Roy, one of the leading intellectuals and social reformers, had helped establish an Association to promote European learning and science as far back as 1816. The next year, the Hindu College, the first modern institution of higher education in India, was founded. When the debate over the future of education in India was raging, Roy wrote a letter to Lord Amherst, the then governor-general. In this letter of 11 December 1823, Roy protested against the establishment of a Sanskrit College in Calcutta and pleaded instead for "a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy, with other useful sciences." Roy's letter, no doubt, had a profound and far-reaching effect because we find distorted echoes of his letter in Macaulay's minute itself. But a careful reading of Roy's submission shows that what he wanted was modern, technical education, not necessarily English literary education. Roy, in fact, favoured primary and secondary education in the vernaculars, but also wanted Indians to learn English and progress in modern learning. What Macaulay delivered instead was a more textual and literary type of education, with very little emphasis on practical arts and technical subjects.

In 1857 the three universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, one in each of the three presidencies of the Empire, were established. With that, English education became deeply entrenched in India. As Macaulay had desired, a new class was created who were perfectly at home both in the English language and English culture. Naturally, it was from this class that Indian English writers came.

1.3 THE IMPACT OF BRITISH COLONIZATION

I have been suggesting that Indian English literature and Indian English poetry more specifically--since the latter was the first literary genre to emerge--were the products of a larger cultural or civilizational encounter between Britain and India. Let us try to understand this encounter in some depth before we focus more directly on Indian English poetry. The first thing that I'd like to say is that Britain was not the first European country to impact upon India. Of course, I don't refer to the much, much earlier and much vaunted "conquest" of India by Alexander the Great. That occurred way back in 326 BC. Actually, Alexander succeeded in defeating only one Indian ruler, Paurava or Porus, the king of Punjab. This defeat, in fact, was achieved at a tremendous cost from which, arguably, Alexander and his armies never recovered. Within twenty years of his death much of the territory that he had acquired was re-conquered by one of the most powerful Indian emperors, Chandragupta Maurya. Even prior to Alexander's raid on India, India had commercial and cultural tries with ancient Europe, mainly Greece and Rome, but these were more or less on an equal and reciprocal footing. In other words, ancient India was more than able to hold its own against Europe and the two were not antagonists in any obvious sense of the word.

It took nearly another 1800 years for Europe to register its next significant clash with India. In the intervening years, trade and cultural exchange did take place, but after the rise of Islam, not as freely as before. The Arabs began to rule most of the Middle East and Asia Minor, with the result that the European urgency to discover new sea routes to India increased in the middle ages. In 1498 Vasco da Gama, another soldier and empire-builder, landed on the shores of South India, near Cochin. The Indo-Portuguese encounter is little discussed today outside specialist circles, partly because it was so totally eclipsed and overtaken by the Indo-British encounter. But it is useful to go back to this, earlier Indo-European clash for two reasons: a comparison of Portuguese and British imperialisms not only reveals two faces of Europe, but the Indian response to them reveals two faces of India.

The Portuguese intervention in India was essentially different from the British because it was, informed by a different type of imperial ideology. Military conquest, conversion, and profit--in that order--were its motivations. In other words, it was a more traditional form of imperialism. In areas such as Goa where Portuguese rule was consolidated, the native culture was altered more radically than where British colonization thrived. The Portuguese conquest of Indian territories was accomplished with much more bloodshed and naked violence than the British. What the Portuguese sought to do was to impose their own religion and culture on the Indians, so as to create a new kind of society in the East. In the ultimate analysis, their impact was limited when compared with the astonishing success of the British Empire that followed it.

One reason for this is that the conquest of India could not be effected merely through an assertion of cultural or military superiority. When Britain conquered India later, it was not just another country or culture defeating ours; that is, it was not just the triumph of Britain or Europe, but of modernity. Britain won because it was, powered by a different kind of engine and a different kind of energy. Ascendant Europe had learned to capture the hidden powers of nature itself; the Industrial Revolution of the 1780s and the years of preparation which preceded it, gave Britain a technological, military, and therefore cultural, advantage over India which was, perhaps, unprecedented.

Though Portuguese rule gave way to British rule, it did make a significant impact on the mind of India and Europe. For nearly a 100 years, things Eastern in general came to Europe mediated through the Portuguese language and people. I have already told you how this was true of most early Indian lexical borrowings in European languages, including English. That is, the first Indian words in English came via the Portuguese language. But on the Indian side too, Europe, especially Roman Catholicism, came to be nativised in a unique new community in Goa. This community of Indian Christians played an important role in the modernization of India. Our first Indian English poet himself, Henry Derozio, belonged to this community. Derozio is probably a shortened version of Derozario, a common Portuguese surname, which several converted Hindus adopted. Francis Derozio, Henry's father, is referred to as "a native Protestant" in Church records and also as a Portuguese merchant. Both these clues suggest that Derozio's father was a product of the Indo-Portuguese encounter. Other Indian English poets such as Dom Moraes, Eunice de Souza, and Charmayne D'Souza also belong to this community of Goan Christians.

As I have suggested above, Portuguese colonialism in India failed, or at any rate succeeded only partially. One reason for this was that it was very narrow-minded and limited in its approach and methods. In a sense, then, it represented the conservative face of Europe. In Europe itself, the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church, which had conspired to divide the vast territories of the New World, between two countries, Spain and Portugal, was being challenged. Both the Dutch and the English were challenging Spain, as the rising tide of Protestantism was challenging the Roman Catholic Church itself. The charter of the East India Company took place during the reign of one of Britain's greatest monarchs, Queen Elizabeth, as did the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 by Britain, which marked a decisive point in the rise of British power. Over the next 250 years, Britain would emerge as the greatest power not only in Europe, but also in the whole world.

British imperialism backed as it was by a more modern and secular outlook, started by concentrating on trade. It had a policy of non-interference with the religious and cultural traditions of the people it conquered. Conquest itself was not the aim to begin with but was almost thrust upon the East India Company in its fight to protect its trade interests. The volatile political situation after the fall of the Mogul empire gave John Company (as the East India Company was popularly known) a unique

opportunity to meddle in the affairs of the warring Indian princes. The Company used its leverage as a seemingly neutral outsider to its advantage. After its trading settlements in Surat and Hoogly were attacked, it began to fortify them and to arm itself. It raised an army mostly by recruiting local mercenaries and training them in modern, European methods of warfare. The Battle of Plassey in 1757 in which a small but well-trained army of Indians, led by a small band of British officers under Robert Clive, defeated the huge but divided army of Siraj-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Bengal. The model of this battle can be seen in that uniquely Indian tribute to the Raj, the Victoria Memorial, in Calcutta. I have already mentioned how the Battle of Plassey inaugurated a series of military victories for the British, culminating in an almost unprecedented paramountcy over the whole of the Indian sub-continent.

It was through this conquest that India bore the full brunt of Western or, more properly, modern culture. This impact was so extensive and thoroughgoing as entirely to transform Indian society. Such an upheaval, perhaps, had no parallel in Indian history. Even the impact of Muslim rule in India had arguably been less far-reaching. It is not for us to analyse or describe this impact in great detail. That would not only be outside the scope of such a course, but also somewhat tangential to our central concern, which is with Indian English poetry. After all, you may say that Indian English poetry does not really engage directly with British colonialism or with several of its effects, which we have been trying to understand just now. True, there may be few poems exclusively about racism, imperialism, nationalism or what we may call the "master narratives" of our times. But nearly every poem in our course will deal with these issues, either directly or indirectly. For instance, there are a great number of contemporary poems on poverty, violence, the urban condition, and so on. Well, these realities arise partly out of our colonial heritage. In fact, the condition of India, which was and remains a major preoccupation of our thinkers, scholars, intellectuals, and artists, was very much on the mind of our first Indian English poet, Derozio. He wrote sonnets lamenting the fall of India. It is precisely this fall, from which we have yet to recover fully and which was the major outcome of the colonial intervention.

Let me clarify that to regard colonialism from such a standpoint is by no means innocent. It is informed by its own politics, which to some may seem outdated or even dangerous. For a variety of reasons, it has become difficult to espouse a simplistic nationalism in these days. Indeed, that is not my intent. What is, however, my intent is to offer a clearly anti-colonial reading of our recent history and literature It is very important, in other words, to be clear in our minds what sort of stand we shall take on colonialism. In those days, there were many who agreed with the British that colonialism was a civilizing and modernizing force and therefore, ultimately, beneficial. In fact, there were many that tended to see in it not just a blessing in disguise but an act of providence. Some Hindu nationalists, for instance, were of the view that British rule saved Hindus from the domination of Muslims, allowed them to recoup their strength, and eventually regain their lost nation. There were and are what we may term as modernizers who also believed that British rule ushered in liberal values and helped us reform a corrupt and decadent traditional order. I would not like to endorse such positions, though I can see that they are not entirely devoid of truth or merit.

My position on British colonialism follows that of M. K. Gandhi. Gandhi believed that traditional Indian civilization, at least in its basic orientation, was not just sound and therefore worth conserving, but, in many ways, superior to modern civilization. Gandhi argued that our traditional civilization was essentially moral, or to use a more apt term, Dharmic, as such it gave its adherents a coherent way of life. Modern civilization, on the other hand, is inherently violent and materialistic. According to Gandhi, it encourages vice and selfishness. From such a viewpoint, Indian civilization was self-sufficient. Furthermore, it had the capacity for renewal and regeneration. As opposed to this, Rammohun Roy in his letter to Lord Amherst, which I've mentioned earlier, advanced the view that traditional knowledge was not

just defunct and outdated, but harmful; that, in fact, India was badly in need for modern, especially technical know-how from the West. While Roy's and Gandhi's views are not necessarily antithetical or mutually exclusive, clearly they show a different emphasis. For Gandhi, the primary yardstick of measuring the success or the merit of a civilization was the extent to which its inhabitants had achieved a high moral stature. Roy was more concerned with economic and technological advancement of the modern sort, what came to be known as development in 20th century parlance. The members of "Young Bengal," a radical group, mostly composed of students of Hindu College, many of whom, incidentally, were also pupils of Derozio, advocated the destruction of the older order, that is of Hinduism itself, before anything new could come up in India. They saw India as totally insufficient if she had to rely only on her native sources. Rabindranath Tagore offers yet another perspective in this debate. He advocated a more liberal, even cosmopolitan or universalist approach. His views are often thought of as an endorsement of a synthesis between the best of the East and the West. However, as Sri Aurobindo clearly shows in *Foundations of Indian Culture,* a half-baked or weak-kneed synthesis is tantamount to capitulation. Later, of course, as British imperialism became more and more repressive, Tagore revised his opinions somewhat. Though he supported the national struggle for independence led by Gandhi, he differed with the latter on key issues. Both often aired their differences in public but never lost their love and respect for one another.

Whatever view we may take on the Indo-British encounter, it is important to bear in mind that British rule in India was not just oppressive, but highly exploitative. It was an iniquitous system in which India's surplus wealth was systematically extracted and expropriated by Britain. The enormous inflow of capital from the colonies, arguably, helped in Britain's own process of rapid industrialisation and development. India, as we know from our own personal experience, was impoverished, became within the space of 200 years, one of the poorest and most backward countries in the world. Not too long ago, it was one of the richest and most advanced. There may have been a variety of other factors, which contributed to India's impoverishment, but colonialism was the chief of these. A simple proof of the horrors of colonialism is the fact that throughout the history of British rule, famines struck the country with predictable regularity, almost once in ten years. The most devastating of these, of course, is the great Bengal famine of 1943 in which more than 3 million people died. Ironically, this famine was not caused by drought or crop failure, but was entirely man-made. It was caused by the British war policies. Amartya Sen, the Nobel-prize winning economist, was growing up at that time; what he saw and experienced then influenced his career choice and work later on.

Apart from the drain of India's economic resources, which resulted in a number of other side effects, British imperialism almost destroyed India's belief in itself, its self-confidence. It was as if the backbone of this ancient civilization was broken; it began to see itself as a hopeless failure, a miserable wretch. A good deal of this inferiority complex persists to this day. India's poverty and cultural "cringe" also encouraged some of the worst traditions and practices to gather strength. The best example, perhaps, is Sati, which reached epidemic proportions in Bengal, precisely during British rule. Now, it is often thought that the British took great pains to abolish this evil and that we must be grateful to them for this. That is, the abolition of Sati is seen as the triumph of benevolent modernity, with its notions of human rights and equality, exemplified by British rule, over the irrational and inhuman customs of the Hindus, who therefore are superstitious and barbaric. But such a view begs the more fundamental question of which the incidence of Sati rose to such unprecedented proportions during the benevolent rule of the British. Nowhere else in India did the numbers even remotely resemble those of British Bengal. Again, before British ascendancy, Sati was not so prevalent even in Bengal itself. It stands to reason that British rule had something to do with its flare up.

In fact, it was during British rule that a number of other social evils suddenly became noticeable, entering the realm of public debate for the first time. These included child marriage, female infanticide, and the position of widows in Hindu society. If you take the case of child marriage, you will notice that this was in itself a response to another social and political problem, probably the attitude to women during Islamic rule. There were no doubt other reasons, economic, social, and cultural for the prevalence of this custom. But, with British rule, these social circumstances were once again altered. What might have been a necessary evil became merely an evil. Just as the modern consumer culture encourages the demands for dowry, even if this is illegal, during British rule, a number of contradictions and problems in Indian society came to the fore. Both the supposedly secular British ruling class as well as European missionaries were interested in undermining traditional Indian society so that they could establish their hegemony. This pressure from above coupled with desperate economic conditions exposed, so to speak, the faultiness of our culture.

Besides these economic and social effects, there were major political and ecological consequences of British colonialism too. Indians lost their freedom, their liberty, their sovereignty; they were reduced to a subject people, second class citizens or non-citizens in their own country. The ancient system of autonomous or semi-autonomous and largely self-sufficient village communities was gradually broken down, mainly to facilitate an easier access to revenues. Forests were cleared; the natural resources of the country were used up to fund imperialistic expansion, both in India and abroad. Gradually but surely, India was integrated into a world system of capitalism. Its native industries and technologies were destroyed to be replaced by mass-produced British goods. Large numbers of artisans and craftsmen were de-skilled. Many poor and land less peasants, on the verge of starvation, were shipped abroad as indentured labourers, to work in some other part of the British Empire. India suddenly lost its complacent isolation and entered the maelstrom of world events.

Of course, the British also build the railways and developed the post and telegraph system. They built canals and developed Indian infrastructure in some areas. Indians began to access the rich trove of knowledge, both the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology, which the West had. India, also, in turn, gave much to Europe, almost spurring a second renaissance with the "discovery" by Europe of its classical languages and literatures. The work of European Indologists was to have a lasting impact on the growth of the post-Enlightenment world. Finally, as a by-product of this encounter, a new class of nationalists was created who, eventually, succeeded in overthrowing British imperialism. As a result of this struggle, two new nations were born, India and Pakistan. Moreover, it is as citizens of one of these nations that we are studying the growth and development of Indian English poetry in an institution funded by an agency of the Indian State.

Throughout this section, I have tried to suggest that Indian English poetry should not be seen in isolation to the broader process of the evolution of modern India. This evolution is closely linked with the meeting of two civilizations under the sign of colonialism. It was like the mythical churning of the seas in which the Devas and the Asuras struggled for supremacy. A number of things, in other words, came out of the struggle between Indians and the British; not the least of them was Indian English poetry, which we are endeavouring to study and understand.

1.4 THE IDENTITY OF INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

There is a great deal of confusion and ambiguity over the identity and scope of Indian English poetry, especially when we view its evolution historically. The earliest of our poets, as I hinted earlier, were considered as curiosities and usually listed in the

appendices of collections of verse by Anglo-Indians. No wonder, Indian English poetry was first called Anglo-Indian poetry. In fact, the earliest collection of Indian English poems is to be found in a remarkable anthology called *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day with Biographical and Critical Notes* edited by David Lester Richardson and published by the Committee of Public Instruction, Calcutta, in 1840. This was probably the first text used to teach English literature anywhere in the world. I had the good fortune to examining this book, which luckily was in very good condition, at the British Library. Richardson included poets from Chaucer to the Romantics. But what is more interesting to our concerns is a forty-six-page supplement that he provided to the main body of his text. In this section he included several "British Indian" poets such as Henry Derozio and Kasiprasad Ghose.

So, though the term "Anglo-Indian" persisted for some time, Richardson was already sensitive to the difference between Indians who wrote English and Britishers who wrote about India. That's why he used the term "British Indian." But in the first serious scholarly study of this body of writing, F. Oaten's *Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (1908), Indian English poetry is still seen as an appendage to the then more prolific Anglo-Indian writing. Oaten's book was originally a prize-winning undergraduate essay at Cambridge University, a revised and abridged version of which finds a place in *The Cambridge History of English Literature (1907-1914).* "Anglo-Indian," with the passage of time, clearly proved inadequate to describe the work of Indians. Therefore, the inversion of the phrase, "Indo-Anglian," came into vogue. This phrase was popularised by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in a book by the same title published in 1943, though James Cousins in a book called Specimen Compositions from Native Students (1883) coined it much earlier. Though "Indo-Anglian" does not sound very elegant, it has, as Iyengar observed, the advantage of being considered both as a noun and as an adjective. Indeed, the term has persisted even though others, such as Indian Writing in English (IWE) or Indian English literature, have generally come to substitute it. It must be noted that "Indian English" has been accorded the stamp of approval by the Sahitya Akademi, the Indian national academy of letters, itself and that therefore it has a special legitimacy. The Sahitya Akademi, moreover, considers Indian English literature as one of the literatures of India and awards an annual prize for the best book in this subject.

You may wonder why I've spent so much time talking about the various names by which this literature is known. The simple reason for this is that the shifting nomenclature suggests a shifting, or at any rate, an unstable identity. I've already pointed out how this literature born under the star of colonialism, coming of age between two cultures, displays dual cultural loyalties. Is it Indian? Is it English? How authentic is it? Can Indians really write creative works in English? These questions, understandably, have plagued this literature since its very inception. Should we take these questions seriously or simply brush them aside as most Indian English writers tend to do? The writers argue that it is not their business to ponder over such mysteries as to whether Indians can write meaningfully in English or not. Instead, they want to let their writing do the talking for them so to speak. Similarly, those connected with the book trade are laughing all the way to the bank while engaged scholars or literary critics debate this issue. The fact is the Indian English writers command the highest royalties of any language writers in India. Naturally, their publishers couldn't care less about possible lack of authenticity of these writers.

Yet, for students of this literature, we do need to keep this question of the identity and worth of Indian English literature in mind. There are no easy answers and each one of us will have to come to our conclusions, but there are some ground realities that we shall have to contend with. The first of these is the fact that Indian English has been around for nearly 175 years. Secondly, that it is growing in quantity, if not in quality. Indeed, over the last two decades, its growth has been phenomenal, so much so that it is today an easily recognizable element of a global literary marketplace, more in demand than any other literature from India. Thirdly, it follows therefore,

that this literature cannot be dismissed, but must be taken seriously. And yet, we must be careful to avoid the distortions that the market forces cause and be able to make independent judgements. So, I think a profitable approach to this issue would be to avoid both extremes of outright rejection or fawning adulation and, instead, to attempt a critical interrogation. While we do this, we would do well to remember that poetry, as a matter of fact, enjoys very little prestige and power when compared to prose. This reversal has been rather ironic because, it was Indian English poetry that dominated the creativity in this language for the first 100 years of its existence.

To conclude this section, we might say that Indian English poetry, like Indian English literature in general, does suffer from a sort of identity problem. This problem or duality arises out of the clash between its medium of expression, which is English, and its experiential milieu, which presumably, is Indian. This peculiar situation makes it by its very birth a hybrid creature, with mixed parentage and characteristics Gordon Bottomley, an English critic, once called it "Matthew Arnold in a *sari*." But over the years, it is its very hybridity and complex identity, which has added to its appeal. Questions of "Indianness" and "authenticity," on the other hand, need not be dismissed either. They are important and will persist. Especially for those of us who live in this country, the politics of representation in Indian English literature will continue to hold interest.

1.5 THE GROWTH AND PERIODIZATION OF INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

Before we get into this section properly, it may be useful to speak briefly about periodization. Periodization refers to the practice of dividing long literary traditions into more convenient phases or time-slots. For instance, when you examine the history of English literature, you'll find that it usually proceeds along certain set periods such as "The Elizabethan Age," "The 17th Century," "The Augustans," "The Romantics," and so on. Usually, there is more than one way of classifying the history of a literature. English literature used to be identified with the reigning monarch. Thus you had Victorian literature, Georgian literature, Edwardian literature, and so on. Sometimes, if the monarch was weak or if a literary movement was sufficiently distinctive, then a literary period could be known by a different name such as "The Metaphysical Poets," or "The Romantics," and so on. Nowadays, it is less fashionable to identify literature with the reigning monarch. This reflects not just the declining importance of the British monarchy, but also the changing relationships between the state and literary production. I'll come back to this point later. Right now, I want you to understand that periodization is essentially a convenient device to help us understand and study a large body of texts. That is, it helps us *organize* a literary tradition.

But, you might ask, when it comes to a relatively young literature like Indian English literature, how useful or necessary is periodization? This is a valid question but does not obviate the challenge of having to periodize our literatures. For instance, we all know that there was a sea of change in literary styles and tastes in the early decades of this century. I am of course referring to the eruption of modernism in Europe and elsewhere. Now this was a widespread and multifaceted transformation cutting across several arts and practices. So, it is clear that there is a marked change in the poetry written by modernists like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot and that of their predecessors. Invoking the term modernism will help us understand and explain this change; the term also helps us to periodize the tradition of English poetry. Now, a similar change in taste is discernible in Indian English poetry when we move from, say, Sarojini Naidu, to Nissim Ezekiel. How are we to account for and describe this change without resorting to some sort of periodization for the entire tradition of Indian English poetry? So you can easily see the uses and imperatives of periodization.

But, even if you were simply to go by what I just said a little while ago, you will at once notice the complications that arise when we deal with Indian English literature. For instance, though there seems to be a parallel in our literature to what happened in English literature--that is, the change that occurred with modernism--there is such a large time lag? The shift in poetic idiom in Europe took place in the 1920s, but in India it happened only so late as the 1950s. Two questions arise immediately: what accounts for this time lag? And, given this time lag, can we really use the same terms as are used in English poetry to periodize Indian English poetry?

There are no simple answers to these questions. In fact, they throw up very complex issues of literary influences and cross-cultural interactions. Yet, let me resort to some "easification" here so as to suggest a useful way of approaching these questions. Once your approach is right, you can always explore all kinds of complexities. I would submit that there is a fundamental fact that we have to bear in mind when we study Indian English poetry. Indian English poetry is at once similar to and different from English poetry. That is, it is similar in certain ways and different in certain other ways. Our understanding will be enriched in direct proportion to how acutely we can identify these similarities and differences. Moreover, when we do so, we should bear in mind that what's true for Indian English poetry is also true, in varying degrees, for other colonial and postcolonial literatures. Let's consider briefly the example of American Literature. Now, though America ceased to be a colony of Britain with its famous Declaration of Independence of 1775, the fact was that American literature continued to be influenced by literary trends from Britain for more than a century afterwards; in fact, we might argue that it still continues to have that symbiotic relationship with Europe. What we see in American literature then is reflection of major trends in British and European literature. So, just as you have Puritan literature in Britain, you have Puritan literature in America; just as you have neo-classical literature in Britain, you have neo-classical literature in America; just as you have Romantic literature in Britain, you have Romantic literature in America. I used the phrase "just as" a little while ago. Actually, that is deceptive. The point is that though American puritanism, neo-classicism, or romanticism is similar to that of Britain, it is not identical. The two are actually quite different, but, in a sense, you cannot properly understand what happened in American literature without being aware of the goings-on in British literature. Thus, the Americanness of American literature is seen in the way in which it adapts, adopts, or resists the dominant influences from Europe, not just the manner in which it imitates or reproduces them.

Similarly, in Indian English poetry we find this tendency to reflect the dominant idiom of English or, later, of American, poetry, without totally losing its individuality. Some critics, of course, have gone so far as to say that all of Indian English poetry is totally derivative. An extreme example of this is Rajiv Patke who makes such a case in *Canons and Canon-Making in Indian Poetry in English.* A more reasonable view is found in M. K. Naik's "*Echo and Voice....*". We need not get into all the fine points of these essays here, but we do need to be aware that Indian English poetry was, to a large extent, shaped by forces from outside this culture, but forces which were anterior to the literary and cultural milieu of the language itself, that is, English. It is but natural for Indian English poets to be influenced by British poets and poetry. Some of our poets did not go much beyond imitation, but others did develop a strong, distinctive voice of their own. It is important to see the complexity of this relationship between the Indian English poetry and British poetry. It is not just a relationship of inequality and dominance in which British sensibility shaped its Indian counterpart, but also one of exploration, mutuality, and even resistance. Indeed, there are things in Indian English poetry which cannot be found anywhere else--the best example of this is perhaps Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*, which we shall have occasion to talk about later.

From the foregoing discussion it will be clear that one way to periodize Indian English poetry is to find our equivalents for the major trends and movements in British poetry. This is always a useful exercise, but one which has not yet been done

in as much detail as it needs to. Perhaps, one of you may feel impelled to take it on for your research work. The usual course of British poetry from the early 19th century is as follows: neo-classicism, romanticism, late-romantic or Victorian poetry, and modern poetry. But all these phases are not formed in a full blown manner in Indian English poetry. That is because there was so little of it in volume in the first place. But the other important reason was that Indian English poets were responding not only to literary trends from Britain but political and cultural trends in our own country. That is why I had said earlier that the relationship of poetry and the state is very important.

At this juncture, it might be useful to bring in another angle to this debate on periodization. We will discover that a lot depends on who is asking the questions and attempting the periodization. In other words, what is the politics of the periodizer? The modernists, for instance, have only two periods of Indian English poetry: themselves and those who went before them. These modernists, starting with Ezekiel and going on to nearly all the major poets living today, such as Adil Jussawalla, P. Lal, Shiv K. Kumar, Keki N. Daruwalla, Saleem Peeradina, R. Parthasarathy, Eunice de Souza, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, and so on, make one basic claim: Indian English poetry really begins with the modernists in the 1950s. Poetry that was written before that, from Derozio to Sri Aurobindo was not worth studying. In a sense such poetry was akin to the juvenilia of a poet, interesting only for biographical reasons; similarly, older Indian English poetry was the juvenilia of the genre itself, fit only for historical records and interest. The real poetry of any worth was that of the modernists.

What the modernists achieved, effectively, was to divide all of Indian English poetry into two periods: the pre-modernist or traditionalist and the modernist. They did this by flattening out the similarities between themselves and their predecessors; by emphasizing a certain kind of poetry as representative of modernism; and, more recently, by appropriating the "best" of the poets who came after them into the modernist "camp." The result, then, is two groups of poets in whom all the older poets are "Othered" and all the non-modernist contemporaries, rejected.

I have myself engaged with these views in great detail and depth and do not wish to repeat myself here. I can, of course, point to the relevant articles for you to look at yourself. But here I would suggest that there is a more useful way of periodizing Indian English poetry which does not rely so much on the poetics, but instead on the politics of Indian English poetry. As I mentioned earlier, this periodization depends more on the relationship between the poetry and the processes of state formation. I have elaborated upon this in a long essay called "The State of Poetry." According to that essay, all of Indian English poetry can be divided into three broad phases: proto-nationalist; nationalist; and post-nationalist. The first phase, starting with Derozio and going up to the end of the 19th century corresponds to the period in Indian history in which nationalism was being consolidated. Then, in the nationalist phase, from 1900 to 1950, we have poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and Sarojini Naidu, who are engaging in the battle against colonialism. Finally, the post-nationalist phase, which begins in the 1950s, with poets like Nissim Ezekiel, goes on not only to question nationalism, but retreats from large, public themes, to individual and private agonies. Of course this phase also corresponds with literary modernism. Post-nationalism itself can be divided into two phases, 1950-1980 and 1980 onwards. In the latter phase, inaugurated by Vikram Seth, we find a new, diasporic consciousness dominating Indian English poetry.

In my anthology *Indian Poetry in English* I proposed a slightly different periodization: 1825-1900:Colonialism; 1900-1950: Nationalism; 1950-1980: Modernism; and 1980- present: Post-modernism. As you can see, there is here a mixture of both poetic and political criteria, but there is also an overlap in dates with the earlier periodization that I'd suggested.

You need not be confused or alarmed by all the arguments and counter-arguments that I might have flung at you or what you might yourself encounter in the secondary readings on this topic. What is more important is for you to be aware of some major trends in Indian English poetry and how these are linked to certain historical periods. As you read more and more Indian English poetry, you will be able to identify quite easily which period a poem might belong to. What is more, you will become more aware of the unfolding dynamics of this genre, especially in relation to the complex web of cultural and political forces, which impinge on it.

In any case, you can take comfort in the knowledge that there is no one acknowledged and accepted way of periodizing Indian English poetry. You can follow the method that most appeals and satisfies you, as long as you are able to defend your choice. What I have offered is just one of the many ways of approaching this subject.

1.6 THE FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Had I been writing this section a few years ago, I would have been much more optimistic. I would have said that the 1990s are an exciting time for Indian English poetry. I would have pointed out that in 1991-1992 more than fifteen new poets were published in India. The only other year of such intense activity for Indian English poetry was 1976-1977 when more than a dozen poetry books were published by Oxford University Press, Clearing House, and other publishers. I would even have said that the present decade is exciting because there are two generations of living poets in your midst, the modernists and those of us who were born in 1950s or 1960s and after. I would even have urged you to study the work of the younger poets though they were not included in your course just so that you could see the dynamics of this inter-generational poetic dialogue.

But now, I am not so optimistic. As this decade and century draws to a close, Indian English poetry seems to have hit the rock bottom of market gloom. Simply speaking, no one wishes to publish Indian English poetry any more. The earlier publishing boom of Oxford, Penguin, Rupa, HarperCollins, Disha Books, and others seems to have run out of steam. Poetry, it seems, does not sell. It has been all but eclipsed by its more glamorous cousin, fiction. The latter, with huge royalties and huge publicity binges, rules the literary roost.

No doubt, modernist poets have made it into most Indian English courses in Indian Universities, but the future of the genre seems to be threatened by the current crisis. The same old anthologies are prescribed with the same old poems. This has now been going on for more than twenty years. Our own reading list is a little different in that we have included the older poets too, but what about the continued growth of the field? What about newer poets or newer ways of studying older ones? Without such innovations, the study of Indian English poetry might become sterile, if not counter-productive.

Unfortunately, the academy, which sets the standards, is not always the first to respond to a cultural crisis. This energy must come from the reading public at large, in fact, from readers like you. You have to show an interest outside your immediate syllabus, to explore this genre more independently. Eventually, the academy will be forced to respond to the pressures that you exert. I said all this to give you a sense of your own power as makers of Indian English literature, but even if you are more modest in your aims, the course of action that I have suggested will certainly enrich your understanding and make your studies more worthwhile.

1.7 GLOSSARY

Periodization: division according to a specific period or time

Paramountcy: superiority

Institutionalize: To establish properly

Precursor: forerunner

Utilitarian: designed to be useful rather than be decorative or luxurious

Entrench: establish, firmly

Antagonists: opponents

Ideology: ideas that form the basis of a political or economic theory

Leverage: action or power of a lever; power, influence

Mercenaries: professional soldier hired by a foreign country

Protestant: member of one of the western churches that are separated from the Roman Catholic Church

Adherent: one who continues to give one's support

Defunct: dead, no longer existing or functioning

Iniquitous: unfair, unjust

Realm: field of activity or interest

Indenture: written contract, especially of apprenticeship

Maelstrom: great whirlpool

Ambiguity: Uncertainty

Nomenclature: system of names

Fawning: showing affection or try to win favour by obsequiousness

Milieu: environment, surroundings

Obviate: make necessary

Discernible: perceive with the mind or senses

Akin: related, similar

Incipient: beginning in an early stage

Orientalist:	person who studies the languages, arts etc of Oriental countries (countries east of the Mediterranean)
Pitamaha:	grand father
Conservatives:	those opposed to great or sudden changes
Liberals:	open minded, free from prejudice, in favour of progress
Evangelical:	belief according to the teachings of the Gospel
Transformative:	changed in appearance or character
Vernaculars:	language, word or dialect of a country or district
Civilizational:	concerning civilized or cultured social Development
Modernity:	relating to the present
Nativised:	accepted as native or belonging to
Armada:	naval fleet
Imperialism:	policy of controlling other nations
Volatile:	that which easily changes into gas or vapour
Tangential:	abrupt change of course or direction
Racism:	discrimination based on the belief that some races are by nature superior
Master narratives:	great narratives
Intervention:	coming between
Espouse:	give one's support to a cause, theory etc
Providence:	act of God
Expropriated:	take away one's property or belongings
Cringe:	move back in fear
Hegemony:	preponderant influence over others
Autonomous:	self-governing
Dharmic:	pertaining to Dharma or righteousness
Indologists:	Those who study classical Indian texts and cultures
Devas:	gods
Asuras:	demons

Trove:	treasure
Faultiness:	imperfect or defective
Ecological:	dealing with the relationships of human groups with their geographical environment
Enlightenment:	An 18th century European philosophical movement characterized by rationalism, an impetus toward learning
Hybridity:	having the nature of a hybrid i.e. anything of mixed origin
Sovereignty:	the state or quality of being supreme and independent
Modernism:	a movement, which seeks to find new forms of expression and rejects traditional or accepted ideas

1.8 QUESTIONS

Please attempt all the following questions. These will help you to understand the Unit in a much better way and face the exam with full confidence.

1. What is your understanding of the origin of Indian English Poetry?
2. What is your opinion regarding my view that Indian English poets had to have "the English language sufficiently Indianized" and "Indians had to be sufficiently Anglicized to use the English language"?
3. What is the famous Minute of Macaulay and what is its significance in the literary history.of India?
4. What is your understanding of the history of the colonization of India?
5. How did the Portuguese and British invasion affect India in it's formative years?
6. What was the contribution of Gandhi, Rammohun Roy and Tagore to the development of India's culture and nationalism?
7. What was the economic, social, religious and cultural scene in India during British Imperialism?
8. Did these social and cultural differences affect the evolution and scope of Indian English Poetry? Does Indian English Literature in general suffer from an identity problem? Give reasons with proper examples for your answer.
9. How do you periodize Indian English Poetry?
10. Where in your opinion lies the future of Indian English Poetry?

1.9 SUGGESTED READING

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.) *Nation and Narration*, New York: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1990.

Cohn, B.S.: *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Cronin, Richard. *Imagining India*. London: Macmillan, 1990.

Inden, Ronald. *Imagining India*. Oxford: Plackwell, 1990.

King, Bruce. *Modern Indian Poetry in English.* Delhi: O.U.P., 1987

Kulshreshtha, Chirantan.(ed). *Contemporary Indian English Verse: An Evaluation.* Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1980.

Ania Loomba. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism.* New York: Routledge, 1998.

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

Paranjape, Makarand R. *Mysticism in Indian English Poetry.* Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp:, 1988.

-----. *Decolonization and Development: Hind Swaraj Revisioned.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993.

---, ed. *Indian Poetry in English*, Madras: Macmillan India Ltd, 1993

Peeradina, Saleem(ed); *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English.* Bombay: Macmillan, 1972.

Prasad, G.J.V. *Continuities in Indian English Poetry nation language form.* New Delhi: Pencraft International, 1999.

Said, Edward. "Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations," 1 (1990) Race & Class.

_____. Orientalism, New York: Vintage, 1979.

Shahane, Vasant A.and M. Sivaramakrishna,eds; *Indian Poetry in English:A Critical Assesment.* Delhi: Macmillan, 1990.

Sinha, R.P.N. *The Birth and Development of Indian English Verse.* Delhi; Dev Publishing House, 1971.

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

Suleri, Sara. *The Rhetoric of English India.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari, ed. *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India.* Delhi: OUP, 1992.

Viswanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India.* London: Faber and Faber, 1990.

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

Yaravintelimath, C.K.(ed);*New Perspectives in Indian Literature in English*: ***Essays in honour of M.K.Naik.*** Delhi: Sterling, 1995

UNIT 2 HENRY DEROZIO AND TORU DUTT

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall look at two poets, Henry Derozio and Toru Dutt. Both these are important poets of the first phase of Indian English poetry, that is why studying them together is convenient. We shall beging with a brief life sketch of Derozio, followed by an overview of his poetry. We shall then look more closely at two poems, "The Harp of India" and "My Country! In Thy Day of Glory Past". With Toru Dutt too, we'll follow basically the same pattern, beginning with a life-sketch and an overview of her literary career, followed by a more detailed discussion of the three prescribed poems, "Sita," the "The Lotus" and "Our Casuarina Tree."

2.1 HENRY DEROZIO--A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH

We have already referred to Henry Louis Vivian Derozio earlier, in Unit 1, especially to his Portuguese connection. Derozio (1809-1831), our first Indian English poet, is, paradoxically, remembered today as a "Forgotten Anglo-Indian Poet" (which is the subtitle of the only available collection of his works, *Poems of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio* published by Oxford University Press). Derozio's brief, but brilliant, career is a fascinating subject of study. He achieved great renown during his short stint as a teacher at Hindu College. Hardly twenty himself, he was remarkably influential, bringing several new, largely European ideas, to his upper caste Hindu pupils. Considered too dangerous by his opponents, many of whom were the Managers of the College, he was forced to resign his post. Clearly, the Hindu orthodoxy was alarmed that rationalism and free-thinking might upset their young wards and lead them to question several decadent Hindu traditions. A conspiracy was thus hatched to effect his removal. Among other things, he was accused of inciting his students to atheism, disobedience, and incest. No charges were formally leveled against him, nor was he given an opportunity to defend himself. His correspondence with H.H. Wilson on the subject of his removal is both moving and revealing. It shows a colonial culture in the making as the real impact of British rule is beginning to be felt.

Racially, Derozio was an Anglo-Indian, born of an Indo-Portuguese father and English mother. He received an English education at David Drummond's Academy

until the age of fourteen. Afterwards, he worked for two years as an accountant in a mercantile firm, before he was sent by his father to his uncle's house in Bhagalpur. This uncle, who had married his mother's sister, worked as a manager in an indigo plantation. There, Derozio gathered the experiences which went into the *Faqueer of Jungheera* (1828), his long narrative poem about the rescue of a would-be Sati, among other things. At the age of sixteen, Derozio was already contributing to the *India Gazette*. At the age of eighteen, in 1827, his first collection, Poems, was published. This made him famous in the small literary circle of Calcutta. He began to work as the Assistant Editor of the *India Gazette*, also contributing regularly to *The Bengal Annual*, the *Calcutta Magazine*, the *Kaleidoscope,* and the *Indian Magazine*. A few months later, at the age of twenty, he started his own paper, the *Calcutta Gazette*, of which he was both the editor and chief contributor.

That is when the offer of the Assistant Mastership at the Hindu College came up. Founded in 1817, this was, in a sense, the first modern institution of higher learning in India. It was later re-christened the Presidency College, and integrated into the Calcutta University in 1857. While teaching at the Hindu College, Derozio founded the Academic Association, which was probably India's first intellectual club, a forum in which ideas and issues could be discussed freely. Frequented by the educated upper crust of Indian society, it was the predecessor of, many such associations to come, including the Indian National Congress. Derozio's growing influence made him controversial. No wonder, his removal from Hindu College was discussed prominently in every major newspaper of the time.

After leaving Hindu College, Derozio reverted to journalism. He founded *The East Indian,* the first newspaper devoted to the cause of the Anglo-Indian community. Derozio was throughout his career a champion of liberal causes. He was also against racial and caste separations and argued that Anglo-Indians should mix freely with Indians. Derozio died soon after, on 26 December 1831. He was hardly twenty-two. His will, with an inventory of his possessions, shows that he had established himself in Calcutta as a person of considerable means. He not only owned a carriage and four horses, but a printing press, and a considerable library.

2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF DEROZIO'S POETRY

As mentioned earlier, Derozio published two volumes of verse: *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828). Most of these poems today appear either juvenile or half-finished. There are no doubt good lines, even stanzas, here and there, but there is scant evidence of sustained poetic excellence. Of course, we should not be too harsh or hasty in judging Derozio; after all, he was barely twenty-one when he died. Had he lived even for another eight or nine years as did Keats, perhaps we might have had many more poems of higher quality and maturity. At present, however, most of Derozio's longer poems are too uneven and inconsistent really to impress. The Fakeer of *Jungheera* is a long poem about Nuleeni, a high-caste Hindu widow, who is about to be burnt on the funeral pyre of her husband. A robber-chieftan rescues her from becoming a forced sati. The story is rather romantic and narrated in rhyming iambic tetrameter. But, to be honest, I cannot say that I was moved by it. It is not easy to get hold of this poem nowadays, so instead of saying that we can afford to ignore it, I would say the opposite: even to reject it, we shall have to read it again and again.

It is in his shorter poems that Derozio's forte as a poet lies. Many of these are sonnets with somewhat unconventional rhyme schemes. We ourselves are going to look at two of these sonnets. M. K. Naik commenting on Derozio's verse says that it bears a strong impress of British romantic poetry, especially that of Byron. In any case, several features of romanticism are easily evident in his poetry. This is not the place

to discuss romanticism but, briefly, it refers to a wide-ranging movement in the arts which may be considered to have flourished from the 1789 (the outbreak of the French Revolution) to approximately the 1830s. Romanticism, if we were to consider William Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800) as a sort of manifesto, emphasized common language and materials taken from common life as fit for poetry; it also emphasized emotion and authentic feeling over artificiality of thought and diction; it looked to nature for inspiration and used organic as opposed to mechanical models of poetic structure; it was strongly autobiographical and explored the whole range of subjective experience which was hitherto excluded from poetry; it was idealistic, expressive, and, at times, even prophetic. If you have occasion to read more of Derozio's poems see if you can find some of these features in his work.

What is perhaps more interesting for our purposes is that Derozio is the first Indian nationalist poet of any language. No contemporary Indian poet, to the best of my knowledge, has written a single poem about India as a nation in the modern sense of the term. Bengali poets of his time, for example, were writing in the tradition of Shakta and Vaishnava bhakti about the relationship between the human and the Divine. Madhusudan Dutt, Bengal's first modern poet, follows Derozio by a quarter of a century, and Madhusudan, too, is not known for any nationalist poems. Elsewhere in India, the poetry written took no cognizance of the notion of the nation. All these factors make Derozio rather special and invite a careful study of his life and works.

2.2.1 *The Harp of India* and *My Country! In Thy Day of Glory Past*

For reasons of convenience, I propose to take up these poems together, rather than separately.

The two poems of Derozio, both of them sonnets, eminently qualify to be considered nationalist. An interesting aside on the titles of the poems--"The Harp of India" and "To India--My Native Land": from a comparison with the first edition in the British Library, I discovered that the titles were given by the editor, F. D. Bradley-Birt; in the original, the sonnets are untitled. The harp itself and the associated images of the wreath of Fame and the minstrel's grave are derived from the traditions of European poetry. Yet, the subject of the poem is clearly India. The octave describes the sorry condition of the harp, which lies unstrung on a lonely, withered bough, bound in the fatal chain of silence. At the turn from the octave to the sestet, the poet invokes the musicians of the past whose worthier hands once played many sweet melodies on the harp. At the end of the poem, the speaker wonders if those notes can be revived once again; if they can be, he wishes to be the one to do so: "but if thy notes divine/ May be by mortal wakened once again,/ Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!" (1).

The "harp" in the first poem is obviously a symbol, but of what? The poet himself calls it "Harp of my country" in the last line. Clearly, the reference is not just to a poetic tradition, but to the enterprise of an entire civilization. Derozio's poem is suffused with the sense of lost glory and the consciousness of debilitating cultural decline. The withered bough, the unstrung harp, the ruined monument, the cold hands of the dead poets--all these images suggest the sorry condition of the country at present. Yet, the poet is not entirely without hope. If the divine notes of the harp can be revived once again, he wishes to strike the first note. The poem, then, ends with the hope of renewal, but more importantly, on the personal note of the poet's sense of his own role in that revival. Derozio is aware of his being a front runner in this process.

These themes of the fact of decline, the possibilities of renewal, and the poet's own role in it recur in the other sonnet, "To India-My Native Land" too. Here, the ideology of nationalism is quite direct and unambiguous: "My country! in thy day of glory past/ A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,/ And worshipped as a deity thou

wast./ Where is that glory, where that reverence now?" (2). Derozio's approach to his subject clearly shows the influence of the Orientalist literature which was being published at this time. The work of William Jones, H. H. Wilson, Thomas Munro and others had established that ancient India had a great civilization. Derozio, however, uses this idea of past glory only to stress the present decay: "Thy eagle pinion is chained down at last,/ And grovelling in the lowly dust art thou" (2). Such images underscore the loss of freedom and dignity, both being Enlightenment values, which had come to India in their present garb through the Western impact.

At the turn from the octave to the sestet, Derozio foregrounds himself and the possibilities of his own role as a poet. He says that because he cannot sing of anything but the country's misery at present, he would like to "dive into the depths of time,/ And bring from out the ages that have rolled/ A few fragments of those wrecks sublime,/ Which human eye may never more behold" (2). For this service, he expects nothing from his "fallen country" except a "kind wish" (2). Derozio, of course, died young, so it is impossible to judge if he, too, would have gone the way of the Orientalists, retrieving a few fragments of those "wrecks sublime" from the past. At any rate, we know that he did not live to fulfil the promise that he makes in this poem. More poignantly, the "kind wish" that he expects from his countrymen has been given him only partially. We shall repay out debt to this pioneer by reading and appreciating his work better.

Coming back to the poems, in both of them, three assumptions about India are clearly evident: first, that India was a great civilization; secondly, that she is now fallen; and, finally, that her greatness may be revived. Also common to both poems is the role of the poet in this process of renewal. Both poems, also, share a forward-looking, inspirational aspect, which was to be so common to the nationalist literature of the later years. Of course, the tone of these poems is not buoyant and optimistic, but rather pathetic and gloomy; the sense of defeat hangs heavily over them. The fuller possibilities of the re-emergence of the Indian nation were not available to the poet, yet there is a brave attempt to face the future with hope. What is most remarkable about these poems is not so much their enunciation of the pattern of past glory, present decline, and future revival of India, but their very formulation of the idea of India as a unified, coherent entity with a past, present, and future. It is this vision that makes them aligned to the agenda of nationalism, which brought such an imagined community into existence. In my attempts to reclaim Derozio from a nationalist perspective, I am aware that I may be accused of suppressing several other, perhaps equally important aspects of his life and career. Yet, what is so interesting is that he himself wished to be thus reclaimed and integrated; this essay, then, at least partially, answers request for a kind word as a token reward from his fallen country for all his efforts on its behalf.

Though my concern here is not with the text of Derozio's life but of his poems, the life itself, as we have seen, is a very interesting and illustrative one. The central question is what made Derozio throw his lot with the Indians rather than with the English? We know that later, the Anglo-Indian community, by and large, adopted a supportive, if subservient role, in the Raj. They maintained very clearly their distance from the natives. Derozio, then, could have done the same. He was racially more European than Indian; all his education and training were, moreover, on modern English lines. He achieved fame as an advocate of liberal European values and as a writer in English. Most of the other members of his family were totally Europeanised. Claude, a younger brother, was sent to Scotland to study. The family lived in a spacious bungalow on Lower Circular Road, a part of the European quarter. After the death of his mother, his father again married an Englishwoman, who was called Anna Maria Rivers. Despite a predominance of English and European influences, Derozio's concerns both as a teacher and a writer were closer to Indians. How can this be explained?

I would argue that Derozio was a genuine *Indian* liberal, living during a time when the social and intellectual conditions were still fluid. This was a period of transition, when the social and cultural interactions between the English and the natives were still open and full of possibilities. The oppressive and racially exclusive colonial regime which followed later was not yet instituted. British paramountcy, itself, was still being established. But, in addition to possibilities of the period, what is more important to recognize is that Derozio was not only an independent and fearless individual, but somebody who truly believed in liberal values. Indian liberalism was still in its formative stage, but Derozio was clearly one of its proponents. There was scarcely a progressive cause of his times which he did not support or espouse. It was out of such a liberalism that the whole struggle for Independence began. The birth of Indian nationalism, too, can be traced to this same source. When European ideas penetrated the educated native classes, an elite was born which became the vanguard in the formation of this new national consciousness. Later, certain distinct strands and positions in this native elite would emerge, but right now it was in its earliest stages of inception. Those who shaped India were all of them inheritors of dual traditions, the Indian and the European. They all shared a common intellectual and ideological outlook. And Derozio, one of the architects of Young Bengal, was amongst the first of them.

The complexity of Derozio's own racial, social, intellectual, and cultural position, combined with the uncertainty of the times in which he lived, makes it difficult to define his place easily. Because the polarity between the colonizers and the colonized was itself not so sharply etched during his times, it would be unfair to attempt to fix him in that grid. What is clear is that Derozio was not a part of the traditional India of Sanskrit and Persian, nor was he a part of the emergent vernacular India of Bengali or Hindi. Yet, it is also clear that he was not a part of British India, though he was related to it because of the language he wrote in and because his racial status debarred him from higher Government jobs. These eliminations left Derozio in a rather precarious intermediate and inchoate zone, which we may term Indian English India. Indian English India is neither British India nor is it native India, but it is something in-between, a hybrid, a liminal territory, whose identity is still being contested and debated. From this somewhat insecure location, Derozio nonetheless managed to write India's first nationalist poems, and thereby contribution to the making of the Indian nation.

2.3 TORU DUTT--A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH

Toru Dutt, like Derozio, also died young; moreover, she died of that disease, consumption or tuberculosis, which claimed so many precocious and talented artists and poets in the 19th century. Born in 1856 in a well-known Westernised family in Calcutta, Toru had the advantages of good education and happy family environment. Both these factors were to play a crucial role in her artistic development. Govin Chunder Dutt, her father, was a well-to-do Bengali gentleman, given to literary pursuits. Some of his poems were included in an extraordinary family anthology of Indian English poems called *The Dutt Family Album* (1870). This was a collection of 187 poems by three Dutt brothers, Govin Chunder, Hur Chunder and Greece (or Girish) Chunder, a cousin of theirs, Oomesh.

In 1862, when Toru was six, the entire family embraced Christianity. This did lead to a temporary estrangement between Toru's parents, the mother finding it difficult to leave her ancestral religion, but later going on to become an ardent Christian herself. This act of conversion, though it was not necessarily extremely wrenching or traumatic in the case of the Dutts, is of great importance when we try to understand the cultural history of modern India. Many upper-caste Hindus converted to Christianity during this period of reform and revival. Their motivations, however

different, had a common ground: there were many ills plaguing Hindu society. Some of these included caste oppression, religious superstition, inhuman treatment of women, especially widows, child marriage, female infanticide, sati, and so on. But the problems of Hinduism were not the only reason for these conversions. There was also the added allure of assuming the religion and culture of the colonizer. This was a very conscious motive in the famous case of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, reputed to be Bengal's, and indeed India's first modern poet. But in many other cases, matters of faith seemed to be more important. And yet, the very fact of colonialism, the unequal relations between the rulers and the ruled, the declared agenda of the missionaries to proselytize, and the overall attack on Indian society at the hands of both modernists and missionaries make the issue of conversion more complex. I have brought this topic up because the late 19th century was known for several conversion narratives including Baba Padmanji's Marathi novel *Yamuna Paryatan* (1857), one of the earliest examples of the genre in India, two novels by Krupabai Sattianathan, *Kamla* and *Saguna*, and two autobiographical narratives by Ramabai Tilak and Ramabai Ranade. Conversion became an act of extreme rebellion against a decadent and immoral system. It was a part of the auto-critique of Hinduism, as it groped to reshape itself anew under a new challenge. At the same time, the convert was also in a unique position to point out the flaws of the newly adopted religion. Luckily, in Toru's case, the conversion to Christianity was neither violent nor did it result in an automatic rejection of Hindu culture. Indeed, Toru may be credited with being the first Indian English poet extensively to use Indian myths. Occasionally, her Christianity does surface in her renderings, but by and large, it is as a sympathetic insider to Indian culture that she writes.

Toru Dutt (1856-1877)

In 1869, the Dutts left for Europe, intending never to return to India. Toru and her elder sister Aru were sent to a French school at Nice. They had already lost their

brother Abju in 1865; Abju had been only 14. The three siblings feature in the poem "Sita" that you will study. The family moved to London in 1870. Soon afterwards, the *Dutt Family Album* was published. The next year, the Dutts moved to Cambridge, where the girls attended lectures. Toru befriended Mary Martin, who became the recipient of her letters later. These letters are an invaluable record of the growth of the artist's mind. In 1873 the family finally returned to India against their original intention. They divided their time between their Calcutta residence on Maniktolla Street and their "country" house at Baugmaree. A few months after their return, Aru died in 1874. Toru, all alone, turned her attention to her literary ambitions. In 1875 she published *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields,* largely a rendering of French verse into English. The book, well received in India, found its way to London. There Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons both admired it. The latter wrote a Foreword to an English edition published by Kegan Paul. By now Toru had begun to learn Sanskrit. Within a year, she was so proficient in it as to begin composing English poems based on the stories she had read. These were collected posthumously as *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882), with an Introduction by Edmund Gosse. Toru died in 1877 but not before she had finished a French novel, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* (1979). She also left an unfinished novel in English called *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden*. This manuscript was later published in the *Bengal Magazine* in 1878. As you can see, though Toru lived for less than twenty-two years, she had a remarkably productive and creative life. Had she lived longer, there is no telling what heights of literary achievement she would have scaled.

2.4 OVERVIEW OF TORU DUTT'S WORK

The rise of nationalism in India is, doubtless, a complex phenomenon. A very important dimension to it is that of politics of cultural identity. It is in that politics that poets like Toru Dutt (1856-1877) and Romesh Chandra Dutt (1848-1909), India's first ICS officer and Toru's cousin, made an important contribution. Though neither wrote poems to or about contemporary India as Derozio did, they did attempt to validate present by supplying its past. Toru's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* is an example of translation of ancient myths into the late 19th century Indian English. Again, a complex dynamics of self-formation is evident in these poems. Toru's entire family converted to Christianity, thus moving out of their traditional Bengali filiations to move closer culturally to English.

Again, as with Derozio, there is a bit of a cultural mismatch in her work as Toru tried to bring these Indian themes into English verse. Certainly, the originals were neither ballads nor legends, but more properly *Itihasa, purana*, and *smriti*. Also, Toru's own Christian beliefs are introduced into the text once or twice. She also apologizes to her English readers for the contents of some of the poems, attempting to justify or criticize their contents by her own modern standards. A complex relationship with traditional India, thus, emerges in these poems. They are quite different, on the one hand, from the work of Orientalist translators; yet, they are not "Indian" in the way vernacular renderings of our classical texts are wont to be. Again, I would say that they are Indian English--neither British nor native. The politics of these poems is proto-nationalist in that they help construct a modern Indian identity in terms of a continuity with its past. The past is revived, repackaged, even distorted, but all to serve the interest of the present. The interest of the present is, of course, to forge a new Indian identity which can withstand and resist colonial aggression.

2.4.1 *Sita*

The three happy children in the darkened room are obviously Abju, Toru, and Aru. So, the very first line of the poem clarifies that the poem is not so much about Sita

directly as about three children listening to the story of Sita. What is the difference between these two situations? Well, in the first case, the attention would be exclusively on the subject of the poem, Sita, but in the other case it is, willy-nilly, on the act of narration, on telling and listening. It is as if the three children were seeing a movie about Sita. There is, of course, no movie, but the mother's story-telling is so powerful that the whole scene inside the forest comes alive and is projected in the mind's eye.

So the children sit in the darkened room, gazing with wide-open eyes at the picture that unfolds. There is a dense forest and at its very centre, in a secluded spot, is the hermitage where Sita has found her refuge. All of you know that Sita was banished by Rama on suspicion of impurity. This is after her *agni pariksha* or trial by fire in which she emerges victorious and virtuous. But Rama banishes her anyway. Sita finds shelter at the ashram of the great sage Valmiki. There her two sons, Luv and Kush, are born. Valmiki, who composed the Ramayan, tells the saga of Rama to Luv and Kush, who eventually recite it to Rama himself. We may note that this story of Sita's banishment figures in the *Uttararamacharitra*, which is considered an interpolation. That is, it is not a part of the original Ramayana of Valmiki. In this text, Sita and Rama live happily after Rama's return from Lanka.

Anyway, coming back to the poem, we will notice that it contains a very rich and textured description of the forest clearing. It is indeed a magical world in which all of nature is one glorious harmony. There are gigantic flowers here, a lucid lake, gliding swans, springing peacocks, and so on. A truly enchanted world. The poet anchorite is, of course, Valmiki, the *adi-kavi* or the first poet of India. The fair lady is Sita, the sorrowful Sita, weeping in her solitude. But does she weep alone? No, for, as the poet tells us, three pairs of eyes weep with her. Whose are these three pairs of weeping eyes? Abju's, Toru's, and Aru's--of course. At the end of the story, the vision is hushed away. The poem ends with a question: when will those children gather once again at their mother's side? The question is rhetorical because by the time of its writing, the two siblings of Toru, as is the mother in the poem, are already dead.

This is a poem about memory and the power of poetry or the imagination to heal sorrow. In that sense, it is a profound reenactment of what Valmiki himself does in the Ramayana. You may recall that it was the sorrow of the bereaved *krauncha* bird, mourning the loss of his mate, that impelled Valmiki to compose his first verse; it was, literally, *shoka* or grief being transmuted to *shloka* or verse. This is exactly what this poem does. Toru conjures up the evocative story of Sita to mourn her own loss of a happy childhood, but in so doing she also overcomes it by transforming it into poetry. The poem, then, is self-reflexive and precocious in a very postmodern way in that its subject is actually the power of narration itself.

2.4.2 *The Lotus*

"The Lotus" is a perfectly crafted poem with profound cultural implications. This may seem like a very grand claim to make at the very outset of our discussion, but let me tell you that even if you don't agree with the latter part of my statement, the first part of it has the approval of the greatest authorities on Indian English literature such as C. D. Narasimhiah. "The Lotus," then, has been admired for its fine craftsmanship, its sensitive handling of language and sound, its balance of ideas, its felicitous use of the sonnet form, and so on. So let's take a moment to appreciate some of these features. The sonnet, as you know, is a fourteen line poem with a certain rhyme scheme. I would like you to identify the rhyme scheme of this poem. You can do this quite easily by marking the rhyming lines by letters of the alphabet. You will see that the rhyme scheme of the poem is abbaabbacdcdee. This makes the poem a variation of the Petrarchan sonnet. In English poetry, Wyatt, Milton, Wordsworth, and other famous poets used this form. You can compare this sonnet with Derozio's two poems to see the differences and similarities in their form and

technique. The sonnet, as I've indicated earlier, usually contains a debate. The issue here is which flower is lovelier, the lily or the rose? The octave sets forth the problem which is then resolved in the sextet. How is the matter resolved? Flora, the goddess of flowers, offers the solution to Pschye, the soul--a lotus, which combines the qualities of both the rose and the lily, both passion and purity.

This poem, as I said earlier, is really an important cultural statement in my opinion. It is as if the long tradition of Western civilization is unable to reconcile and balance the two tendencies that have contended for supremacy within it. You may call these the Dionysian and the Appolonian, the ecstatic, the irrational, the passionate on the one hand, and the rational, the orderly, the intellectual on the other. Freud called these the id and the superego but you can think of them as emotion vs. intellect, right brain vs. left brain, romanticism vs. classicism, imagination and reason, and so on. In the endless strife between these two no clear or satisfactory outcome seems to emerge. The theme of this strife surfaces in practically all major texts in the Western canon. What Toru's great little poem suggests is that India has found the answer. The lotus, the most venerated flower in Eastern civilizations, is a symbol of so many things, just as the rose and the lily are in Western civilization. But the lotus for us represents the unfolding of higher consciousness, the gnostic state in which the dualities and contradictions of the mind are resolved.

You may consider this a far-fetched, even eccentrically culturalist interpretation of this seemingly simple poem, but then I think I have given my reasons for reading this poem in such a manner. You are welcome to your own interpretation, provided you can back it up with sufficient textual and extra-textual evidence.

2.4.3 *Our Casuarina Tree*

This, in my opinion, is clearly the most impressive of Toru Dutt's poems. It is like a romantic ode, a long lyrical poem, serious, meditative, and intense, with a well-crafted stanzaic structure, and lofty style. In this case, there are five stanzas of eleven lines each. Try to compare these with the other odes that you may have read by poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and so on. I would urge you to read the text carefully, mark the rhyme scheme, the metrical patterns, the difficult words and allusions, and so on. Most of these you will be able to understand and explicate with the use of a good dictionary. There is one literary allusion, which needs some extra glossing. The deathless trees in Borrowdale in the last stanza refer to Wordsworth's "Micahel." Try to read that poem and related it to this one. Try to locate the picture of a Casuarina tree so that you know what it looks like. Make a list of all the images used to describe the tree. Also note all the birds and animals that live in its sanctuary.

What is this poem about? Ostensibly, it is about a tree, the Casuarina tree, in the poet's Baughmaree house. But, as the poem develops, we see that it is about much more than just a tree. You will notice that the tree expands in both time and space, acquiring almost supernatural dimensions. It begins to represent a whole cosmos becoming, in a sense, the tree of life itself. It is seen as sheltering a whole eco-system. But most important, it comes to symbolise some very special memories to the poet (stanza three). These memories are the very stuff of her being. It is these images that the poet wishes to preserve. Memory, which seems fickle and fleeting, is sought to be strengthened through its association with a more substantial and long-lasting object such as the tree. The tree, then, represents the very essence of the poet's self, an anchor to her subjectivity, something which stabilizes her notion of who she is when she is far away. The poet wants the tree to be eternal because she wants her own experiences to be saved from the ravages of time.

Ultimately, what, according to the poet saves the things we hold dear from "oblivion's curse"? It is love, the greatest of all forces. This love of the poet empowers her imagination to bestow the tree with an eternal significance. Notice that in Toru's

poem, the carrier of the longings for immortality is a supremely romantic icon of the tree, not a man-made object like a grecian urn.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar admired this poem too: "In the organization of the poem as a whole and in the finish of the individual stanzas, in the mastery of phrase and rhythm, in its music of sound and ideas, *Our Casuarina Tree* is a superb piece of writing...." (*Indian Writing in English* 73). I agree with this assessment. I myself have called it a poem about "memory, imagination, and transcendence," in which the tree becomes "a symbol not only of the poet's joyous childhood but also, through an extension in time and space, of the poet's longing for permanence and eternity" (*Indian Poetry in English* 11).

2.5 LET US SUM UP

I have been arguing in this unit that Derozio and his poetry occupy a middle ground between British imperialism and native resistance. Overall, it seems to me that he is more aligned to the latter than to the former. But it should not be surprising if he displays patterns of both collusion and collision with the dominant colonialist culture of his times. This culture, of course, was still in the making as was a well-articulated resistance to it. During this intermediate phase, this cusp of history, Derozio appears to play his brief, but crucial role. A full-blown nationalism is, no doubt, yet to emerge, but its first faint stirrings are to be seen. As usual, the poet, the creative artist, precedes the politician, prophesying the shape of things to come. More than sixty years prior to the formation of the Indian National Congress, the notion of the Indian nation has begun to take root in the fertile soil of the delta of the Ganges in Calcutta.

As you have seen, I have looked at Derozio's poetry from a specific, rather politico-cultural perspective. You may or may not find such an approach interesting. Personally, I believe that literary studies is not just about analysing and enjoying individual works of art so that we treat them as autonomous objects, totally cut-off from their larger social contexts. However, you are free to explore these and the other poems included from other, more conventionally "literary" approaches as well.

Coming back to Toru Dutt, she exemplifies in the context of the rise of Indian nationalism a search for cultural identity. At the same time her own Christian beliefs make her aware of a complex relationship with traditional India. Her very Indian themes forge a new Indian identity which can withstand and resist colonial aggression. Her poems *Sita, The Lotus, Our Casuarina Tree* are poems of memory, cultural affiliation and the power of imagination to heal sorrow. Her poetry is superbly crafted in the way she organises individual stanzas, phrases, rhythm and music - all juxtaposing with her ideas. Both Derezio and Toru Dutt, because of the racial status in Derezio's case and Christian beliefs in Toru Dutts', have not found a firm footing in the vortex of Indian English Literature, but their strong nationalist strains have kept the debate of their place alive and hence their contribution in the making of the Indian nation.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Paradox: statement that seems self contradictory, but contains a truth.

Stint: limitation of effort or allotted amount of work.

Atheism:	not to believe in the existence of God or Gods
Mercantile:	trading of trade or merchants
Juvenile:	youthful, childish
Pyre:	pile of wood etc for burning a dead body as part of a funeral rite
Forte:	person's strong point
Cognizance:	to be aware, to have knowledge
Deity:	God, Goddess
Pinion:	bird's wing
Garb:	clothing
Coherent:	connected logically
Vanguard:	foremost part of an advancing army
Inception:	beginning
Grid:	network of lines
Precarious:	unsafe, not secure
Inchoate:	just begun, undeveloped
Hybrid:	offspring of two different species or varieties, things made by combination of different elements
Cusp:	pointed part where curves meet
Ardent:	full of ardour, enthusiastic
Allure:	entice, attract
Proselytize:	Gentile conversion to Jewish faith
Posthumously:	published or awarded after a person's death
Precocious:	having developed abilities earlier than is usual
Octave:	the space between two musical notes which are eight musical notes apart.
Validate:	to make something officially acceptable or approved after checking it first.
Filiations:	the duties of a son or daughter
Itihasa:	history
Purana:	medieval Indian narrative, encyclopaedic, usually devoted to a major deity

Smriti:	sacred texts continuing the memory of a whole people such as the *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharta* and the *Purans*
Proto-nationalist:	that which is precursor to nationalism, icipient national consciousness
Transmuted:	to change from one form unto another
Felicitous:	aptly chosen or appropriate
Gnostic:	of or having knowledge
Eccentric:	out of the ordinary, or unconventional
Ostensibly:	clearly evident
Icon:	an image, figure, representation
Grecian Urn:	Greek vase to hold the ashes of the cremated

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. How did Derozio's personal life and background affect his literary or creative development?
2. What was the social and cultural situation in India during Derozio's time?
3. What kind of a poet was Derozio? Which aspect of his poetry did you find interesting?
4. What is the poet trying to convey in *The Harp of India*, and *My Country in Thy Days of Glory Past*? Please restrict the answer to your own interpretation and understanding of the poems.
5. Why does the poet feel that silence has bound the *Harp of India* with her fatal chain?
6. How far 'fallen' is India in Derozio's poems? What solutions does he propose to this fall of India?
7. Write a short essay on your conception of the glorious past of India and her present situation.
8. Why does the poet wish to 'dive into the depths of time'?
9. The poet at the end of the poem *My Country in Thy..Glorious Past* asks for a 'kind wish'. What should be that 'kind wish', in your opinion?
10. What were the main events in Toru Dutt's life that inspired her to express herself through poetry?
11. How did conversion affect the social set up of late 19th century India?
12. What is your estimate of Toru Dutt's poetry, set at the crucial moment of the emergence of Modern India?

13. Describe the picturesque narration in *Sita*. How powerful is this poem? Why are the three young heads bowed in sorrow?

14. What is Toru Dutt trying to convey in *Lotus*? What does it say about culture and civilization?

15. Describe the allusions to the various mythical characters in the poem *Lotus*, and what in your opinion do these allusions stand for?

16. Give your interpretation of the *Casuarina Tree*. How far symbolic is the poem to Toru Dutt's childhood and memories?

17. What is unique about the *Casaurina Tree* that makes it different from other trees and dear to the poet's soul?

18. Annotate the following:

i. Silence hath bound thee with her fatal cha...
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plane:
O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave

ii. Thy eagle pinion is chained down at last,
And grovelling in the lowly dust art thou:
Thy minstrel hath no wreath to weave for thee
Save the sad story of thy misery!
Well-let me dive into the depths of time

iii. Which human eye may never more behold;
And let the guerdon of my labour be
My fallen country! One kind wish from thee!

19. Annotate the following:

i. There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light,
There dwells in peace the poet-anchorite.
But who is this fair lady? Not in vain
She weeps,-for lo! at every tear she sheds
Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain

ii. Yet shall they dream of it until the day!
When shall those children by their mother's side
Gather, ah me! As erst at eventide?

iii. "But of what colour?"-"Rose-red", love first chose,
Then prayed,-"No, lily-white,-or,both provide";
And Flora gave the lotus, "rose red"dyed,
And "lily-white", queenliest flower that blows.

iv. What is that dirge like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach

v. With deathless trees-like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
"Fear, trembling Hope and Death, the Skeleton,
And Time the shadow";and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
May love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

2.8 SUGGESTED READING

Aggarwal, K.A. *The Poetic Achievement of Toru Dutt*. Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1982.

Anand, Mulk Raj. *The Golden Breath: Studies on Five Poets of New India*. London: John Murray, 1933.

Chavan,Sunanda. *The Fair Voice: A Study of Indian Women Poets in .....English*. Delhi: Sterling, 1984.

Das, Harihar.ed, *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. London: O.U.P., 1921.

Derozio, H.L.Vivian. *Poems*. Calcutta: The Author, 1827.
The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems.
.....Calcutta: Samuel Smith &co, 1838.
Poems.ed.Francis.Bradley.Bart.London:O.U.P.1923,rpt.Delhi:O.U.P. 1980

Dutt, Toru. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. London: Kegan .....Paul, 1882.

Edward, Thomas. *Henry Derozio*. Calcutta: W.Neumann, 1884.

Jain, Jasbir. *The Colonial Encounter: Henry Derozio*. Mysore: Centre for Commonwealth Literature and Research, 1981.

Nair, K.R. Ramachandran. *Three Indo-Anglian Poets: Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu*. Delhi: Sterling, 1987.

Oaten, Edward Farley. *A Sketch of Indo-Anglian Literature*. London: Kegan .....Paul, 1908.

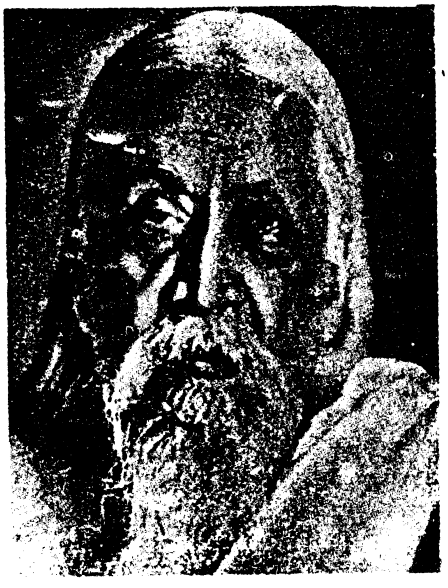
UNIT 3 SRI AUROBINDO AND SAROJINI NAIDU

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit is on two important figures in our recent history, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu. Though we are studying them as poets, they were both much more than that, as I shall show in the brief life sketches that are a part of this Unit. Both were, really speaking, leaders of modern India. Here we will try to appreciate their overall contribution to the country and to our literature before focusing on individual poems. When considering a multi-faceted genius like Sri Aurobindo, it is useful to have an introduction to his works and to the central issues in his poetry. After that, we will read four poems, *A Tree, Life and Death, Bride of Fire,* and *The Golden Light*. With Sarojini Naidu too, we will start with a brief life-sketch, followed by an overview of her poetry, before going on to discuss "Indian Dancers," "Love and Death," and "The Old Woman." We will of course have a brief summing up at the end and, as usual, the Glossary, Questions, and Suggested Reading.

3.1 A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH OF SRI AUROBINDO



Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghosh) (1872-1950)

Sri Aurobindo ranks among the greatest personalities of modern India. He was a multi-faceted genius. As a political revolutionary, social reformer, historian, educationist, philosopher, yogi, and above all, man of letters, his range is truly staggering. He was a journalist, editor, literary critic, linguist, translator, essayist, short-story writer, dramatist, and, more than all of these, *mahakavi*, or great poet. His was an extraordinarily supple intellect, a breadth of mind so extensive that there is scarcely an important field of human endeavor which escaped his notice. His collected works, numbering thirty quartos, are ample testimony of his stupendous achievement. He was truly a Renaissance Man, not only in the traditional sense of the term, but also befitting its application to the Indian context—a man who stands with the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

Sri Aurobindo's life may be conveniently divided into four periods based on the major location of residence: namely, England, Baroda, Calcutta, and Pondicherry. He was born on August 15, 1872 into a Westernized upper-middle class Bengali family, the son of Krishnadhan and Swarnalata Ghose. In 1879, at the age of seven, he was taken to England to be educated there with his brothers. He lived first in Manchester, then in London, where he attended St. Paul's school from 1884-1890, and finally at Cambridge, where he held a senior classical fellowship at King's College, Cambridge University. A brilliant student, he was especially proficient in Classics, securing a first division in the Classical Tripos. He also passed with distinction the written entrance exam to the prestigious Indian Civil Service, but did not enter the service because he repeatedly failed to appear for the riding test. Clearly, his heart was not set on serving the British Government in India. Instead, he obtained an appointment with the Maharaja of Baroda and set sail to return to India in January 1893. That marked the end of phase one of Sri Aurobindo's life. When he returned to India he hardly knew any Indian language, though he was proficient in Greek and Latin, acquainted with French, and, of course, expert in English, having written a volume of poetry in it.

The Baroda period lasts for thirteen years, until 1906. This is generally considered a phase of preparation and growth for his later work. Sri Aurobindo held various posts in the Baroda Service including Professor of English and Vice-Principal of Baroda College. Here he tried to regain contact with his Indian heritage through a program of rigorous scholarship. He studied Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages including Bengali, his mother tongue, and gained a deep insight into Indian culture and civilization. The publication of some of his early poetry such as *Songs to Myrtilla* (1895) and *Urvasie* (c. 1896) took place during this period. Towards the end of the Baroda stint, Sri Aurobindo began participating in two activities that would be crucial to his later life, namely politics and yoga. A particularly important year was 1901 in which he was married to Mrinalini Bose. During this year he also experienced his first definite spiritual realizations, which are reflected in some of poems and reminiscences. These transforming experiences came to a head in 1908 when, under the guidance of a yogi called Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, Sri Aurobindo achieved the silencing of his mind.

In 1906 Sri Aurobindo left Baroda to join the newly formed National College in Calcutta, thus inaugurating his briefer, but crucial, Calcutta phase. His political activities which had begun as early as 1902, when he met Lokmanya Tilak at the Ahmedabad session of Congress, continued most vigorously in Calcutta where in *Bande Mataram*, his influential periodical, he attacked British imperialism vehemently. In 1907 he was prosecuted for sedition, but acquitted. The next year, 1908, was in many ways, one of the most important in his life. That year, he was arrested and detained on suspicion of revolutionary activities. During these twelve months, he underwent further spiritual experiences, including the experience of cosmic consciousness. After a year in detention, he was acquitted following a stormy and celebrated trial, in which he was defended free of charge by the famous lawyer and politician Chittaranjan Das. In 1910 he retired to French Chandranagore, and on hearing that a third prosecution was to be launched against him, set sail for

Pondicherry in the South. Eventually this prosecution, too, failed and Sri Aurobindo found himself a free man. Though, initially, he had not entirely given up political activity, he was never again to return to British India or to politics. He continued living in Pondicherry, until his death in 1950. In 1914, on 15th August, his birthday, he began the publication of *Arya*, a periodical in which the original versions of most of his famous works such as *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Secret of the Veda*, and so on, appeared. He also wrote poetry, criticism, drama, and translated extensively from Sanskrit and other Indian languages during these early years in Pondicherry. For all these first ten years or so, Sri Aurobindo lived in a small rented house with only a few disciples, but the arrival in 1920 of Mirra Richard, or the Mother as she was known afterwards, changed that. The Mother took charge of Sri Aurobindo's household, gradually building up the extensive and superbly organized Sri Aurobindo Ashram, which is internationally renowned today. In November 1926, after some decisive spiritual experiences, Sri Aurobindo withdrew almost totally into solitude. His aim was to hasten the evolution of human consciousness by bringing "down" the Supermind, the higher plane of consciousness, so that all of humankind could benefit. Sri Aurobindo's seclusion ended twelve years later in 1938 after he suffered an accident. Thereafter, he saw a select group of people, including some doctors. For the next fourteen years or so, Sri Aurobindo continued his literary and spiritual activities, living mostly in seclusion, but guiding his rapidly growing number of disciples through yearly *darshans* (public appearances), and an extensive correspondence. Sri Aurobindo died on December 5, 1950, three years after India achieved its independence in 1947--on August 15--his birthday.

3.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO SRI AUROBINDO'S WORKS

Sri Aurobindo's complete works were collected and edited in the thirty volume Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (or SABCL for short). The bibliography of primary works in Vol. 30 lists 101 books by Sri Aurobindo in English, published during his lifetime and afterwards. Out of these, the following, in chronological order, are collections of poems, written originally in English (works marked with asteriks are fragments or incomplete poems):

Songs to Myrtilla (1895; rpt. 1925)
Urvasie: A Poem (c. 1896)
Baji Prabhou (1910)
Chitrangada (1910)*
Ahana and Other Poems (1915)
Love and Death (1921)
Six Poems of Sri Aurobindo (1934)
Poems (1941)
Collected Poems and Plays (1942)
Poems Past and Present (1946)
Last Poems (1952)
Savitri (1954)
More Poems (1957)
Ilion (1957)*

All these except *Savitri* are included in Volume 5, SABCL, and *Savitri*, with Sri Aurobindo's letters on it appended, is contained in Volumes 28 and 29. A new edition, *The Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA) is now underway. More ambitious and accurate than SABCL, this edition is expected to run into thirty-five volumes.

3.3 ISSUES IN SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY

Clearly, Sri Aurobindo is not an easy poet to comprehend. A lot of work needs to go into trying to come to terms with him. The modernist poets have consistently attacked his poetry. P. Lal divided readers into those who liked Sri Aurobindo and those who can't stand him. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra in his anthology says words to the effect that Sri Aurobindo spent most of his life composing a "worthless" epic of 24,000 lines! On the other hand there are devoted readers of Sri Aurobindo, who read his works as they would a sacred text. I know of people who don't leave home without reading a few lines from *Savitri* each day. Moreover, in terms of critical responses, no other poet has attracted as much attention as Sri Aurobindo. I would therefore like you to steer clear of the extremes of adulation and antipathy. Try, instead, to come to your own judgement of Sri Aurobindo's worth as a poet. But for this, you will need to take yourself seriously as a reader. And how can you do this without engaging seriously with the poet's extensive corpus? For this course, we have selected four short poems of Sri Aurobindo. This may give you the briefest glimpse of his orientation as a poet, but let us read at least these four poems carefully.

3.3.1 *A Tree*

This is one of Sri Aurobindo's early poems. It is only six lines long, with two stanzas. The first is a quatrain, with the rhyme scheme abab, followed by a couplet. Though deceptively simple, I believe that this poem contains the quintessence of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. What does the poem say? It says that a tree, beside a sandy bank, stretches its branches heaven-wards. It is "Earth-bound, heaven-amorous" that is though it is fixed to the ground, with its roots in the soil, it actually reaches upwards, towards the skies. The couplet drives home the significance of the image: the human soul is just like this tree. Our body and brain are so grounded, so earthy, that they detain our heavenly flight. Notice the slight difference in the manner in which the tree and the human being are portrayed. While the tree is seen in positive terms, in terms of its aspiration, the human being is seen somewhat negatively, his body and brain *detaining* his upward rise. Unlike the tree, the human being is almost being blamed for this urge to remain bound and limited. I said earlier that this poem contains the seed of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Can you guess what it might be? Sri Aurobindo sees us as divided beings, one part of us happy with our present attainments, another thirsting for higher things.

3.3.2 *Life and Death*

This is another short poem with a structure that is similar to *A Tree*. You have a quatrain and a couplet, but the latter is not separated or set off from the former. The rhyme scheme is also similar: ababcc. And similar is the attempt to reconcile two opposites, in this case, life and death. Sri Aurobindo says that the two have been regarded as antinomies for ages, thus shaping our thought; but now he has access to new wisdom, as it were, "long-hidden pages/ Are opened, liberating truths undreamed."

What is this long hidden-truth that Sri Aurobindo has discovered? It is this: "Life only is, or death is life disguised,--". I think we should pause a bit at the first part of the statement, "Life only is," because this idea is somewhat easier to understand. In this part of the line, Sri Aurobindo asserts that there is no death at all; everything is only life. Then he qualifies himself a little by admitting that if there is death at all, it is merely life disguised, life itself masquerading as death.

This is a profound utterance because it will, if taken seriously, altogether change our attitude to life. If there is no death at all, then all of us are immortal. Clearly, this would seem to go against our normal experience. We do see people dying; they are,

to all appearances, taken away from our midst for ever. But is this really true? How do we know that they are really dead? Perhaps, they have passed from one kind of life to another. That is what the second half of the line implies. Death is life disguised; that what appears to be death is another kind of life. In *Savitri* too at the climactic moment in the epic, it is Death itself which reveals its true face as the Supreme Lord of Life and Delight.

But in this brief poem, it is really the last line that packs the punch. It contains a radical reversal of the relationship between life and death. Earlier, it was death which was sought to be banished or, rather, redefined in terms of life. Now the life that we consider to be the ultimate reality is itself seen as a sort of death, a short one, until we are surprised by another kind of life. That is, what we might consider the after-life (and the before-life) is much vaster and greater than this short duration on earth that we know as life. If our visions were so to expand, surely we might discover that eternity which nestles in the bosom of time—this, at any rate, is what the poem says to me.

3.3.3 *Bride of Fire*

Another short poem of four quatrains, *Bride of Fire* is quite like a chant, don't you think? The rhyme scheme is abab, but it is the rhythm that really powers the poem. The first and third lines are longer, composed of four somewhat irregular feet, with the more ponderous dactyls and anapests alternating with trochees and iambs. The second and fourth lines have only two feet each, one of which is an anapest and the other, You'll have to scan the poem slowly to unravel its structure.

The poem is an address to the Bride of Fire. The first line of each stanza begins with a request to it: "clasp me now close," "surround my life," "thrill and enlace," and "sound in my heart." The poet supplicates this bride to do all this to him. The third and fourth lines of each stanza show, as it were, the poet's credentials, what he has done to qualify him for the granting of his wishes. They establish not just his preparation, but also his dedication. In other words, no aspiration can be mounted except on the strong foundation of the readiness that comes from renunciation. But there is a paradox running through the poem. The addressee is a bride whom the poet desires, but he claims that he has slain desire to qualify himself for this bride's embrace. The entire language of the poem, then, suggests the attainment of higher ecstasies for which the lower ones have to be sacrificed.

Obviously, the key question in the poem is who is the strange bride that the poet addresses? Clearly, it is no earthly or ordinary bride, because it is described as the bride of fire. What might happen if one were really to clasp a bride whose body is fire? One would be burnt to ashes, no? Well, the clasp of this bride too is not devoid of a similar danger. But it is the sort of dying which releases one into a higher life, as the earlier poem implied. Only when the dross of lower instincts and desires is purified through the furnace of askesis does the higher self awaken. The bride of fire brings about this alchemy by transforming the poet through her immortalizing embrace.

I'd said that this poems is like a chant. Indeed, if you read it aloud that is what it is, but its content is that of a prayer. Sri Aurobindo believed that the highest form of poetic expression was the mantra. When you read this poem aloud, do you detect in it a mantric quality? The sound and sense combine so as to create an elevating reverberation with your consciousness.

3.3.4 *The Golden Light*

Sri Aurobindo wrote a remarkable series of sonnets during his poetic career. No other poet in the English language attempted a sonnet series on spiritual topics. So Sri Aurobindo's series is unique. Each sonnet is a brief, but clear description of a

spiritual state or experience or mood. This sonnet is Shakespearean in structure, consisting of three quatrains, followed by a couplet. If you notice the central movement of the poem, it is suggestive of a descent. From the crown of the brain, the seventh chakra of the kundalini, the thousand-petalled lotus of the *sahasrara*, this descent moves lower and lower through the being, enlightening, purifying, and transforming as it courses through the system. Again, we see how important the idea of divine descent is in Sri Aurobindo's thought. The aspiring devotee's urge to fly upwards has to be met by the answering descent of the Divine. Without this meeting of the ascending and descending triangles, the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo cannot find fruition. You will see that Sri Aurobindo's symbol, too, consists of two intersecting triangles, one pointing upwards, the other downwards. In the middle is the square which represents the supermind, in the midst of which blooms the lotus of consciousness—*arvind*, incidentally, also means lotus. The idea of avatarhood, likewise, is an idea of descent, of the divine coming down to the earth. In this poem, the light descends from the top and touches the mind, the throat, the heart, and finally the feet. These four levels also symbolize the four planes of consciousness—the mental, the psychic, the vital, and the physical which are important in Sri Aurobindo's yoga. All of them, even down to the physical, have to be divinized before "earthly life becomes the life Divine."

In this poem, the culmination is the whole of the earth becoming the Divine's play field after the transformation of the physical (represented by the feet). Once again, I urge you to compare this sonnet with the others you've read so far in the course. How is it different from them?

3.4 A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH OF SAROJINI NAIDU

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949)

Sarojini Naidu was born on 13 February 1879 in Hyderabad. Her parents were Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya and Varada Sundari Devi. She was the eldest of several children of which eight survived. Aghorenath was a remarable man. A DSc from Edinburgh, he had been excommunicated from his caste for his radical views. His wife, Varada Sundari Devi, had to be schooled in a Brahmo Samaj home for women during his absence. On his return, Aghorenath took up service with the Nizam of Hyderabad. He not only founded the modern system of education in Hyderabad but was well-known as a reformer, thinker, scientist, and alchemist. If you go to Hyderabad, you can visit the home of the Chattopadhyayas. It is on Jawaharlal Nehru Rd, just ahead of the General Post Office, Abids. It now houses the Sarojini Naidu Memorial Trust.

Sarojini was a precocious child who began composing poetry at an early age. She passed the Madras Matriculation exam when she was thirteen. At fourteen, she fell in love with Dr. M. Govandarajulu Naidu, who was a widower nine years her senior, besides being from a different caste. Perhaps, fearing for the future of his daughter, her father arranged to send her to England on a scholarship from the Nizam. She was in England from 1895 to 1898, of which she spent over two years at Girton College, Cambridge. That environment, however, did not suit her. She failed to make a mark in her studies or in sports, but instead got to know some of the leading English poets of her time. Edmund Gosse became her patron and encouraged her to write. She returned to India in 1898 to marry her beau, Dr. Naidu. The marriage caused a sensation and was solemnized in a Brahmo ceremony, under the provisions of the Special Marriages Act, by Pandit Veerasalingam Garu. Sarojini was already a celebrity in India.

Soon after, she had four children in quick succession, but could not be contented with the life of a housewife. She plunged into public life and public service, publishing her poems alongside her other activites. Before long, she became an important member of the Congress Party. Influenced first by Gopal Krishna Gokhale and then by Mahatma Gandhi, she rose to be one of the best known freedom fighters of her times. She traveled widely, both in India and overseas, as a spokesperson for the Congress and for the cause of India. Already famous as a poet, she now became known as one of the front-ranking national leaders. She was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Congress in 1925 and also served as the President of the All India Women's Committee. She was jailed four times during the struggle for freedom and became the first woman Governor of India's largest state, United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) after independence. Clearly, Sarojini was one of the most talented, visible, colourful, and dynamic Indian women of this century.

3.5 AN OVERVIEW OF SAROJINI NAIDU'S POETRY

Sarojini's poetic career began when she was just eleven. Arthur Symons quotes her in his Introduction to *The Golden Threshold:*

> One day, when I was eleven, I was sighing over a sum in algebra: it *wouldn't* come right; but instead a whole poem came to me suddenly. I wrote it down. From that day my 'poetic career' began. At thirteen I wrote a long poem *a la* 'Lady of the Lake'--1300 lines in six days. At thirteen I wrote a drama of 2000 lines.... I wrote a novel, I wrote fat volumes of journals. I took myself very seriously in those days.

Of these early works, only the first, the long poem *a la* "Lady of the Lake" survives today. It was actually published as *Mehir Muneer: A Poem in Three Cantos by a Brahmin Girl* in 1893, when Sarojini was fourteen. Perhaps, it was the presentation of this book to the Nizam which resulted in her being awarded a scholarship by him for higher studies in England.

Her next collection, *Songs by S. Chattopadhyaya* was printed privately by her father, Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, in Hyderabad in 1896 and contains poems which she wrote from 1892-1896. The collection was, thus, published when she was in England. We know that she sent letters and poems to her would be husband, Govindarajulu, from England. Some of these poems found their way into *Songs,* along with a number of older pieces. This collection is the weakest of all her books. In fact, I have not found a single poem in it which is worth including in my edition of the *Selected Poetry and Prose* of Sarojini Naidu. The publication of *Songs* was not supervised by her, though the printed copies of both *Mehir Muneer* and *Songs* show correction marks in her handwriting. Perhaps, she intended to republish both later, but then dropped the idea. The poems in these two juvenile collections are hardly ever discussed by critics.

It was with *The Golden Threshold* in 1905 that Sarojini's career as a poet really took off. Arthur Symons was responsible for the publication of this book. The poems in it belong almost wholly to two periods: 1896 and 1904. Sarojini had sent Symons some new poems in 1904 and he had already seen her earlier work in 1896. Symons says, "As they seemed to me to have an individual beauty of their own, I thought they ought to be published." (*Sarojini Naidu: Selected Poetry and Prose* 9). Sarojini then wrote to Edmund Gosse asking for his advice and permission in publishing the collection. Sarojini's dedication of the book to "Edmund Gosse who first showed me the way to the Golden Threshold" shows how deeply she was influenced by him. Ironically, when Gosse had seen many of these very poems in 1896, he had been disappointed as he tells us in his Introduction to *The Bird of Time*. Now, thanks to Symons they were being published anyway. There was, however, yet another difficulty which no biographer or critic to my knowledge has mentioned. William Heinemann was unwilling to risk his money on the book, though it was recommended by Gosse and Symons, and would carry an Introduction by the latter. The poet had to actually pay the publisher a tidy sum in pounds sterling to cover the printing costs. This is revealed in Sarojini's letters to Gosse at the National Archives. The book, of course, went on to be a huge success; the first edition was sold out by the end of 1905 and a new edition was published and quickly snapped up in 1906.

The book was reviewed favourably both in the Indian and, especially, in the British press. There were reviews in *The Times* (London), *The Manchestory Guardian*, *The Review of Reviews*, *The Morning Post*, *Athanaeum*, *Daily Chronicle*, *Spectator*, and *T.P.'s Weekly* (see Sengupta, 1966, 57-59). *The Golden Threshold* made Sarojini a celebrity in both India and England. Never before had a book of poems by an Indian caused such an impact abroad. *The Golden Threshold* remains Sarojini's best and most popular books. She never quite exceeded what she achieved in it. *The Bird of Time* was published by William Heinemann in 1912 with an introduction by Edmund Gosse; it was also published simultaneously in New York by John Lane. This book, too, was reviewed widely in India and in England. By now, Sarojini was an established poet. Her readers in England expected both beauty and oriental glamour from her and she did not disappoint them.

The Broken Wing, her third collection, was published by Heinemann in 1917. By now, however, the praise had become lukewarm. There was also considerable criticism of her limitations as a poet. In Europe, the first wave of modernism was beginning to gather momentum. There was about to be a cataclysmic change in poetic fashion. Sarojini was swept aside by this tide. She never published another collection in her lifetime. By the time Padmaja published *The Feather of the Dawn* in 1961, modernism was the ruling mode in Indian poetry. The book was panned by Nissim Ezekiel, among others. Sarojini had been all but consigned to poetic oblivion.

Thus, the graph of her career shows that her reputation was at its highest from 1905 to 1917 and then declined afterwards. In India she continued to have a readership and following until her death. But in the 1950's when modernism became the dominant mode of Indian English poetry, her reputation as a poet sunk to its lowest. This contempt for her poetry persists in an entire generation of poets and critics who are now in their fifties and sixties. Perhaps, the time is now ripe for a reinterpretation, if not revival of her works.

As a writer of prose, Sarojini was never well known. Except for a few booklets, she never published a sustained piece of prose in her lifetime. Her collected speeches are uneven in quality and lacking in well-developed or original thinking. In fact, most of the thousands of speeches she delivered were extempore.

In the sections that follow we will look more closely at some of Sarojini's well-known poems.

3.5.1 *Indian Dancers*

This poem, from Sarojini's first collection, *The Golden Threshold*, is perhaps the best example of her aesthetic of excess. Every sense is pushed to a point beyond satiety in this poem through an overabundance of lush and overripe imagery. The overall effect is to create a hazy and entranced mood, as might be induced by a narcotic or opiate. The images suggest a lack of sharpness, clarity, and visibility. Sarojini's idea of sensuality is hedonistic glut.

I wonder how this poem has been arranged typographically in your textbook. Actually, it should be in three stanzas of four lines each with the rhyme scheme, abab. Can you guess why it looks different, at least at first sight, from what I've described it to be? That's because the lines are inordinately long. Let's try to scan them. To do so, you must identify the dominant metrical foot. Can you guess what it is? Read the lines aloud a couple of times so that you get a feel for the rhythm. The main foot is the anapest, that is two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. The opening foot of each line is an iamb. There is also an extra, weak stress at the end of each line: "-ire," "-ght," "-ire," "-ght," and so on. How many feet are there to a line? There are eight strong stresses, so there are eight feet. Each line naturally breaks into two units of four feet each—so each line of this poem is actually like a couplet. You can tell by its design that the poet has been quite innovative here. The lines are long enough to make you breathless, quite like the dancers themselves, but yet Sarojini provides you with a breather half-way, after one beat of four feet. Sarojini was quite a master of metre. Especially, she achieved some wonderful results with the anapest, a longish, feminine foot, which makes her lines sound very sensuous and oriental.

Now, what do these three stanzas convey? They are, as you notice, mainly descriptive, piling on image after image. But does a very clear picture of the dancers emerge at the end of the poem? Not really. There's a strong impression, an experience, an atmosphere, but no clear vision. That is because the light is dim in this poem. Everything is hazy and languorous. Sarojini wishes to create a certain effect of super-sensuality. The boundaries between various senses get blurred. There is a controlled, but rather deliberate creation of excess, conveyed by words such as "ravished," "rapture," "celestially panting," "passionate bosoms," "aflaming with fire"—just to go by the first line.

If you were to critique the aesthetic that informs this poem, you would call it decadent and escapist. The sorrow, the labour, the degradation, the sweat, the toil of the dancers is all but elided. Their subjectivity is lost. Questions of sexual exploitation are also pushed into the background. Instead, we are invited to dope ourselves into an unthinking stupor as we admire these dancers into the "voluptuous watches of the night." And yet, the very excess with which these dancers are depicted should alert us against facile or dismissive judgements. The excess implies that Sarojini was aware of what she was doing, so much that the picture is almost a caricature. Like the other "folk" in her poetry, the bangle-sellers, the palanquin-bearers, the coromandel fishers, the corn-grinders, and so on, Sarojini prettifies these dancers not to turn them into living ghosts but to invest their lives with some sort of dignity and charm, even if in the process she ends up exoticising them. That's why, in the ultimate analysis, I consider these poems to be forms of resistance and protest against colonialism and modernity, both of which were robbing the common people of India of their self-respect and autonomy.

3.5.2 *Love and Death*

This sonnet from *The Bird of Time* can easily be rated as one of Sarojini's finest poems, though few critics have considered it so. Its form is Petrarchan, with the rhyme scheme abbaabba cdcecd. The octave depicts the ideal of love; like Savitri,

the poet dreams that her love has freed her beloved from death. But the sestet reveals the hard and cruel reality which forces the poet to accept that her love hasn't been able to mitigate even one throe of pain, let alone bring the beloved back from death. The poem is modern in spirit in that it refutes the ideal represented by Savitri. You will recall that in the latter story, Savitri manages to win back life for her dead husband Satyavan. Sarojini's poem makes an interesting comparison with Toru Dutt's "Sita" and Sri Aurobindo's Savitri.

Like all good sonnets, *Love and Death* contains an argument, a debate. The debate is between a certain idea of love, which asserts that love conquers all odds, even triumphing over death. The speaker imagines that her love gives her beloved the matchless dowry of immortality which engirts him from the cruel hands of overmastering Fate. She dreams that her love has ransomed him from Death itself, like Savtri had saved Satyavan. On the 9th line, the poem turns. Dream over, the poet wakes up to the harsh reality: her love has been unable to annul even one throe of predestined pain, to prolong her lover's breath even by one heart-beat. To all appearances, then, this is a sad, pessimistic, even brutally realistic poem. It shows that Sarojini was capable of some hard-headed, even heart-rending, engagement with reality. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, in his characteristically brutal fashion, dismissed Sarojini's poetry as "mellifluous drivel," but when we read this poem, we get a different impression. Instead of regarding her as an incurable romantic or light-hearted warbler of innocent rhymes, we are invited by poems such as these to reassess our understanding of her poetic ouvre, indeed to take her more seriously as a poet who was actively engaged with the real world in which she lived.

3.5.3 *The Old Woman*

Another fine poem, again from *The Bird of Time*, *The Old Woman* evokes *karuna* or compassion. The refrain, which is the first article of faith for a Muslim, works very effectively, underscoring the woman's stoicism and fortitude born of her faith. Sarojini gives us a possible history of the old woman, how she once was a wife and mother, but is now reduced to begging in the street. The second stanza is probably one of the most realistic pieces of verse Sarojini ever wrote; there is very little ornamentation or prettification in it. Again, we see her confronting reality with a sober and unblinking gaze.

Each stanza consists of fourteen lines, with the last four constituting the refrain. How well the Arabic blends into the English, a fine example of code mixing through quotation. The other eight lines in each stanza have the rhyme scheme: abaabccdeed. Again, the dominant foot, as you might have noticed is the anapest.

A good project would be to compare the old woman with the dancers in the first poem. You'll notice how the former is very sharply etched, while the latter are hazy and blurred. The image of women in Sarojini's poems, similarly, alternates between enormous clarity about their oppression but also tends to endow them with a beguiling or bewithing glamour and sensual appeal, which blunt her critical gaze at times.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed two important figures in the realm of Indian English lliterature - Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu. The quintessence of Sri Aurobindo's poetry is the duality of the self - the body/mind duality that he highlights, the physical urges of the body to remain bound and limited and the other being thirsting for higher things - "Earth-bound, heaven-amorous". Further, Sri Aurobindo reconciles life and death in his profound utterance: "Life only is, or death is life disguised". What this

line hints at is that death is another kind of life and that the 'after life' is much vaster and greater than the 'before life' on earth.

The epitome of Aurobindo's poetry is the 'Mantra' or the poetic chant. Indeed Aurobindo's poetry both in form and content is like a prayer.

To end this section, let me go back to the title of Sarojini's first collection, *The Golden Threshold.* Obviously, the title is significant, hinting at the kind of romanticism Sarojini practiced. After all, she gave her home the same name too, even shifting the name when she shifted residence. So, the question arises, what is the book a threshold to? Does it refer to a key theme in the collection, that of growing up, bidding goodbye to one's dreams, and of maturing a person and woman? Or is it a threshold to her poetic career, which she hopes will be golden? Or, yet again, is the collection a sort of threshold or passage to India itself for Western readers? And as a nationalistic poet, she would want to introduce her readers not to an earthen or clayey India, but a magnificent, golden India, embellished by her imagination and carefully ornamented so as to be pleasing and delectable to her foreign readers? At any rate, the title foregrounds the problem of representation which is at the heart of Sarojini's poetic project. It would help you at this point to look at Malashri Lal's *The Law of the Threshold,* one of the few original pieces of feminist theorising to come out of India. Lal argues that most texts by and about women in India demonstrate what she calls "the law of the threshold." This law states that Indian women, in their growth, always encounter this "Lakshman rekha," a visible or invisible boundary, overstep which they might at their own peril. What happens to those who remain within its confines, step out, or step back in is analysed in the book. See if you can apply some of these ideas to Sarojini's poetry as well.

3.7 GLOSSARY

Stupendous: astounding, wonderful

Reminiscences: some past experience or event that is recalled

Sedition: an offense that tends to undermine the authority of a state

Antipathy: a feeling of dislike or hostility

Antinomies: contradiction existing between laws or principles or views

Masquerading: to participate in a masquerade ie. a party or gathering at which guests come in disguise

Climactic: involving or causing a climax

Ponderous: heavy, huge

Alchemist: a person who practices alchemy

Languor: pleasant mental or physical tiredness or lack of activity. adj: languorous

Palanquin: in East Asia, a covered litter, usually for one person, carried by poles on the shoulders of two or more men

Engirt:	to encircle, or encompass
Annul:	to make void, abolish
Beguiling:	to mislead by cheating or tricking, deceive
Dactyl:	a metrical foot of three syllables, the first accented and the others unaccented as in English verse
Anapest:	a metrical foot of two unaccented syllables followed by an accented one
Trochee:	a metrical foot of two syllables, the first accented and the other unaccented
Iamb:	a metrical foot of two syllables, the first unaccented and the other accented
Credentials:	that which entitles to credit, confidence etc
Mantra:	hymn or portion of text, esp from the Veda chanted as a prayer
Reverberation:	a reechoing or reflection
Kundalini:	energy or Shakti residing in a coiled form at the bast of the spine in human beings. When awakened, the process of spiritual evolution begins
Sahasrara:	thousand pettaled lotus at the crown of the head, the highest *chakra* which the Kundalini reaches on its upward ascent
Avatarhood:	incarnation
Innovative:	to bring in an innovation or new ideas
Aesthetic:	sensitive to art and beauty
Elided:	to ignore, omit or strike out
Subjectivity:	determined by and emphasizing the ideas of the artist or writer
Caricature:	satirical picture
Throe:	pain, affliction, strong yearning
Oeuvre:	the lifetime work of a particular writer or artist or composer
Stoicism:	indifference to pleasure or pain, stoical behaviour
Embellished:	improved by adding detail, ornament

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. Give a brief life sketch of Sri Aurobindo and his contribution to the literary scenario in India.

2. What are the major issues in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo?

3. What is the philosophy inherent in the poem 'A tree'? Explain with examples.

4. What is Sri Aurobindo trying to convey through the poem, 'Life and Death'?

5. What is your own interpretation of the poem?

6. What does the "Bride of Fire" stand for? Give a critical analysis of the poem.

7. Describe the poetic structure of the sonnet, "The Golden Light". How is this poem different from the other poems you have studied?

8. Give a detailed sketch of the life of Sarojini Naidu. Do you consider her to be a rebel or a conformist?

9. Describe briefly the poetic career and achievement of Sarojini Naidu.

10. Critically analyse the poem, "Indian Dancers". Describe the rhyme scheme and the poetic structure?

11. What is the poet trying to convey through the poem, "Indian Dancers"?

12. Compare the poem, "Love and Death', with Toru Dutt's 'Sita', and with the Savitri story as it is conventionally known.

13. What is your interpretation of the poem, 'The Old Woman'?

14. Compare and analyse the two poems, 'The Old Woman' and 'Indian Dancers'.

15. What in your opinion does 'The Golden Threshold' stand for?

16. Annotate the following:

i. This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.

ii. Life only is, or death is life disguised,-
Life a short death until by life we are surprised.

iii. Voice of infinity, sound in my heart,-
Call of the One!
Stamp there thy radiance, never to part,
O living Sun.

iv. Thy golden light came down into my feet;
My earth is now Thy playfield and Thy seat.

17. Annotate the following:

i. Now silent, now singing and swaying and swinging like blossoms that bend to the breezes or showers

ii. I dreamed my love had set thy spirit free,
Enfranchised thee from Fate's O'ermastering power,
And girt thy being with a scatheless dower
Of rich and joyous immortality;

iii. And her withered, brave voice croons its paean of praise,
Be the gay world kind or unkind:

"La ilaha illa-l-Allah,
La ilaha illa-l-Allah,
Muhammad-ar-Rasul-Allah

3.9 SUGGESTED READING

Aurobindo, Sri. *Savitri.* Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1950; rpt.1954, 1970.

Collected Poems. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972.

Letters on 'Savitri'.Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1951.

Dustoor,P.E. *Sarojini Naidu and her Poetry.* Mysore: Rao and Raghavan, 1961.

Gokak,V.K. *Sri Aurobindo: Poet and Seer.* Delhi: Abhinav, 1973.

Ghose, Sisir Kumar. *The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo: A Short Survey.* Calcutta: Chatuskone, 1969.

Gupta,Rameshwar. *Eternity in Words: Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri'.* Bombay: Chetna Prakashan, 1969.

Sarojini Naidu: *The Poetess.* Delhi: Doaba House, 1975.

Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. *Dawn to Greater Dawn: Six Lectures on Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri'.* Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1975.

Sri Aurobindo: *A Biography and A History.* 2 vols. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972.

Khan, Izzat Yar. *Sarojini Naidu: The Poet.* Delhi: S Chand & Co, 1983.

Kotoky,P.C. *Indo English Poetry: A Study of Sri Aurobindo and Four Others.* Gauhati: Gauhati University, 1969.

Mehta,Rohit. The Dialogue With Death; Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri': A Mystical Approach. Bombay: SABDA, 1972.

Mishra, D.S. *Poetry and Philosophy in Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri'.* Delhi: Harman Publishers, 1989.

Nair,K.R.Ramachandran. *Three Indo-Anglian Poets: Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, and Sarojini Naidu.* Delhi: Sterling, 1987.

Naravane, V.S. *Sarojini Naidu: An Introduction to her Life, Work and Poetry.* Delhi: Vikas, 1980.

Paranjape, Makarand.R.,ed. *Sarojini Naidu: Selected Letters*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997.

-----, ed. *Sarojini Naidu: Selected Poetry and Prose.* Delhi: Harper Collins India, 1993.

The Penguin Sri Aurobindo Reader. Delhi: Penguin India, 1999.

Rajyalakshmi, P.V. *The Lyric Spring: A Study of the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu.* Delhi: Abhinav, 1977.

Sethna, K.D. *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo.* 1947, rev.ed. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1974.

UNIT 4 NISSIM EZEKIEL AND KAMALA DAS

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall study two poets, Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das. We will follow the usual pattern of learning something about their lives and poetic careers, before studying individual poems in detail.

4.1 A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH OF NISSIM EZEKIEL

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-)

Nissim Ezekiel was born in 1924 in Bombay in a Bene-Israeli family. The Bene-Israelis are a small community of Jewish people, most of whom speak the local Indian language, in this case, Marathi. Nissim studied English literature at Wilson College, Bombay, earning a B.A. and an M.A. He then went on to read philosophy at Birbeck College, University of London. After his return to India without taking a degree, he served as an editor with several journals including *Quest*, *Poetry-India*,

The Illustrated Weekly, and *The Indian P.E.N.*. After short stints in journalism, advertising, and broadcasting, he taught for several years at Mithibai College, Bombay, and then at the University of Bombay, Department of English. He retired as the Professor of English, University of Bombay. Nissim also wrote a regular column on art for the *Times of India.* Besides being a pioneer in modern Indian English poetry, Nissim has discovered, encouraged, and published several of India's leading Indian English poets. He has also been an active translator, playwright, and reviewer. His impact on the Indian English literary scene is therefore very significant.

4.2 AN OVERVIEW OF HIS POETRY

Nissim Ezekiel has published seven volumes of poetry: *A Time to Change and Other Poems* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1958), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), - *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982); his - *Collected Poems* were published in 1989. He won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1983 for *Latter-Day Psalms* and has also been honoured with the title Padma Shri in 1988.

Nissim has often been called the father of modern Indian English poetry. Bruce King says: "Of the group of poets attempting to create a modern English poetry in India, Nissim Ezekiel soon emerged as the leader who advised others, set standards and created places of publication" (*Modern Indian Poetry in English* 91). In an earlier unit, I briefly spoke of how a complex set of factors promoted the creation of literary modernism in India in the 1950s and 1960s. There is no doubt that this modern idiom and sensibility were consciously created by a group of poets, editors, anthologists, and teachers. Some of these did form a literary *avant garde.* Of these it is clear that, over the decades, Nissim was probably the most influential.

Of course, as I've argued in my anthology *Indian Writing in English,* there was a whole pre-history to Indian modernism which is now almost forgotten. A poet like Shahid Suhrawardy, who went to Pakistan after independence, was already writing in the modernist mode long before Nissim. But he is forgotten today. Instead, a myth is being promoted that Nissim was India's first modern poet. In fact, Nissim's first collection, significantly titled, *A Time to Change*, reflects a deeply religious sensibility rather than a modernist bent of mind. This preoccupation with religion remains with Nissim through all his poetry. What I've been trying to suggest is that modernism itself is not a simple or unitary phenomenon, but a rather complex set of attitudes and idioms.

Perhaps, what distinguishes the Indian English modernists from their predecessors is their precise use of language, especially of well-crafted images, and their largely ironic stance. The modernist also brought a whole new range of subject matter into their poetry. Nissim's poetry, for example, focuses on life in Bombay, with all its difficulties, on human sexuality, on typically modern problems of alienation and identity, without giving up on a more traditional desire to find an answer to these problems. The recurring theme of sexuality and of the male-female relationship is also an important element in modern poetry. The earlier poets did not address these issues in quite so direct and blunt a fashion. Ezekiel's poetry displays a variety of styles and themes, but his strength is clearly the introspective, ironic, somewhat humorous poems of self-exploration and self-formation.

The Unfinished Man and *The Exact Name* have some of these best poems of Nissim's. Though he does not attempt a long poem as such, there are sequences of shorter poems as in *Latter-Day Psalms* and *Hymns in Darkness*. Nissim also wrote a number of very Indian poems in English, the only one to use Indian English for poetic effect

after Joseph Furtado. Some of these poems are satires, but they also show the poet's sympathy for the objects of satire.

4.2.1 *Enterprise*

This poem of thirty lines in six stanzas of five lines each is from *The Unfinished Man.* The dominant pattern is an iambic tetrameter, with the rhyme scheme of abaab. It shows at once Nissim's commitment to certain poetic values--regularity, orderliness of form, clarity of thought, and precision of diction. Reminiscent of Eliot's "Journey of the Magi," this poem is about the inevitable disillusionment which greets the conclusion of any grand enterprise. Some lines like "what the thunder meant," as well as several phrases, allude to Eliot's *Wasteland.*

The interpretation of the poem hinges on the meaning of "enterprise." What enterprise is being referred to in the poem? It seems to me that the word has a vast symbolic potential. It could refer to something as broad as the independence of India or it could even be a critique of romantic idealism. There is a gradual progression of moods in the poem, from hope, almost to despair at the end, but what gives the poem both coherence and strength is the detached realism of the speaker's voice. As the observer, witness, and narrator, he retains a grim commitment to the truth of the moment, never letting himself slide into rage or self-pity.

The poem is also a rewriting of the ancient Biblical story of the Exodus. In this poem, too, the journey is to a promised land across deserts, but after all the travails and hardships, isn't all that fulfilling at the end. Indeed, a question mark is placed on the very value of such ventures. The poet concludes: "Home is where we have to earn our grace." This longer line has a lot of narrative weight in it, coming as it does at the very conclusion of the poem. The attitude that the poet encourages, then, may be called "stay at home"--remain where you are and all things will come to you. No need to embark upon ambitious enterprises. So the poem also criticises all those who, like the great imperialists and colonialists, sought their fortunes upon distant shores. Or else, this is an interrogation of all grand narratives with their false promises.

Like other modern poems, there is a certain lack of clarity regarding the "plot" of the poem. Who are these people? Where are they going? What is their goal? Such questions are not answered precisely but enough information is provided to give us a *sense* of what they are about. It would be a good idea to make a careful inventory of all the information that is offered in the poem. How is this information controlled? What sort of gaps exist? How do these gaps enhance the richness of the text? As a modern poem, "Enterprise" offers rich dividends to the sort of close reading that New Critics recommend.

4.2.2 *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher*

This poem of twenty lines in two stanzas is from *The Exact Name.* It is a rather popular poem, much-anthologised and studied. One reason for its popularity is that it outlines a sort of poetic credo. The message of the poem is clear: "The best poets wait for words." But this waiting is, by no means, simple. The poet cannot while away his time, but like the careful birdwatcher, has to remain ever alert. There is the eternal vigil that is the price for the gift of poetry. To stay poised in that tension is what Ezekiel recommends to poets. The whole meaning is enhanced and elaborated through the elaborate and extended comparison with bird watching.

Of course, there is a third element that is introduced too, that of lovemaking. Courtship, birdwatching, and poetry and thus related; in each case, the attitude that is recommended is of passive alertness, not of anxiety, hurry, aggression, or hyperactivity. The more one is agitated, the less one gains. The one who is loved is not chased like a quarry, but watched with such intensity that she risks surrendering.

Ultimately, the rewards of such worshipful patience are great: what is gained is not just "flesh and bone but myths of light/ With darkness at the core."

Here we see that for Nissim, love and poetry are means to a special knowledge, wisdom, transcendence even. There is a major miracle that the two bring about: "The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight." Poetry, then, like love, is ultimately a different way of perceiving reality, of seeing, hearing, and experiencing it differently.

4.2.3 *Background, Casually*

Another well-known poem, first published in 1965 though collected in *Hymns in Darkness*, this longish narrative in 75 lines and three parts, is a sort of poetic autobiography. Yet, unlike Wordsworth's *Prelude*, there is no claim to high seriousness here. As the title itself suggests, Ezekiel wishes to be rather casual about his background. Each part of the poem has five stanzas of five lines each. The lines don't rhyme, but occasionally as in the first stanza, there are some half-rhymes: born-bone, eat-kite. The dominant foot, again, is the iamb.

Overall, the poem portrays the poet's uneasy relationship with India, his home. The very first line starts with a sort of summing-up of his personality: "poet-rascal-clown." He goes to a Catholic school, "a mugging Jew among the wolves," clearly despised by his Christian classmates. He doesn't get along any better with Muslims or Hindus either: "A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears" and "I grew up in terror of the strong/ But undernourished Hindu lads." Somewhere, the poet's spiritual quest also surfaces: "Could I, perhaps, be rabbi-saint?" But what prevails is the enduring skepticism that marks his poetry: "The more I searched, the less I found."

Then, the inevitable journey abroad with the three "Ps" for companionship: Philosophy, Poverty and Poetry. Not making much of a success of his academic career, he returns home, scrubbing decks to earn his passage. But the return is not without its tensions and questions: "How to feel it home, was the point." He even tries to read up on India to own it up, but not with too much success. The sense of otherness when it comes to the majority persists. Then the inevitable descent into the drudgery of marriage and earning a living.

Gradually, a sense of purpose unfolds. The poet begins to feel his place in the scheme of things, realizing where he comes from and where he is heading. He reclaims the memories of his ancestors but really finds meaning in dreams of words or in poetry. There is an acceptance of responsibilities and of one's limitations, a reconciliation even with a difficult environment: "The Indian landscape sears my eyes./ I have become a part of it." Finally, a clarity emerges:

> I have made my commitments now.
> This is one: to stay where I am,
> As others choose to give themselves
> In some remote and backward place.
> My backward place is where I am.

The poet's attitude to his home, India, does not necessarily change; he doesn't regard it in positive terms. It is still a backward place, but there is a realization that he belongs to it and must consequently give himself to it. And this realization gives him the peace that he has sought. The resolution to Ezekiel's identity crisis is rather instructive when we compare it with that of others. While many other diasporic and expatriate writers have found themselves unable to commit themselves either to India or to their adopted country and, indeed, made maximum capital, literary or otherwise, of this in-between state, Ezekiel points to the opposite path of throwing in one's lot with one's immediate surroundings. It is not for us to make value judgements about which path is better, but to observe the dynamics of each.

4.3 A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH OF KAMALA DAS

Kamala Das (1934-)

Kamala Das was born in Punnayurkulam, Kerala in 1934. Her mother, Balamani Amma, is a well-known poet and writer in Malayalam. Kamala spent several years in Calcutta, where she went to Catholic schools. She also spent some years in boarding school. She was married fairly early, before she finished her college, so she happens to be perhaps the only leading Indian English poet without a degree to her name. She began writing early and published her first poems in *The Indian P.E.N.* She was also published by C. R. Mandy in *The Illustrated Weekly of India.* Her collections include *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973). The first volume of her *Collected Poems* published in 1984 won her the Sahitya Akademi award for 1985. Besides poetry, she also writes short stories, some of which were collected in *The Doll for the Child Prostitute and Other Stories*, and novels. There are two of the latter, *Manas* (1975) and *Alphabet of Lust* (1976). Her controversial autobiography, *My Story* was published in 1974.

4.4 AN OVERVIEW OF HER POETRY

Kamala Das has been typecast as a confessional poet. There is no doubt that her poems are accounts of deeply personal experiences. But more than this confessional element, it is the brutal frankness of her verse that shocked and attracted readers. Kamala writes about sexual frustration and desire, of the suffocation of an arranged, love-less marriage, of numerous affairs, of the futility of lust, of the shame and sorrow of not finding love after repeated attempts, of the loneliness and neurosis that stalks women especially. As such, her poetry speaks not only of her personal distress, but of her outrage against the social norms of a patriarchal society. Kamala was featured in *Time* magazine for "breaking the sexual barrier." What she did was to bring new subject matter into Indian English poetry. A whole range of experiences which were never spoken of were introduced for the first time by her. As Bruce King says, "Rather than finding salvation in art, Kamala Das's poetry spoke of fantasies, many lovers and the continuing disappointments of love" (*Modern Indian Poetry in English* 20).

Equally important is Kamala's experimentation with language, as we shall see in *"An Introduction."* She began to use Indian English, not in the ironic and comic manner in which Ezekiel did, but unselfconsciously, unaffectedly, naturally. Not being a

foreign-returned English teacher, she had no qualms about using a language which she was comfortable and familiar with. Again, as King observes, "More important than its themes was the use of an Indian English without the concern for correctness and precision which characterised most earlier modern verse. Instead, it appeared unpremeditatd, a direct expression of feelings as it shifted erratically through unpredictable emotions, creation its own form through its cadences and repetitions of phrases, symbols and refrains" (ibid).

While reading the poems, I would like you to pay close attention to the form. Does the form reflect something of the instability of the poetic persona?

4.4.1 *An Introduction*

This loosely structured poem of 59 lines is from *Summer in Calcutta*. There is no visible rhyme scheme nor is Das using metre consistently. Line breaks are dictated by natural pauses or breaks in meaning. There is a certain disjointedness in this poem which makes it more conversational and immediate. Again, I am reminded of what King said: "In Das's poetry the distance between the poet and poetry is collapsed" (ibid 21). This is how the "confessional" element in the poetry operates at the technical level.

I said that there is a certain disjointedness in this poem. Notice that the first sentence, "I don't know politics ... Nehru" has nothing to do with the second. The poem may as well have begun with "I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar...." But the first sentence has an oblique connection with the subject of the poem. The poet disclaims any special knowledge of politics so as to provide an artistic and autobiographical rationale for the language of her creative expression, English. In other words, this poem is a defense, if not an apology, for writing in English. Now, writing in English, as we all know, is more than just a cultural or artistic choice. It has its politics as well. Or, at any rate, the issue of writing in English has been politicised for more than a hundred years. To speak out against this, the first thing that Das does is to claim an apolitical position for herself. She couldn't care less about politics and politicians, she implies. This indifference then gets translated into a demand for artistic and personal freedom of expression:

> Why not leave
> Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
> Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
> Any language I like?

There is a certain frustration, anger even, at attempts by others to control or restrict her.

The poem goes on to become an elaborate justification of the kind of poetry she writes and the kind of language she writes it in:

> The language I speak
> Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses,
> All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
> Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
> It is human as I am human, don't
> You see?

Indian English, both linguistically and culturally hybrid and half-caste, is defended passionately. In a society obsessed with hierarchy and purity, even something of privileged status such as English becomes subaltern when you begin to write poetry in it. Such an act is seen almost as a betrayal, an evidence of bad faith.

But the poem is a plea for more than artistic freedom or for expression in Indian English. There is a passion in the appeal which comes for a defiance of those who wish to silence the poet. I am a human being, the poet screams, and I have a right to my voice. No one should try to silence me. My voice is like the cawing of crows and the roaring of lions. If you don't deny them the right to their voices, why are you trying to silence me? The sub-text is clear: are you trying to gag me because I am a woman? The silencing of the voices of women and of the oppressed is a common fact of the history of all civilizations. It is the elites, the culture defining groups, which always speak on behalf of their less privileged fellows. Das want to break this stranglehold. She says, let me speak; don't try to shut me up.

After she creates this space to speak, she begins to tell her story, as it were. What is this story? It is of a lonesome child, growing up on her own. In the background are "Incoherent mutterings of the blazing/ Funeral pyre" signifying the loss of loved ones. There is a quick growth into puberty, and suddenly, a terrible accident: marriage. When the poet asks for love, all she gets is versions of marital rape. I am using blunt words because the text warrants them. You must bear in mind here that the speaker is just sixteen years old, legally still a minor. At this stage she is perhaps totally unprepared for sex. But marriage gives the legal sanction to a man to impose his will on what in this case is a child's body. The aftermath is clearly spelled out, "He did not beat me/ But my sad woman-body felt so beaten." This experience seems to be a crucial one for the poet. It creates a wound in her psyche which never heals. It leads, as we see in the following stanzas, to immense self-loathing and attempts to escape from her self.

The poet tries to deny her femininity by dressing like a man, cutting her hair short, and so on. Actually, the revulsion seems to stem from what men do to women. Again, the imposition of social norms: "Dress in sarees, be girl/ Be wife, they said." The whole package is flung at her; embroider, keep house, quarrel with servants, but above all, "fit in." Clearly, however, the poet is a misfit, if there is one. She rebels, not consciously or deliberately, but compulsively, traumatically. The next stanza, shows a greater incoherence, suggestive of a breakdown in personality. Compulsive behaviour, schizophrenia, nymphomania, and then the inevitable reaching out to another man, the rejection that follows and a devastating indictment of the male sex: "he is every man/ Who wants a woman" and "It is I who drinks lonely/ Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels in strange towns." The poem ends on an uncertain note, the poet seeking not much more than to survive, to earn the right to simply be called "I."

4.4.2 *My Grandmother's House*

This well-known poem, again from *Summer in Calcutta*, speaks of what we might call the "pre-lapserian" stage. It harks back to the childhood of the poet, the security of a grandmother's house, where the self of the poet attains some sort of integrity. In that sense, it refers to a time before the rupture, the dislocation that we've seen so vividly described in the previous poem.

The poem, sixteen lines long, is a sustained description, and thus more tightly knit. The main feature of the house is that the poet is loved there. That is what, as you may remember, the speaker wanted in the previous poem but was practically raped instead. It might be dangerous to see the poetic persona as one continuous self across different poets, but in Das's case this is possible, even useful. That the poems are from the same collection adds to the utility and justifiability of such an approach. But, of course, we shouldn't overdo this interpretative ploy. To revert to the poem, in addition to love, the security of being cared for, there is the whole world of books, suggestive of so many possibilities. The house in Malabar, thus, not only symbolizes security and integrity, but also imagination and youth. Here the poet, though somewhat lonely, is free to dream her own fantasies, to fulfil, albeit vicariously, her desires to be connected to a more interesting world.

The last part of the poem is actually an address to what might be considered the poet's husband. The clue is not just the endearment, "Darling," but the whole sense of explanation and justification that the poet offers. She says, can you believe that I was "proud, and loved ... I who have lost/ My way and beg now at strangers' doors to/ Receive love, at least in small change?" The last two lines are terribly poignant. The speaker has been reduced to begging for love in small change at strangers' doors. What a contrast from the loved, protected, and proud child that we see in the first part of the poem.

As a critic or careful reader, however, you should never take any text at surface value. If I were in your shoes, I would at once ask if the poet is exaggerating both the idealization of the childhood as she does the degradation of the present. That way you will begin to pry open the hidden crevices of meaning lurking beneath the surface and, perhaps, even go on to deconstruct what appears to be the "official" meaning that the poem seeks to promote.

4.4.3 *The Sunshine Cat*

This is an extremely powerful poem of twenty-two lines from the same collection, - *Summer in Calcutta*. It is about the decline and disintegration of a woman. The protagonist seems to have suffered from a nervous breakdown. She is abused, locked up in a room, and is finally reduced to being "a cold and/ Half-dead woman, now of no use at all to men."

The "facts" of the situation should by now be familiar to us. Here is an attractive, sensitive, creative, but rebellious and misunderstood woman, trapped in a love-less marriage. The husband uses her sexually; she resists, strays, seeks love from other men; the husband retaliates by locking her up each day; she suffers a breakdown as quoted above.

But notice that in this poem, the indictment of men and thus of patriarchy is much more clearly spelled out. The very first line says, "They did this to her, the men who knew her..." Who are these men? First, there is someone she loves who out of cowardice and selfishness betrays. Perhaps, this is her first love, someone whom she was hoping to marry but could not. Then comes the husband, who is described as someone "who neither loved her nor/ Used her but was a ruthless watcher." This suggests that in fact her faced neglect in the marriage, neglect and, of course, jealousy. Then there is the "band/ Of cynics she turned to"--for what? "To forget,/ To forget, oh, to forget..." But to forget what? This is not clear, but a sorrow deeper than what is visible or obvious is implied. It is also clear that the solace she seeks in these men is sexual, "burrowing her/ Face into their smells and their young lusts...." What we see, then, is a pattern of compulsive behavior. Clearly pathological, it is suggestive of great addictions, as for gambling or alcohol. Each of these men is unable to love her, but can at best offer kindness. In the process, she slides down peg after peg of sanity. There is a powerful image of the speaker weeping, insomniac and utterly helpless. The poem ends with the poet's confinement, with only a sliver of sunshine line, a yellow cat, to keep her company. Again, the longing for sympathetic contact is stressed in the image of the sunshine being like a cat. But, by sundown, even this "cat" disappears, leaving her cold, and half-dead. This poem has no happy ending, only a grim statement of the speaker's uselessness to all men. The last line, once again, underscores her need to be loved, wanted, cherished, but her despair at not having this need fulfilled.

4.5 · LET US SUM UP

We have seen how Nissim Ezekiel is probably the most influencial of the group of poets, editors, anthologists and teachers who form a literary avant garde of

modernism in India in the 1950s and 1960s. He is modernist in his use of language, whole new range of new themes including problems of alienation and identity, sexuality and male-female relationship. Ezekiel's poetry also displays the introspective, ironic, humourous self-explorative strains. Nissim also singles out for using Indian English for poetic effect.

As I suggested earlier, Das's poems work at least at two levels. On the one hand, they depict a personal, a very individual tragedy. This tragedy may have variations, but it is made up of the following ingredients: a bad marriage; a series of sexual flings; a collapse of personality; a sense of worthlessness at the end. But in addition to this personal tragedy, the poems also comment on larger topics, on the institution of marriage; on marital rape, marital neglect, marital jealousy; on extra-marital sexual forays and their unseemly consequences; on experiences and knowledge hard-won, but fragile. If we keep in mind the feminist slogan, "The personal is the political," then Das's poems are not about the private life of an unbalanced woman, but about all those forces of tradition, culture, and society which make her so. These poems are an attack on a whole way of life characterized by patriarchical norms which oppress and restrict women, reducing them to neurotic and pathetic creatures. The poems are also, ultimately, about struggle and survival.

I began this section by noticing how Das consciously attempts to distance herself from politics. By doing so what she is really signaling is the inauguration of a different kind of politics, not a retreat into apolitical passivity. Das's politics is not about the pursuit of power at the level of the state, but it is about personal empowerment and autonomy, it is about the politics of the integrity of the female self in male-dominated and sexually predatory world. It is, ultimately, the politics of the survival not of the fittest, but even of those who are unable to fit in, those who are unfits and misfits in our society.

4.6 GLOSSARY

Pioneer:	a person who is one of the first to explore a new region or Subject
Introspective:	examine one's own thoughts and feelings
Quarry:	intended prey or victim; thing sought or pursued
Transcendence:	go beyond the range of experience , belief etc. surpass
Drudgery:	to do laborious or menial work
Sear:	scorch or burn
Qualm:	feeling of doubt, especially about whether one is doing or has done right
Cadence:	rhythm in sound, the rise and fall of the voice in speaking
Hierarchy:	organisation with grades of authority from lowest to highest
Stranglehold:	deadly grip

Warrants:	justification, authority
Aftermath:	result, consequence
Schizophrenia:	type of mental disorder marked by lack of association between the intellectual processes and actions
Nymphomania:	abnormal and uncontrollable desire by a woman for sexual Intercourse
Ploy:	undertaking
Protagonist:	chief person in a story or factual event
Cynic:	person who sees little or no good in anything and has no belief in human progress, and who shows this by being sarcastic
Empowerment:	to give power or authority
Autonomy:	the right of self-government

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. Did Ezekiel's religious background and upbringing influence his development as a poet? What is his contribution to Indian English Poetry?
2. How does modernism reflect in Indian Writing in English? Evaluate Nissim Ezekiel's role in the modernist period of Indian English Poetry.
3. Critically analyse the poem 'Enterprise'. What are the religious implications in the poem?
4. How significant is the title 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher', to the content of the poem? What is Ezekiel trying to convey to his readers?
5. Analyse the poem 'Background Casually' with reference to the religious strifes in India.
6. Does the poem 'Background Casually' relate to the 'identity' problem faced by the poet? Substantiate with examples.
7. Give a brief life sketch of Kamala Das
8. Do you think Kamla Das' works are autobiographical? Give examples to substantiate your answer.
9. In your view what kind of a poet is Kamala Das?
10. Do you think that the form in her poems reflects the instability of the poetic persona?
11. What did you understand by the poem, 'An Introduction'? What is the poet trying to convey?

12. Critically analyse the poem 'My Grandmother's House'.

13. Give your own interpretation and critical analysis of 'The Sunshine Cat' with reference to the issue of women, patriarchy, and empowerment.

14 Annotate the following:

i. But when the differences arose
On how to cross a desert patch,
We lost a friend whose stylish prose
Was quite the best of all our batch.
A shadow falls on us - and grows.

ii. When, finally we reached the place,
We hardly knew why we were there.
The trip had darkened every face,
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
Home is where we have to earn our grace.

iii. Who never spoke before his spirit moved.
The slow movement seems, somehow, to say much more.
To watch the rarer birds, you have to go
Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow
In silence near the source, or by a shore

iv. A poet-rascal-clown was born,
The frightened child who would not eat
Or, sleep, a boy of meagre bone.
He never learnt to fly a kite,
His borrowed top refused to spin.

v. In everything, a bitter thought.
So, in an English cargo-ship
Taking French guns and mortar shells
To Indo-China, scrubbed the decks,
And learned to laugh again at home.

vi. The song of my experience sung,
I knew that all was yet to sing.
My ancestors, among the castes,
Were aliens crushing the seed for bread
(The hooded bullock made his rounds).

vii. The Indian landscape sears my eyes.
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners.
They say that I am singular,
Their letters overstate the case.

viii. One among them fought and taught,
A Major bearing British arms.
He told my father sad stories
Of the Boer War. I dreamed that
Fierce men had bound my feet and hands.

ix. I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to say where I am,
As others chose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am.

15. Annotate the following:

i ----I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't wrote in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like?

ii. You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to the crows or roaring to the lions,

iii. -----Fit in. oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace draped windows.
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose a name, a role.

iv. And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

v. -----you cannot believe, darling
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved...I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?

vi. Of cynics she turned to, clinging to their chests where
New hair sprouted like great-winged moths, burrowing her
Face into their smells and their young lusts to forget,
To forget, oh, to forget...and, they said, each of
Them, I do not love, I cannot love it is not
In my nature to love, but I can be kind to you...

vii. Winter came and one day while locking her in, he
Noticed that the cat of sunshine was only a
Line, a hair-thin line, and in the evening when
He returned to take her out, she was a cold and
Half-dead woman, now of no use at all to men.

4.8 SUGGESTED READING

Das, Kamala. *Summer in Calcutta*. Delhi: Rajinder Paul, 1965.
-----. *The Playhouse and Other Poems*. Delhi: Orient Longman, 1973.
-----. *Collected Poems*. Trivandrum: Modern Book Centre, 1984.

Dwivedi, S.C; ed. *Perspectives on Nissim Ezekiel*. Delhi: Kitab Mahal, 1989.
Ezekiel, Nissim. *Collected Poems*. Delhi: O.U.P, 1988.

Karnani, Chetan. *Nissim Ezekiel.* Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974.

Kohli, Devindra. *Virgin Whiteness: Kamala Das's Poetry.* Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1968.

Lall, Emmanuel Narendra. *The Poetry of Encounter: Three Indo-Anglian Poets (Dom Moraes, A.K. Ramanujan, and Nissim Ezekiel).* Delhi: Sterling, 1983..

Prasad, Madhusudan,ed. *Living Indian English Poets.* Delhi: Sterling, 1989.

Rahman, Anisur. *Expressive form in the Poetry of Kamala Das.* Delhi: Abhinav 1981.

-----. *Form and Value in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel.* Delhi: Abhinav, 1981.

Varma, Monica. *Facing Four(on Kamala Das, Suniti Namjoshi, and Gauri Deshpande).* Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1973.

UNIT 5 A.K.RAMUNUJAN, ARUN KOLATKAR, AND JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall study selections from three poets, A.K.Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, and Jayanta Mahapatra. There is no special reason to group them together, except that all three happen to be bilingual poets, that is, they write original poetry in English and in another Indian language. Of course, the phenomenon of bilingual creativity embraces, in one way or another, all Indian English writers. We have already seen how, in a sense, all Indian English writing is a kind of translation, because Indian experiences are conveyed through the medium of English. Many Indian English poets, therefore, consciously work in some Indian language or the other, either writing directly in it or translating from/into it. These activities no doubt enrich their English verse, bringing to it a dimension that monolingual English writing lacks.

Each of these writers, however, is different in the way in which he handles his native language. Ramanujan, for instance, is an Iyengar, a Tamil Brahmin, whose family were settled in Karnataka. While he translates from both Tamil and Kannada, he writes originally only in Kannada, not in Tamil. His Kannada writing, mostly fiction, is not regarded very highly, though. Kolatkar, on the other hand, is equally regarded in both Marathi, his native tongue, and in English. His Marathi verse, thought not very extensive, is considered unique in both style and content. He has brought a new dimension to Marathi poetry with his modern rewriting of Bhakti metres and themes. Mahapatra, who taught Physics for several years at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, began writing when he was nearly forty. He wrote in English, mostly poetry, going on to publish in many of the leading journals in U.K. and U.S.A. He began writing in Oriya quite late, when he was almost sixty years old. Earlier, he used to translate from Oriya into English, but now, I am told, his original Oriya poetry is also highly regarded.

So you can see how literary bi-lingualism and bi-creativity, so to speak, is a rather complex activity. At the root of it, though, is a sensibility which is at home in more than one cultural milieu. When you read these poems, I would like you to bear in mind this dual influence and heritage.

5.1 A. K. RAMANUJAN: A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH AND AN OVERVIEW OF HIS POETRY

A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1995)

Attippat Krishnaswami Ramanujan was born in 1929 in Mysore, where he went to school and college. Later, he studied linguistics at Deccan College, Pune, and went on to do a PhD in linguistics at Indiana University on a Fulbright fellowship. Soon after he finished, he got a job at the University of Chicago, where he remained till his death in 1993. When he died he was the William E. Colvin Professor of South Asian Languages, Linguistics and Civilizations, and a member of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Ramanujan wrote several books, including collections of verse in English and Kannada, but he is best known as a translator. *The Interior Landscape* (1967), *Speaking of Siva* (1972), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981) and *Poems of Love and War* (1985) are some of his better known translated works. He also brought U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* international recognition by translating it into English in 1976. Towards the end of his life, Ramanujan turned his attention to another rich area of Indian life and culture, folklore. One of his last publications was *Folktales from India* (1994), a selection of oral narratives from twenty-two Indian languages.

What I find most persistent in Ramanujan's poetry is the element of hardened skepticism. I say "hardened" instead of healthy because, in the end, it is this lack of commitment which makes his poetry unsatisfactory to me. Ramanujan's use of tradition, too, is similarly ironic. In his much-acclaimed translations of Tamil and Kannada medieval mystical poetry, he turns the ecstatic utterances of the bhakti poets into clipped and understated modern poetry. The result is readable, but is it true to the spirit of the original? Ramanujan was against Sanskrit because he found it too ideologically loaded and therefore oppressive. From the grand narratives of great traditions, he turned to the more unaffected, homely, and unassuming wisdom of the folk, the vernacular, the local. There is, however, a certain anxiety that informs his poetry. Could this anxiety stem from his own emptiness within? Behind the mask, perhaps, there's a blank, not necessarily a recognizable face. His poetry abounds in the quotidian, the trivial even. But it does convey, with a certain dry precision, the consequences and conundrums of a profound displacement. "Ramanujan's poetry has been celebrated for its irony and ambiguity. He uses his experience as an expatriate to

interrogate the values of both the motherland, India, and the adopted country, USA. In the process, he gives us sensitive renderings of childhood experiences and remembered events. These are presented without sentimentality and nostalgia. While these qualities in Ramanujan are praiseworth, I shall present a contrary interpretation. You are, of course, free to disagree with it and make your own, independent reading of this important poet."

5.1.1 *Looking for a Cousin on a Swing*

This poem is from Striders (1966), Ramanujan's first, and I believe, best collection of poems. Throughout this collection, questions of memory and identity predominate. The poet remembers events from his past in India, while located abroad. He tries to reconstruct these events, to make sense of them, to rearrange them in such a manner as to help consolidate his present identity. But, in the process, his attitude to his past is revealed to be neither sentimental nor nostalgic, but coolly aloof and ironic. Somehow, as is usually the case in such reconstructions, the present self gains at the expense of the past, its own insecurities shored up by deflating or dissecting the memory that triggered off the reflection.

The poem, twenty-three lines long, is an irregular metre. There are two characters in this poem, a boy and his female cousin. And there is the narrator, who is most probably the boy himself. Note that this narrator does not say "I" when he refers to the boy, but "he." This is a clear sign of the kind of distancing and detachment that I spoke of earlier.

As in many of these memory poems, there is a "then" and "now," a "before" and "after" in this poem as well. A scene is described when the boy is six or seven and his cousin four or five. They are on a village swing, sitting against or facing each other, as children sometimes do when they double up on a small swing. There is an adult imposition of sexuality on this pre-pubescent scene. The children feel each other, but this is probably "innocent" as the poet says. The impact of the poem comes from what's happened to the cousin, the little girl who was "innocent" about feeling her cousin or climbing up a tree. The poet says that the girl, now a grown woman, is still looking for that experience, but its innocence is all gone. There is an air of disapproval in the poet's tone as he describes her forays in "cities with fifteen suburbs" and the clearly ironic repetition of "innocent" in line seventeen.

The poem actually deviates in the end, with more attention paid to the tree than to the cousin. The tree, a fig tree, becomes a magnified symbol of fertility, ready to "burst/ under every leaf/ into a brood of scarlet figs." The last line, "if someone suddenly sneezed" is set off and therefore attracts too much attention to itself. Do you think it succeeds? I am not sure. You are left on an inconclusive note, which is rather typical of Ramanujan. You wonder, at the end, what the point of the poem was. Perhaps, the point is not to make a big point at all.

5.1.2 *Self-Portrait*

This brief poem from *The Striders* conveys a pervasive theme not only in Ramanujan's poetry but in modernist poetry in general. The self-portrait is a popular device of modern painters in which the painter paints himself. It is the equivalent in painting of a literary autobiography. Self-portraits, as of Van Gogh, reveal a lot about the painter. Here Ramanujan uses this idea in his poetry to question the notion of self, not just to describe a self.

In Ramanujan's view, there is strangeness to oneself which is brought home when one suddenly encounters one's reflection, as in the glass windows of a shop. The poet says that he resembles anyone but himself. I don't think this lines means that he really resembles other people but that he is a stranger to himself. Self-estrangement is a recurrent theme in modern literature. It occurs because of a variety of factors, but

all these involve some sort of displacement or dislocation. Modern life is characterised by displacement and dislocation. In Ramanujan's case, there is a move across countries, cultures, and languages, to say the least. And yet the poem's last line suggests, rather slyly, that this self-estrangement is not total. Instead, he marks the signature of his father in the corner of the portrait. The "author," thus, is the father; the portrait is undated. But this attribution of authorship to the father is more of a trick, because not only is the "real" author of the poem Ramanujan himself, but so is the putative author within the poem, the poet who perceives himself.

In the end, then, the poem ends up meaning something slightly different from what it states in the beginning. For instance, even to claim that one does not resemble oneself, one would have to know what one looks like; that is, self-recognition of another sort is implied even in the act of self-denial. Then, after having made his own portrait, as of someone not resembling himself, the poet attributes it to his father, thus suggesting not that he does not resemble himself so much as he is not really what his father scripted. The portrait of himself drawn by his father is that of a stranger; in other words, the "real" Ramanujan is different from what his father intended or even what Ramanujan's image in the glass suggests. The poem, to put it differently, is one that through its gesture of self-denial suggests a self-avowal of a different kind. What this self is, in the modernist fashion, never stated. Instead, through denials and evasions an escape from the "official" self is effected.

5.1.3 *A River*

This is a slightly longer and more complicated poem from the same collection. Here we see some of Ramanujan's erudition as a translator of Tamil verse. The poem is ostensibly about a river, in the ancient city of Madurai, in the heart of Tamil Nadu. Madurai is described as a "city of temples and poets"; but these are poets who sing of "cities and temples." There is thus a sort of circularity to these poets and their themes, a tautology even. In a city of temples and poets, the poets sing of cities and temples. There is, in other words, a self-absorption, a stagnation in their writing.

Now, the poem moves to the description of the river, which is the ostensible subject of the poem. The river "dries to a trickle/ in the sand," every summer. Obviously, it is not a very grand or impressive river, but what it exposes or leaves behind when it dries up is described in great detail, in very vivid language. The river's "sand ribs" are bared, its water gates are clogged with "straw and women's hair," and the wet stones thus exposed glisten "like sleepy crocodiles," while the dry ones look like "shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun." As you can see, these images, which are fresh, original, and memorable, constitute a different sort of idiom than what the poets of Madurai are writing about.

As if to confirm this suspicion, the poet says in the very next line, which is actually a stanza set off from the earlier one, "The poets sang only of the floods." The poet goes on to add that he visited the city for a day when they actually had the floods. Again, we are given some vivid images of the rising river, of the pregnant woman being carried away, and of the almost comical pair of cows called Gopi and Brinda. Now that the floods have actually come, what do the poets of Madura write about? "The new poets still quoted/ the old poets" he says. These poets ignored what all the people were talking about, but Ramanujan, like in the earlier poem, embellishes what happened during the floods by making the pregnant woman expect twins.

From these experiences, "he," that is the present poet, constructs his own poem. Again, there is a comic enhancement of the events, the drowned twin foetuses are "identical twins/ with no moles on their bodies, with different-coloured diapers." I'm not sure these lines work. Where do diapers come into the picture for the unborn twins of a drowned pregnant woman; moreover, one might ask, where do diapers come into the picture in Madurai? The setting does not seem to suggest the use of these items of Western hygiene, in different colours, to mark the difference in sex of

the babies. Is the poet being ironic at his own expense? That is, how poets make things up, bluff, and say ridiculous things? I'm not sure, but there is some irony and comedy here at the expense not only of the poets of Madurai, but, at least to my mind, of the present poet himself.

One thing, however, seems to be clear. The poem is less about a river than about poetry itself. The river, which figures in the works of the poets of Madurai, is, to all appearances, not much to write about. It becomes a trickle during the summer, and floods rarely during the year. Instead of writing about the "reality" of the river, about its changing shape and size, of what is exposed when it dries up and what it carries away during the floods, the poets stick to literary conventions rather blindly. The new poets quote the old ones and still write only about the river in flood. But even when they do so, they don't talk about the pregnant woman who drowning (remember, her hair is discovered clogging the water-gates when the river dries up) or the cows carried away by the river.

This job of actually describing the river is left to the main character in the poem, the outsider, who like Ramanujan, is the dislocated poet, non-resident alien. But what does this poet achieve except a comic embellishment, which at times is suggestive of an insensitivity? Isn't there just this hint of tragedy, not just misfortune, about what happens to the pregnant woman? Perhaps, she commits suicide because she is pregnant. Men don't seem to drown in this river. If the woman is or could be a suicide who wants to hide her "shame" by drowning herself, it's not very nice, is it, to joke about her unborn twins? I don't wish to make too fine a point of it, but once again, here is comedy and humour that is, arguably, misdirected. The NRI poet does not emerge in very good light in his treatment of Indian material.

5.1.4 *Love Poem for a Wife--I*

This is the first of two poems of the same title. It's taken from *Relations* (1971), Ramanujan's second collection. This eighty-four line poem is, in my opinion, one of the poet's strongest. It is an exploration of a marital relationship which can be described as uneasy, if not difficult.

The first stanza begins with a clear thesis statement: "Really what keeps us apart/ at the end of the years is unshared/ childhood." The rest of the poem, it would seem, goes on to illustrate this statement, to work it out with examples and instances. At the end, once again, the poet reverts to this theme by saying that the only way out, perhaps, was the Egyptian one, wherein brothers and sisters married one another.

On the face of it, though, this thesis is not tenable. How can a shared childhood be necessary for a couple to have a successful marriage? If this were the requirement, then no marriage could possibly be happy, even that of the Egyptian Pharoahs. After all, even brothers and sisters have different experiences, often growing up not together, but worlds apart.

Something like this is illustrated in the next couple of stanzas in which the poet shows how the wife is enthusiastic about the husband's childhood and vice-versa, though each has got it second-hand. Notice, as a contrast, how the poet uses the first person, "I" in this poem, not his usual "he" when he speaks of the couple. The title confirms the autobiographical element by affirming that the poem is for the poet's wife. In the process of debating their childhood, the poem exposes a rich lode of images quarried from the pasts of both the poet and his wife. Note the images carefully. See if there is a hidden story in them.

Here, let us concentrate on the poem's argument. As the descriptions of the past start to get more and more detailed, we notice a certain unpleasantness, a drifting apart even. Clearly, the past is never easy to conjure up; we are likely to disagree with other people's reconstructions of it. It is impossible, it would seem, to discover

exactly what happened, let alone agree on it. Inevitably, the wife reduces the husband's entire career to some remark his father made in his diary. "Smilesian" refers to Samuel Smiles, a writer much admired by a certain class of Indian gentleman a couple of generations ago. Similarly, the speaker makes a dig at his wife's father, how he paced up and down the balcony, cigarette in hand, waiting for his daughter's return. The latter, late again, had gone out with a Muslim friend who "only hinted at touches." Again, we find a rather ironic use of "innocent" here.

In the next stanza, the poet brings in his wife's brother, James; how, this time, it is the brother and sister who quarrel over their childhood. But, leaving out the nature or the content of this quarrel, what does it do for the central argument of the poem that the lack of shared childhood keep husband and wife apart? There are one or two lines in this stanza which strengthen this argument. For example, how the poet and his sister-in-law (James's wife) are completely left out of this "dog fight" between brother and sister because neither of them has any idea of where the bathroom was in the backyard. But most of this last half of the poem seems actually to go against the main argument. What is illustrated is not so much how husband and wife grow apart because they don't have a shared childhood but how even a shared childhood isn't conducive to a good relationship. If anything, these stanzas suggest the opposite of the central argument: brother and sisters will make pretty bad spouses. If that is the case, the initial claim of the poem is belied and its conclusion is unconvincing too.

I may have been a bit harsh on this poem, expecting from it a logical consistency that you may think poems need not have. But good poems, in whatever tradition, have to be logically consistent, especially poems which profess to advance an argument. Whether it is Donne, Marvel, or Browning, poets often work out elaborate arguments in their poems. Some of these are of course facetious, pseudo and not real arguments. Only when you read your poems carefully can you take yourself seriously as a critic. In the present case, you should not only examine the poem carefully, but also the case I have made against it for failing to prove its central proposition.

Perhaps, you could find a way of rereading the poem so as to disprove the argument that I have offered against it.

5.2 JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH AND AN OVERVIEW OF HIS POETRY

Jayanta Mahapatra (1928-)

Jayanta Mahapatra and his poetry are closely identified with one place, Cuttack, an ancient city in Orissa, near which the new capital of the state, Bhubaneshwar, has been built. Mahapatra was born there, was educated there, taught there, and has lived there for all his life. There were brief stints out of Cuttack, as at Science College, Patna, where he got his MSc. And, later, frequent trips out of Orissa, especially in the last twenty years, when he has been invited to various seminars and conferences both in India and abroad, as one of our leading Indian English poets. But Cuttack continues to be the haunting presence behind most of his work.

Mahapatra comes from a native Christian family, a fact which is seldom mentioned by his critics, but appears in his poetry. His grandfather was what may be called a "rice Christian"; in a time of famine and starvation, he sought refuge with a Christian mission and, in the process, also adopted a new faith for himself and his family. The Christian community in Cuttack is small, but quite distinct. It is far more Westernized and therefore less hidebound by tradition. Earlier, social intercourse with the dominant community was also restricted. All this would give someone born into this community a sense of isolation; he or she would feel like a natural outsider to the dominant cultural mores of the Hindus. I have mentioned these biographical details because they help explain Mahapatra's attitude to the landscape and the people he loves so dearly.

In poem after poem what we notice is a veiled criticism of the callousness and ruthlessness of tradition, or the indifference of his society to suffering, of the insulated and fossilised Hindu culture to which he bears an uneasy relationship. Images of inertia, helplessness, torpor, and decadence frequent his poetry. The universe that he inhabits is static, languid, almost unchanging, but it is also corrupt, violent, and predatory. The poet himself is impotent to change this world, but can only meditate on it with the deepest karuna or compassion. Ultimately, Mahapatra's is a brooding, interrogative poetry. Profound questions are raised without the answers being necessarily supplied.

Mahapatra's poetry shares the skepticism and questioning of tradition that we see in the modernists, but he departs company with them in his craftsmanship and also in his deeply emotive, not cerebral, tone. There are profound depths in his poetry, sometimes complicated by ambiguous or uncertain syntax. In other words, when you analyse a Mahapatra poem you need to go beyond the surface texture. Invariably, the mood that the poem evokes should be taken into account.

Mahapatra came to poetry somewhat late in his life. He was already thirty-eight when he published his first collection, *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (1971). That same year, another collection, *Swayamvara and Other Poems* appeared. Both these collections show promise rather than real achievement. After a gap of five years, Mahapatra published two collections of much better poems, *A Father's Hours* (1976) and the much-acclaimed *A Rain of Rites* (1976). After several collections have followed including *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* (1980), *Life Signs* (1981), *Selected Poems* (1987), *Burden of Waves and Fruit* (1988), *Temple* (1989), *A Whiteness of Bone* (1992). *Relationship* (1980), a long poem in many sections, won the Sahitya Akademi award for 1981. Mahapatra has also published a collection of short stories in English and collection of original poetry in Oriya. From 1979 to 1985 he edited a journal of creative writing called *Chandrabhaga*. He was also the founding editor of *Kavya Bharati*.

5.2.1 *Dawn at Puri*

This poem from *A Rain of Rites* is, in many ways, typical of Mahapatra. It is set in Orissa, in the holy city of Puri. In Puri, there is a stretch of beach called Swargadwara, or gateway to heaven, where the dead are cremated. Many pious Hindus consider it auspicious to die in Puri. Of course, Puri is famous not only as one of the four dhams, or sacred cities, but also for the math or monastry established

there by the Sankaracharya. Puri is presided over by Lord Jagannath, a form of Vishnu.

The poem is eighteen lines long, made up of six stanzas of three lines each. Most of the sentences are purely descriptive, but notice how the mood builds up gradually. The first line simply says "Endless crow noises." As you will notice, it is not even a sentence, just a phrase. It's the second sentence, however, which bites: "A skull on the holy sands/ tilts its empty country towards hunger." The skull in question could be that of an unburnt corpse, but to the poet's eye it suggests the hunger of an entire country.

The images that follow, though apparently neutral, are quite critical and negative. There are widows in white, past their primes, waiting to enter the great temple. Notice how their eyes are "caught in a net." They are trapped by faith, not a very happy position to be in. The shells on the sand are "ruined, leprous," again suggesting decay and disease. A whole tradition and way or life lies like "a mass of crouched faces without names." Anonymity, loss of identity, facelessness, death--such are the ideas that the poem invokes.

The next images are that of a blazing funeral pyre, which is "sullen" and "solitary." It's the speaker's dead mother being consigned to flames because it was "her last wish to be cremated here." The poem ends on a uncertain note, like the corpse of his dead mother, "twisting uncertainly like light/ on the shifting sands."

You will notice how the poem evades a direct stand on what it describes. This is typical of Mahapatra. His own position is never stated clearly, but emerges from the manner in which he describes the events and incidents in his poems. Here it is clear that there is a strong sense of disapproval which is the undercurrent of the poem. The social critique is unmistakable when we go back to the title, "Dawn at Puri." The title does not say "A Dawn at Puri," that is, it does not refer to one particular dawn, which might have been particularly unpleasant. After all, one's mother is not cremated every day. But rather than make this dawn special, the poet does the opposite, suggesting that all dawns at Puri are more or less like this, with dead mothers being burnt on the sands, widows in white being herded into the old temple, and empty skulls, tilting their empty eyes towards the sky, signifying the hunger of a whole continent. The poem is informed by a deep compassion for those who suffer.

It is this compassion which gives the images their bite, their sense of outrage and smouldering anger. But there is little sympathy for the traditions and practices of a society on whose fringes the poet stands. The poet has no kind words to say about those who believe in the traditions and practices that he criticises.

5.2.2 *Indian Summer Poem*

Once again, we see a very general title for what appears to be a specific scene and experience. This poem is, again, about death and birth, about the end and the beginning of life. But the images here are more elliptical, disjointed. There is a description of a scene: what in your opinion is actually happening in the poem? It seems as if the poem describes a funeral. The last line makes this clear by referring to "the deep roar of funeral pyres." But who is dead? This is unclear. We only know that the priests are chanting; the waters opening their mouths wide to receive the dead; the crocodiles moving farther down; and so on. Note the image, "the mouth of India opens." India is seen as a sort of giant monster opening its mouth to swallow up the dead. It is not a very flattering image because the poet seems to identify the whole country with death. Another brief stanza emphasizes the burning sun above and the burning pyres below. No wonder a certain vision of India emerges in Mahapatra's poems which is rather grim and graphic. There is a sense of futility even in death because there is the poet's good wife sleeping in bed unaffected by the burning of the funeral pyres. The languid wife's mid-afternoon siesta in the poet's

bed is suggestive of sexual possessiveness. She dreams, that is she is unaware of the sense of death that haunts the poet. But, to speak up for the wife, should she be aware of death at all? Whose death? That we don't know. So it is perfectly natural that most of us are unaware of all the cremations or burials that take place in our own cities because the dead are those whom we don't know. But in Mahapatra's poem, the speaker, who is aware of death, is estranged from his sleeping wife because she has recourse to her dreams while he must face the brunt of a horrible reality.

5.2.3 *Hunger*

This rather well-known poem is also from *A Rain of Rites*. Mahapatra selects it quite often when he gives a reading and says that the "poem is based on a true incident" (see Mehrtotra, *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* 22). The poem is in five paragraphs of five lines each except the last one which has an extra line. It tells a rather simple story. It has three characters: there is the speaker, an old fisher, and his young daughter. The fisherman is willing to let the speaker have sex with his daughter for a few rupees.

The casualness of this transaction underscores, for the the speaker, its enormity. There is a sense that a terrible moral crime is about to erupt with such little fuss on the sprawling sands of this beach. The speaker, despite his own disgust, succumbs to the temptation and has sex with the fifteen year old daughter of the fisherman. But what he experiences at the end is a sort of horror: "Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber." The act is utterly degraded, losing all its sense of joy, comfort, or pleasure. Instead, it evokes a sense of disgust and self-loathing in the speaker. The fisherman's shack opens "like a wound." The girls legs are "wormy." And as he enters he feels a hunger there, of "fish slithering, turning inside."

The poem contrasts two types of hunger and how they feed on each other. The speaker's hunger is that of the flesh, that of "a mind thumping in the flesh's sling." As we know, this is one of the hardest hungers to control. No matter how respectable and decent we might try to be, it gnaws us to our very bone. Contrary to this is the other hunger, the hunger not for sex, but for food, perhaps the only hunger more primeval. The fisherman and his daughter are poor. To feed their stomachs, they resort to feeding the other hunger, the sexual hunger, of the speaker. But, in the end, is that hunger really appeased? It does not seem like it at all. Instead, a sense of catastrophe haunts the speaker; the very sky, it seems, falls on him.

This poem is more direct, less ambiguous, than the earlier one. Here the moral outrage, the social criticism is much more direct, hard-hitting. The poet, from behind his persona, clearly indicts the system which allows such careless prostitution to happen. Here, destitution is the cause of the prostitution. And it is this extreme poverty and deprivation that the poet focuses on and exposes.

5.2.4 *Evening Landscape by the River*

This poem from *Life Signs* (1993), once again, takes us back to a familiar landscape. Instead of the sands of Puri at dawn, here we wander on the banks of the river in Cuttack at dusk. It is a short, fourteen line poem, in three stanzas. What is its theme? There are images of broken shacks of fishermen, of frail and still temples, of an infant crawling in a hut, of light laughter and abundant darkness. The poem ends with "an uncertain light," reminiscent of the same phrase in the last lines of "Dawn at Puri." Here, the light is like "familiar but useless ornament," a wonderfully telling image.

This is a good example of a mood poem. At the beginning the poet states that he is sad--he says so not directly, but indirectly, in a rather impersonal statement: "There is a kind of sadness which closes the eyes." Why is the poet sad? This is not clear, but some clues are provided. Is it because he can no longer recollect the faces of the dead? That is he can no longer remember those he has lost? Or is the sadness even

more profound, a sort of emptiness in which everything around one is familiar but useless, unable to take away from the overflowing dukkha of existence itself? All the images seem to suggest that the poet's sorrow is like the clinging and abundant darkness in which all the objects and events of daily life get detached and depersonalized, losing the individuality and capacity to be meaningful.

There is a tremendous loneliness that seeps through this poem. The speaker is thrown back upon himself and nothing that he observes or experiences seems to be able to take him away or out of himself. The nature of the experiencing self itself, the poem suggests, is sorrow. The evening by the river, then, becomes a metaphor for the suffering of the human condition itself.

This is a very well-constructed poem which, in a few lines, touches upon a subject of great importance. The poet, of course, offers no palliatives, no answers, no antidotes to the sadness that he invokes. Perhaps, it is best to feel it as deeply as he does and thus to purge ourselves of it.

5.3 ARUN KOLATKAR: A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH AND AN OVERVIEW OF HIS POETRY

Born in 1932 in Kolhapur, Arun Balkrishna Kolatkar was educated at Rajaram High School. Later he studied art at the J.J. School of Art, Mumbai, and at Kolhapur and Pune, before getting his diploma in painting from the J. J. School. Kolatkar has lived in Mumbai most of his life, earning his living in advertising. He is, as I mentioned earlier, a bilingual poet, writing both in Marathi and in English. Since 1955 he has been appearing in various journals and anthologies, though he has published only one book in English, *Jejuri* (1976), and one in Marathi, *Arun Kolatkarchya Kavita* (1976).

Jejuri, from which all the three poems that you're studying have been taken, is a rather special collection of poems. It is the only book of poems to have won the Commonwealth Prize. It has thirty-one poems, but can be read as one long exploration on a common theme. The book describes a journey to Jejuri, a temple town near Pune. Jejuri is an ancient centre of pilgrimage in Maharashtra. The presiding deity, Khandoba, predates more popular folk deities like Vittala. Khandoba is worshipped by the Dhangar or the shepherd community in Maharashtra.

Jejuri has provoked a considerable amount of debate because of its attitude to the religious experience. What happens in this book is a modern pilgrimage which overturns or undercuts several traditional devotional practices. The speaker seems to be rather irreverent. Some readers have found Kolatkar insulting or supercilious; others have asked him whether he himself believes in God or not. But from a more literary-textual point of view both issues are less relevant; what we need to do as readers, first of all, is to discover what the poet is trying to do. Mehrotra in his excellent headnote to Kolatkar in *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* gives us a clue when he says, "The presiding deity of Jejuri is not Khandoba, but the human eye" (54). Thus, the poems, in Mehrotra's words, "name and observe, isolate and magnify, and by so doing radically transform ... everything they see" (ibid).

This exactness of observation is almost an article of faith for the modernist poet. They wish to look at, and thus, make things anew, not being content with images of the past, images filtered through the coloured glasses of other people's words and deeds. Discarding the burden of tradition does not always make for irreverence or bad faith but may actually prepare the ground for a new vision and creation. *Jejuri*, then, is about noticing and observing what is before us, not giving it a name of "sacred" or "holy" just because it is considered so. In such skepticism is a certain

kind of sacredness because adherence to truth produces a sanctity which the blind imitation of tradition cannot.

5.3.1 *The Bus*

Eight three line stanzas followed by a single line of conclusion make up this poem. It occurs at the beginning of the collection and rightly so because it describes a journey to Jejuri. It is as if the poet is approaching a new planet, so conscious and careful he is about everything he observes. The aimed at objectivity is illustrated in the pervasive use of "you" to signify what the poet observes. The whole poem abounds in visual metaphors. In the beginning, the tarpaulin flaps of the bus, its eyes so to speak, are buttoned down. Very little is visible. In the cold wind, the narrator looks for signs of dawn, expressing yet again a yearning to see things clearly. The first attempt is abortive: all that can be seen of the countryside is the speaker's own divided face in an old man's glasses. This seeing of oneself instead of the object is very significant. After all, this is the curse that is involved in any act of perception. One's own intentionality damns one no matter how hard one strives for a flawless objectivity. The subjective, inevitably, intrudes, clouding one's judgement. In the end, you can only see what you are; that is what you allow yourself to see or what you are allowed by your own limitations to see. One's own self is thus divided--it is both subject and object at the same time.

The next stanza takes us to the speaker's destination; significantly, it seems to be just above the caste-mark on his forehead. Again, we see the effects of optical illusions and reflections; in the glasses of the old man, the speaker observes the countryside. But beyond caste, beyond tradition is certainly where the poem leads us thematically. Then the sun rises, aims and shoots its beams into the bus, touches the driver's temple; the direction of the bus changes. Jejuri is near. The images of the sun suggest a splitting, a breaking into two. The speaker's own face appears to be on either side of the bus when he gets off.

The destination so far has been mapped on the old man's face, through the reflection of the countryside on his glasses. Now, when the bus actually arrives, the poet's own face is divided; the optical illusion is broken.

As you can see, this poem only prepares the ground for what is to follow. It merely describes an arrival. It must therefore be viewed in continuity with the other poems in the collection. What is important, though, is the attitude of the speaker, of the observer, to what is seen and observed. That establishes the tone of the rest of the collection.

5.3.2 *A Low Temple*

This sixteen-line poem exemplifies the so-called "irreverance" of the speaker quite well. The adjective low cannot be devoid of its negative connotations of inferiority and inadequacy, though it is primarily descriptive, that is, suggestive of lack of height. No doubt the temple is "low," but by whose standards? Many old houses were similarly "low," with such small doors that you had to bend down to enter. But by the standards of those for whom these houses were built, they must have been adequate. The speaker's response is typical of a modern person, used to the modern architecture of steel and concrete, not of someone used to living in a hut made in the same way for centuries. What I've been suggesting is that the gap is not just ideological but technological.

When a devout person enters a temple, he may bow before the deities, concentrating more on his relationship with the Divine than on the physical features of his surroundings. In Kolatkar's poem, however, just the opposite happens. The darkness inside the shrine prompts him to claim that the gods themselves are in the dark in this

low temple. Actually, the speaker is as much in the dark as the gods whom he cannot see clearly. It's not that the gods are in dark, but there is darkness inside the temple.

The next lines carry on this metaphor of literal enlightenment; only when the matches are lit do the gods "come to light." What happens next? Not devotion, again, but a cool apprehension of "amused bronze." What the speaker sees are not icons but forms of bronze. And stone--"smiling stone." The depersonalization is unmistakable. The gods, however, are "unsurprised," though the poet may be. The length of the matchstick, both in real time and visual time, creates the effect of cycles of the creation and destruction: "gesture after gesture revives and dies/ Stance after lost stance is found/ and lost again." But these gestures and stances are lost on the poet. He has to ask the priest who that was.

The exchange that follows is interesting. "The eight-armed goddess" does not impress the speaker: "a skeptic-match coughs." The speaker, with his sharp observation even in darkness illumined only with matches says, that she has eighteen, not eight arms. But this does not convince the priest. Tradition is stronger than empiricism; no wonder the speaker's skepticism does not abate. On deeper reflection, however, the problem is somewhat more complicated. I wonder what Indian words were used to describe the eight-armed or eighteen armed goddess. Perhaps, knowing this will help us verify if clash in perception is linguistic or epistemological.

We are denied the luxury of such reflections in the last two lines of the poem. The speaker, emerging from the low and dark temple, lights a cigarette and jokes about children playing on the back of a twenty-foot tortoise. What is this twenty-foot tortoise? Is it the poet's idea of a fitting retort to the error of perception on the priest's part inside the temple? Or is it a rock shaped like a tortoise? We don't know, but, once again, questions of perception are foregrounded.

On the whole, the poem shows an interaction between two kinds of sensibilities, one traditional and the other modern, inside the dark interiors of a low temple. Perhaps, the labels that I have used, "tradition" vs. "modernity" are neither precise nor productive. Try to reformulate this difference in your own words, if you like. Yet, this poem, indeed the whole book, is about this clash between two ways of seeing and, perhaps, two ways of being. In the end, you'll have to ask yourself what each offers before making your choice.

5.3.3 *Chaitanya*

This tiny poem contains an important message which is conveyed through one vivid image, that of Chaitainya spitting out the seeds of the grapes that he has eaten. Chaitainya was a great Vaishnavite figure of the 15th century. He hailed from Bengal, but traveled all over India spreading his cult of ecstatic devotion to Lord Krishna. Chaitanya, of course, also means awakened consciousness. His visit to Jejuri must have been commemorated by several temples.

The thrust of the poem, as I said, is on one image--the stones of Jejuri are as sweet as grapes. To prove this, Chaitanya pops a stone in his mouth instead of a grape. Now grapes have "stones" or seeds which we spit out instead of chewing. But in this case, instead of these seeds, Chaitanya spits out gods. The image seems to be blasphemous, but what it implies is the god-making ability of Chaitanya. He had the capacity to turn stones into gods. Eating and spitting out both suggest a supernatural, if irreverant, attitude to this otherwise miraculous transfiguration. In several Indian temple-towns, we have instances of shrines consecrated by some great saint, sage, or mythological hero. Sometimes, shrines are named after parts of the body of this legendry figure; at other times, places associated with that figure become sacred. Here the same process is not just described but satirised. Even the grape-stones that Chaitanya might have spat out would become apotheosized, such was the faith of our folk. Chaitanya sat here, ate here, slept here; this is his foot print; this is his hand

impression--and so on--all these legends would turn into temples or shrines. The poem, then, is about associational sacralization--how a place gets deified and sanctified through its association with a holy person. In this case, the skeptic in Kolatkar imagines that given the credulity and devotionalism of our people, even the place where Chaitanya spat might become a shrine.

There is, no doubt, something quite anti-devotional about this poem but perhaps it betrays a faith in a different kind of reality. Not the reality of legends and myths but of historical facts. A healthy secularism runs headlong into the sacred mythology of a temple town. From the images that spark off from this clash, a new kind of poem is born--terse, sharp-edged, and provocative.

5.4 LET US SUM UP

We have in our discussion on Ramanujan found the element of skepticism which runs most persistent in his poetry. We have also seen his use of tradition which is ironic and that a certain anxiety, a blankness marks his poetry. However, the consequences and conundrums of profound displacement may appeal differently to you. It is for you to judge his treatment of Indian material.

The other poet, Jayant Mahapatra, shares the skepticism of Ramanujan and the modernists, but he departs from them by being deeply emotive, not cerebral. Mahapatra's Christian belonging made him an outsider to the dominant Hindu culture and hence all the helplessness, inertia, torpor and the unchanging universe.

Arun Koltakar's *Jejury* provokes a debate in the context of religious experience of a modern pilgrim. The presiding deity being the "human eye", it transforms the phenomena it sees and interacts with. As a modernist, Koltakar does not discard the traditions but prepares for a new vision and creation and, therefore, makes us look at 'modernism' in a new perspective.

5.5 GLOSSARY

Vernacular: language of one's own country, native tongue.

Estrange: alienate person from another.

Ostensible: professed; used as blind.

Putative: reputed.

Torpor: suspended animation; apathy.

Languid: suffering from faintness or lassitude.

Ambiguous: of doubtful meaning; uncertain.

Smouldering: burning without flame or in suppressed way.

Apotheosis: deification; transformation.

Deify: make a god of.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Give a biographical sketch of A.K.Ramanujan. What/Who were his major literary influences?

2. Critically analyse the poem *Looking for a Cousin on a Swing*.

3. Give the critical appreciation of *Love poem for a Wife*, and write a short note on the love-hate relationship portrayed in the poem.

4. What is the poet trying to convey through *Self Portrait* and *A River*?

5 Give a detailed analysis of Jayanta Mahapatra and his contribution to Indian English Poetry.

6 What is the significance of the title *Dawn at Puri*? Give a critical analysis of the poem.

7 What is the poet trying to convey through the poem *Evening Landscape.*

8. Give the critical appreciation of *Indian Summer Poem* and *Hunger.*

9. What is Kolatkar's contribution to Modern Indian English Poetry?

10. What is the poet trying to convey through *Jejuri*?

11. Give a critical appreciation of *The Bus*.

12. How does Kolatkar portray the famous religious poet of Bengal, Chaitanya in his poem *Chaitanya*? Give a critical appreciation of the poem.

13. In what way, do you think, can Kolatkar's *Jejuri* be compared with T.S.Eliot's *Four Quartets*?

14. Annotate the following:

i. With every lunge of the swing
she felt him
in the lunging pits
of her feeling;
and afterwards
we climbed a tree, she said

ii. Now she looks for the swing
in cities with fifteen suburbs
and tries to be innocent
about it

iii. I resemble everyone
but myself, and sometimes see
in shop-windows,
despite the well-known laws
of optics,
the portrait of a stranger,
date unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father.

iv. a river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
baring the sand-ribs,
straw and women's hair
clogging the watergates

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

vi. Really what keeps us apart
at the end of years is unshared
childhood. You cannot, for instance,
meet my father. He is some years
dead. Neither can I meet yours:
he has lately lost his temper
and mellowed.

vii. ....and reduce the entire career
of my recent unique self
to the compulsion of some high
sentence in His Smilesian diary.

viii. .....Probably
only the Egyptians had it right:
their kings had sisters for queens
to continue the incests
of childhood into marriage.

15. Annotate the following:

i. Endless crow noises
A skull on the holy sands
tilts its empty country towards hunger.

ii. Their austere eyes
stare like those caught in a net
hanging by the dawn's shining strands of faith.

iii. her last wish to be cremated here
twisting uncertainly like light
on the shifting sands.

iv. Over the soughing of the sombre wind
priests chant louder than ever:
the mouth of India opens.

v. Mornings of heated middens
smoke under the sun

vi. I saw his white bone thrash his eyes.
I followed him across the sprawling sands,
my mind thumping in the flesh's sling.
Hope lay perhaps in burning the house.

vii. She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.

viii. This is the kind of sadness which closes the eyes.
Here the memory for faces of the dead never appears.

ix. A temple stands frail and still
in the distance, as though lost in reverie.

x. It is evening, there is light laughter,
and the abundant darkness of water
lies like a familiar but useless ornament
over which an uncertain light of the moon

16. Annotate the following:

i. your own divided face in a pair of glasses
on an old man's nose
is all the country side you get to see

ii. At the end of the bumpy ride
with your own face on either side
when you get off the bus
you don't step inside the old man's head

iii. Sweet as grapes
are the stones of Jejuri
said Chaitanya

iv. he popped a stone
in his mouth
and spat out gods

v. For a moment the length of a matchstick
gesture after gesture revives and dies
stance after lost stance is found
and lost again,
Who was that, you ask.

vi. You come out in the sun and light a charminar
children play on the back of the twenty foot tortoise.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

Bhatnagar,O.P(ed) *Studies in Indian Poetry in English*. Jaipur: Rachna Prakashan, 1985.

Chitre, Dilip. *'Poetry in the Enemy's Tongue: On Two Indian Poets Writing in English'*.(Jussawalla and Mahapatra) *New Quest*. No. 14, March-April, 1979, 77-82.

Dwivedi, A.N. *A.K.Ramanujan and his Poetry*. Delhi:Doaba House, 1983.

Kolatkar, Arun. *Jejuri*. Bombay: Clearing House, 1976.

Krishnamurthi, M.G. *"Arun Kolatkar", Quest* 74 (1972), 41-43.

Mahapatra, Jayanta. *A Rain of Rites*. Athens: Georgia University Press, 1976
----- *A Father's Hours*. Calcutta: United Writer's, 1976.
----- *Waiting*. Delhi: Samkaleen Prakashan, 1979.
----- *Life Signs*. Delhi: O.U.P, 1983.
----- *Temple*. Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1990.

Mohan, Devinder. *Jayanta Mahapatra*. Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1987.

Prasad, Madhusudan,ed. *The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: A Critical Study*. Delhi: Sterling, 1986.

Ramanujan, A.K. *The Striders*. London: O.U.P, 1966.
-----*Selected Poems*. Delhi: O.U.P, 1976.
-----*Poems of Love and War*. Delhi: O.U.P, 1985.

Sergeant Howard(ed). *Pergamon Poets 9 : Poetry from India*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970.

Shahane Vasant.A. and M. Sivaramakrishna (eds). *Indian Poetry in English: A Critical Assesment*.
Delhi: Macmillan, 1980.

Young, Vernon. 'Poetry Chronicle', *The Hudson Review*, 29, No:4 (Winter 1976-77) 615-630. Discusses Mahapatra's poetry, 616-618.

UNIT 6 R. PARTHASARATHY AND KEKI N. DARUWALLA

Structure

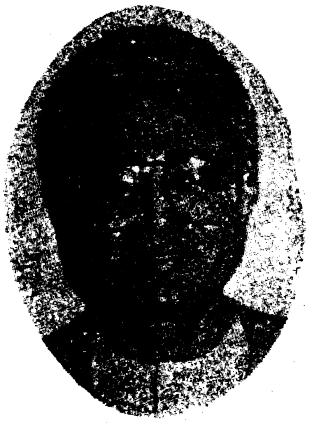
6.0 OBJECTIVES

Our last Unit in this Block includes poems by two talented but rather different poets. R. Parthasarathy occupies a poetic world similar to that of A. K. Ramanujan. Like Ramanujan, Parthasarathy has traNslated extensively from Tamil into English, but, unlike him, has not written much in Tamil. In his only significant collection, Parthasarathy speaks of problems of identity, loss of the mother tongue, and ultimately, the loss of poetry itself. Daruwalla's poems, on the other hand, deal with a world of action, not just of ideas. His is a strongly masculine muse, preoccupied with themes of power, control, and dominance. He explores the rich mine-field of history, not just of Indian history but of middle-eastern and near-eastern history, coming up with incidents and images of lasting value. Daruwalla's poetry is cosmopolitan, not necessarily Indo-centric. In this Unit, we shall look at selected poems of both poets, preceded, of course, by a brief life-sketch of each and an introduction to their works.

6.1 R. PARTHASARATHY: A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH AND AN OVERVIEW OF HIS WORK

Rajgopalan Parthasarathy was born in Tiruparaitturai, Tamil Nadu, in 1934. He spent his early years in the temple town of Srirangam, before moving to Mumbai for his education. In Mumbai, he was educated at Don Bosco School and Siddharth College, where he got a B.A. in English. He then did his Masters in English from Bombay University.. After teaching in a college for some time, he went abroad to study in 1963-64, as a British Council scholar at Leeds University.

In England, his distance from his motherland and mother tongue gave rise to the special tension that is evident in his poetry. He published some poems that were privately circulated when he was in Bombay, but his only major published collection is *Rough Passage* (1977). Parthasarathy revised this collection in 1980, recasting many of its poems. It is this revised edition from which we have got our texts. Parthasarathy has been an extremely influential editor and anthologist.



R. Parthasarathy (1934-)

His anthology *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*, published by the Oxford University Press in 1976, is perhaps the best-selling and most prescribed anthology of modern Indian English poetry. In it Parthasarathy defined the modernist ethos in a manner which has not been seriously disputed by any other anthologist except Makarand Paranjape. I shall not go into the details of the debate here except to say that Parthasarathy, by selecting specific types of poems of just ten Indian English poets, consolidated the purist high-modernism which has made Indian-English poetry so restricted and narrowly confined. By tightly controlling the canon, by rejecting the older poets, and by exercising an oppressive control over the content and style of poetry, Parthasarathy's anthology can be considered to mark the high-point of Indian English literary modernism.

Parthasarathy also served as an editor of Oxford University Press. During his tenure, some of the best-known Indian English modernist poetry was published, with the same careful and exacting editorial standards. The year 1976, in fact, saw the publication of several significant titles in recent Indian English poetry. After Parthasarathy left Oxford University Press, he went to the USA to complete a PhD at the University of Texas at Austin. He is now a professor at Skidmore College, USA.

6.1.1 *Exile: 2*

Rough Passage is divided into three sections, Exile, Trial, and Homecoming. This tripartite structure suggests the loss and recovery of a colonized self, an almost emblematic shape of the progression of every postcolonial pilgrim.

All the poems in the revised *Rough Passage* have three-line stanzas as in this poem. This one has fourteen stanzas. The scene is a basement flat in London. In the fog, lights shine like holes in walls. The basement flat suggests rather cheap accommodation such as students might afford. Conversation fills the night--and cigarette stubs, empty bottles of liquor, and the music of Ravi Shankar. Such a setting is conducive to some serious soul-searching, it would appear. What does the main character, distanced through the impersonal second person, "he," learn from exile: "He had spent his youth whoring/ after English gods." The image is powerful and self-incriminating, but in the context of our long history of colonization, suggestive of nothing really new. We could say the same of Michael Madhusudan Dutt or of any of the Anglicised poets, writers, and intellectuals of the nineteenth century or twentieth century. Like them, the protagonist learns that "roots are deep" only when he is exiled. More troubling is the loss of the language under an alien sun: "language is a tree, loses colour/under another sky." Ultimately, it is this that is most distressing about exile; what it does to the language of one's cultural make-up.

The other thing that the poet encounters is the racism of England. He is considered a "coloured" person, marked out as different from the white natives. The city is also full of "smoke and litter." Here the poem's thematic concerns expand to embrace the whole history of colonialism, of "the de Gamas, Clives, Dupleixs." This requiem for dead empires is heard by the poet at Trafalgar Square. An old man, presumably a Briton, speaks the words: "Victoria sleeps on her island/ alone, an old hag,/ shaking her invincible locks." This seems to suggest that the end of empire is quite inglorious and anticlimactic.

The poem ends with images of London: the scene from the Westminster Bridge, the stone chariot wheels of Boadicea, the shadow of the poplars, the Thames at night, and so on. Again, there is an uncertainty about what the poem is trying to say exactly Perhaps, we should not look here for some well-articulated idea about the postcolonial condition, so much as a sense of exile that an Indian poet experiences when abroad. This section is a part of a larger poem in three parts, we should remember. As in Jejuri we must not expect a sense of completion and unity in each poem.

What remains vivid about this poem is a sense of both displacement and belonging, a rediscovery of one's roots and the acute awareness of the loss of one's language, the requiem for empire sung by an unknown old man, and, finally, the uncertain and confusing submergence of these vexing questions themselves in the welter of the city.

6.1.2 *Trial: 1*

What is this brief poem about? No doubt, it speaks of some experiences which are very distressing, even anguish-ridden. There are references to "the end." What end is the poet talking about? The end of life itself or of something else as well? There is a confession that the speaker has not found the "key to unlock His gates"--His, that is God's. So there is no solace in some superior wisdom or faith. The skepticism of the modernists definitely comes back to haunt them. Even love is nothing but "night curves." Can it answer to the soul's anguish? Can it solve the riddle of the universe? Not really. And yet, love does offer some solace, some comfort: "I grasp your hand/ in a rainbow of touch." So the physical presence and warmth of another being attentive to one's own does help. The poet ends with a resolve rather unconnected with the rest of the poem: "Of the dead/ I speak nothing but good." Is he saying that he will not blame his parents or ancestors for his condition?

Let us come back to the beginning of the poem: "Mortal as I am, I face the end/ with unspeakable relief." Death here is seen as a release. But the very next lines express the panic of someone who is cut off mid-sentence, before he has had a chance to complete what he wished to say. Yet, soon afterwards, quite philosophically, the poet reconciles himself to that eventuality: "Yet that too would pass unheeded." That is, when one is cut-off, whether one has things left to say or not does not matter. The emphasis on having things to say and being stopped in the middle suggests, at least to me, that the "end" is not just the end of the body, but could be thought of as the end of poetry. The loss of poetry, of the gift of the poetic voice, is akin to death, so debilitating it can be. And yet, here, the poet bravely prepares for that. It is as if he tells himself that the worst that could happen is death (or the end of poetry), but one would have to accept even that.

To learn to accept reality, no matter how bitter or difficult it may be, is one of the ordeals that the poet must undergo during his trial.

6.1.3 *Homecoming: 1*

What remains to be seen, after the exile and trial, is if the homecoming is triumphant and convincing or, at best, uncertain and unsatisfying. In the four stanzas of this

poem, a penitent poet returns to his mother-tongue: "My tongue in English chains,/ I return, after a generation, to you." This is perhaps the most acute and pained statement of the clash inherent, as we have seen, in the very nature and texture of Indian English poetry. While later, postmodern poets, have seen this clash of languages as a blessing rather than a curse, Parthasarathy seems to prefer purity to hybridity.

The poet returns not to a country but to a language, Tamil, his tongue in English chains. Again, the fact of the primacy of English induces guilt and unease in the poet as in the earlier image of whoring. English, then, is not only the rival but also the alien mistress who has usurped the place of the mother-tongue. The poet feels guilty of disloyalty. And yet, the hunger for the mother-tongue is "unassuaged." Perhaps, as the poem proceeds, we realize that this hunger cannot be assuaged because Tamil too is no longer the language of the Kural, but is now hooked on celluloid; from the language of classical texts, it has become that of popular films.

The poem thus speaks not only of the politics of identity but of language. It tells us what happens to languages--how one language dominates the other in the international market place, how people choose languages not for ideological but for pragmatic reasons. Even Tamil to which the poet turns to for reclaiming his self is now dominated by market forces. Commerce triumphs over culture.

This poem shows us that the poet's homecoming is somewhat uncertain, if not unsatisfactory. Perhaps, there is no primal wholeness to which we can return. Rather, we substitute one sort of displacement for another.

These three excerpts from Rough Passage may not offer us a coherent picture of the text, but do help to foreground certain themes that recur throughout modern Indian English poetry.

6.2 KEKI N. DARUWALLA: A BREIF LIFE SKETCH AND AN OVERVIEW OF HIS WORK

Keki N. Daruwalla (1937-)

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla was born in Lahore in 1937. He spent his childhood at various places, including Junagad, where his father was in the service of the Nawab. Daruwalla later went to college in Ludhiana, where he got an M.A. Afterwards, he joined the Indian Police Service. He has served the Government of India in various positions and postings, including stints abroad, before his retirement. His volumes of

poetry include *Under Orion* (1970), *Apparition in April* (1971), *Crossing of Rivers* (1976), *Winter Poems* (1980), *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982), and *Landscapes* (1987). He has two or three new collections which are ready for publication. He won the Sahitya Akademi award for his collection *Keeper of the Dead.* He is also a short story writer with two collections to his credit. In addition, he has edited an anthology of modern Indian English poetry, *Two Decades of Indian Poetry: 1960-1980.*

Daruwalla, as I said earlier, is primarily a poet of action. Some of his poems like "Hawk" or "Wolf" are about predatory birds and beasts. A number of other poems feature conquerors or soldiers. There is a fascination for power and dominance. The victims of history as seen as just that--victims, who may deserve sympathy, but little else; after all that is how the world operates. Is there a God that presides over Daruwalla's world? We cannot be sure, because here the law of the jungle seems to operate. If there is a moral order it is marked by the absence of compassion or retributive justice. One need not conclude that Daruwalla is a cynic, though that is what some of his poems might suggest; actually, he would probably prefer to see himself as a realist, someone who can look at the unsavoury aspects of history with an unblinking eye. He is not fascinated or impressed by those who renounce power and glory, unless this leads to a different kind of power as in the Ashokan edict poem, "The King Speaks to the Scribe." Instead, in Daruwalla's world, the powerful will exercise power, even if they do so in a cruel and destructive fashion. Power, violence, lust are like natural forces and drives; they will work themselves out in the world of men. This is what human history is about, for Daruwalla.

6.2.1 *Rumination*

This poem from *Under Orion* is a meditation on violence. The speaker is somebody who is on duty, as it were, "prodding rat-holes/ and sounding caverns" to detect violence before it erupts. Perhaps, he is a police officer like Daruwalla himself.

As the poem begins, the speaker "smells violence in the air," as if before the outbreak of a communal riot--there is a clear reference to "mass hatreds." The image of these hatreds drifting "grey across the moon" is suggestive of a momentary lapse of sanity or, to be more precise, a touch of lunacy (the word itself derives from the supposed effect of the moon on people). Violence is next compared to a poised cobra, hood swaying, fangs exposed. The speaker, searching as if for an enemy, seems to be tracking down death itself, suggested by the cross bones and skull head.

In the next stanza, which is the longest, the focus of the poem shifts somewhat from violence to death itself, to the frailty of the flesh, in fact. The poet describes how a dead body putrefies, turning pulpy as it rots. At the funeral, the stench of rotting flesh competes with the aroma of incense-sticks. Next we see another stray instance of violence: a woman with her nose sliced off, supposedly for cheating on her husband. Then we see three ways of disposing off the dead--cremation, burial, and the Parsi tower of silence, where the body is picked to the bone by the vultures.

The poem ends with a description of rain. But this rain does not leave the poet feeling cleansed. Why? The poet says he has misplaced it "somewhere in the caverns" of his past. The meditation on violence and death has not given the poet knowledge or release. Instead, it has made him (and through him, us, his readers) confront some unsavoury facts about the human condition. The poem does not offer us a well-articulated insight about violence or death but induces in us a feeling of discomfort and, even, revulsion. Why are people violent? Why do we kill each other? These questions are not answered. Instead, we are left with sensations that accompany them, sensations which are by no means pleasant.

I've been trying to suggest that this poem operates not though a progression of ideas so much as through a progression of images, which convey some definite sensations. These sensations, however, do end up conveying some sort of message about the

nature of violence. And it is left to us, as readers, to figure out what that message might be. To me, this poem suggests that the cycle of violence follows a certain, almost natural pattern. First, there is a sense of menace in the air, the brooding, hovering felling of an impending outbreak. Then, violence does erupt. Many people may be killed in the process; or else, as in the case of domestic quarrel, only one person may be mutilated or dead. In death, it is clearly how pliant man is, so easy to dispose of. He is equally amenable to a variety of terminations and disposals. Finally, it is over. Like rain after summer, normalcy is restored. But this normalcy does not necessarily cleanse us; certainly, the speaker does not feel cleansed. Instead, he is left with several unanswered questions and a bitter after-taste.

6.2.2 *Routine*

This poem is from Daruwalla's second collection, *Apparition in April* (1971). In tone and content it seems to continue from the previous poem; even, the persona seems to be the same as in the earlier poem. The speaker is a policeman, whose "beat" is to put down a riot; so he is on a riot routine in this poem.

The poem begins with the putties, or the strips of cloth which policemen tie on the calves above their boots. This practice, as indeed, much else about our police force, is a hangover of the British Raj. Why does the poem allude to this past? The fact is that this so-called independent country bears many after-effects of colonial rule. The police in any colonial state is an instrument of state repression because by definition a colonial power cannot have the best interests of its citizens in mind. But, what about an independent nation which has won its freedom in spite of brutal repression by this very police force? Shouldn't the police force of such a nation be different? But, no, it is not--as the poem shows us only too well.

The dress code of the police does not seem to be climatically suitable because it makes the police rather short-tempered: "Within the burning crash-helmet/ the brain is fire-pulp." Daruwalla wishes to give us an insight into the psyche of the policeman. He is doing a very difficult job under very difficult conditions. Naturally, he may lose his temper and react. Some innocents will die. In the end those killed will only be empty statistics for the third page of the daily newspaper. The crowd that the cops have to control is not only unruly, but abusive. Daruwalla depicts it as immature and dangerous. Karam Singh's observation, "these kids whose pubes have hardly sprouted" suggests both his sympathy and contempt for them. Raw, uncouth, and callow, the protestors seem to be students. The reference to "young blood" and the burning of tram cars later suggests that the poem is set in Calcutta. The first stanza also gives us a clue about the composition of the force. Colonial administration was based on the principle of divide et empera or divide and rule. Policemen recruited from one region were sent to keep law and order in another part of the country. They were thus not only perceived as outsiders but were actually aliens, who could carry out certain kinds of anti-people orders with less guilt because they had little sympathy for the local people. Perhaps, Karam Singh, who says that he has children as old as the rioters is one of these outsiders.

In the second stanza, the poem reaches its climax. The very routine that the policemen have to perform makes them callous and cynical. It's the same story over and over again. The speaker says "It's all well rehearsed." The protestors are warned; the police are commanded to load and to fire. But unlike Karam Singh and most others, the speaker fires not in the air, to warn the protestors, but into the crowd. He knows what he is doing: "I put a piece of death up the spout."

The main question in this poem is why does he do so? Is it hatred? Or indifference? The evidence of the poem seems to suggest the latter. The boy killed by the speaker's bullet is picked up by the Salvage Squad, to be sent for an autopsy. The speaker continues with his tone of matter-of-fact reporting. Order has been restored. The policemen, weary and depressed after the toil, march back to the lines.

The last line, "We are marching forward," makes us reflect on the chief import of the poem. The last line is, of course, ironic, meant to suggest the opposite of what it states. It satirises the politicians who mouth slogans of progress though they themselves contribute most to the backwardness and chaos in the country. And yet, shifting the blame to the politicians does not solve the problem that the poem raises. It does not absolve the speaker of killing the rioter, almost in cold blood. This is an act of murder, all the more deplorable because it has been carried out by a law enforcement agent. True, the poem does show us how badly stressed out these riot police are. But the individual pathology of the speaker cannot be exonerated by the difficult conditions under which the whole force functions.

The poem's main intent seems to be to do precisely this: to offer an explanation for certain acts of inexplicable violence which the police themselves perform. But, in my opinion, instead of offering the rationale for such an act, the poem actually ends up doing something entirely different. The hero of the poem is Karam Singh, and thousands of "good" cops like him, who even in times that are very trying, do not lose the sympathy for their Other, the amorphous crowd that they are sent in to control. Instead, Karam Singh, though supposedly an outsider, can actually see the crowd not as a crowd, but as what it really is, a group of individuals, each with their own personal histories and families. Karam Singh and the rest of the contingent aim at the sun when they fire their rifles, that is, they shoot in the air. Provoked some more, they may even be forced to shoot at the feet of the protestors. But the speaker aims straight into the body of the crowd and ends up killing one of the youths.

Instead of increasing our understanding of and sympathy for the speaker, the poem ends up exposing the psyche of cold-blooded killer in the garb of the policeman. It is in this deft and, perhaps, terrifying clash between professed and possible meaning that makes this poem so fascinating as a study in the pathology of violence.

6.2.3 *Crossing of Rivers*

The poem from Daruwalla's eponymous collection published in 1984 certainly ranks among his best. Its forty-five lines are split into paragraphs of uneven length, some just a couple of lines long, while others, like the third extend to nineteen lines.

The subject of the poem, as the title says, is the crossing of rivers. Now this itself can be of various kinds. You may cross the river for fun, just to see if you can swim across. But this simple act can have a lot of symbolic significance. For instance, you must have heard of the phrase "cross the Rubicon." This refers to Ceaser's crossing of a sall river in Northern Italy that marked the border of the Roman Republic. Caeser's crossing of the Rubicon in 49 B.C. started his civil war with Pompey. Once he did so, there was no going back of Ceaser. He had to defeat his enemy or be defeated. It was a point of no return. Do you think this poem also suggests such an irrevocable transition?

Geographically, a river is often a natural boundary. Psychologically or culturally, too, it can suggest a similar liminality. Crossing a river, then, can trigger a transition to a different state of consciousness, a different way of life, a different culture, a different religion, and so on. Is this change reversible? Or is it final and absolute? That may vary from situation to situation, but it is certainly a very decisive event in the life of an individual or a nation.

In Daruwalla's poem, the act of crossing a river is generalized; this is clear because the title uses a plural--rivers, not river. So the very first line of the poem is as symbolic as it is literal. The crossing of rivers has to be undertaken in every season. Sometimes, as he says, the river is waist-deep, sometimes it is placid and glassy, and at other times it is in flood.

The state of the river is related to not just the life cycle of humans, but to specific images of various kinds of crossings. This gives the poem its particularity and freshness. Even if its ultimate import is symbolic, it never loses sight of the immediate, the specific, the local.

The main story of the poem is of a crossing which is linked with grown up, with a rite of passage as it were. The youth plunges into the swollen river, holding on to a water-skin or the tail of a buffalo. He wishes to venture out, to go beyond his ancestors' compass. Perhaps, they have never explored what lay on the other bank. His youth is described in sexual terms: "slivers of glass/ explode like flying fish."

On the other side, there is a fisher-girl waiting for him. She rescues him, half-drowned that he is, clears his mouth of clotted weed and grit. It's a kiss of life, literally, or, to use less romantic terminology, CPR, or mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The youth has truly crossed over to the other side because he cannot see the rock from which he took his plunge.

The experience in the poem is of a transformation that follows a risky venture. A barrier is crossed, both physically and psychologically. The river is an obstacle, a challenge; the youth almost loses his life going to the other side. Actually, that is as it should be, because youth dies at the end, yielding to a wondrous cognition of the beginnings of adulthood.

Much, of course, may follow. Will the youth return to the other bank or set himself up on the other side, with his new-found saviour, the fisher-girl? Such questions are not answered in the poem. But, perhaps, we are left as breathless and wonder-struck as the youth at the end.

When we return to the poem, however, what we remember is the series of striking images with which its simple-enough story is told. The brown weeds, the coughs and eddies, the river conversing with the mud, the glassed green moss, the stretch of silt, the head bobbing up like a coconut, the crowd of silhouettes, the oozing mud between their toes, the ring of froth around the youth's mouth, and so on. The craftsmanship of the poet is revealed in these specific metaphors and images. It allows the poem to one particular crossing of the river and many such crossings, in general, at the same time.

6.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed Daruwalla primarily as a poet of action. His poems reveal his fascination for power and dominance. Daruwalla does not let God preside over his world as 'power' and dominance' imply the law of the jungle. But then he would not like to be called a cynic either. A better term to describe him, would be a realist. In Daruwalla's world natural forces like power, violence, lust are as powerful as the elemental forces and these drives work themselves out in the world of men. Human history is an account of these natural forces.

In our discussion on Parthasarthy we have seen how he is better known for his anthology *Ten Twentieth Century Poets*, published by the Oxford University Press in 1976 and establishing the purist high-modernism in Indian English Poetry in no uncertain terms. After reading this Block, you may or you may not agree with his modernist stance but undoubtedly his poetry is marked by craftsmanship in his use of metaphors and images. His tenure as an editor of Oxford University Press saw the publication of some of the best known modern Indian English poetry.

Of calling him a cynic he would like to be called a realist. In Daruwalla's world natural forces like power violence lust are like natural forces as powerful as the elemental forces and drives that with work themselves out in the world of men. Human history is an account of these natural forces.

6.4 GLOSSARY

Cosmopolitan: of all parts of the world.

Incriminate: charge with crime.

Vexing: annoying; disturbing.

Hybridity: offspring of two different species.

Apparition: appearance especially of startling kind.

Akin: similar.

Retributive: recompense especially for ill deeds

Eponymous: commemorated by the adoption of the name.

Resuscitate: return or restore to life.

6.5 QUESTIONS

1. Write an essay on Parthasarathy and his contribution to Indian English Poetry.
2. Give a detailed critical appreciation of (i) *Exile* (ii) *Trial* (iii) *Homecoming*.
3. Does *Exile* deal with the question of language and identity upon the need for roots? Elaborate with examples.
4. What is Parthasarathy trying to convey through the poem *Trial*?
5. Has Parthasarathy's Tamil upbringing and heritage reflected in *Homecoming*? Explain with examples.
6. Give a comparative study of the 'self' in the poetry of Ramanujan and Parthasarathy.
7. Write an essay on Keki.N.Daruwalla and his Poetry.
8. With examples assess Daruwalla as a poet of nature.
9. Write a short essay on the myth and imagery in the poem *Crossing of rivers*.
10. Give the critical analysis of the poem *Rumination-1*. Write a note on the symbolism in the poem.
11. Annotate the following:

    i. He had spent his youth whoring
    after English gods.
    There is something to be said for exile:

    ii. you learn roots are deep.
    That language is a tree, loses colour
    Under another sky.

iii. On New Year's Eve he heard an old man
at Trafalgar Square: "It's no use trying
to change people. They'll be what they are.

iv. An empire's last words are heard
on the hot sands of Africa.
The da Gamas, Clives, Dupleixs are back.

v. Victoria sleeps on her island
alone, an old hag,
shaking her invincible locks."

vi. Were I to clutch at the air,
straw in my extremity,

vii. how should I not scream,
"I haven't finished"?
Yet that too would pass unheeded.

viii. I grasp your hand
in a rainbow of touch. Of the dead
I speak nothing but good.

ix. My tongue in English chains,
I return, after a generation , to you.
I am at the end
of my dravidic tether,
hunger for you unassuaged.

x. Now, hooked on celluloid, you reel
down plush corridors..

12. Annotate the following:

i. I can smell violence in the air
like the lash of coming rain -
mass hatreds drifting grey across the moon.

ii. I watch my wounds but they don't turn green.
Cross -bones I look for you.
Death I am looking
for that bald bone-head of yours.

iii. Man is so pliable, adaptable. Bury him
and he is steadfast as the earth.
Burn him and he will ride the flames
Throw him to the birds and he will
surrender flesh like an ascetic.

iv. Karam Singh marching in the same rank as I
curses under his breath,
"I have children older than them,
these kids whose pubes have hardly sprouted!".

v. Depressed and weary we march back to the Lines.
A leader says over the evening wireless,
"We are marching forward."

vi. Somewhere along that stretch of silt
a cry goes up as someone spots you,
your head bobbing up along the waters
like a coconut.

vii. --sends a shaft of cold oxygen through her gills ,
and wipes the ring of froth from your mouth
with her wet mouth.

viii. And when you gaze across
you can't even see the rock
from where you took the plunge.

6.6 SUGGESTED READING

Chirantan, Kulshrestha(ed). *Contemporary Indian English Verse: An Evaluation.* Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1980.

Das, Bijay Kumar,(ed) *Perspectives on the Poetry of R. Parthasarathy.* Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1983.

Daruwalla, K.N. *The Keeper of the Dead.* Delhi: O.U.P, 1982.
----- *Two Decades of Indian Poetry: 1960-1980.* Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1980.
----- *Crossing of Rivers.* Delhi: O.U.P, 1976.

Nabar, Vrinda. 'Keki.N.Daruwalla and a National Culture', *Indian Poetry in English: A Critical Assessment*.ed, Vasant.A. Shahane and M. Sivaramakrishna. Delhi: Macmillan, 1980, 28-40.

Parthasarathy, R. *Rough Passage.* Delhi: O.U.P, 1976.
----- (ed). *Ten Twentieth Century Poets.* Delhi: O.U.P. 1976.

Uttar Pradesh
Rajarshi Tandon Open University

Block

8

TARA

EXPERTS COMMITTEE

Prof. R.K. Agnihotri
Delhi University, New Delhi.

Prof. Walter R. Desai
Delhi University, New Delhi

Prof. Malashree Lal
Delhi University, New Delhi

Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah
Dhvanyaloka, Mysore

Dr. Shyamla Narayan
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

Prof. M.L. Raina
Panjab University, Chandigarh

Prof. Mohan Ramanan
University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad

Prof. K.V.S. Subba Rao
Delhi University, New Delhi

Prof. Rajeev Verma
Delhi University

IGNOU Faculty

Prof. Asha S. Kanwar

Prof. P.N. Pandit

Dr. R. Nandyal

Dr. A.B. Sharma

Dr. Renu Bhardwaj

Dr. Anju Sehgal Gupta

Ms. Neera Singh

COURSE PREPARATION

Dr. G. J. V. Prasad
J.N.U., New Delhi

COURSE COORDINATION & EDITING

Dr. Renu Bhardwaj
IGNOU

PRODUCTION

Ms. P. Gupta, CE,
Camera Ready Copy Prepared by: Sh. A.S.V. Venkateswar, PA

April, 2001

ISBN-81-266-0100-0

MEAN-07(2)/242

BLOCK INTRODUCTION: *TARA*

In this final block of your course on Indian English Literature, we will discuss Mahesh Dattani's play *Tara*. This is the only Indian English play you are studying in this course and as you know drama is quite different from the novel and poetry because it is a genre which is performed. There are four units in this block. We will first look at the history of Indian English drama, and the problems faced by the Indian English dramatists – the special challenges that they have to overcome. Then, in the second unit, we will look at Mahesh Dattani's dramatic world by discussing his other plays and identifying his major concerns and evolving techniques. In the third unit we will discuss the plot of *Tara*, and identify the themes of the play. In the fourth and last unit we will study the techniques that Dattani uses in this play including his use of language. Thus, at the end of the block, we will be able to understand and appreciate *Tara* fully and be able to place it in Dattani's oeuvre. We will also be able to evaluate Dattani's contribution to Indian English drama and place him in its history.

You will of course have read *Tara* before you start on the third unit, but I would appreciate it if you read other plays by Dattani as well. Four of them are available in a published volume, *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. His plays have been collected in a single volume called *Collected Plays* published by Penguin. This includes his radio plays which were not published earlier. Dattani is a contemporary playwright and it is possible that he may have already written another play by the time you read this block. It would be of great interest and benefit to you not only to read other plays by Dattani, but also to watch his plays in performance. In any case, watch whatever plays you can and read as many plays as you can.

We have also recorded an interview with Dattani on *Tara* which you can watch at your study centre. In another video Dattani and Mahesh Elkunchwar chat on their plays and dramatic art. We are providing a transcription of the interview at the end of our discussion on *Tara* in this Block. This is a first hand account of what Dattani has to say on *Tara* and is going to be of immense advantage to you.

UNIT 1 AN OVERVIEW OF INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to familiarise you with the challenges that the Indian English dramatist faces and to take you through the history of Indian English drama. This will enable you to both appreciate the contribution of Mahesh Dattani and place him historically.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we look at the history of Indian English drama, let us ask ourselves what we know already about it. How many Indian English playwrights have you heard of? Take five minutes and write down as many names of Indian English playwrights as you know:

Were they two lines too many? You must have written Mahesh Dattani's name because we are studying his play *Tara*, but did you come up with any other names? We don't really have to think only of the past, can you name any of Dattani's compatriots?

How many names did you come up with? Do they all write in English originally or are they translated into English? Girish Karnad, for example, is a Kannada playwright who translates his plays into English himself. A number of playwrights who write in other Indian languages are translated into English – for instance, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Mahashweta Devi, Badal Sirkar... Did you write their names by any chance? Among them, Girish Karnad is an interesting case because he translates his plays himself and makes changes while translating. These changes he then sometimes takes back to his Kannada originals! Hence a case can be made out to include him in the Indian English list. But none of the others should make it to a list of Indian English playwrights. But don't worry if you came up with no name other than Dattani's. Ask any reasonably knowledgeable person to name some modern Indian English playwrights, and it would be surprising if they name even one English language playwright. S/he may take Mahesh Dattani's name, and that would be because of his Sahitya Akademi award. The avid theatregoer may have watched his plays and appreciated them as good theatre as well as because he addresses

contemporary concerns of the Indian middle class in the same way that playwrights in other Indian languages do.

Another contemporary Indian English playwright whom people may remember is Manjula Padmanabhan whose play *Harvest* won a major international award, The Onassis Prize. Others who have written plays whose names you may recognise are Nissim Ezekiel, Cyrus Mistry, Gieve Patel, Gurcharan Das, and Dina Mehta. Ezekiel and Patel are well known poets and Das is a novelist as well. Dina Mehta and Mistry are also known for their short fiction. They have all tried their hand at writing plays with varying degrees of success, but none of them has taken to the theatre as their main focus of writing.

1.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY THE INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMATIST

1.2.1 The Problems

Have you ever wondered why Indians have written so few plays in English? Well, before any of you say to yourself that you didn't know that, that you assumed that there were many published plays, let me be more precise and ask why so few plays in Indian English are ever staged? This question again assumes that you watch plays, and that your town has a healthy theatre. Even if that were so, you would have realised that all is not well with theatre in India and that it needs great commitment and interest to keep theatre going. Since there is so little incentive monetarily, there is a dearth of good dramatists in India, and English is no exception.

But does the Indian English playwright face special problems and challenges because of the very language that s/he uses? What could they be? Again take five minutes and jot down your thoughts in point form:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

We will be able to speak with some degree of confidence about this after we study *Tara*, but let us compare a few preliminary notes.

Indian English drama has an in-built inhibiting factor – the fact that most of our life is spent speaking other languages. English is usually associated with certain functional spaces – certain offices or academic institutions. Even in these spaces English is not even the only language used any longer, except in written documents. Though these may have great impact on our lives, think of exam results for instance, the dramas of our lives are played out in a melange of languages, very often in languages other than English. In this circumstance, how is the Indian English dramatist to create convincing theatre? So, our first point could be that the Indian English playwright has to write dialogues in a language that his characters may not speak all the time or even in the specific circumstances that the playwright has created.

You may have put down as your second point that not so many people are proficient in English, proficient enough to go and watch plays in English. While this may seem true enough, the fact is that the audience that there is for good theatre is an extremely tolerant, extremely curious audience. They would watch plays in any language! The fact is that English plays, just like English films, do have their audiences. Perhaps the audiences for English plays will never be enough to sustain independent theatre but that is true of almost all language theatres in India. Hence the second point could be

better reformulated to state that since English is seen as the language of the elite, sponsors might only put up money for what they see as entertainment for the elite.

Did you have a third point? Was it about the lack of trained actors in English? That is a valid point and should be a cause for concern when there are more Indian English playwrights and plays.

This leads to the fourth point, which is directly related to the first, which is that there is as yet no accepted Indian English for the writers to use confidently and consistently. What can writers do in this peculiar circumstance? Write British English as far as possible or try and create credible Indian characters with Indian accents and Indian ways of speaking English? How well will this be accepted?

You may say that the Indian English novelist lives and writes in the same circumstances and yet manages to write quite well and successfully. I'll only point out one major difference here between the novelist's craft and the playwright's. The novel is published and read individually by readers. You as the reader will use your imagination to create characters and their speech patterns. You may even imagine them speaking in languages other than English. But a playwright writes for the stage. You watch live actors moving around in front of you, living out their lives in English, speaking the language in all kinds of circumstances. How credible would it be for a normal Indian character to speak in English to the maid, or vegetable seller, or to the autorickshaw driver, or even to grandparents? How credible would you find it if these characters spoke impeccable British English or mouthed some kind of American English? But how would you react to Indian regional accents?

Is it of any surprise then that Indian English theatre is such a low yielding field that if it were not for the growing global influence of the language it would have been abandoned long ago as not worth cultivating? Official patronage, whatever there has been, has always been extended to theatre in Indian languages. The National School of Drama in New Delhi for instance which is the premier institution in this country for training actors and directors for theatre, requires its students to know and function in Hindi. Theatre costs money and private patrons like industrial houses have to be wooed to sponsor shows by theatre groups who do not have official patronage. They have increased their support for English plays in recent years but only for those which have great entertainment value and are already accepted as plays worth going to. It is not in their interests to sponsor controversial or disturbing plays. So while there is more of English theatre in these years of liberalisation, there is still only one Dattani who has made it successfully to the stage and to our consciousness.

1.2.2 Solutions

In a recent conversation between them, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani had many interesting things to say about theatre in India (*Indian Review of Books*, Vol. 8, No. 6, Mar-April 1999). One of the major challenges as they see it is to write credible dialogues. As Girish Karnad puts it, "You write spoken dialogue – you just don't write dialogues." What Karnad means is that what the playwright writes has to sound like it could be spoken by the given character in the given circumstances. It should not sound stilted or text bookish. The dialogue need not, should not, obey the rules of written English. As Karnad says, Indian English playwrights should not write, "as they may have learnt in an English class."

Mahesh Dattani too feels that the biggest of challenges "is to reflect the language the way she is spoken and not harp on the 'correct' form." In the newspaper article where he says this (*The Sunday Times of India*, New Delhi, March15, 1998), he also adds that the limited reach of English theatre is a cause for concern. He feels that English is still a city-based language and the only way to reach the common man is to make the language and content more accessible, This is easier said than done. What do you

feel about it? How can Indian English plays be made accessible to a wider audience? Take a minute and write down whatever strikes you:

You may feel that it is only a matter of time before English asserts itself over all of us the way it has never done before. In these days of globalisation, English has slowly taken over the role of lingua franca of the world. So as more and more Indians learn English and use it in some context or the other, the audience of Indian English plays will increase accordingly. This may or may not happen. The only other way is to translate the plays into as many Indian languages as possible and stage them in those languages. What I am arguing here for is something that Indian theatre artistes have accepted for quite some time, that the only way they can build an Indian theatre is to translate plays from various Indian languages into each other, English is no exception to this rule for survival and construction. This may not be the answer you thought of or expected but so long as English has the limited reach it has in India, there can be no other.

Comparing the situation with that of the novel once again, do you remember or know what Raja Rao saw as the task of the Indian English novelist, the challenge that he wrote about in 1938, in his preface to his novel, *Kanthapura*? He said that the main challenge for the writer was to "convey in a language not one's own the spirit that is one's own." He also cautions that we cannot write like the English and that we should not do so, we must write as Indians. But how can one do this? The novelists did this by inventing their Indian Englishes. People do not talk the way Rao's characters or Mulk Raj Anand's do. But this fact, while it may put off some readers, will and does not matter to the majority of sensitive readers. You realise that the writers are translating a certain context into English and trying their best to retain the specific flavours and nuances of their locations. But in theatre the character who asks, "Why are you eating my head?" or says that his head is circling is bound to elicit laughter rather than sympathy. A book can be read over a period of time, at a pace convenient to the reader who can also go back and forth, but a play is acted out in real time. The audience of a play sees everything in a linear progression and there can be no action replay. So the language spoken has to be clear and have immediate impact. You cannot have audiences laughing at characters you want them to take seriously; not laughing for the wrong reasons.

Hence it is important for a playwright to tread more carefully than a novelist. A playwright must take risks but cannot take as many as the novelist. A novelist can frame a character, can write around the character, make comments on and explain the character to the reader. A playwright cannot do this but has to convey everything through the spoken dialogue and then depend on the understanding and competence of the director, actor and audience. The playwright has to make the language seem natural to the character portrayed. The character cannot be seen to be trying to speak in a language not his or her own. The spirit cannot be conveyed so easily or at all if the language is seen to be different. Hence the Indian English playwright has to write in a language that is recognisably Indian, and recognisably belonging to the social milieu portrayed.

As you would have seen in recent Indian English novels there is a greater availability of a range of acceptable Indian Englishes. Our overall attitude to purity of languages has changed and we are willing to allow our languages to pollinate each other. In fact we make instant decisions to shift from one language to another as well as to use words from a language different from what we are speaking. These are instances of borrowing and shifting. Can you think of instances when you do the two and think of reasons for them? Try to write down as many instances and reasons as you can below:

I am sure that if you belong to a multilingual milieu, you very often decide to speak a certain language on the basis of inclusion or exclusion. What I mean is that you may speak a particular language to a person to give that person a sense of belonging to your group, or you may decide to speak a language known only to some of you so that others may be excluded from your conversation. You may also shift to a language to establish a sense of belonging especially when you want to get close to someone or have some work done by that person. You may shift to English or the regional official language to mark the official nature of your talk and shift away from it to move on to personal topics. Sometimes you may shift to a language like English when you don't want to be identified by your caste or regional location. You may also speak in English to keep the conversation formal, to maintain distance, to help avoid easy familiarity. You may also speak English because of the prestige attached to it, to impress people.

The words you borrow could also be for similar reasons. Usually you will retain all kinship terms from your language when speaking English. This will be true of curse words as well! What about food items? Dosai may become dosa, and vadai become vada (this only proves the reach and dominance of Hindi), but little else would change. What I am saying is that the pronunciation may vary according to the region where these words are spoken and both the speaker and the audience. Technical terms ter. l to be retained in whatever language you speak and so do everyday items like 'powder'.

You knew all this already and are perhaps wondering what it has to do with writing plays. Or you may have already realised that characters would become more credible if they spoke English the way you do – slipping from one language into another easily and as circumstances demand. Various things can be established through this – the geographical and cultural location, the relationship between characters, the desires of characters...In short, the use of this kind of language will go towards not only establishing the ambience of the play but also in the construction of characters. As more and more playwrights do this (and Dattani has shown the way), Indian English drama may appeal to more people, and its history may be one of successes rather than attempts.

1.3 HISTORY OF INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

1.3.1 Pre-Independence

Perhaps the earliest Indian English play was written in 1831, when Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote **The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes illustrative of the present state of - Hindoo Society in Calcutta**. Look at the year the play was written. Obviously English plays could only be written after the English established themselves in India. Further, there should be enough people proficient in English to constitute an audience. So, like the first poetry, this play comes after the establishment of Hindu College in Calcutta, after nearly a generation had been educated in English and been sufficiently influenced by western ideas. The tide of reformation had begun and this

play illustrates this movement – it is about the conflict in the mind of a young man, a Bengali, between orthodox Hindu practices and modern ideas inculcated by English education.

Modern theatre came to India with the British and the first theatrical companies were established in those areas which first came under their influence. The first modern production in Bengali was in November 1795, when two plays **Disguise** and **Love is the Best Doctor** were performed in Bengali translation. Curiously these translations were done in collaboration by a Russian, Lebedoff, and an Indian, Goloknath Das. By 1831, a Bengali theatre (the Hindoo Theatre) had been established which began by staging portions of Shakespeare's **Julius Caesar**. What this theatrical activity led to was the birth of modern theatre in various Indian languages and not in Indian English. The felt need for English drama was obviously fulfilled by original British plays.

You may remember that poetry and drama have always been close companions. Is it any wonder that the first recorded play in English by an Indian in almost a generation after Banerjee is by a poet? This is by a famous poet, one who is famous in his own Indian language as a pioneer and an innovator, one who is famous for abjuring English to write in his own language. Can you name the person? It is Michael Madhusudan Dutt of course. But Dutt's **Ratnavali** (1858), itself a version of Harsha's Sanskrit play, is a translation of his Bengali original. He also published another translation of a Bengali play written by him, **Sermista** (1859) Another of his plays **Is This Civilisation** came out in 1871 and is considered by S Krishna Bhatta, who has written a critical study on Indian English Drama, to be a major play in English. A fourth play, **Nation Builders**, was published posthumously in 1922. In fact, just one more play, Ramkinoo Dutt's **Manipura Tragedy** (1893) completes the list of Indian English plays from Bengal in the 19th century.

In Mumbai (then Bombay) the first theatre, The Bombay Amateur Theatre, was built in 1776 but was exclusively for performances by visiting European companies. Marathi theatre made an early start because of this. Vishnudas Bhave's **Sitasvayamvara** was produced in 1843 though Annasaheb Kirloskar's production of **Shakuntal** in 1880 is seen by many to be of crucial importance. The Parsi Natak Mandali was established in 1852 and The Elphinstone Dramatic Club and Victoria Natak Mandali followed. The first recorded play in English from Mumbai is a verse-play. This is **The First Parsi Baronet** by C.S. Nazir produced in 1866. The only other plays that have survived from this early period are D.M. Wadia's **The Indian Heroine** (1877), which is based on the events of the first war of independence (1857), and P.P. Meherjee's **Dolly Parsen** (1918).

In Chennai (then Madras), the Madras Dramatic Society was founded in 1875. It mainly encouraged amateur European theatrical productions. The Oriental Drama Club was established in 1882, and The Sarasa Vinodidini Sabha, an amateur dramatic society, was founded by Krishnamachary in 1895. The Madras theatrical scene seems to have been quite active and a number of playwrights came to the limelight. These playwrights wrote on social as well as historical and mythological themes. Some of the plays, for example, are **Urjoon Sing or the Princess Regained** (1875) by P.V.R. Raju, **Dasaratha or The Fatal Promise** (1901) by Krishnamacharya, **Harischandra or The Martyr to Truth** (1912) by A. Srinivasacharya, **Lord Clive** (1913) by Krishna Iyer, **Nur Jahan** by T.B. Krishnaswamy, and **Harischandra** (1918) by K.S. Ramaswami Sastri. But the most productive of these playwrights was V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar. Two volumes of his plays entitled **Dramatic Divertissements** appeared in 1921. These plays expose the behavioural patterns of the middle class. They seem to have been written as light entertainment or farces. The collection includes the following plays: **Blessed in a Wife, Vichu's Wife, The Surgeon-General's Prescription, The Point of View,** and **Wait for the Stroke**. Aiyangar writes highly entertaining one-act and two-act plays but doesn't let his talent loose over a full-length play.

What we can see is a pattern we should recognise. All the early playwrights turn to historical and mythological themes to construct the idea of the good (Hindu) Indian, the Indian we must reinvent. The impact of colonialism was to challenge the intellectuals into constructing a past militaristically and morally equal if not superior to the British. As part of this agenda they write to reform their contemporary society as well. You may have already read about this part of our history, about the impact of British colonialism on Indian intellectuals in earlier blocks. In any case you could refer to the books in the suggested reading list that comes at the end of this unit.

When we talk of pre-independence theatre, there are two colossal figures who left their mark in many varied fields who have to be taken into account. They are Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore's real impact is in Bengali and the plays that are well known in English translation like **The Post Office** and **The King of the Dark Chamber** were not even translated by him. He was a great literary and cultural figure and his impact on his contemporaries was enormous but I don't think we should look at him in such a short survey of Indian English drama. Sri Aurobindo wrote five complete and six incomplete verse-plays between 1891 and 1916. The five complete plays are **Perseus the Deliverer**, **Vasavadutta, Rodogune, The Viziers of Bassora,** and **Eric the King of Norway**. As you can see from the titles themselves Aurobindo's plays are not confined to India at all -- past or present. **Eric** is set in ancient Norway and **Vasavadutta** in ancient India, while the other three are set in the Middle East. **Perseus, The Viziers**, and **Rodogune** belong to his Baroda period (1893 –1906) while **Eric** and **Vasavadutta** were written between 1912 and 1916. It is of interest to note how this England returned revolutionary and philosopher moves form **Perseus** to **Vasavadutta**, from the western classics to Sanskrit texts. But Aurobindo is better known as a poet and philosopher, his plays trying to emulate Shakespeare and unable to pull it off. But obviously with a writer of his distinction, these plays do reward readers with flashes of brilliance.

The other major playwrights from before independence are Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, T.P. Kailasam, and Bharati Sarabai. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya may be better known to you as Sarojini Naidu's brother but he was an accomplished poet in his own right. He has many plays to his credit beginning with **Abu Hassan** (1918), a light fantasy. He has seven verse-plays to his credit on the lives of Indian saints: **Pundalik, Saku Bai, Jayadeva, Chokha Mela, Ekanath, Raidas**, and **Tukaram**. These were included in his **Poems and Plays** (1927). He presents episodes to highlight the individual's search and fulfilment as opposed to societal curbs and hierarchies. They make good reading. A member of the Progressive Writers Movement, Chattopadhyaya's socialist sympathies come to the fore in his five social plays. These **are The Window, The Parrot, The Sentry's Lantern, The Coffin,** and **The Evening Lamp. The Window** is dedicated to "The Brave Textile Workers of Parel, Bombay" and is about the exploitation of poor labourers by industrialists. While **The Parrot** examines morality, the bondage of customs, **The Sentry's Lantern** is about the evils of imperialism and is dedicated "To all the victims of Imperialist Gallows". The three characters in the play, a merchant, a bourgeois poet, and a worker, give us their thoughts before they are hanged. It is the worker who faces death boldly. **The Coffin** which is "Dedicated to the progressive writers of India" satirises a bourgeois artist and shows us the responsibilities of writers. **The Evening Lamp** is an ironic sketch of a young romantic. He has four other plays – **The Sleeper Awakened** (n.d.), **The Saint: A Farce** (1946), **Kannappan or the Hunter of Kalahasti** (1950), and **Siddhartha: Man of Peace** (1956). His deep social commitment is evident throughout, as he exposes social evil and celebrates the achievements of the lowly and the downtrodden. He is good at writing crisp dialogues and his plays do manage to impress the modern reader.

T.P. Kailasam has a role to play in two histories of literature –Indian English and Kannada. He is and will always be better known for his contribution to Kannada drama than Indian English. He chose Kannada for his contemporary social plays and English for a rendering of tragic heroes from the epics. Further the ease with which he writes his Kannada is missing in his English. He wrote in the spoken language of

the middle class in Kannada, so much so that it seemed like a mix of Kannada and English (he called it 'Kannadanglo'). In English however he tried to heighten the language with Sanskrit terms. Obviously he reserved his wit (he called himself "Typical - ass – am"!) and humour for his Kannada plays. His English plays are **The Burden** (1933), **Fulfilment** (1933), **A Monologue: Don't Cry** (1933), **The Purpose** (1944), **Karna or the Brahmin's Curse** (1946) which is the only full length play published by him in his lifetime, and **Keechaka** (1947). Kailasam has chosen most of his main characters and dramatic episodes from Indian epics. **The Burden** is based on the **Ramayana**, and depicts Bharata's feelings on hearing about his father's death. **Fulfilment** and **The Purpose** are based on the Ekalavya story from the **Mahabharata**, which supplies the story for **Karna** and **Keechaka** as well. Though Kailasam went to the epics for these plays, he champions the underdog, and gives us refreshingly different views of these characters.

Bharati Sarabai's two plays, **The Well of the People** (1943), and **Two Women** (1952), show the impact of Gandhi. The first play was inspired by a story in the **Harijan**, and depicts an old woman who unable to go to Kashi and Haridwar decides to build a well for the so called 'untouchables' instead. The second play depicts two women, Anuradha, the wife of the anglicised Kanakaraya, and Urvashi, a widowed girl who has become a devotional singer. The play seems to advocate that spiritual peace can be found here and now, and complete fulfilment isn't to be found in giving up the world and material ties. Both the plays, the first written in verse and the second in prose, show Sarabai's spiritual and religious beliefs. Both the plays show a society in transition while the first seems to do it far more effectively. Verse-drama has had a chequered history but if it has to be successful Sarabai's natural speech patterns would be worth emulating.

As you can see from the above, admittedly sketchy, history of pre-independence Indian English drama, Indian English dramatists like their counterparts in other genres were involved in constructing an ideal India. For this they mined the epics and puranas, the lives of saints, and history. They explored and reinterpreted their chosen texts in order to create the India and the Indian who could stand shoulder to shoulder with the English. The Indian they constructed was necessarily Hindu because of the past that they were uncovering in its glory. They were actively engaged in constructing a new society, one that went beyond their specific locations in terms of caste and region. Their territory was India and their audience Indian. This would explain why T.P. Kailasam wrote his engaging rooted social plays in Kannada but his epic character sketches in English. Their India had a Sanskritic past and an English present, their regions had other histories and other needs. This is perhaps why Indian English drama never took off while theatres in other Indian languages flourished during this time. Indian English dramatists couldn't serve or create any needs among audiences. The audience that wanted theatre in English could see European productions or even Indian productions of English/European plays. The audience that wanted Indian theatre could watch theatre in Indian languages. The only way Indian English theatre could have succeeded was to become theatrically provocative and interesting, address local realities in local Englishes. This was hardly ever done. Not only do they make no theatrical innovations, and write mainly short plays, they do not even look to Indian dramatic techniques even while they look to ancient Indian epics for characters and episodes. Their dramaturgy doesn't even seem to extend beyond the Elizabethan!

There are of course many other playwrights and plays. More than three hundred Indian English plays were written before independence. There were dramatists like A.S. Panchapakesa Aiyar who were popular in their own times. You can read more about these playwrights in the books suggested at the end of the unit.

1.3.2 Post-Independence Indian English Drama

It is not as if things changed a great deal after independence. While the first five-year plan did give conscious thought to the performing arts, and the National School of

Drama and various State Akademies were set up, obviously the stress was on theatre in other Indian languages. The few Indian English dramatists who achieved some success were actually staged abroad. The first major Indian English dramatist after independence (many would say the first Indian English dramatist of any consequence) was Asif Currimbhoy who wrote more than thirty plays. Other playwrights of note (other than those we mentioned at the beginning of this unit) are G.V. Desani and Pratap Sharma.

G.V. Desani, the author of the hilarious novel **All About H Hatter**, which you must read if you haven't, has one play, **Hali** (1950), to his credit. **Hali** was a critical success when produced in England and is a play about human longing and fulfilment. An abstract play (it has no visible actors on stage, only voices), described as a 'poem play', **Hali** is an allegorical play of every person's quest. Hali, named after a Muslim saint, wears long hair and bangles and anklets and is also named a very feminine Hindu Girija. Hali thus stands for all humanity. While Maya comforts him for a while, and Rahu tests him, Hali loves and loses and finally achieves true understanding. Unfortunately, this seems to have been a one-off experiment by Desani, for he could have brought great stylistic innovation to Indian English theatre.

Pratap Sharma's **A Touch of Brightness** (1968) was again performed abroad (it was actually banned for some time in Mumbai). A picture of the Red-light district of the then Bombay, the play is bold in its theme and treatment. The dialogue for once is in the speaking voice and the play presents the goings on in a brothel in a straightforward manner. It is a stage-worthy play and at least deserves a reading. The other play by Pratap Sharma, **The Professor Has a Warcry** (1970), is again interesting in terms of stagecraft and dialogue. In this, a young man, Virendra, comes to know that he is the 'illegitimate' child of a mother who was successively raped by a Muslim and an Englishman after having been deserted by her lover, a Hindu Professor. Finally Virendra and the Professor kill each other off. In an interesting technical innovation, Pratap Sharma uses the demon from Kathakali to represent Virendra's inner state.

Asif Currimbhoy also achieved success abroad and he too had a play banned in Mumbai. Currimbhoy's plays deal with contemporary political events and social issues. **The Doldrummers** (1960), the play which was banned for a while, is about the hippie culture and Anglo-Indians. The play depicts the extent to which youth can feel alienated, and the resultant mess they can land up in. **The Captives** (1963) is about the Sino-Indian conflict. **Goa** (1964) is a play about the invasion/liberation of Goa by India. **Monsoon** (1965) is about colonisation, while **An Experiment with Truth** (1969) is about the freedom struggle and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. **Inquilab** (1970) is about the Naxalite movement, while **The Refugee** (1971) and **Sonar Bangla** (1972) are about the fallout caused by the conflict between the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and its western counterpart. **Om Mane Padme Hum** (1972) is about China's occupation of Tibet and the Dalai Lama's flight to India. **Angkor** (1973) is on Indo China, **The Dissident M.L.A.** (1974) is based on a contemporary student agitation in Gujarat. **The Miracle Seed** (1973) is on a famine situation in Maharashtra. **The Tourist Mecca** (1959), **The Hungry Ones** (1965), and **Darjeeling Tea?** (1971) are about the East-West encounter. **The Hungry Ones** attempts to show the similarities between American beatniks and Indian yogis, the Black Muslims of America and Bengali Muslims. Among his other plays are psychological plays like **The Clock** (1959) and **The Dumb Dancer** (1961). The latter is about a Kathakali dancer and has been performed successfully.

Currimbhoy was a playwright with great potential and his career and output illustrates the deficiencies caused by the lack of a living Indian English theatre. He didn't play around with spoken Indian English very much because he didn't get to work with Indian actors very often. As he was performed less and less his plays began to be written to be read rather than performed. His later plays read more like T.V. or movie scripts, making almost impossible technological demands of the stage.

Since some of his plays were produced abroad, he never achieves any kind of cultural confidence with his symbolism. But Currimbhoy through his sheer fecundity, and his sheer dramatic quality that he displays at his best, remains a dramatist to be respected.

As mentioned earlier, Nissim Ezekiel, the well-known poet, has also written plays in English. He displays his ease with the language as spoken in an urban middle and upper class milieu. Where he falls short is in his handling of plot or dramatic structure. His plays **Marriage Poem: A Tragi-Comedy, Nalini: A Comedy, The Sleepwalkers: An Indo-American Farce, Song of Deprivation** (all 1969), and **Don't Call it Suicide** (1994) deal with social issues and personal relationships but fail to grip in spite of their accessible language. But they make for a pleasant reading experience. This is a pity because he has the feel for spoken language so necessary for drama and doesn't lack dramatic vision but sublimated his dramatic impulse in his poetry.

On the other hand, Gurcharan Das's **Larins Sahib** (1970) is a much performed much acclaimed play. In this three-act play, Das delineates the life of Henry Lawrence, a British Resident in the court of Dalip Singh in Punjab in 1846-47, who progresses from enlightened liberalism to authoritarianism. This is a historical play and according to the author the events were reconstructed from documents and letters exchanged by the principal characters. **Larins Sahib** is one of the few rare successes of the Indian English stage and this can be attributed to its lively dialogue, its plot construction, and its historical subject matter, but where it really scores is bringing to life characters who arouse interest in the audience.

Larins Sahib, Dina Mehta's **The Myth-Makers**, and Cyrus Mistry's **Doongaji House** are all winners of the Sultan Padamsee Award for playwriting. A lack of theatrical opportunity means that it is only competitions and awards that will unearth and encourage new playwrights. **The Myth-Makers** was published in the journal **Enact** (in 1969) which ceased publication after the death of the indefatigable Rajinder Paul who brought it out. Dina Mehta's radio play (which of course is quite different from a regular play in terms of craft) **Brides are not for Burning** (1971) was named the best play in a world wide competition held by the BBC. **The Myth-Makers** is a three act play about the violent demonstrations in Bombay against migrants from other states, especially from the South. A play of great topical interest, it shows the level to which parochial politics and politicians can fall. The play ends abruptly leaving the audience to imagine what could happen to the female protagonist who is sickened by the conduct of her husband.

Cyrus Mistry's **Doongaji House,** which though written in 1978 was first produced only in 1990, is on the other hand about a specific community – the Parsis. The play addressed the situation of the Parsi community in a nation where the communal divide is seen in terms of Hindu and Muslim. The play shows the disintegration of the family and the emotional trauma of newly reduced circumstances. **Doongaji House** looks hard at an India that is divided on the basis of language, religion, community, and class even as it searches for a common heritage.

Among the more recent playwright, Manjula Padmanabhan merits mention not just because her play, **Harvest** (1997) received the first Onassis International Cultural Competitions for Theatrical Plays but also for the fact that she has written for the theatre with consistency. **Harvest** is her fifth play and at least two others, **Lights Out** and **Gaslights** have been performed to great acclaim. Manjula Padmanabhan is a playwright of great promise (she is also an illustrator and cartoonist as well as writer of short fiction) but one who needs to work consistently with a theatrical company to realise her undoubted potential. **Harvest** is a play set in the future and explores a situation when citizens of the developed world shop for body parts in the third world. It is a dark and bitter comedy worth reading. **Lights Out** on the other hand is about

the callous nature of the urban middle class. Padmanabhan has the vision and talent to disturb us with credible scenarios.

Again the sketchiness of the above history of post-independence Indian English drama should not fool you into assuming that there are no other playwrights or plays in this period. You must read other books to get a more comprehensive history. (You must also make an attempt to read at least the available contemporary plays even if you are not in a position to watch them in performance.) You should have noticed that I haven't even mentioned Mahesh Dattani. I haven't mentioned a number of other playwrights either. In fact what I have attempted to do is to show in what important ways the post-independence Indian English theatre has differed from the pre-independence theatre. It is in the depth of individual voices and focussed contemporary concerns and in the evolution of an acceptable and accessible spoken language. In post-independence Indian English drama too we can see the repetitions of older attempts to create an India through the exploration and construction of Hindu historical figures. There are a few plays on saints as there are on episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. One of the biggest theatrical spectacles of recent years was the staging of **The Legend of Rama, Prince of India** by Amir Raza Husain (1994, New Delhi). As you can see from the title itself, Indian English theatre still feels part of the construction of the nation and national identity. The history that I have marked out highlights the many playwrights who focus not on the nation as a whole, or even make the construction of the nation an overt part of their theatrical agenda, but those who focus on certain communities, classes, local situations. It is to this group of playwrights that Mahesh Dattani belongs.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

There are many challenges that the Indian English playwright faces – from the lack of opportunity and trained actors and sponsorship to the demands made by the language itself. The audience and theatrical companies that want plays in English have always had the choice of British and American plays available to them. Hence Indian English drama hasn't grown in the way drama in other Indian languages have. The history of Indian English drama demonstrates the presence of individual talents and sporadic theatrical activity. Like other genres in the language, Indian English drama shows the impact of British colonialism on Indian intellectual to re-imagine India and the Indian. Always a drama of the middle and upper classes, Indian English drama seeks more and more to be a drama of local spaces and communities.

1.5 QUESTIONS

1. What are the obstacles that Indian English theatre faces?

2. What are the specific challenges that the Indian English playwright faces because of the language itself? How can the playwright overcome them?

3. Name some major pre-independence Indian English playwrights.

4. When were the first theatres established in the major centres and when were the first Indian English plays performed there?

5. What did the pre-independence Indian English playwrights write about? Is there a discernible pattern in their writing?

6. What could be the reasons for the failure of pre-independence Indian English theatre as compared to the success of theatres in other Indian languages?

7. Name some prominent post-independence Indian English playwrights and some of their plays.

8. Name the prize that was given to three of the plays discussed in the above unit. Which plays won this award?

9. What are the differences between the pre-independence Indian English playwrights and post-independence playwrights? Discuss this highlighting the contributions of post-independence playwrights.

1.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bhatta, S. Krishna. *Indian English Drama: A Critical Study*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1987.

Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories,* New Delhi: OUP, 1985.

Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*, Bombay: India Publishing House, 1962.

King, Bruce (ed.). *Post-Colonial English Drama – Commonwealth Drama since 1960,* London: Macmillan, 1992.

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

Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism,* New Delhi: OUP, 1983.

Reddy, P. Bayappa, *Studies in Indian Writing in English with a focus on Indian English Drama*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1990.

UNIT 2 A PREVIEW OF DATTANI'S DRAMATIC WORLD

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to engage with other plays by Dattani to mark the contours of his dramatic world – to establish his major concerns as a writer and the techniques he uses as a dramatist. We'll also look at his use of the English language.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

lahesh Dattani is a Bangalore based playwright and director. There are tw published texts of Dattani's plays – one a collection of plays and the other prescribed text. We shall talk about *Tara* in detail later, so we shall concen other plays by Dattani now. *Final Solutions and Other Plays* contains four *Where There's a Will, Dance Like a Man, Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *Fi Solutions*. Recently his plays have been collected in a single volume called *Col Plays* published by Penguin. This includes his radio plays which were not publ earlier. I suggest that you read these plays even before you read *Tara*. These play showcase Dattani's concerns as a writer and dramatist. In other words, they

demonstrate his continuing thematic concerns as well as his exploration of, and experimentation with, stagecraft.

2.2 THE PLAYS

Even a cursory reading would have created an impression on you of a vigorous mind enquiring about contemporary urban concerns in a language not too different from what we hear or speak. What do you think are his characteristic concerns? If you have already read his plays, take a few minutes and write down your answer in point form:

Whether you've read the plays and answered the above question or not, let us go on to discuss the plays (albeit briefly) to see what themes reveal themselves to us.

Where There's a Will has as its protagonist a rich businessman, Hasmukh Mehta, who dies in the first scene itself and then stays on the stage as a ghost! He ruled his household when alive, and has attempted to do so after his death. This he does through his will, which installs his former mistress in the household. The play explores the lives and motivations of his son, his daughter in law, his wife, and his mistress who have to collectively exorcise his ghost. Mehta, it transpires has been sick of his son's namby pamby ways. His daughter in law is interested only in the money and may have hastened his end by substituting vitamin tablets for his blood pressure pills. The son, Ajit, resents him while Hasmukh Mehta's wife is under her sister's thumb and gives him no satisfaction. It takes the entry of his mistress into his family for Hasmukh's ghost to be laid to rest. Hasmukh is finally dismissed as no more than his father's creation, a projection of an image, a prisoner to somebody else's needs rather than an individual of his own making.

In *Dance Like a Man,* Dattani examines the life of a couple, both of whom are Bharatanatyam dancers. Jairaj had gone against his father's wishes in order to learn dancing and dedicate his life to it. Amritlal, the father, thinks dancing a feminine occupation and manages to buy off Jairaj's wife, Ratna, to thwart Jairaj's dancing career and sets the couple off on a life of petty manipulation – the lot in any case of all artistes in this age of bureaucratic patronage. Jairaj is forced to live with a sense of mediocrity as well as his wife's treachery. Both Ratna and Jairaj have to live with the knowledge of their sacrifices and sins having led to nothing more than a sense of frustration. They have even lost their son in their pursuit of fame. But their ambition lives on in their daughter, Lata, who has fallen in love with a sweet wallah, Viswas. Will she have the career they didn't or will she have the successful family life that they never had. Or can she manage both? We don't know because the play ends with the birth of Lata's daughter.

Bravely Fought the Queen (the reference to the famous poem on the Rani Of Jhansi should be obvious to all educated Indians who've done some Hindi in school) shows us the boredom of suburbia, the emptiness of lives caught up in the swirl of capitalism (the Trivedi brothers run an advertisement agency). Each of the characters has to face up to this emptiness, to his/her needs. But the women have a special fight on their hands, a fight for agency, a fight to structure their own lives. And bravely they fight – but should they fight like the men or create a different space, adopt a different strategy? The story revolves mainly around the Trivedi brothers, Jiten and Nitin, and their wives, Dolly and Alka, who are sisters. Lalitha and Sridhar are the outsiders who get caught up in the action of the Trivedi family. There is Baa, the mother of the Trivedi brothers, and a few other characters, both imaginary and real. Of the real characters, two do not ever come on stage. They are Daksha, daughter of

Jiten and Dolly, and Praful, the brother of Dolly and Alka. The undercurrents of 'normal' family life are revealed to us; we see the results of the examples parents can set and the turf battles that they fight. It turns out that the father was a violent man and the first son, Jiten, turns out to be like him. Even Praful is shown to have been violent with Alka when admonishing her for mixing with boys. Nitin is ultimately revealed to be a homosexual who has been duped into marrying Alka (and she him) by his partner, Praful. Where will it all end?

Dattani's *Final Solutions* takes on a larger theme of Hindu-Muslim hostility. Dattani resists easy schematisation in this dramatisation. There are no good Hindus or bad Hindus, no good Muslims or bad Muslims. What we have are people caught in the trap of conditioning and past experiences. Again the situation is worked out through a family and the way in which the past controls its present. In the Gandhi household which consist of Ramnik, his wife Aruna, their daughter, Smita, and Ramnik's mother Hardika, two intruders enter. They are Muslim youth seeking refuge during a riot. How does the liberal humanist Ramnik deal with the situation, or for that matter the religious-conservative Aruna, or the rabidly anti-Muslim Hardika? It turns out further that Smita knows one of the youth, Babban alias Bobby, fairly well (she may be in love with him but can she face it?) as well as the sister of the other, Javed. Javed is in town as an agent provocateur, and is intensely anti-Hindu. Babban is the seemingly acceptable face of Islam but he is actually ashamed of his religious roots, which is why his preferred nickname is Bobby. As each one of them comes to terms with the present, the past reveals itself including the terrible family guilt that Ramnik carries about, an event which had wrongly soured Hardika against Muslims altogether. His father who had asserted his patriarchal authority over Hardika to stop her from meeting her Muslim friends had actually made use of riots to obtain the shop that had belonged to Hardika's friends. Can such historical situations ever be righted? The play ends with this question.

Can you see any common threads running through these plays? What are they? Write down your thoughts (briefly) here and we shall compare notes later.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

I shall not discuss this immediately but go on to tell you in a few lines about Dattani's later plays – plays written after *Tara*. You realise of course that with a living and successful playwright like Dattani you will have to look out for newer plays constantly and learn to read them with the confidence gained from reading his earlier plays here. What may happen also is that the newer plays could make you re-read/re-evaluate the earlier plays.

In *On a Muggy Night in Bombay*, Dattani's latest stage play, one of the characters sings, "When makes a man a man?" Kamlesh is a homosexual who is comfortable with his gayness. But he is in a turmoil because his sister is going to marry his former lover who pretends to be straight (a heterosexual). In Dattani's one-act play, *Night Queen* (published in *The Telegraph Autumn Collection*, 1996), Ash sleeps with Raghu whose sister he plans to marry. In his radio play *Do the Needful* (broadcast on BBC in 1997), Alpesh reveals his homosexuality to Latha, his future wife. She has a married lover herself and agrees to marry Alpesh. They make a marriage of convenience and continue to meet their lovers. In another radio play, *Seven Circles around the Fire* (broadcast on BBC in 1999), Dattani looks at hijras, who are treated as less than human by the majority of society but who nevertheless are used as sex objects.

2.3 THEMES

Homosexuality

It must be clear by now that the major preoccupation of Dattani, the predominant theme in his later plays, is homosexuality. Is this related to some of the themes that you may have noted down? Homosexuality is dealt with in *Bravely Fought the Queen* as well (there too a former homosexual partner marries a sister, but the circumstances are very different). Have you put down patriarchy as one of the recurrent themes? You can see that the autocratic (if not tyrannical) father is present in more than one play of Dattani's. You have Hasmukh Mehta in *Where There's a Will*, Amritlal in *Dance Like a Man*, Jiten's father in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, as well as a host of hurtful husbands. So if family life is oppressive (and did you write family as well as oppression as major themes?), it is mainly due to the operation of patriarchy embodied in the figures of the fathers and other males (remember Praful in *Bravely Fought the Queen?*).

Gender Identity

This leads automatically to another of Dattani's concerns – gender identity. How are men and women constructed in terms of gender? What are the definitions of their roles? How meaningful are these definitions? Hasmukh Mehta does not think his son Ajit manly enough in *Where There's a Will*, and Amritlal does not think dancing is for men in *Dance Like a Man* (and crucially even Ratna thinks her husband Jairaj isn't much of a man). *Bravely Fought the Queen* foregrounds this whole issue with its very title. This seemingly awkward translation of the well-known Hindi poem that supplies the title to this play is rendered by Lalitha:

> 'We'd heard her praises sung so often
> So bravely fought the Rani of Jhansi
> So bravely fought the manly queen...' (Act 3)

Our attention is immediately focussed in the ensuing dialogue on the supposed manliness of the queen. What this does is to question what we have always lived with, our traditional ways of defining ourselves. Why should the bravery of a queen make her manly? Why should a man who wants to dance Bharatanatyam be effeminate? What is manly and what feminine? Why should it be so? Why can't women go out in the world? Why should men be masterly and women subservient? Why can't men and women be open about their sexuality? Dattani raises these and a host of other questions regarding gender and social stratification and hierarchy and sexuality.

Revelation of Past

Dattani's plays are revelatory in nature. The past rides the shoulder of the present and not only has to be dislodged and laid to rest but has to be faced fully for what it was. There is always some action that has been suppressed, some deeply damaging action that has contributed to the warped growth of characters and the conflicts between them. If in *Where There's a Will* it is the ghost not of Hasmukh Mehta but of his father that has to be recognised, in *Dance Like a Man* it is the collusion between Ratna and Amritlal to thwart Jairaj's ambitions as also Ratna's hand in the death of their son. In *Bravely Fought the Queen* it is a host of issues that have to be revealed and faced – from the homosexuality of certain characters, to the violence of the father, to the hand of Jiten in the maiming of his daughter, Daksha. In *Final Solutions* there are again various revelations, the most important being the heinous behaviour of Ramnik's father and grandfather. But while it may seem that this is almost Ibsenian, this concern with direct but suppressed causality, Dattani is actually more tangential. He is not so much interested in the causality – who can say that these are necessarily the only possible effects – as in the process of revelation. His concern is to show what

lies beneath, what took place before, in peeling the layers and showing us unexpected complexities.

Middle- Class Life

He shows us the hollowness of middle-class lives. His plays explore what lies below the facades characters and families put up to fool the world, reveal the essential loneliness of people. Dattani presents to us the vulnerability of characters, the emotional price they pay in their quest for successful appearances, in their need to belong. His characters are displaced, disenchanted. They are dangerously normal, average, people who are in search of happiness, and fulfilment. They need love and affection; they need to feel sexually fulfilled. If they seem to need the family only as much as one would need a terrible pain somewhere in the body, they need to work out their destinies within the family unit, as it is the basic unit of society. The family in Dattani stands for society at large. Dattani's characters search for security and acceptance, to be true to themselves and yet belong. These are everyday concerns of every person.

Family

Dattani's is not a world of simple dichotomies. There is a great deal of conflict in relationships and no one is willing to be an easy victim. In this world of patriarchy, women emerge as pretty strong characters. The home is a battlefield with uneasy (and perhaps disastrous) alliances being forged by various parties and everyone fights as many of the others as possible for individual turf. In Dattani's world the socialisation process initiated in the family unit has as its aim the stunted growth of a bonsai tree. The family is there to stifle all natural instincts and inclinations, to suppress and oppress, and to curb freedom and growth. All we can produce are ugly dwarves.

2.4 TECHNIQUES AND LANGUAGE

One thing that emerges immediately in Dattani's career is the fact that while he writes about everyday lives, he does not attempt an impossible realism. He in fact revels in the possibilities that the stage (as well as the fictive mode) offers him. A playwright who begins his career with a ghost present almost through the play obviously has no interest in replicating the drawing rooms of the world on the stage. In *Where There's a Will*, Dattani has the ghost addressing the audience directly with the actor playing the ghost picking up a victim in the audience to inform that his/her shoes need polishing (Act II, scene ii). In *Dance Like a Man* there are rapid shifts not only in space and time, even actors change roles instantaneously.

In his note to the play, Dattani gives us this direction:

> The play requires four performers, and the parts should be distributed as follows:
> THE YOUNG MAN, early twenties, plays Viswas and the younger Jairaj.
> THE YOUNG WOMAN, early twenties, plays Lata and the younger Ratna.
> THE OLD MAN, early sixties, plays the older Jairaj and his father, Amritlal Parekh.
> THE OLD WOMAN, early sixties, plays the older Ratna.
> It is important that the above role-switching be adhered to, as it is vital to the structure of the play.

Dattani's caution at the end of the note is important. It would be impossible to create the same impact if the switches in role are not performed the way he wants. In the first flashback in Act One, the actor playing Jairaj wears a shawl to change into his father. Viswas becomes Jairaj, and Lata changes into Ratna. Their ages remain the

same as the previous characters they played. A shawl, lighting, and a lightning change in the setting and we are in the 1940s. At the end of this flashback the younger Ratna exits calling for the younger Jairaj, Amritlal takes off his shawl and becomes the older Jairaj, and the older Ratna enters calling out to him. There are such rapid and effortless shifts in time and space throughout the play.

In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, past and present commingle as does the office and the home in Act II. The level that represents Baa's room in Act I remains in Act II even though the locale has changed to the office of the Trivedi brothers. Even the well stocked bar from the previous act is retained though now as part of the office. In this act you see the interaction between Baa and the women that took place almost off stage in Act I. You hear them through and in between the conversation between the men; and Baa's comments on her sons and her husband are heard as we watch the men in action. Baa's voice from the past intermingles with the present conversation between her sons and frames it in ways otherwise impossible.

In *Final Solutions*, Hardika and Daksha, the old grandmother and her younger self, exist on the same plane. When the play opens the younger (fifteen-year-old) Daksha is reading out what she has just written in her diary, while the sixty-year-old Hardika is seated at the same level. Again, Dattani's stage directions are worth noting:

> On another level is a room...This belongs to the young Daksha, who is in fact the grandmother, also sometimes seen as a girl of fifteen. There are several instances when Hardika – the grandmother, and Daksha – the young bride, are on this level at the same time, although they are the same person. Hardika should be positioned and lit in such a way that the entire action of the play is seen through her eyes.

The past and the present both co-exist, and while the past has fashioned the present the present helps the characters to re-read the past. So the play has to be seen through Hardika's eyes; the play should be seen as Hardika's education and tragedy. We are meant to see the social processes of oppression and hatred as they operate on Hardika. Hence even in a play which was meant to be about the construction of communal hatred, a play which was meant to be on a large scale, choric in character, Dattani's stage techniques are aimed at making the audience intimate with the life of a family – its trials and tribulations and debilitating secrets. This is perhaps why John McRae notes in his Introduction to *Final Solutions and Other Plays* that while Alyque Padamsee's production of Final Solutions was spectacular and choric, Dattani's (he is a director himself) was small-scale and intimate (p 8).

You must have noticed in the stage directions that we discussed above, as in the directions to other plays, that Dattani likes to divide his stage into different levels. This enables Dattani to mingle the past and the present as well as stretch available space to show different locations at the same time. This may help both – a narratorial linearity as well as simultaneity. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, for instance, in the scene we discussed earlier, the brothers are shown talking to each other in the office, while at the same time their mother is shown in her interaction with the women at home. This simultaneous action in two different locales helps us to evaluate the characters as the action builds up to the moment when the mother and the brothers speak through each other and some of the past is revealed. The influence of their mother's life and views on them and their lives is seen as a continued presence through the device of having her bedroom at a higher level and keeping it visible throughout the play.

As we have seen, Dattani exercises great care in ensuring through his detailed stage directions that readers and potential directors understand all this. This division of the stage allows clearly demarcated space for certain characters, or time periods, as well as for different locales. He specifies the use of lighting for a similar purpose. This allows Dattani to cut from one character to another, one time frame to another, one

locale to another as well as to fuse everything together when he needs to. This helps him to build tension as well as further the action. The stage also becomes emblematic of the layered nature of our lives. In *On a muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani allows for at least three levels, including one called 'shunya' where the true selves of the characters are revealed. C.K. Meena says, in an article on Dattani, "Unmasking the Middle Class: The Drama of Mahesh Dattani" (Indian Review of Books, Vol. 8, No. 6, 1999), that this distribution of "the action among different levels on stage... not only makes his plays visually exciting but makes them move at a snappy pace." What do you think?

Have you also noticed how often Dattani uses an outsider as catalyst to the action? He also experiments with symbolism (for example, the use of bonsai plants in *Bravely Fought the Queen*). He departs from his usual style to include a chorus in *Final Solutions*. And the same actors visibly play different roles in *Dance Like a Man* as we have seen. Dattani isn't averse to experimentation and is an evolving playwright. What we have established is that though Dattani seems to favour the well-made play as a vehicle, he doesn't mind playing around with it, bending and twisting it to his will. The well-made play is tailor made for Dattani because it essentially suits his kind of theatre where the character is foregrounded and key actions are revealed in climaxes. This structure helps him to build tension and to reveal things gradually till the tempo is heightened to the climax.

But at least two other things need to be said about Dattani's craft. Do you know what they are? We haven't mentioned his humour as yet, nor have we talked about his use of language. Dattani is essentially a comic writer. There is a great deal of humour in his plays, from the subtle to the slapstick. Kusum Haider points out in a review essay, "Essentially a Comic Muse" (*The Book Review*, Vol. XXII, No. 3), that the tone of Dattani's "plays is light, there is bright comedy within often sombre bounds." The comedy arises from Dattani's essential subject matter – human behaviour. There is often comedy in the way people talk to each other as well as in the way they present themselves to and perceive each other. But the amusing dialogue does give way to dark truths. I would like to think that Dattani makes you examine the spring-wells of your own sense of humour. Humour and laughter too are ways of dealing with the world and its unpalatable truths.

The most important contribution of Dattani is perhaps his use of language. The note to his very first play, *Where There's a Will*, reads as follows:

> Should the play be read in classrooms, I sincerely wish that English language teachers... will not dismiss my syntax as bad English, or worse still as incorrect. While knowledge of the rules of grammar is important, the richness and variety of the spoken word is a study in itself.
>
> The characters, I am sure, would love to speak in Gujarati but have unfortunately been conceived by a mind that thinks in English. This is not an apology, but a definition of reality. In fact, it is this misfortune that puts all such works on edge, creating challenges for both the performer and the serious student...

Dattani defends his use of English as spoken by people in India but also goes on to make another serious statement. He says that his characters "would love to speak in Gujarati" and his challenge as a writer is to convey their Gujaratiness without distortion in English. His *Where There's a Will* is thus a Gujarati play in English set in Bangalore. Dattani's characters speak the kind of English that most middle class Indians do. And they would obviously speak in it in the same situations that we would. The challenge that Dattani faces is not to allow the audience to feel that his use of English limits his range or that of his characters. He has to attempt the same feeling of authenticity, of range and of nuance, as a Gujarati playwright writing about the middle class. Do you think that Dattani manages this or do you think that his

characters end up speaking a homogenised convent English? Does his language remain a perennial limitation? I feel that Dattani manages to meet this challenge successfully. He is getting to be freer in his use of language to the extent of cracking interlingual jokes. As his characters begin to move freely from English to Gujarati and Kannada (do not forget that he is a Bangalore based playwright), much as middle class Gujarati residents of Bangalore, his theatre becomes visibly (audibly?) more representative and accessible and acceptable. Dattani, I think, has over a period of time managed to extend the range of his language and made it more suitable for his theatre.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Mahesh Dattani's plays usually deal with middle-class life in urban India. While the plays are usually based in Bangalore, they are peopled with Gujarati characters. The major issues he deals with are homosexuality, gender identity and construction, the pressure of the past, the hollowness of middle-class life, and the family as a battlefield. He uses all the resources of theatre at his command, from creating different levels on the stage to giving double roles to actors, to effective use of lighting and music. All this allows him to collapse the past and the present as well as geographical locations. He is also able to achieve fluidity of movement, which gives his plays a cinematic quality. He also uses Indian English with great confidence and captures the rhythms of the spoken language.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Name Dattani's published plays.
2. What according to you are the major themes in his plays?
3. Discuss Dattani's treatment of gender in his plays other than *Tara*.
4. Why does Dattani divide the stage into different levels or acting areas?
5. What are the various devices that Dattani uses to show the continuity of the past in the present?
6. What according to Dattani are the challenges that language poses to the Indian English dramatist?

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bentley, Eric. *The Theory of the Modern Stage: An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968

Dattani, Mahesh. *Final Solutions and Other Plays*, Madras: Manas (Affiliated East-West Press), 1994 (You will find the introduction quite useful.)

UNIT 3 READING *TARA*

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will discuss *Tara* and identify its themes. We will see how Dattani structures the play and develops the characters. Our discussion of his other plays will also help us in this task.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The first thing to do is to check your memory. Without looking up the text of *Tara* (this is assuming that you have read the text at least once), write down the story of the play. Notice that I am saying story, so don't follow the action of the play but write down the story as you understand/remember it, from the birth of *Tara* and Chandan.

Did you mention Roopa in the story? Did you need to? Can you write the story without mentioning Roopa? Did you mention Bharati's father? Did you need to? If you mentioned one and not the other, or if you mentioned neither, can you think why? Is neither character important? Roopa does appear on stage and has a role to play but is she more important than the absent grandfather? What I am pointing your attention to is the old fashioned but still relevant distinction between story and plot, which is that while the story tells you the sequence of events, plot tells you the why as well. When you write down the story you may also have decided to leave out characters who are only mentioned in passing as well as such incidents. You may have decided not to mention Prema or Nalini. Or you may have mentioned both the grandfather and Roopa as they both play a part in the story but who has the more important part, the greater impact on the lives of the major characters on stage? Obviously, it is the grandfather. Why do I say so? Think it through but we'll come back to it later.

What is your reaction when you read the opening stage directions of *Tara*? We have already seen the importance of stage directions when discussing some of Dattani's

Chandan and Tara
(*Tara*: A Scene Stealers Production Jan.1997)

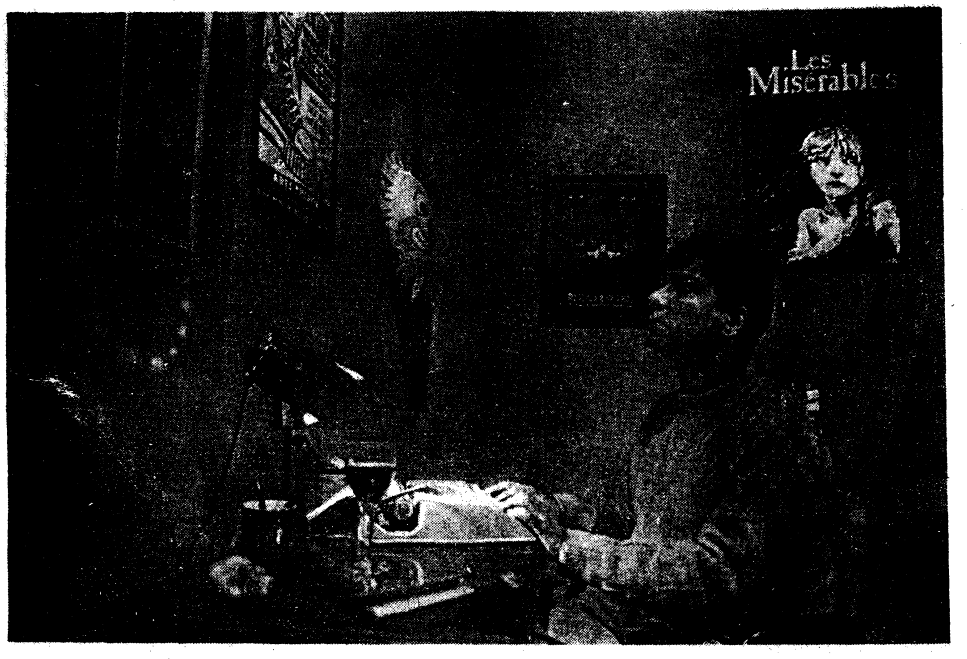
plays, so perhaps you don't need the admonishment or advice to read the stage directions carefully when you read plays. You know that stage directions are indications of the intentions of the playwright. A novelist can go on and on about character and mood and location and motivation. A playwright has to show all this through dialogues and character interaction. He can sketch in the setting and put down (short) notes to how the scene should be played/read in the stage directions. These stage directions also alert us to the playwright's world view and theatrical philosophy.

You can see from Dattani's first stage direction itself that he is a playwright for whom the set is an integral part of the action. It is also clear that while he segments the stage to show various locales and times. One of the levels, the one that represents Chandan's London bedsitter, is the only realistic level. This is then obviously Chandan's play. Dr. Thakkar sits behind on a higher level throughout the play and as Dattani points out, he has a "sheer, godlike presence." This alerts us to the fact that while Dr. Thakkar will have a major role to play as perhaps a catalyst he is not important directly to the emotional drama. The lowest level represents the Patel residence, which "is seen only in memory." There is a galli outside the house "which can be suggested by cross lighting." This is where the past is played out and revealed. If you've missed noting this in the cast of characters you will realise now that there is an older (called Dan to avert confusion) as well as a younger version of Chandan in

the play. The stage direction itself alerts us to the fact that this is not a straightforward realistic play but one in which memory and flashback will play a major role.

3.2 ACT I

Let us go through the action of the first act of the play quickly. You realise of course that this will be different in structure from the story you wrote down. We're now looking at the sequence of action on stage. The play opens with Dan. We've already been alerted by the stage directions to the fact that this is Dan's play, for his level is the only realistic level in the play. Dan is busy typing when the play opens and addresses the audience directly immediately. We are told that (i) he keeps reliving an experience trying to put it on paper, (ii) that he lives in London mainly to put distance between him and his past, (iii) that the play he is writing is called "Twinkle *Tara*" (and you know that this play is called *Tara*, and that '*Tara*' means 'star') and is composed of his memories, (iv) that what he had tried desperately to suppress so far was the fact of having had a twin sister, *Tara*, who was inseparable from him – "The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb." He also talks of his freakishness, that he is a freak. In this longish soliloquy, we are made aware of the pain and anguish caused to Dan by past events, events that have to do with his twin sister, *Tara*. We are also told that Dan and *Tara* had shared one body – that they were Siamese twins.



Dan in his apartment in Condon
(*Tara*: A Scene Stealers Production Jan. 1997)

The action (and the lighting) moves to Mumbai and to the past. Bharati has finished her morning pooja, and Patel is getting ready to go to work. In Dattani's plays, men go to work and women safeguard and ensure the continuation of tradition and rituals. These are stereotypical gender roles and Dattani makes full use of them as such. Dattani sketches in an immediate conflict between husband and wife regarding her father. Bharati also seems more concerned than Patel about *Tara*'s diet and health. The children have a health problem and there is mention of publicity that had surrounded them in the past. Roopa is introduced to us in all her glory while it is also made clear that Patel would like Chandan to follow in his footsteps. As *Tara* explains to Roopa about the conversation between father and son, "The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the

cave." Chandan seems to have different plans and wants to be a writer. And *Tara* would like to be "Strong. Healthy. Beautiful." We're made to understand that it is Bharati's mental health that Patel is worried about.

There is a break in the action here and we go back to Dan who is presumably remembering all that we have witnessed and he decides to get back to essentials. It is

Tara and Chandan with Bharati Patel
(*Tara*: A Scene Stealers Production Jan. 1997)

Tara that he wants to focus on and we're told that nature hadn't been fair to either of them. Perhaps nature intended them to remain united, but "preserved in formalin for future generation to study." Dan decides to begin with Dr. Thakkar who had taken on God and Nature. In the nature of a TV interview Dr. Thakkar (the interviewer being Dan) relates to us the case history of Chandan and *Tara*. He talks of having had to operate on them when they were only three months old. When he talks of their being of different sexes, Dan remarks about being "A freak among freaks."

This is the cue for action to move back to the lowest level. We see *Tara* being asked to exhibit her artificial leg. In the ensuing dialogue between her and Chandan we learn a lot of facts but most importantly that Bharati fusses over *Tara* and that *Tara* resents what she sees as lack of interest in her father towards her. One of the girls who inspected *Tara*'s leg turns out to be Roopa who makes her re-entrance on stage. We learn that Patel and Bharati belong to different states, Gujarat and Karnataka respectively. We see Bharati bribing Roopa to be friendly with *Tara*. Roopa runs off to tell her friends that Bharati is the odd one in the family. We flit to Dr. Thakkar and then cut to Patel hearing over the phone that a donor has been found for *Tara*'s kidney transplant. It turns out that Bharati wants to donate her own kidney but that Patel doesn't approve of it.

We see the husband and wife quarrel and the husband say bitterly that her father's money was always Bharati's strength against him. When Patel tries to force Bharati to see a psychiatrist ("You'll have to obey me. It's *my* turn now." He says.), Bharati threatens to reveal something to *Tara*. Patel gives up but asserts that it would be from him that they should hear the revelation. Soon afterwards we see Bharati with the children and she tells Chandan that Patel doesn't care so much for *Tara* and that even though their grandfather had left them money, *Tara* would need a career to retain her own self esteem. She has tried to prevent Roopa from saying something to *Tara* and

it turns out that this was popular belief that when Patels didn't want daughters they would drown the babies in milk. Bharati herself seems to have a lot of love for *Tara* and she says, "*Love can make up for a lot.*"

During this talk Bharati has been knitting a sweater for *Tara* and Chandan points out that she has dropped a stitch. Patel enters when Chandan is helping his mother with her knitting, and this calls forth his views on gender identity and the confusion that he feels his wife is creating. He has already made his plans for Chandan, that he would study further and go abroad. He accuses his wife of having taken over *Tara* completely and deliberately. The act ends with *Tara* who is the bone of contention falling into a dead faint.

In the first act itself there have been a number of revelations, as well as a number of hints about further dark secrets. How many of Dattani's characteristic concerns have you noted so far? In other words, how many of the themes that we said were important to Dattani has he picked up in this play as well as one evident from the first act itself? Write down your list first:

_____

_____

_____

_____

You must have written gender identity. It does seem to be quite important in this play. The roles that Patel seems to assume are natural to males and the roles that he assigns to women are vastly different. Why can't Chandan knit, and why can't *Tara* go to his office? Why are baby girls killed in our country? You must have also noted down the relationship between husband and wife or noted it down as family in conflict. This is typical Dattani, the husband and wife in conflict over an increasingly fragmented family. There is the pressure of past here as well as an unseen (dead) Bharati's father who seems to have played a role in their deteriorating relationship. The relationship between siblings is also important and you wonder what effect the turf battle between their parents (with them as prizes to be won) will have on them.

Mr. & Mrs. Tara and Chandan, Dan in background
(*Tara*: A Scene Stealers Production Jan. 1997)

You can see the familiar Dattani dramatic concerns and trademarks of the necessary revelation and of the suppressed past, of societal constrictions of [illegible]ity, and of strong patriarchy. We'll re-examine this list after we look at the second act.

3.3 ACT II

This act opens with Bharati and *Tara* in conversation with each other. Bharati is going to donate her kidney to *Tara* in a soon to be performed operation. Bharati says she is doing this for love as well as to make up for (after a little hesitation) *Tara*'s father and all the things God hadn't given *Tara*. Dan looks through a scrapbook and tells us about the operation and of Bharati's indisposition after it. He ends with the comment that even nature had given *Tara* a raw deal. Dr. Thakkar tells us of the various complications that attended the operation of the twins. The action cuts to the return of *Tara* after surgery and the revelation to her that her mother has had a nervous breakdown. While Dr. Thakkar continues to talk of the operation to separate the children the action goes back to the Patel household. *Tara* is unhappy about her mother and refuses to go to physiotherapy or to fill forms for college. Chandan refuses to do either without her and Patel wants *Tara* to comply for her brother's sake. His plans for his son are still on and it is also revealed that the grandfather had left his house in Bangalore to both of them, but his money only to Chandan. Patel resents his father-in-law deeply and advocates the burning down of the house! While Chandan and *Tara* resolve the college issue, it becomes clear to us that while Chandan is not so affected by his lack of one leg, *Tara* longs to be normal in that respect. In the next movement, Dan talks about the dying having an understanding of and attachment to life. Dr. Thakkar continues to talk of the difficulties of the operation and the action moves to Roopa and Chandan. The usual talk of movies is about "Sophie's Choice", in which Sophie has to choose between sacrificing a son or a daughter. There is a mild attempt at petting that leads nowhere. *Tara* enters to defuse the scene but ends up throwing Roopa out, calling her ugly and deformed.

Dr. Thakkar explains to us that both the children would be sterile and then *Tara* wishes to die rather than have so much money spent on her. All she cares about is her mother, she says. This movement ends with her equating Chandan with their father and other men as "creeps." There is a phone call from Patel to Dan to inform him of Bharati's death. Dan refuses to go back and asks his father to come to London instead now that both *Tara* and Bharati are dead. *Tara* has been dead for six years. In the next movement, we see *Tara* accusing Chandan of indifference towards their mother. She tells Chandan that their father is denying her access to their mother. She thinks that her mother has a secret to disclose to her. At this moment of complete distance from them, Dr. Thakkar informs us that the separation was a complete success. Chandan and *Tara* defy their father and decide to go and visit their mother. Dr. Thakkar tells us that the greatest challenge was to keep the girl alive. And Patel decides to tell the children the truth. He says that all three were to blame – the grandfather, his wife, and him. The twins had three legs between them and the third leg was fed by the girl's blood system. The chances of the leg's survival were greater with the girl. But Bharati and her father had decided to risk giving the leg to the boy. Patel couldn't protest strongly enough and the doctor was bought off with sanction for land in Bangalore by Bharati's powerful politician father. The leg had survived for two days while it could have been *Tara*'s forever. *Tara* is devastated by this revelation. The play ends with the spirits of *Tara* and Dan hugging each other.

You can see of course that in my description of the action there is a lot I have left out in the two acts. I expect you to fill in all that including Roopa's role in the last movement of the play. You must have also noticed that I have been talking of the play in terms of movements. The constant reference to music in the play suggested it to me that this was one way to talk of the shifts in locale and action.

3.4 THEMES

Let us now get back to our earlier short discussion about the themes that Dattani explores in this play. We started with gender identity, but is that the maior theme?

What do you think now after looking at both the acts? What does the dark secret revealed in Act II have to do with? Of course this revelation itself is a major concern of the play – the exposure of the fact that people hide their motivations (and past actions) in their relationships with people. Bharati's excessive love for *Tara*, her concern for her future, her empathy and sympathy for her, her desire to donate her own kidney to *Tara* when there is another donor, her desire for *Tara*'s exclusive love – everything is motivated by the inhuman act of having decided to deny her one leg. It is the knowledge of having committed a wrong that leads to her mental breakdown and the deterioration of her relationship with her husband.

But is her husband free of blame? Why is he more interested in Chandan's future than in *Tara*'s? Why did he agree to his wife's and father in law's plan? Isn't he also complicit in their decision? Why? Isn't it because he too subscribes to the ideology of the patriarchal world? He can blame his wife and her father but he is no different from them. The male should always be given the greater chance. If Bharati's father had left the money only to Chandan, he is consistent in his actions. He always values the male higher. But what about Patel? He too makes plans only for Chandan's education and future career. Bharati may have taken *Tara* over because of her sense of guilt but Patel doesn't seem to have cared very much about it. Thus more than gender identity, it is gender hierarchy, patriarchy (which of course rules on gender identity) that seems to be the major concern in this play. It is to underline this that Dattani has Dan apologise to *Tara* at the end of the play: "Forgive me. *Tara*. Forgive me for making it my tragedy."

This is a play about the injustices done to women. This is also a play about the injustices done to men. The construction of gender, the hierarchisation, does as much harm to (sensitive) men as to women. The men in the play, here I mean Dan and Patel (Dan more than Patel), carry as much of an unfair burden as the women. Patel is complicit in the working of patriarchy but then so is Bharati. But, while Bharati's pangs of guilt have changed her views, Patel continues to subscribe to patriarchal views almost as if in defiance of Bharati, to rub her nose in. Nothing in Dattani's plays is simple. Dan, however, the recipient of an ill starred, unwanted, tragic gift, will carry forever the burden of having wasted *Tara*'s leg and blighting her life by just the fact of being himself – a male. His life is profoundly affected by the decisions of other people, by the values of his/our society. He has to pay for the sins of his parents (and grandfather). Hence the play ends with *Tara* and Dan hugging each other, each with two normal legs now, beyond both nature and society (and its science). I say society and not science, though I do recognise the role of science within brackets, because it is society that decides the uses of science. Dr. Thakkar and his team could easily have taken the sound medical decision of leaving the leg with *Tara* but for his ambitions and the carrot of land held out to him by people who had decided on basis of gender and not on medical grounds.

The play is obviously also about the complications of family life, the facade of middle class morality and commitment to family values. What is the morality that the Patel family has practised? If the decision to give the leg to Chandan was taken by Bharati and her father, Patel had kept quiet because of Bharati's father's social status, as also because he had no clear-cut view to the contrary. His family has cut them off because of their inter-caste, inter-regional marriage. Hence, they are dependent on Bharati's father for both monetary and moral support. This in turn has led to a power structure within the family where Bharati and her father take the important decisions. Thus we see the couple bickering after the death of Bharati's father and after Bharati has felt the full force of her guilt in taking the decision about *Tara*. Having sacrificed *Tara*'s leg, Bharati has had to struggle to construct her maternal love and concern for her daughter, to assert her moral superiority over her husband, to carve out her space in the family. Her final act of donating her kidney to *Tara* is an act of expiation, even if ultimately futile.

What we see is that love itself is an instrument, not an end or a state of being. Bharati uses her love for *Tara* as a weapon against Patel, as well as an expression of her desire to compensate *Tara*. This should remind you of Jiten and his mother, Baa, in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and their frequently expressed love for Daksha, Jiten's daughter, who had received grievous injury when in the womb because Baa had instigated Jiten to violence against his pregnant wife. Can parental love be taken for granted? Can any love be taken for granted as a natural given? Can family relationships be assumed to be protective and loving and caring? Isn't any and every relationship actually a site for conflict? And isn't this a conflict for control and power? Most of these conflicts are hidden from the world and a facade of decorum and contentment is maintained. What all this puts in jeopardy quietly but completely is chances for individual growth and fulfilment.

The revelation of the skeleton in the cupboard is the typical action of a Dattani play. Here the skeleton points towards the gender issue. The action leads inexorably towards the revelation, and we see characters struggling to meet the imminent moment of crisis. Dattani doesn't seem so much concerned with characters per se as with the process of revelation, the unearthing of secrets, the unmasking of the supportive family. Individuals cannot exist in a vacuum, cannot escape the consequences of societal dictates and familial choices. Dattani is not interested in the angst of characters, in their tragedies. This play is not Chandan's tragedy, nor is it really *Tara*'s. There is tragic action in his plays, but that tragic action belongs to every day life. His is not the drama of heroes. Dattani's world and Dattani's characters constitute the normal middle class urban India.

Everybody yearns for a normal life, but nobody knows what that is in reality. Roopa is the counterpoint to *Tara* and Chandan in this play. She is normal and offensive and comic. She is offensive and comic because she is normal. Dattani deliberately creates an opportunity for the audience/readers to laugh at her, giving her an uncertain

Roopa and Tara
(*Tara*: A Scene Stealers Production Jan. 1997)

control over both English and Kannada. She has all the curiosity of a healthy adolescent girl and all the confusions and fears. But Dattani makes it impossible for you to ascribe normality as a positive attribute to Roopa. Her minor foray into sexual exploration with Chandan is played for laughs and otherwise she is portrayed as a mean and slightly corrupt figure, the kind who will grow up to constitute the ever interfering, ever watching ('ogling') society. She exploits Bharati's need while laughing at her (Dattani uses Roopa to show us Bharati's unhealthy obsession with

Tara's life). If this be normality, who wants it? Notions of normality and the implementation, the institution, of norms, are seen as vicious traps in the world-view of these plays. *Tara* declares that the rest of the world is ugly and she has a point.

What I haven't mentioned so far, and you must be wondering why, is that the play deals with disability and its consequences. At the surface level, the play seems to be about this in the beginning. The impact of the children's disability on the family and their own lives seems to be at the heart of the play. The problems others have accepting them for what they are – fun-loving, wisecracking growing children – and hence their struggle for acceptance and the levels of frustration that this brings on seems to be part of the central action of the play. The strain on the parents and the effect this has on their marriage seems to complete the picture. That the family has gone through tough times seems obvious and they seem to be reeling under the continuing strain. However, the play has other paths to traverse. But this does remain a major concern in the play, and Roopa's interaction with them is a thread that runs right through the play and is emblematic of how society receives them. Towards the end of the play, the last time we see Roopa, she is shown taunting them, calling them freaks and holding up a poster saying "We don't want freaks." We have a special ability to make various people unwanted, be it in terms of their religion or case or community or different abilities.

Tara, like any other play, can be looked at in various ways. We have already looked at several themes in the play. But some approaches become apparent only in performance. Roopa can be seen as a merely comic figure on stage and the actress playing the role can walk away with the laughter and the applause. Hence Dattani has to work carefully in order to balance the play out in such a way that even if the audience roots for the actress playing Roopa, the play doesn't lose its impact. We'll look at the techniques that Dattani uses in *Tara* in the next unit. Obviously, techniques help to foreground his thematic concerns. So we may come back to some of our discussion in this unit once again.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have looked closely at the text of *Tara*, and discussed the various themes that inform the play. *Tara* is about disability and all that it causes in a certain social environment, it is about patriarchy, gender hierarchy and gender identity, about power play within the family, about middle-class morality, about the social role of medicine, about normality, about the pressures of the past, about sexuality, about youth and the imperfect world...

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. Would it matter if the medical information given in *Tara* were absolutely wrong in reality? Give reasons for your answer.
2. How important is the family in Dattani's plays? Answer with special reference to *Tara*.
3. What is Roopa's role in *Tara*?
4. What according to you are the major themes of *Tara*? Discuss whatever you consider to be the most important of them.

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Dattani, Mahesh. *Tara*, New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1995.

UNIT 4 APPRECIATING *TARA*

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to study *Tara* in order to identify the theatrical techniques that Dattani employs and their impact on our reading of the play. We will also examine the language of the play.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A play doesn't take too long to read. What I would like you to do is to re-read *Tara* as many times as you need to feel completely familiar with the text. This time around pay particular attention to the stage directions and the language. Techniques influence the ways in which we interpret any play. Music, costume, lighting – all help in shaping the way we receive characters and evaluate their motivations and actions. The language the characters speak help us in placing them in terms of their social and geographical environment(s).

4.2 TECHNIQUES

We have already looked at one of Dattani's evolving techniques – the division of the stage into various levels. The three levels are there throughout the play allowing Dattani to cut and splice action almost cinematically. Dan's level is described as the only realistic level and is furnished to represent a London bedsitter. We see the room of an aspiring writer. It is from this level that we watch the play. What I mean by that is that Dan is the narrator of the play, and in a sense the organiser of the action, much like a sutradhar. What we get to see at the other two levels is either imagined (Dr. Thakkar's level) or remembered, (the Patel household). This is Dan's play and we see it from his point of view. It is his remix version that we get of what happened in the Patel household more than six years earlier.

Dan is not only the narrator. He is also a character in the play. He is not just looking back but participating in the action. Dattani makes us very aware of the constructed nature of this narrative (as all narratives) by having a quick break in action and a re-start of the action to satisfy Dan's aesthetic (and is it only aesthetic?) requirements. Open your text to the page where the first episode in the Patel house ends with Patel expressing his worry about his wife. Read the stage direction: "*Cross cut to Dan who suddenly jerks as if woken from a nightmare.*" In the speech after that Dan talks of his mind wandering too much and tries again for a beginning and finds it in Dr. Thakkar. Dan is the interviewer at this level of action, where Dr. Thakkar holds forth proudly on his God-like intervention in the lives of *Tara* and Chandan. But action at Dan's

level does not consist of only direct address to the audience. Dan also receives a phone call from his father who is in India. This is the phone call that tells him and us of his mother's death. We see Dan's mental and emotional turmoil, his desire to put as much distance between him and India and the past as possible. But the past is within, just an ever present (memory) level away. When the play ends, we are back with Dan in his real time, a Dan who has imagined all that we have watched. He still hasn't managed to put it down on paper. This framing of the action ensures that we see this as Dan's play, that we realise that the action has been constructed from Dan's point of view.

In our very first view of the stage, Dattani breaks the unity of place. He disregards the other two unities as well – the unity of time and the unity of action. He cuts between different times (including one which perhaps is totally imaginary and attributed in terms of time to immediately after the operation – this is Dr. Thakkar's interview), and different actions (this is not a straight forward narrative). As I said in an earlier unit, Dattani plays around with the form of the well-made play, shaping and reshaping it like plasticine. And yet there is a strong sense of unity in his play, the action moves inexorably towards the crisis, the ultimate revelation. All the levels come together in a crescendo towards the end, when you see and hear all the characters that have been on stage. While Patel makes his revelation, Dr. Thakkar moves to his triumphant conclusion, Roopa plays out her spite, Bharati shows us her over-compensatory love for *Tara*, and Dan expresses his revulsion. Everything comes together as the play comes to an end.

Dattani moves from one level to another with lightning speed using (yes!) lighting, and music. When the play begins a spot picks up Dan. As he begins to imagine the past music begins to play faintly and then a spot lights up the stage level and *Tara* and Chandan walk into it. Then the lights cross fade to the Patel's living room and the action moves there. Again, when Dr. Thakkar is introduced to us, the light picks him up while Dan fades into darkness. But Dr. Thakkar's interviewer is Dan who continues to speak from his level. Thus, we see how just by clever use of lighting the action can be picked up at any level without any breaks for change of scene. It is this that gives the play the feeling of unity of action. You can see how Dattani handles this throughout the play.

Dattani uses music as well to both create a certain mood as well as to make a point about certain characters. If you've read the play carefully, you'll remember that the music played at important moments is by Brahms. There is a pointed exchange between Chandan and *Tara* about the music. Can you recall it? Who is the other musician referred to there? Why is he referred to, do you think? Pause here for a minute and work it out for yourself.

If you remember, the first reference to Brahms is in the stage directions in the first act, right after the interview with Dr. Thakkar that ends with Dan describing himself (and obviously *Tara*) as a freak among freaks. To the "explosive opening of Brahms' first concerto" as the directions put it, *Tara* is made to expose her artificial leg to the three girls in her locality. She enters the house and after a little while comments on the music, listening to it with pleasure. She then says, "Beethoven must have been a passionate man." When she is told that it is Brahms' first concerto that they are listening to, she says, "Stop it. Turn it off. I thought it was Beethoven." After a while, after she has revealed to Chandan what had transpired outside and told him that one day she would tell those girls "exactly how frightful they look", she says, "Oh, play the music real loud. Beethoven was never as good as this."

You may have thought that this was just an exchange between characters, much as people talk about liking various musicians or singers or groups in real life, of no real consequence. But a play is not real life. Every word spoken on stage is significant.

You may or may not know western classical music well or know it at all, but just looking up the names of these composers in an encyclopaedia should reveal a few things to us. Both these composers were German and Beethoven is said to have influence Brahms. But the important point to notice about them is that Beethoven started going deaf in his twenties, and wrote some of his greatest music when he was completely deaf. *Tara*, in her moment of deep hurt and resentment caused by the 'normal' world wants to hear only Beethoven. She identifies herself with the musician with a disability, the musician who established his greatness in spite of being unable to hear his own creations. The same music that she has enjoyed she wants to reject once she learns that it is not by this composer. But Brahms' first concerto is described by Chandan as having "his quality of high tragedy and romance – of youth bursting forth in the world with all its claim. A spring like freshness..." (He says this was written on the record cover!) After she gets rid of her feelings by talking things through with Chandan, *Tara*'s natural longing for a fulfilling life reasserts itself and she demands that Brahms be played loudly again. Youth is once again making its claim on the world loudly and clearly. We seem to be discussing the theme of the play once again. This is why we say that technique and theme are wedded together. Could we say that Brahms' first concerto becomes the theme music of *Tara*?

When I started this discussion about music, I did say that many of us may not have heard of these composers or have heard western classical music at all. Even in the play only *Tara* and Chandan seem interested in this music and informed about it. What does this do to our evaluation of them as characters? Obviously they are more 'westernised' than the other characters in the play. (Notice that the older Chandan is an English Dan.) It also shows them at a tangent to the society around them; they have been pushed into a different trajectory of life. Does it make them stand out in the world of the play, showcase their status as misfits? Does it also make them appear more intelligent, more cultured than the rest of the characters? You do realise that your answers will also depend on your real life views. If you think that people who listen to western classical music are snobs, you may not see the characters in a better light for having the taste for such music. If you think it shows taste, you'll look at *Tara* and Chandan with a degree of more sympathy.

How else is music used in the play? You do realise that it is up to the director to choose what music to play when, except what has been written in by the author. There is at least one other instance when Dattani specifies a piece of music to be associated with one character. When Dr. Thakkar is introduced to us, A television style signature tune is played to set up the interview format as also to signal a different movement in the play. Dr. Thakkar will show us his public documentary self, be the revered modern icon. He'll share information with us – information that will show him in good professional light – and claim his fifteen minutes of fame. The information age has no sympathy for the humanity it claims to serve. Just like the television intrudes into people's lives, Dr. Thakkar intruded into their lives. By playing a signature tune, Dattani makes us ready for the TV interview format (and the voyeurism that it brings out in us).

We have already seen how Dattani uses a technique he has used earlier, the presence of two actors playing the same character but at different stages of life. This was through role switches in *Dance Like a Man*, but in *Final Solutions* the characters had been present at the same time on stage. In *Tara*, this technique is repeated, and we see Dan as well as Chandan on stage at the same time even if at different levels. This obviously underlines the fact that Dattani isn't writing a realistic play but it surely is meant to do more than that. One thing that strikes me immediately is that Dattani picks for portrayal that stage in a character's life in which some crisis has occurred. The person who undergoes that crisis continues to live in the older person, continues to haunt the action even much later in life. Chandan's life reached a crisis point when they were in Mumbai for *Tara*'s kidney transplant operation. What Chandan realised then was not something he could come to terms with easily. However much Dan may

move away from that past in terms of distance and time, Chandan is there along with *Tara*, just below the surface.

You must have also noticed how Dattani deftly sketches in the social environment and geographical locale. This is a play set in Mumbai and London with a past (that is referred to) in Bangalore. The multicultural nature of Indian cities and especially Mumbai is easily worked into the play with the names of people – Narayan saab in the neighbourhood, Dr.Kapoor in the hospital, a kannadiga Roopa ... It is revealed to us that Patel and Bharati themselves belong to different states. And while on names, Chandan and *Tara* can be from many different places in India, but Chandan also stands for the coveted sandalwood. This resonates with his wooden leg, which is hardly an object of desire in the play. *Tara* means star and Twinkling *Tara* has hardly been treated as the star of anyone's eyes.

Did you notice the number of movies named in the play? What does this detailing achieve? Do you remember which character mentions the name of a movie first? It is Roopa of course. Cinema is a part of popular culture and the 'normal' and 'common' Roopa would obviously be obsessed with movies. When we first see her, she is shown talking to Prema's mother who is (we guess) denying her access to her friend. This is because Roopa seems to have planned to see "Fatal Attraction" with her without the mother's permission. Roopa's choice of movies is also dictated by her awakening sexuality. It is with Roopa that the world of movies enters the play and thus we have references to "Sophie's Choice", "Twins", and "Children of Lesser God." The last movie is about deaf and dumb people while 'Twins" is about twins with a difference. We've already looked at "Sophie's Choice." Each one of these movies comments tangentially on the central situation of the play. So while the VCR and these movies may actually detail in a time period, they also serve other purposes in the action of the play.

One of the techniques that Dattani uses to quickly and economically sketch in a dense environment in spite of using spare staging and fewer characters is reference to various unseen and unheard characters throughout the play. For example, Praful is never present on stage in *Bravely Fought the Queen* and yet he has a role to play in the action. Nor is the autorickshaw driver in the same play. This kind of reference allows a textual richness without dramatic excess and confusion. It suggests to us that there is a world out there in which the characters live. You can see this technique in other plays of Dattani's as well. Does he use this in *Tara*? Try and remember at least two characters who are named as being part of the world depicted in *Tara* but who are never represented on stage:

You must have thought of Nalini and Prema immediately even if you didn't remember their names correctly. Roopa is their representative on stage. But did you remember Praful? (Dattani does seem to have a fondness for certain names!) Praful is Patel's brother in England who is referred quite early in the play as the person who would take care of Chandan's future education. Chandan talks to his father later on, asking him not to talk to him through Praful but directly. There is also Narayan saab, the neighbour, with whom Patel speaks early in the first act. You should also remember Prema's mother with whom Roopa speaks before she talks to *Tara* and Chandan the first time.

Dattani tries to use all the resources of theatre at his command in order to make an effective dramatic statement. He is willing to experiment all the time, willing to use symbolism and stylisation if it can get an effect across. In the rapid movement of this play, as it reaches the climax, Dattani shows for a moment Bharati talking lovingly as if to an infant in her arms. Is this an image from the past, or an image from the dramatic present (she has had a nervous breakdown after all)? It doesn't matter for what we are meant to see is the image of a loving mother – an image she had worked so hard at making and maintaining. It is because of the way that he constructs the

play that Dattani can get away with the last piece of action in the play – *Tara* and Dan walking onstage without limping and then hugging each other in understanding and forgiveness. This is not a realistic play and hence it is not a mushy (Hindi film style) ending. I wonder if you remember the reference to the Hindi film style separation and reunion of siblings in the first act (this is in a conversation between *Tara* and Chandan, the same conversation in which they discuss Brahms). The siblings have been finally separated by nature and reunited by sentiment.

4.3 LANGUAGE

You could refresh your memory about language and Indian English drama by looking at earlier units. We have already looked at Dattani's views on language as well as the way in which he uses it in earlier plays. We see a similar sense of freedom in *Tara*, don't we? If Dattani had to use such a tag question ("don't we?"), he would have had his character say "isn't it?" for that is what is heard more often in Indian English. Dattani doesn't just make points with his use of English, he has moved far enough even to make points with his use of Kannada in *Tara*. Can you recall how he does it? It is Roopa who breaks into Kannada once she knows that the Patel family has come from Bangalore. But as a result of the incomplete hotch potch cultural education that we all get in this modern urban India, her Kannada is atrocious, as atrocious as her English. Her Kannada identifies her as presumptuous and half-baked.

While on the use of other Indian languages, there are jokes and wisecracks in this play which presume knowledge of Hindi, especially Bambaiya Hindi. In the little long lost sibling act that *Tara* and Chandan play, when *Tara* calls out "Bhaiya" to her brother, Chandan retorts that she has just called him a milkman. Only that he doesn't even say milkman, he says "doodhwalla". If you don't know Hindi 'bhaiya' means 'brother', and if you don't know Mumbai Hindi, 'bhaiya' would refer to a milkman there, a 'doodhwalla'. This isn't a major part of the play but it is refreshing to see an Indian English play move into other Indian languages and not just for local colour.

What did I mean by Dattani making points with his use of English? I explained about his use of Kannada and how that helps to characterise Roopa, as also how her English characterises her. As a matter of fact, Dattani makes cruel fun of the girl's lack of control over English. A number of jokes in the play are at the expense of her English starting off with "two peas in a pot." It would be an interesting exercise for you to mark all the jokes cracked at her expense. The last one is when she says that she and Chandan are not 'combatible.' The 'b' in the middle could also gesture to an inability to distinguish between 'b' and 'p' which is characteristic of some South Indians. This English places Roopa as a character inferior to *Tara* and Chandan. Roopa could also be shown as speaking strongly accented Indian (Kannadiga) English. So she would be an object of fun the minute she opens her mouth. This is certainly a class attitude in operation and perhaps that is the reason Dattani introduces the little Kannada that he does – to show her as linguistically and intellectually deficient in any case.

The English spoken in this play (perhaps even the fact that it is in English, or even the fact that it is a play to be performed in urban closed auditoriums) marks it as a play about the middle class, for the middle class (and the upper class as well!). What Dattani establishes and exploits theatrically is the fact that there is a certain level of acceptability to standard middle class Indian English. The stress and intonation need not be British, nor need the language be absolutely grammatically correct. There can be Indian words as well as allusions and metaphors. But this does not mean that any kind of English is acceptable. Deviations from this English are necessarily comic (almost all the humour in this play is linguistic) and point to the class aspiration and lower status of the characters speaking this deviant English.

Is the English spoken in the play limiting in any way? Remember that this is a family formed by an interstate marriage, the mother is Kannadiga and the father Gujarati. The children have obviously been to public schools where the medium of education and, more and more, the medium of all interactions is English. The medium of communication in such a family would be English. They have also moved around a bit – there is mention of an earlier stay in Mumbai and another in London. Again this makes it natural that they would speak English. Not that they do not know other languages but English is what they would be and are comfortable in. This is the new global world of the middle class and the lingua franca of this world is English. Having said all that, the question asked at the beginning of this paragraph still needs to be answered. Did you feel when reading the play that the language inhibits, limits, the dramatist in any way? Does it stop him from reaching certain emotional levels that are more natural to other Indian languages?

It is interesting here to recall the conversation between Karnad and Dattani that I referred to in an earlier unit. Talking of the performance of Karnad's play *The Fire and the Rain* in Karnad's own English translation, Dattani says, "...what was really refreshing...was that you gave so much to a group to work with, the language and the sheer simplicity of words...at no point did I feel that it was slipping into rhetoric or self-indulgent poetry." (*Indian Review of Books*, Vol. 8, N0. 6) Karnad's reply is that English is particularly sensitive to pomposity. What I am directing you to is the fact that Dattani may be deliberately eschewing 'high' emotion – "rhetoric or self-indulgent poetry". Hence if English is seen as limiting then in that particular case both Dattani and Karnad see it as a positive rather than a negative characteristic of the language – it imposes a certain emotional discipline on the writer.

Does Dattani manage to individuate characters by the English they speak? You have Roopa as well as Dr. Thakkar who are characterised by the language that they speak. We've looked at Roopa's language already; Dr. Thakkar's is the formal public speech English, the English of a scientist speaking to ordinary viewers. Chandan plays with the language more than the others (after all he is an aspiring writer); *Tara*'s English is that of the educated young people's (with its quota of slang); the parents speak a more studied English but even here Bharati is more apt to use Indian words. By the time Dattani came to write *Tara*, he is quite sure of what he can achieve with Indian English and *Tara* is a good example of what such theatre can achieve.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we saw how Dattani uses the theatrical resources at his command to control the way we view the action. We saw how he uses the segmented stage in *Tara* and how effective use of lighting and music allows him to use this stage to cut and splice the action almost cinematically. We saw how his techniques help him to present a character in a certain light and direct us to a certain response and evaluation. We saw how he plays with the structure of the well-made play and how he gives us a feeling of the real world without the features of theatrical realism. We also saw how he uses the language with great dexterity in order to individuate characters as well as to detail a social milieu. We saw that Dattani's humour is an integral part of his play.

Let us end with a question. Do you think *Tara* is a bleak play or an optimistic, essentially comic, play? Your answer by now will be as good as mine.

4.5 QUESTIONS

1. How does Dattani use music in *Tara*?

2. Discuss the use of stage levels and lighting by Dattani in *Tara*.

3. How does Dattani give texture to the play? In other words, how does he give you a sense of place, and time? How does he make you feel that these characters belong to a certain world?

4. Do you agree with the view that all Dattani characters speak the same homogenised convent English? Discuss Dattani's use of English in *Tara*.

Conversation with Mahesh Dattani

Anjali: Hi Mahesh Welcome to Delhi

Mahesh: Thank you.

Anjali: And congratulations for The Sahtiya Award.

Mahesh: Thank you Anjali.

Anjali: And I think this is the first time an Indian English playwright has won this prestigious award.

Mahesh: That's right it's unprecedented

Anjali: So, What do you think this is going to do to the Indian English Theatre in this country?

Mahesh: Well, I think this has been really the kind of endorsement that Indian English Theatre in the country has been looking for because up till now it seems as if it belonged to a fringe section of a society and that it was seen as not quite theatre, not quite art, that it was more of a kind of a theatre club kind of thing. And perhaps justifiably so. I am not saying that its not entirely unwarranted that feeling and opinion. But I think since so much has actually happened and there has been a serious attempt to, you know, have a kind of movement in this direction. Because there are enough English speaking people and there are enough people who want to do theatre, and right in the language, so this has been a kind of endorsement of that effort.

Anjali: So what made you enter this fringe activity almost because when you started writing there was not really an active history of Indian English Theatre that was being performed at any rate in our cities?

Mahesh: Well, I had no choice because my interest lies primarily in drama. So I didn't have a choice, that, oh, I'll write for drama, I will write a novel or I will write poetry. It has always been drama from the beginning because that's where my focus is and I began writing for the stage quite later, later on in my career so to say in theatre. I began as an actor, then I moved on to direction and then finally because there is a dearth of scripts written originally in the English language, Indian scripts. That's why I decided to try my hand at it.

Anjali: How would you differentiate your work from the only other English playwrights who are known for original writing in India such as Currimbhoy and Nissim Ezekiel?

Mahesh: Well, they are the forerunners of the Indian English writing for the stage movement and I think Nissim Ezekiel is really known as a poet and Asif Currimbhoy is extremely prolific and I think they were writing for their times in the sixties and early seventies I think and I am writing for my time so I think that's what we have in common and lot happened in our country in these thirty years, - almost forty years. And so I guess I am dealing with contemporary issues, which perhaps are different from the issues that were dealt with in sixties by these playwrights.

Anjali: But the contemporary issues that you deal with also are not limited to just the eighties and nineties in this country for example one of your major theme is that of gender which you dealt with, in almost all your plays from *Bravely Fought the Queen, Dance like a man,* right down to *Tara*. These are really limited to the nineties. But your treatment of this is very thing so. How did you change? Do you think, from the first play you wrote to *Tara*?

Mahesh: Well, it changed quite a bit. Although I did deal with gender. It was really very much within the conventional set up and it was the housewife who had no option but to you know exactly follow her husband's instructions even after he died and he was literally ruling from the grave and she is just not the kind of woman who would have said to hell with you, I am going to leave you. You know ale

Nora or whatever started on to discover herself, but if you look at say *Bravely Fought the Queen,* the battles are far more visible, but at the same time they still can't leave, that's their battleground, that's their home and they are going to fight those battles and they are going to stay right there. But there has been a change even then - those five to six years between those took place and I think *Tara* although that came earlier to *Bravely Fought the Queen* actually is more rebellious in that sense.

Anjali: Yes, Tara in that sense is almost a final word on the gender issue because where a *Dance Like a Man* explores the stereotyping of gender for both man and woman, *Tara* really shows you the serious side of that discrimination. So Tara is a more extreme play, but was written before *Bravely Fought the Queen.*

Mahesh: That's right, yes

Anjali: So what gave you the idea for Tara I mean how did that come about? Well, basically, it began with, you know, reading an article in a medical journal about Siamese Twins being separated, and, of course, they were invariably of the same sex and there was this thing about a fused leg and which had the qualities of both left and right so there had to be some careful consideration as to which twin was supplying the blood to the leg and the journal went into the detail because obviously it was a very unique operation and separation. Although that was the inspiration but I think by then having written *Dance Like a Man*, I was prepared to take on the gender issue head on, and I think that was a powerful metaphor. Again, you know, the play is misread and, you know, people tend to focus on the medical details but that's really not what the play is about. It's a metaphor either for being born equal as male and female and sharing so much more and with the surgical separation comes a cultural distinction and prejudices as well, but on another level, it could also deal with the individual having the male and female self and half the female self is, whether your gender is male or female, is definitely given the lower priority.

Anjali: Yeah, in the sense the distinction between the two between *Chandan* and *Tara* comes up even before they are born.

Mahesh: That's right.

Anjali: Because they are seen as two distinct children who are hugging each other in the womb and once they are born, of course, a process of gender discrimination carries on but what do you think is the most explosive scene in the play which makes it completely clear.

Anjali: Well, I think it is the revelation in the end about, you know, Tara's love for her mother which uptil then was unquestionable. She suspected her father for having done something, you know, was in someway, but she had no idea what it was, but her love, her mother's love was unquestioned and she did not question that, so when she comes to know of the truth of what we, I mean, we only have the father's version. We don't know whether that is the real truth or no. Again, but it does sort of break her away like a shooting star from the mother, and I think with that she - that's the tragedy, she dies. We don't know how she dies, but we know that's the end of Tara, and I think that's somehow all the attitudes towards Tara and the relationship between her mother, her father and her brother, which we see through the play. In hindsight you could see where it was coloured or where it was blinkered or where it was being compensated for.

Anjali: Right, in any text there are also other scenes which somehow seem to actually coalesce all the major things after you have seen the whole play and those scenes are the ones that stand out as representative of

all different things that anyone text is trying to convey at the same time. For you which would be those scenes in Tara.

Mahesh: Well, that's a little difficult because you do have various forms of prejudices which are, which come, which recur as a variation on a theme. So, you know, in one sense gender prejudice against feminine gender is a strong thing but you also have the class differences coming and, of course, all these prejudices are interrelated because ultimately it is about power, the patriarchal system, it's to, you know, to acquire and appropriate power, you know, for-for you know, what I call what Dan says in the end to live in the forced harmony. It's forced because it's not equal but at the same time there is a harmonious existence because as long as, you know, your status and you continue to play and stay within your station, then there is harmony. But there is also discontent and that's why needs the kind of ferment, which Tara is able to bring about but it still is a tragedy.

Anjali: Because, Tara deals as you rightly said with hierarchies of all kinds, also the hierarchy between the doctor with his knowledge as power which is set apart very clearly and the hierarchy between Rupa and Tara as well as between Tara and her twin, her otherself.
So how did you deal with all these opposing things? How could you? What made the gender issue come up as most important over class, caste, religion and science. You know, mother and child and father and child.

Mahesh: Because I think that's the most visible form of discrimination in our country. Well, you could say that class is the most visible form, but in a way it is such, so ingrained the class system, that sometimes it remains unquestioned. You know, you can order your servants about nobody questions you. You know weapon to fight discrimination against her. If Rupa is going to stare at her when she walks across the road, when she limps across the roads. As she, you know, examines her artificial leg, and knocks on it and what not. Tara is going to pull her cards and say that, you know I speak English better than you do and hence you are inferior to me. It's such a you know, ridiculous system we have, but then that's the only weapon she has against Rupa, so in a way, she is buying a social perception of what is superior and what is inferior, the same way as Rupa is doing to her.

Anjali: And is the only possible end or harmony for Dan is to leave. Once he leaves the house, he still obviously is not free of the trauma of what happens.

Mahesh: That's right. That haunts him and continues to haunt him.

Anjali: But in the end the only reconciliation with Tara is possible after the mother has died.

Anajli: Yes, and after they have died as well because Tara has died and Dan dies, and then you have this vision of this union between the siblings of male and female uniting on a different time and plane.

Anjali: So what you are really saying at some level perhaps through Tara is that as long as we continue to do this kind of differentiation, there is no end possible in this world.

Mahesh: Absolutely, yes, because it is an artificial difference in that sense, you know, biologically there are polarities between the genders, you know, which is meant to seek the union of one another, but the cultural polarities are artificial, and actually the boundaries hinder the natural unions of male and female whether its body-to-body or within oneself.

Anjali: What would be the turning point you think where you in your play, when once you established that Tara is not a victim and that we have to look at her not as a girl who is physically handicapped but who is

just somebody who has been handicapped by the very fact that she has been born with gender she has.

Mahesh: Right, Well, we got to, there are several scenes in the play which deal with her furies and how she fights her battles when she talks about how she blackmailed her classmate into doing her homework for her and even very much earlier on when she shows up Rupa for her malapropism, her lack of usage of certain idioms and you get to know very earlier on that she is sort of fighting for superior position and then when she finally confronts Rupa and says how does it feel having one tit smaller than the other and let me see how it feels, you know, when other people stare at you. You know, the way they stare at my leg and how would you feel, you won't be able to come out of your house and what not. So those are the places where we get some insight into Tara's inner life and her anger basically. And you know, you, you, you know the idea is so easy to sympathise because sympathy is another way of polarising as well. You sympathise with someone, and you are saying they are not me you know, No I am in a different location, you know, I am the superior and I am the one to sympathise. So stay there and I will sympathise with you.

Anjali: Right, but you don't sympathise with Chandan. He does not call for that. Was that a deliberate characterization?

Mahesh: Again yes, yes, because I really felt that these, these, these people have their battles and they were fighting them and Chandan fought by withdrawing into his music, into his own world and later on he fights by again withdrawing, by going into another space entirely. So these you know are ways of fighting his battles and again I didn't want this entire notion of sympathy for them.

Anjali: Has Tara been your most successful play?

Mahesh: Well, actually its *Dance Like a Man* because that's somehow been commercially more successful but that does not mean that Tara has not had its share of success as such. So, it's a little difficult because the metaphor is so strong and overwhelming that sometime people get caught up in the metaphor and reject the play.

Anjali: Right, well, thank you very much Mahesh, it's been a real pleasure talking to you.

Mahesh: Thank you, Anjali.